

Refugee Legal: Defending the Rights of Refugees



Acknowledgement of Country

Refugee Legal acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands across Australia and, in particular, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong Boon Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation, traditional custodians of the land on which our office is situated. We pay deep respect to elders both past and present.

Who We Are



Refugee Legal is an independent, non-profit community legal centre, specialising in refugee and immigration law, policy and procedure. We have been at the forefront of providing legal assistance for over 35 years.

We are Australia's largest provider of free legal assistance to asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants.

As lawyers expert in immigration law, we work directly and strategically to defend the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

What We Do

We promote and protect the rights of refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants.

We focus on the greatest need: legal permission to stay, protection and freedom in Australia and to reunite with family here.

Our work has delivered many remarkable wins for clients and changes to policy and practice which have changed the course of their lives for the better.

We advise and assist through our telephone and evening advice services and ongoing representation for those whose cases have merit but who are unable to access services elsewhere.

We advocate for law reform to ensure that Australia's migration and refugee programs operate in a just, fair, ethical and humane manner.

We educate and inform through the delivery of national training programs, accredited continuing professional development seminars for registered migration agents and lawyers, as well as community information sessions.

In all areas of our work, partnerships and collaboration are central. We could not do what we do without the support of a vast, nation-wide network of volunteers, pro bono law firms, NGO sector agencies, leading law schools, UNHCR and other international bodies and the wider community.

At the heart of our work lie personal lives and unique stories. So many people have been granted protection, found safety from family violence, been freed from detention, reunited with family, or had their residency restored.

Staff, volunteers and pro bono partners continue to do what they do best: providing legal help — and hope. Together we will continue to make the biggest possible impact, knowing the powerful potential of our work to change the course of many people's lives for the better.

Our Values in Action



Human dignity and human rights

Every person is equal in dignity and rights, and is valued and respected. Human rights are universal; they derive from the inherent dignity of every person.

The international human rights framework and the rule of law underpin the work that we do. We respect basic rights and freedoms and promote inclusive, equality-based, non-racist, non-discriminatory immigration, citizenship and refugee law, policy and procedures.

In this context, we live in a diverse multi-lingual, multicultural society and value and respect people for who they are, what they believe in and how they wish to live their lives. Our services are safe, reliable, accessible and responsive.

Effective

We aim to make a positive impact on the lives of our clients, families and communities, our staff and volunteers and our supporters and partners. We use our expertise, practical skills and resources strategically to adapt and adjust to meet client and community needs and maximise the broader impact of our work.

Empathy and compassion

Empathy and compassion help us understand the perspectives, concerns, needs and feelings of our clients and drive our desire to assist.

Integrity

We do what we say and say what we do. We live our values. We treat others the way we would like to be treated ourselves. We are accountable, honest and take responsibility for our decisions and actions. We embrace diversity and different perspectives. We are prepared to tackle complex and challenging problems. We are experts in our field and maintain the highest professional and ethical standards.

From our President and CEO

Family Violence Program

"History shows that progress and change are not supernatural forces – they are determined by individual will and political will. Our individual and collective agency.

So let's continue to work together with the hope and conviction that we can effect real change by bending the destiny of so many people and our country toward greater justice."

Refugee Legal is often called upon to respond to the dire consequences of global events on the lives of so many people, and to do so in concrete ways which make a real difference to their future.

And it has been another year in which global humanitarian crises proliferated, knew no barriers and deeply reverberated locally.

The demand for our help has been beyond overdrive.

In response to the Israel-Gaza crisis, we rapidly mobilised, and scaled-up to establish the Refugee Legal Israel-Gaza Legal Hotline and Clinic taking distress calls from so many people here and overseas gripped with fear and desperate to find safety for them and their loved ones.

In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, we have been a bedrock of legal support and advocacy for many Ukrainians fleeing the war.

Three years after the horrors of the Taliban's seizure of power and reign of terror, we continue to help thousands with family reunion and protection here through our Afghanistan Legal Hotline and Legal Clinic for people impacted by the crisis. While it's faded from the front pages of the news, it has not faded from the forefront of what we do.

On the back of the brutal military coup in Myanmar in 2021, our special Myanmar Legal Clinic continues to deliver legal help, and ultimately, grants of protection to many people who cannot return.

On the question of change, we are just at the start of the road to fundamental reform; change so crucial to the rights and lives of people seeking protection.

Some progress has been made, for example, 20,000 people have been lifted out of a decade of cruel limbo.

Yet the hopes we had for real change with the change of government in 2022 have not been realised. We remain far off from meeting our international obligations and the values which underpin them: humanity, compassion, fairness and justice and 'welcome'. The long era of inhumanity has not yet been brought to an end.

The reality is that a very big battle for justice still lies ahead, and the battle for justice is essential to what we do.

At Refugee Legal we advise and assist, with the aim of helping as many people as possible, we educate to improve ethics, competence and professional standards and to raise awareness, and we advocate to combat systemic injustice.

Our work is enabled by a team that manages our resources,



systems and processes and that grows and supports our network of pro bono legal firms and volunteers.

I'm delighted to report that this year:

- Client assistance reached a total of 19,853.
- Our service footprint has grown to now include the Northern Territory as well as South Australia.
- Our volunteer numbers are now at 600 and we have 25 pro bono firms.
- We made strong progress in the second year of implementation of our Strategic Plan.
- Our advocacy has real impact at the local, national and international levels.

From our President and CEO (cont.)

Through our work so many people have been granted protection, freed from detention, evacuated to safety, found safety from family violence, or have had their residency restored. Staff, volunteers and pro bono lawyers have done what they do best: provide expert legal help. Help which comes with a huge heart. This work has resulted in so many remarkable wins for clients, changing the course of their lives for the better.

This year the battle for justice focussed on indefinite detention and saw us win a major test case in the High Court.

Our advocacy on this and related issues is multi-pronged. We work through public and private forums, in the media, and in the highest of our courts informed by our commitment to refugee policies that are fair, just, equitable and humane.

It combines change through individual legal challenges, together with advocating for fundamental policy change so that we can bring to an end this kind of sheer inhumanity and restore peoples' basic freedoms and dignity.

Indefinite detention continues to epitomise the appalling and deep inhumanity of immigration policy in this country. This practice has not only been unjust and unconscionable, but continues to cause devastating and often lifelong harm, including those who have fled from harm, inflicting



a second wave of suffering. It continues to represent one of the great injustices of our times. And to make perpetration of other injustices possible.

It's also been at fundamental odds with Australia's international human rights obligations and with the current Government's policy that 'immigration detention that is indefinite or otherwise arbitrary is not acceptable'. But ultimately, it was left to the High Court to decide.

Our client in the landmark case of YBFZ and his family fled in fear from Eritrea to Ethiopia when he was 10. He arrived in Australia as a 14-year-old boy together with his family in 2002, resettled as a stateless refugee. He has grown up here with his family. Australia is their home. In 2014, in his mid-20s, he was first diagnosed with schizophrenia. After serving a sentence of 18 months,

instead of being released into the community, his permanent residency was cancelled, he was taken into indefinite immigration detention where he remained for more than five years.

In November last year, it was found by our highest Court to be unconstitutional and unlawful, overruling a 20-year precedent: a fundamental victory for the right to liberty and the rule of law in this country.

Our client was released as a result of the High Court's ruling. Like others, on his release, ankle bracelet monitoring and daily curfew conditions were imposed on him by the Government. He called us in distress asking why he was being punished again. He told us he felt humiliated, with constant fear that if he was late home by one minute, or didn't recharge his ankle bracelet on time, he would be imprisoned for at least one year.

So we went back to the High Court, and in October this year it ruled that the Government's imposition of ankle bracelet and curfew conditions after release from indefinite detention is unconstitutional and unlawful. This was another major victory for fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in Australia.

Our client and many others in a similar situation have since had the ankle bracelet and curfews removed – and have expressed huge relief.

But on the day after the High Court ruling, the Government rushed in new regulations and a Bill seeking to circumvent the High Court ruling.

And so, this battle for justice continues.

While the High Court rulings have seen some people freed, many people remain detained for prolonged periods. We continue to advocate for a systemic end to indefinite detention and have developed and proposed a model for the establishment of an Independent panel that would ensure that detention is only ever used where necessary and as a last resort.

We in partnership with others will continue to take action to protect people's fundamental freedoms and dignity in the face of Government's continued overreach of its powers. This is the work we do.

Across the country, beyond the current crises, unmet legal need for people seeking asylum, refugees and vulnerable migrants remains endemic and is escalating.

So we will continue to help as many as we can, we will continue to have a direct engagement with key policy decision-makers and ensure that the voices and faces of refugees are front and centre of this change. We will continue our significant scale-up of policy and advocacy reform work to seize every possible opportunity to shape and secure reform.

However, we could not do what we do without the partnerships and collaboration of our network of over 600 volunteers, now 25 pro bono corporate law firms, pro bono barristers, Victoria Legal Aid, leading Law Schools, UNHCR and other international agencies, and our very generous philanthropic funders, major donors and donations from many.

In such tough times, our partners have been crucial in standing with us. We want to make special mention of our volunteers and pro bono law firm partners who stood up right across the country and who have enabled us to expand the reach of our work when it was needed most. This has translated to hundreds of lawyers coming on board for urgent scale-up to respond to a new humanitarian crisis – to assist on the frontline. And to make a real difference.

The foundation for all of our work is the staff and the Board.

Once again, we want to acknowledge the outstanding collegiality, wisdom and support of our Committee and Management. We have the great privilege of working with a truly remarkable and inspiring team of staff who drive our work tirelessly – with such skill, commitment, courage, compassion and humanity.

Our annual report is an opportunity to not only to take stock of the year's work, but to focus on the profound challenges that continue to lie before us and the ones that lie ahead. And what's clear is that for people seeking our help and for those defending their rights major challenges continue.

As a community and a nation, don't let our humanity be the last casualty of our response to people seeking asylum and refugees. In overcoming inhumanity, our greatest asset is our own humanity.

Ultimately, this is not only about restoring that golden spirit of welcome, and justice and hope for refugees. It's also about the kind of society we want to live in, dream of and defend.

Clare Morton
President

David Manne
CEO

Advise & Assist

We **advise** and **assist** refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants through a combination of direct legal assistance to many and strategic legal action for systemic change. We seek to defend people's rights, to secure protections, redress injustices and promote legal and policy change.

Educate

We **educate** to improve ethics, competence and professional standards, to raise awareness within the community, develop understanding, inspire ideas and collaborations and build action for change.

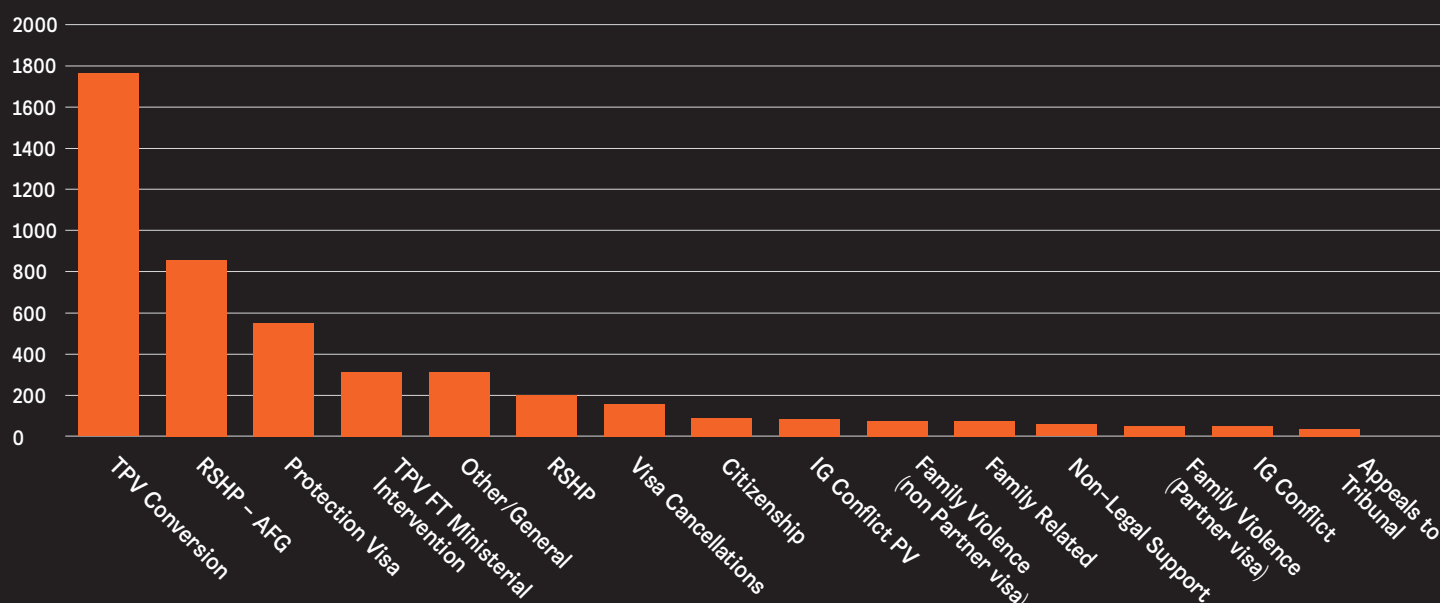
Advocate

We **advocate** at local, national and international levels through the media, in public and private forums and, together with key partners, combat systemic injustices which threaten rights and lives, and promote immigration and refugee policies that are fair, just, equitable and humane.

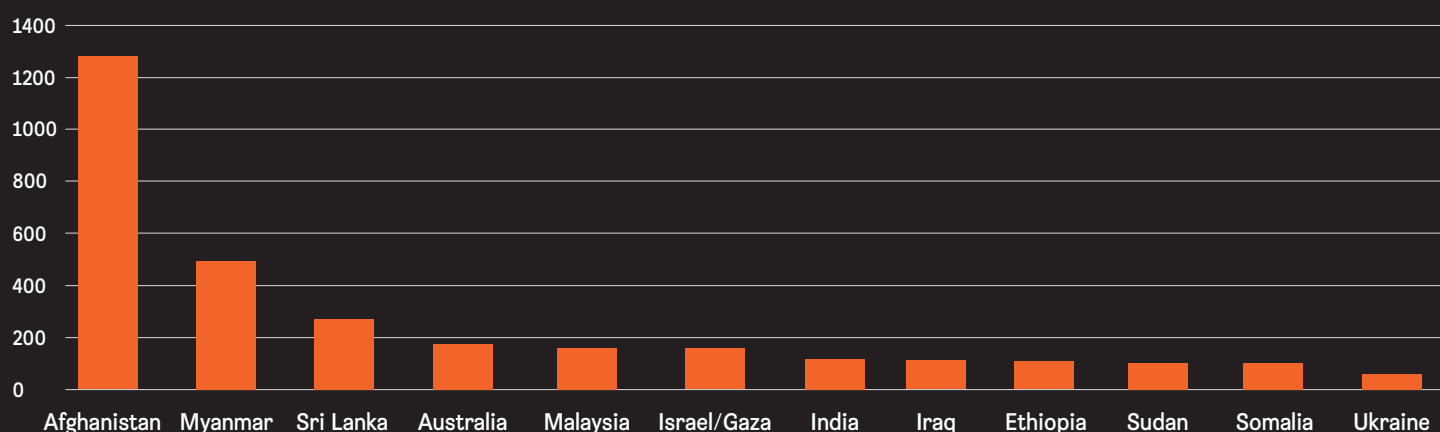
The Numbers for 2023/2024

Total Client Assistance	19,853
Telephone Advice	7,169
Face-to-face Advice	5,134
People Represented	2,712
Clinic assistance	4,838

No. of Matters



No. of Clients



Advise and Assist

Record Levels of Assistance

"Once again, our service faced ever increasing demand and our team of passionate and dedicated lawyers, with the support of legal volunteers, paralegals and interns, responded in kind to provide record levels of advice and assistance to those in need.

Conflicts around the world continued to impact our clients throughout the year resulting in high levels of need for assistance to seek safety in Australia."



Providing high quality, practical legal advice and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants who cannot otherwise access legal help is the core of what we do every day at Refugee Legal.

Access to our service begins through our busy administrative team who receive high volumes of calls and emails from those in need seeking our services. Matters are triaged accordingly with our senior legal team to our various programs and our advice services.

Twice a week, on Wednesdays and Fridays, our lawyers provide advice by phone on all manner of immigration law and citizenship matters. This may cover requests on how to bring family members to Australia; how to provide updates or respond to requests for further

information for ongoing visa matters, how to access documents or amend information that has been provided, what criteria they need to meet to become a citizen and, most frequent of all, how they can get a visa and remain safely in Australia.

Inevitably there are always those matters on a Friday afternoon that require our lawyers to urgently jump into action and lodge a protection application to preserve the rights of their client or prevent their detention and removal from Australia.

Our weekly day and evening advice services provide further opportunities for clients to provide us with vital information to assess their circumstances and advise them on their legal options. From there, our team of lawyers

take on matters for full application assistance after consideration of merit, vulnerability, and capacity.

Once again, our service faced ever increasing demand and our team of passionate and dedicated lawyers, with the support of legal volunteers, paralegals and interns responded in kind to provide record levels of advice and assistance to those in need.

The majority of our work involved advice and assistance to those seeking protection in Australia with both lodgment of applications and assistance through the Department of Home Affairs stage as well as for those seeking review of negative decisions at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Advise and Assist (con't.)

"With the assistance of several pro bono law firm partners, supervised by our team of lawyers, we assisted applicants to lodge Protection visas in Australia."

Our work helped people understand the legal criteria they need to satisfy to be recognised as needing protection in Australia as well as providing practical assistance to complete the lengthy forms and supporting documents required to evidence their claims and to navigate the often long and confusing process.

Assistance to vulnerable refugees and migrants looking to reunite with partners, children, and other relatives from overseas also remained a priority for our work.

Our dedicated Character telephone service operated multiple times a week to advise and assist vulnerable people in prison or immigration detention facing cancellation or refusal of visa applications due to character matters, with ongoing assistance being provided to people through our Character Clinic.

Following the High Court decision of *NZYQ v. Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs & Anor* [2023] HCA 37 in November 2023, we assisted many affected clients with requests to amend conditions on their bridging visas and with understanding how the Court's decision impacted their circumstances.

On behalf of one of our clients, we brought a challenge in the High Court to the constitutional validity of certain conditions on the Bridging Visa R.

The fate of people in Australia who previously spent years in offshore processing regimes on Nauru and Manus Island remained unresolved with our team supporting people to continue to renew bridging visas to remain lawful in Australia and with exploring third country resettlement options such as New Zealand.

Legal clinics – Myanmar, Ukraine, and Israel-Gaza

Conflicts around the world continued to impact our clients throughout the year resulting in high levels of need for assistance to seek safety in Australia.

Myanmar

Citizens of Myanmar in Australia, primarily on temporary student visas, were unable to return to their home country after actively expressing their opposition to the military government currently in control in their country.

Ukraine

Citizens of Ukraine remained unable to return home to their country as the war with Russia continued giving rise to an increasing demand for longer term protection and safety for those who arrived in Australia on visitor visas.

With the dedicated assistance of several pro bono law firm partners, supervised by our team of lawyers, we assisted applicants to lodge protection visas in Australia.

Israel-Gaza

In response to the Israel-Gaza Crisis, we set up a dedicated Israel-Gaza Crisis Legal Hotline. The Hotline continues to receive a significant number of calls for help. Enquiries are from people who have recently arrived in Australia from the conflict zones and from people seeking advice about bringing family to safety.

We commenced our Israel-Gaza Clinic to assist those impacted by the crisis to apply for Protection visas.

We also assisted people from Gaza who had their Visitor visas cancelled en route to Australia with requests for revocation of visa cancellations. Many of these people had their visas reinstated and were able to travel safely to Australia.

As well as providing assistance to individuals, for each of these groups, we have worked in partnership with key non-legal organisations to:

- assist with people accessing non-legal supports;
- advocate for increased supports for people arriving in Australia;
- advocate for appropriate Government funding for organisations.

Fast Track and TPV/SHEV Conversion

Permanency and Security ... and Citizenship

"Knowing that we are assisting refugees to finally achieve permanency and security, many of whom have been in limbo for many years, continually renews our sense of purpose."



The Fast Track Clinic was established in 2017 when the then Federal Government forced around 31,000 asylum seekers who had arrived in Australia by boat to apply for protection before an arbitrary deadline of 1 October 2017.

Since then, our legal team, with the help of our 25 pro bono law firm partners, has assisted thousands to apply for Temporary Protection and Safe Haven Enterprise (TPV/SHEV) visas and with conversion of their visas to applications for the permanent Resolution of Status (RoS) visas, now available to them following the decision of the Federal government in February 2023.

This year the Fast Track Clinic continued to combine large-scale legal assistance with individual assistance to hundreds of eligible individuals.

This year 'Citizenship' became the fifth element of our Fast Track Clinic.

RoS visa holders are now becoming eligible to apply for Australian citizenship and we are providing advice and assistance to them through this next important phase in their journey. Many clients seeking assistance with citizenship applications are stateless and for them the ability to apply for citizenship is momentous.

Other areas of work by the Fast Track Clinic are as follows:

Applications for permanent RoS visas

The TPV Conversion team continued to lodge hundreds of RoS visa applications, for thousands of applicants. While most eligible individuals have had their RoS visas granted many still require assistance to provide additional information to the Department of Home Affairs to support their applications. In particular, we are assisting many RoS applicants to update their circumstances and provide the Department with additional information about their identity.

Requests for reassessment – Ministerial Intervention

We continued to assist clients with requests for Ministerial Intervention where their applications for protection have been refused, but where they have compelling needs, for example, due to changed country circumstances such as in Myanmar or Afghanistan.

Over the past year we have had great success with requests for Ministerial Intervention with many Afghan and Burmese clients being given permission by the Minister to lodge new protection visa applications. We are assisting them with their new applications.

Family reunion

Many of our clients who have been granted RoS visas now wish to sponsor family they have been separated from for so many years. We are helping them to apply to bring their partners, children, and other close family to Australia.

Initial applications for protection

We continue to provide legal assistance to people still undergoing processing of their initial application for protection at the primary or merits review stages. Departmental figures show there are still over 1,800 people (out of approximately 30,000) in this situation nationally. If people are approved, they will be eligible for the RoS visa.

State of Delivery in New Territories

"The message from the community was clear: There is a significant level of unmet legal need in the Northern Territory and the community wants a dedicated local service to meet that need.

In response, Refugee Legal has formalised partnerships with local agencies to create referral pathways so that NT based clients can access our services."

Refugee Legal South Australia

Refugee Legal South Australia services continue to develop and grow to meet the pressing legal needs of the local community.

Over the past year we have worked closely with the South Australian community, collaborating and engaging with the broader sector to address the high demand for specialist refugee legal services.

We have assisted large numbers of South Australian based clients with a diverse range of legal issues including the protection visa application process, Ministerial Intervention, family reunion and conversion from temporary to permanent visas.

A highlight of the year was the partnership with Flinders University to provide a clinic program for law students. Under the supervision of our lawyers, these students have been exposed to a broad range of our work. We look forward to ongoing collaboration with Flinders University.

Extensive consultation and community engagement underpinned the merger between Refugee Legal and the Refugee Advocacy Service of South Australia (RASSA) in July 2022.

These relationships remain fundamental to the work that we do.

Community legal education is a priority for the development of our work in SA. We know from our decades of experience that great legal need can present itself in rural and remote locations. In the past year, our team delivered education sessions in Mount Gambier, Naracoorte, and Bordertown, with a focus on TPV/SHEV conversion, family reunion, protection visa applications and citizenship.

We look forward to another exciting year further developing services to deliver the essential legal assistance needed by many vulnerable people in the SA community.

Refugee Legal Northern Territory

Despite the needs of the community, the Northern Territory has never had a local specialist community legal centre dedicated to the assistance of refugees and asylum seekers. Until now.

Over the past years Refugee Legal tried to provide help to those in need where possible.

Following close engagement with a broad range of services in the NT and also with government to scope and assess the level and nature of the need, this 'ad hoc' approach is now becoming more formalised.

The message from the community is clear: there is a significant level of unmet legal need in the NT and the community wants a dedicated local service to meet that need.

In response, Refugee Legal has formalised partnerships with Melaleuca and other local agencies to create referral pathways so that NT based clients can access our services.

We look forward to further developing our services across the NT in the coming years, including delivering community legal information sessions to clients and local services and delivering in-person direct legal assistance to those most in need.

Pathways Free from Family Violence

Family Violence Program

"The assistance provided by our lawyers has enabled many vulnerable women to access their own visa pathway, so they are no longer dependent on a violent partner for their visa."

Advising and assisting women and children impacted by family violence has been a significant part of our legal, policy, and advocacy work for many years. People on temporary visas, or without visas, affected by family violence are incredibly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and we assist large numbers of individuals in this group with multiple and complex vulnerabilities.

Demand for help in relation to visa status for people experiencing family violence has continued to grow. To meet this growing demand, we have expanded our services and are continuing the transition to a formal Family Violence Program, underpinned by an integrated strategy of legal assistance, reform, and community empowerment.

Our range of services includes one-off advice and full application assistance for women to present their cases for protection, or in relation to partner visas and other migration matters where there has been family violence.

The assistance provided by our lawyers has enabled many vulnerable women to access their own visa pathway, so they are no longer dependent on a violent partner for their visa. Our day advice service continued, with weekly appointments supervised by our family violence legal team and conducted by lawyers from our pro bono partners.



We work collaboratively with other legal and non-legal services, to ensure that clients receive the specialist support they need.

We also acknowledge that, while most clients impacted by family violence are women and children, they are not the only ones who experience such harm and we provide assistance to all genders affected by family violence.

We provide specialised legal services to people from the LGBTQIA+ community, who are often amongst the most marginalised in our community. Our close connections with LGBTQIA+ support organisations mean these vulnerable clients are able to access support services while addressing their legal need.

Refugee Legal is a leader in policy and in the area of family violence and migration.

This year there were a number of welcome policy reforms, including limited expansion of

the family violence provisions. These changes have meant increased access to visas in their own right for some vulnerable women. However far more needs to be done and we will continue to advocate for further protections for non-citizens affected by family violence.

We continue to engage directly with government on legal and policy issues through consultation and written submissions.

We take an active role on the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence, the Law Institute of Victoria Family Violence Working Group, and work with our colleagues across a variety of legal and non-legal services to continue advocacy for a new visa for women experiencing family violence. As experts in this area we have presented at a range of forums and panels on the issue to the community and sector.

Witnessing the Joy

Afghanistan Legal Program

"This year we have seen a number of children reunited with their parents after years of separation. To witness the joy of these families when they are reunited, and in safety, is an honour and privilege."



We continued to assist members of the Australian Afghan community to make refugee and humanitarian visa applications for their family members who are at risk of harm. This has included a number of applications under the split family provisions for immediate family, including young children proposing their parents. A number of children were reunited with their parents this year after years of separation. To witness the joy of these families when they are reunited, and in safety, is an honour and privilege.

This work is assisted by a large group of dedicated pro bono lawyers and paralegals working under the supervision of experienced Refugee Legal lawyers.

Family Reunion Clinic

As the dire situation in Afghanistan shows no sign of improvement, demand for help to propose family in Afghanistan and neighboring countries has continued unabated over the last year.

Advocate Shaping Local, National International Policy

Special Projects and Policy Unit

"We continue to shape reform of migration and refugee law, including through test case litigation in a range of matters."

The work of the Unit has involved extensive collaboration with key stakeholders and direct engagement with key politicians, policy makers and senior bureaucrats with a focus on:

- addressing systemic injustices particularly through the use of strategic litigation.
- advancing public awareness, understanding and dialogue and building action for change, and
- direct engagement with key policymakers on areas of reform priority at local, national and international levels, including high-level engagement with key policy-makers.

Reform proposals focused on:

- alternatives to detention
- options for people refused a TPV/SHEV, and family reunion
- supports for people in the community seeking asylum, including Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS)
- family violence
- people held offshore and brought back to Australia
- disability and detention (for the Disability Royal Commission)
- the Refugee and Humanitarian program, including an increased intake and related issues about composition

- the Ukraine crisis response
- the Israel/Gaza crisis response
- Afghan aid workers
- the abolition of the AAT and the establishment of a new Administrative Review Tribunal, and
- visa processing, including addressing primary and merits review delays and backlogs.

We made detailed written submissions to key Federal Parliamentary and departmental inquiries, including:

- the Attorney-General's Department Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership Program (Joint submission by Specialist Refugee and Immigration Legal Centres)
- the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Migration Amendment (Removal and Other Measures) Bill 2024.
- Refugee Legal also commenced a High Court test case challenging the imposition of an ankle bracelet and curfew on a client (AUK15 v MICMA & the Commonwealth S152/2023). The case was subsequently discontinued before judgment on the basis that the conditions were lifted and there was no need to proceed with the case.

Stories of Courage and Hope

".... Saafi had been separated from his family for ten years, while his wife and children lived illegally in Pakistan in constant fear of deportation back to danger in Afghanistan."

Case Studies

Afghan client – Partner visa

Saafi* is a 47-year-old Afghan citizen. He contracted polio as a child leaving him with a physical disability. Saafi and his family are Shia Muslims who faced the constant risk of persecution by the Taliban and so fled to Pakistan. Saafi arrived in Australia in 2012, and was granted a permanent Protection visa in 2013. Saafi's family could not accompany him on his journey to Australia because it was too dangerous. This caused Saafi significant distress, and meant his wife was left to raise their children alone. Saafi proposed his family for a Refugee and Special Humanitarian visa, but this was refused by the Department of Home Affairs in 2013. Saafi's mental health deteriorated due to the prolonged separation from his wife and children and he began to suffer from depression and anxiety. Refugee Legal assisted Saafi to sponsor his wife and children for Partner visas in February 2023. At this stage, Saafi had been separated from his family for ten years, while his wife and children lived illegally in Pakistan in constant fear of deportation back to danger in Afghanistan. Saafi's wife and six children were granted partner visas in 2024, and they are extremely relieved to finally have been reunited in safety in Australia.

Angolan client – AAT

Firyali* was born in Angola in 1974. She arrived in Australia in 2018. Firyali had a traumatic childhood, owing to the civil war in Angola which lasted from 1975-2002. Firyali and her family had to flee to Congo when she was still a child. They eventually returned to Angola when the situation there improved. Firyali became a police officer and had five children. In Angola, Firyali reported her neighbour for sexually abusing his six-year-old daughter. As a result, Firyali was subjected to sexual abuse, physical harm, and kidnapping by her neighbour, his associates and by corrupt police. She fled from Angola to Australia in fear of her life. As a result of the abuse she endured, Firyali suffers from depression and PTSD. With Refugee Legal's help, she applied for a Protection visa but her application was refused by the Department of Home Affairs. In 2023, with our help she successfully appealed this decision at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Firyali is now waiting for her visa to be granted, so she can sponsor her children to join her in Australia.

Afghan client – Protection visa

Mahsa* was born in Afghanistan in 1978. He left school at the age of ten or eleven to support his family, and is functionally illiterate. By 1994, Mahsa was married and had three daughters. When the Taliban took control of Kabul in 1996, one of Mahsa's cousins was killed.

Between 1996 and 2000, the Taliban kidnapped Mahsa three times. He fled with his family to Iran, where his two sons were born. It was difficult for Mahsa to obtain medication in Iran for his chronic illnesses which also made it impossible for him to work. Mahsa registered with the UNHCR, and he and his family were granted global humanitarian visas to Australia in 2013. Mahsa struggled to adjust to life in Australia, and he suffered from major depression and suicidal ideation. In 2015, he was convicted of several offences. He served his time in prison, but his visa was cancelled and he was subsequently taken into immigration detention. In 2018, Refugee Legal assisted Mahsa to apply for a Protection visa. When this application was rejected on character grounds, Refugee Legal brought Mahsa's matter before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, where he was successful. Mahsa was finally granted a Protection visa in 2024.

The Impact Multiplier

Volunteer Program

"We are grateful for the unwavering commitment of our volunteers and partners. They remain crucial to our ability to meet the growing demand for our services and ensure that those in need receive critical legal assistance."



It is a simple equation that has continued to deliver maximum impact. The Refugee Legal team multiplied by pro bono law firms/lawyers and university partners multiplied by volunteers (paralegals, interns and support teams) equals more people in need getting life-changing assistance.

This year has been a remarkable year for our volunteer team. We could not have achieved all of our work without our team of pro bono lawyers, paralegals, lawyers, migration agents and university partners. Their ongoing commitment is essential to our success each year. Through their support, we can expand our services to meet a critical need for free legal assistance in the community.

This year, we strengthened our relationships with pro bono partners, continuing to meet twice a year. At these meetings we discuss our goals for the year and receive valuable feedback. A consistent theme expressed by

our pro bono partners is that working with Refugee Legal is a highlight for them and their teams. They speak highly of the meaningful impact they can make and shared the genuine enthusiasm they have for our work. They also valued the strong supervision Refugee Legal lawyers provide during clinics.

We also established a new partnership with Flinders University in Adelaide. This collaboration has expanded our university partnerships, giving more students hands-on experience in migration law. These experiences enhance their skills while making an incredible impact on our clients' lives.

Throughout the year, our pro bono partners and volunteers provided essential support across various programs, often responding to complex and urgent legal matters. Their dedication allowed us to meet the increasing demand for legal assistance in the community.

We held several recruitment rounds for our Night Service Clinic and day paralegal volunteers, allowing us to further scale up our client response.

To express our gratitude, we held a volunteer thank-you day, bringing our volunteers together in a fun and relaxing setting. This event was a heartfelt thank you to our volunteers for their hard work and dedication to Refugee Legal.

We are so grateful for the unwavering commitment of our volunteers and partners. They remain crucial to Refugee Legal's ability to meet the growing demand for our services and ensure that those in need receive critical legal assistance. We look forward to continuing these strong relationships in the years to come.

Valuable Insights and Unique Challenges

From our interns

"It is a fantastic and privileged opportunity to be able to give back to the community and develop a deeper understanding of the issues facing vulnerable persons around the world and refugees and asylum seekers in Australia."



Claudia Stafford

In January of this year, I had the privilege of completing an internship at Refugee Legal as part of an internship subject offered by the University of Melbourne. Coming into it with little experience in a legal setting, especially in a community legal centre, I was grateful for the support of the Refugee Legal team and my supervising lawyer, who helped me get up to speed quickly. On my very first day, I was immersed in the complexities of client meetings, where I observed firsthand the challenges of communicating across language barriers. I was deeply impressed by my supervising lawyer's patience and professionalism, which were crucial in navigating these interactions. This initial exposure set the tone for an incredibly hands-on experience.

Over the course of the internship, I worked closely with interpreters to take down client statements, conducted research on specific

countries to support legal claims and helped prepare visa applications. These tasks gave me valuable insight into the unique challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers and introduced me to the broader scope of services provided by Refugee Legal. My experience was enriched by the diversity of the clients we served, offering me a comprehensive understanding of legal advocacy in the context of refugee and asylum seeker rights in Australia.

I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to have been mentored by such a supportive supervisor and to have gained a unique perspective on community legal practice. This experience has not only deepened my appreciation for refugee and migration law but has also sparked a strong interest in human rights and public interest law. I would highly recommend this internship to anyone, whether they have a specific interest in refugee law or are still exploring their path in the legal profession.



Joshua Elsbury

I completed my Practical Legal Training (PLT) placement at Refugee Legal over a three-week period. I chose immigration law as the field I wanted to obtain experience in and was fortunate enough to be assigned to such a professional organisation that assisted in a wide range of different immigration matters. During my time there I worked under the supervision of a lawyer, and with their guidance and assistance I completed a range of different tasks that gave me a taste of what immigration law had to offer. I was able to assist multiple clients with their visa applications, draft statutory declarations for people's protection visa claims, attend client meetings, complete legal research and draft country information submissions, and attend an Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) Hearing. The knowledge and experience I was able to gain in my short time at Refugee Legal has really assisted me in my current role as an Immigration Lawyer.

My time at Refugee Legal was fundamental in my development as a lawyer, where the substantive work, along with the environment, made the overall experience one that I will never forget. All the people I met who volunteered and worked at Refugee Legal are all passionate and determined people who try their hardest to achieve a common goal. I strongly recommend any law student, law graduate, or legal professional with an interest in immigration law, and ultimately giving back, to apply to join the team at Refugee Legal. As the experience and skills gained will set you up for any career within the legal industry.



Amira Marwan

In June, I completed an internship at Refugee Legal, facilitated by Melbourne Law School, after having volunteered at the organisation for around 10 months.

During my internship, I undertook tasks such as assisting clients pre-fill visa applications, conducting

research tasks aimed at strengthening protection claims and drafting submissions. These tasks usually involved speaking to clients either in-person or over the phone, occasionally with the use of an interpreter. I gained much practical experience through these tasks, as well as a deeper understanding of the role of an immigration lawyer.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the internship was being involved in several stages of clients' journeys. I was therefore privy to the direct impact of Refugee Legal's assistance on vulnerable people. An example of this was when I sat-in on an interview between a client and a caseworker from the Department of Home Affairs, in which the client made their case for protection. I had previously conducted country information research for this very client. I then drafted submissions for them that would help strengthen their application for protection. Having the opportunity to meet this client and assist them in these ways made the work all the more meaningful.

Overall, my internship at Refugee Legal was an extremely positive and rewarding experience. I am very proud and grateful to have contributed to the organisation's amazing work in advocating for asylum seekers and refugees. I would strongly recommend all law students or anyone with an interest in human rights to apply to volunteer or intern at Refugee Legal.

Educate

Accessible and Practical

"There has also been extensive engagement with communities affected by emerging legal need, including groups affected by conflict in the Middle East. The timely provision of information in clear, easy to understand terms has been crucial in helping communities respond to real-world developments."

Our CPD Workshops

The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Program is a central element of our broader education program. Our workshops are focused on developing skills and knowledge of lawyers and registered migration agents in areas of migration law directly relevant to our practice. This includes all aspects of the protection visa process, family migration and visa cancellations.

A key focus this year has been updating practitioner skills and knowledge to address a number of important Federal Government legislative and policy changes that have affected the sector over the past 12 months including the Government's commitment to addressing historic processing backlogs, the transition to the Administrative Review Tribunal and introduction of new Ministerial directions.

Online workshops are now a permanent offering of the program ensuring greater accessibility for attendees and guest presenters from regional areas and across Australia.

Partnerships in Legal Education

Our partnerships with tertiary institutions, such as Melbourne Law School and Monash University achieved positive results for all involved, including staff, students, and Refugee Legal's clients.



Community Education

We continue to prioritise community-based information and education programs to ensure proactive engagement in the dissemination of accurate information as widely as possible and the delivery of targeted capacity building programs.

Community education sessions were delivered face-to-face and online across Victoria and interstate, with an increased emphasis on reaching regional communities. Sessions were delivered in Melbourne, Shepparton, Mooroopna, Nhill, Border Town, Naracoorte, Mt Gambier, Mildura, Darwin and Alice Springs.

Our programs focussed on support services that work with refugees, asylum seekers and other migrant communities, as well as directly to community members to ensure that accurate and effective advice is widely available,

and communities are properly supported when navigating the migration system and its complexities.

Education workshops were conducted with a number of health providers and family violence support services to build capacity and enhance service delivery strategies.

There has also been extensive engagement with communities affected by emerging legal need, including groups affected by conflict in the Middle East. The timely provision of information in clear, easy to understand terms has been crucial in helping communities respond to real-world developments.

An Active Voice

"As organisations sign up to the Pledge, the amount of pro bono assistance grows."

The work of the Special Projects and Policy team underpins Refugee Legal's engagement the local, national, and international levels with refugee and humanitarian organisations, communities, governments, politicians/legislators, law firms, universities, and individuals.

Our advocacy includes conferences, speeches, lectures and presentations, submissions, roundtables, briefings and community meetings. And it has been another busy year.

The work of the Unit played a significant role in the implementation of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) 'Legal

Community' Pledge, to mobilise the global legal community to address the acute unmet legal need of refugees and others forcibly displaced.

In December 2023, the GRF Legal Community Pledge Framework was launched.

Refugee Legal is a member of the Core Group which led the development of the Legal Community Pledge. This involved input from staff members of the Core Group with lived experience of displacement as well as input from law firms, international and local legal assistance NGOs, refugee-led organisations, refugee

lawyers, and others with lived experience of displacement.

UNHCR and relevant bodies, such as the Asylum Capacity Support Group and the Global Strategic Litigation Council on Refugee Rights (GSLC), were also consulted.

Signatories to the Pledge commit to 'take action for and with refugees and other displaced people to increase legal assistance and to facilitate improvements to the systems through which rights, justice, and solutions are accessed.'

They commit to doing so 'in solidarity with displaced

people, one another, and other stakeholders as part of a multi-stakeholder initiative that recognizes the mobilization of legal stakeholders is essential to a whole-of-society and whole-of-route approach to refugee response and to the realization of the Global Compact on Refugees' (GCR) four objectives. We acknowledge this mobilization must occur from a local to global level and in partnership with affected populations.'

The number of signatories continues to grow. In 2019 there were 83, this year 113. And as organisations sign up to the Pledge, the amount of pro bono assistance grows.

The following is an overview of our advocacy and engagement:

Regional and global

We attended the UNHCR Global Refugee Forum 2023, the UNHCR Consultations on Resettlement and Complimentary Pathways (CRCP) and the UNHCR Global Consultations with NGOs in Geneva.

We also attended the Asia-Pacific Consultations with NGOs and OHCHR and APRRN Consultations in Bangkok.

We consulted with key UN officials, including Gillian Triggs (former Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR), Ruvendrini Menikdiwela (current Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR) and others.

Meetings with Members of Parliament and Government Officials

We attended high-level meetings with key members of the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), including as a member of the peak DHA-NGO dialogue, and consultations with key Federal and State Parliamentarians across the political spectrum.

We briefed the Victorian Government on key issues and needs and our work on a wide range of refugee and immigration policy issues.

Meetings and roundtables

We participated in high-level meetings and roundtables, including with the sector, partner agencies, key advocates, and government in relation to:

- TPVs and Afghan human right defenders
- Third country options for 'transitory persons' – people held in offshore detention
- Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) reform
- TPV/SHEV transition to permanent visa reform
- Alternatives to indefinite detention
- Policy law reform post the change in Federal Government following the 2022 Federal Election

- Resettlement to New Zealand and United States of America for people held in offshore detention Crises in Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Myanmar
- Final Departure Bridging Visas for people brought to Australia for medical treatment
- Supports for people in the community seeking asylum, including SRSS
- Visa processing, including addressing primary and merits review delays and backlogs
- Women on temporary visas or without visas experiencing family violence
- Federal Human Rights Act
- Refugee and humanitarian program, including an increased intake and related issues about composition.
- Anti-vilification reforms

We also sat on Boards and Committees, including the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness Advisory Board, the Refugee Leadership Group, the Steering Committee of the Refugee Leadership Alliance, and the Core Group of the Global Refugee Forum Legal Community Pledge.

An Active Voice (cont.)

Sector Meetings

We participated in high-level stakeholder meetings with the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

We continued to contribute to advocacy and policy priorities through our attendance at meetings with other organisations working in this sector, including the Refugee and Immigration National Community Law Coalition (RAINCLC), the Refugee Council of Australia, the Law Institute of Victoria (LIV), the Refugee Reform Committee, the Australian Red Cross, the Network of Asylum Seeker Agencies (Victoria NASAVic Network), Victoria Legal Aid, the Federation of Community Legal Centres (FCLC), Community Legal Centres Australia (CLCS), the National Asylum Policy Advocacy Network (Victoria Branch), the Detention Advocacy Network, Anglicare, Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the National Asylum Policy Network, Refugee Sector Advocacy and Campaigns Strategy Group, the National Advocacy Group for Women on Temporary Visas, the LIV Family Violence Working Group and the Pride Foundation Australia – LGBTQIA+ Refugee and Asylum Seeker Advisory Group.

Submissions

We made detailed written submissions to key Federal Parliamentary and departmental inquiries. Refer to the Special Projects and Policy Unit section for further details.

Media

We provided frequent public commentary to mainstream and alternative media organisations in Australia and overseas on a wide range of current asylum and immigration issues.

Conferences, Presentations, Roundtables and Community Meetings

Presentations included:

- 3rd Australia & New Zealand Refugee Trauma Recovery in Resettlement Conference
- UNHCR Global Refugee Forum - High-Level Event on Access to Legal Protection (as part of GRF Legal Community Pledge)
- Palm Sunday Walk for Justice and Peace Event, Refugee Advocacy Network (Speech)
- 11th Annual Strategic Litigation Roundtable hosted by UNHCR
- 'Prime Minister's Apology to Refugees (2040)', The Leo and Mina Fink Workshop in Australian Migration Studies, Monash University (Keynote Speech)
- Labor for Refugees Victoria AGM (Speech)
- Bayside Refugee Advocacy and Support Association Event (Speech)
- Corrs Chambers Westgarth Sydney legal staff on our

pro bono program

- Bartier Perry legal staff on our pro bono program
- Maddocks legal staff event for National Pro Bono Day
- The Fairness Yet to Come' Forum - Combined Refugee Action Group (Keynote speech)
- Law Society SA CPD Forum on 'Indefinite Detention, Due Process, and Human Rights: Australia's Past Post High Court Ruling in NZYQ'
- NASAVic sector meeting on the TPV/SHEV Conversion to Permanent Visa Program
- Key aid agencies on changes to Afghan visa processing (and assistance with development of advocacy strategy)

Guest lectures

- The Melbourne Law School Human Rights class run by Professor John Tobin
- The Melbourne Law School Refugee Law course run by Professor Michelle Foster, joint lecture with Chief Justice Debra Mortimer

Attendance at key events

- Roundtable with the Victorian Attorney-General

-
- Federation of Community Legal Centre's Roundtable with the Honourable Jaclyn Symes MP, Victorian Attorney-General
 - Ministerial Consultations on the 2023–24 Humanitarian Program
 - Meeting with Co-Chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations
 - Federation of Community Legal Centre's Principal Lawyer Annual Meeting
 - Refugee Communities Association of Australia National Conference Gala Dinner
 - Jesuit Social Services Annual Dinner
 - Eastern Community Legal Centre 50th Birthday Dinner
 - Celebration of 35 Years of Centre for Multicultural Youth
 - Welcome Ceremony for Justice Christopher Horan
 - Refugee Council of Australia's 'Operation #Not Forgotten' event
 - Department/Legal Service Provider Meetings (weekly) on TPV/SHEV Conversion, and coordinated legal service provider questions and feedback
 - Meeting with the Australian Human Rights Commissioner
 - Meetings with Amnesty International
 - Meeting with UNHCR Regional Representatives
 - Departmental consultation on Alternatives to Held Detention
 - Consultation to inform the Review of the Family Relationships Services Program - Attorney-General's Department (Cth)
 - Stakeholder Targeted Consultation on New Federal Administrative Review Body – Attorney-General's Department (Cth)
 - SA Attorney-General's Department 'Assessment of Legal Need in South Australia' project
 - Multicultural legal practitioners' roundtable on Anti-vilification reforms hosted by Victorian Multicultural Commission
 - Victorian Multicultural Commission, Gala Dinner

Thank You to our Generous Supporters

As a non-profit organisation, Refugee Legal relies on the generous support of the community. We are grateful to all our supporters and acknowledge here the leadership, gifts and support of our major partners who make our work possible.

Refugee Legal Supporters



Refugee Legal Pro Bono Partners include:



Thanks also to our other major supporters who include, Noel & Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation, Karen McLeod Adair and Anthony Adair, Jack and Hedy Brent Foundation, B & A Miller Foundation, The Lettissier Foundation, Krishna Somers Charitable Trust, Brigitte Smith, Australian Philanthropic Services Foundation, Community Impact Foundation, Australian Community Foundation, Rural Australians for Refugees Affiliated Groups, Manningham Uniting Church, Byron Anglican Parish, Montmorency Asylum Seekers Support Group, Bayside Refugee Advocacy and Support Association and a number of major donors and significant individual donors who prefer to remain anonymous.

Refugee Legal Patrons



Professor Emerita Gillian Triggs



The Honourable Michael Kirby AC CMG

Ambassadors



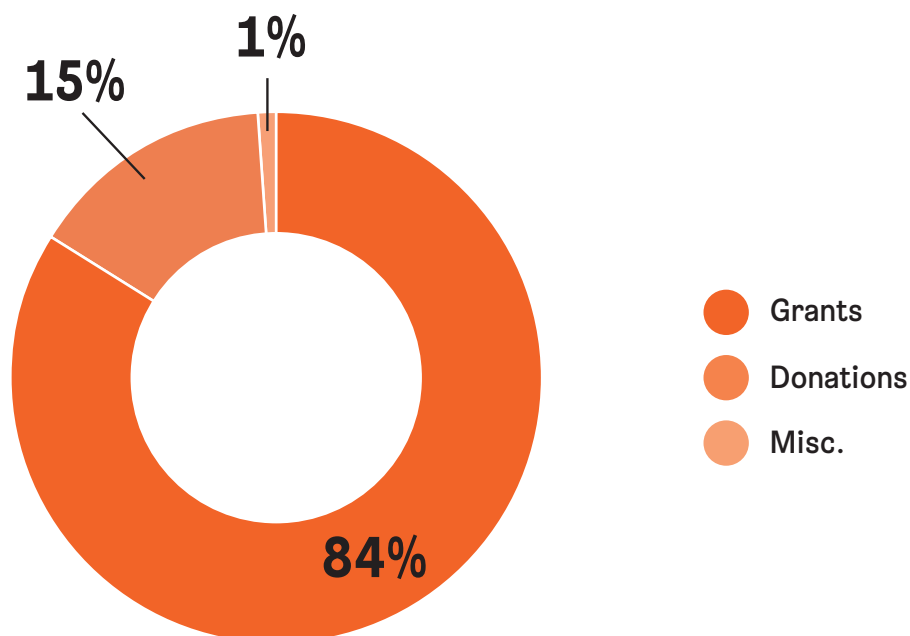
Special thanks go to two of our Ambassadors Tom Ballard and First Dog on the Moon (aka Andrew Marlton) for helping to build our presence, expand our supporter base and raise much needed funds.

Treasurer's Report

A Sound Financial Position

"Refugee Legal remains in a sound financial position to support our core legal services and to respond to new and emerging needs."

Funding Sources



Treasurer's Report

Refugee Legal is pleased to announce an operating surplus of \$145,904 for the financial year ended 30 June 2024.

Throughout the financial year, Refugee Legal has continued to grow as an organisation. New staff have been employed and new projects pursued.

Our expenditure on ordinary activities increased from \$5,354,732 to \$5,770,426. A part of the increased expense was attributable to the cost of work across the TPV/SHEV Conversion to Permanent Visa Program. Funding for this program ended on July 2024, however, the work in this program and associated financial costs will continue over at least the next three years.

Total income from ordinary activities increased from \$5,789,060 to \$5,916,330. This year our income from ordinary activities included 15% from Donations and 84% from Other Grants.

Over the course of the financial year, Refugee Legal benefited from generous grants and donations from numerous philanthropic organisations, major donors and individuals from the community, as well as the substantial pro bono support from 25 corporate law firms.

We also received funding from the Victorian State Government, the Commonwealth Government (to support the TPV/SHEV Conversion to Permanent Visa Program and the Protection Processing Backlog Program) for some of our core work.

Refugee Legal remains in a sound financial position to support our core legal services and to respond to new and emerging needs.

As of 30 June 2024, Refugee Legal has a total equity of \$4,540,124 (compared to 4,394,204 end of 30 June 2023) and total current assets of \$8,708,318 (compared to \$6,537,914 end of 30 June 2023). The total current assets include 2,828,582 of grants received in advance to undertake our core services.

To ensure that we continue to operate sustainably we will continue to employ a range of essential strategies to secure diversified funding, including from donors, philanthropic foundations and State and Federal Government funding. This is particularly important in the context of unprecedented and ever-escalating demand for our services. Additionally, we continue to harness the goodwill, resources, and expertise of volunteers and the broader community to support our work.

Financial Summary

Income and expenditure in summary

Income 2023-24	2024	2023
Other Grants	\$4,947,036	\$4,840,391
Professional Development & Training Courses	\$30,969	\$11,762
Donations	\$902,543	\$891,726
Interest Income	\$25,629	\$8,426
Other Income	\$10,153	\$36,755
Total	\$5,916,330	\$5,789,060

Income 2023-24		
Auditor's Remuneration	\$9,245	\$5,500
Bank Charges	\$7,225	\$1,233
Consultants	\$99,484	\$83,752
Depreciation	\$23,418	\$10,255
General Expenses	\$77,377	\$31,517
Insurance	\$20,340	\$8,732
Interpreters	\$496,354	\$701,184
Postage	\$4,965	\$5,876
Professional Development & Training Courses	\$483	\$8,159
Publications & Subscriptions	\$17,798	\$29,722
Refugee Legal SA	\$3,235	\$64,553
Rent	\$514,039	\$321,045
Repairs & Maintenance, Consumables	\$133,531	\$130,863
Salaries (including packaged benefits)	\$3,806,297	\$3,492,836
Stationery, Office Supplies	\$22,844	\$36,919
Staff Training, Seminars & Conferences	\$7,948	\$2,102
Superannuation	\$395,444	\$332,357
Telephone & Fax	\$40,058	\$10,338
Travel & Accommodation	\$73,008	\$55,572
Workcover	\$17,333	\$22,217
Total	\$5,770,426	\$5,354,732
Surplus after income tax expense	\$145,904	\$434,328
Net Assets	\$4,540,124	\$4,394,220

Our Staff

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Linda Budd

Volunteer Coordinator

Harmonie Cribbes

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Bianca DeToma

Senior Solicitors

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The Question of Change

In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, the Chair of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Drafting Committee, "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. [...] Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.

Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world."

That's why you and your support for Refugee Legal, and those we assist, is so vital, so valuable and so powerful.

Thank you,
David Manne
CEO
Refugee Legal

Refugee Legal:

Refugees Asylum seekers Vulnerable migrants