

Refugee Legal: Defending the Rights of Refugees



Acknowledgement of Country

Refugee Legal acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands across Australia, 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 37 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.

Our work is underpinned by helping as many people as possible who are most in need as effectively as we can.

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 outcomes 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, nationwide 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

"Amid these global forces, the need for Refugee Legal has never been more stark and the imperative to act never more urgent. We are responding at a time when clarity of purpose, steadfast values and courage in advocacy are more essential than ever. The reality is there has never been a greater need for our collective work."

We live in revolutionary times. The world order is being fundamentally reshaped, dangerously. Global crises - climate, economic and humanitarian - proliferate and the space for safety shrinks.

Across the world, the numbers of people fleeing deadly conflicts and persecution continue to soar, while routes to protection and safe passage diminish by the day. The humanitarian, legal and moral challenges mount, and the pace and scale of change demand that we remain ready to respond, deeply grounded in purpose and resolute in action.

Amid these global forces, the need for Refugee Legal has never been more stark and the imperative to act never more urgent. We are responding at a time when clarity of purpose, steadfast values and courage in advocacy are more essential than ever. The reality is there has never been a greater need for our collective work.

In the face of crises, we must also maintain hope, knowing that while we may not be able to help everyone, we can help someone.

Our work continues to be powered by the conviction that, no matter who you are or where you're from, you should be able to get a fair go before the law.

Every single day, we see the human stakes of these realities - predicaments which could hardly matter more: protection from

persecution, reunification with family, safety from violence, and freedom from detention.

The work we all do is in providing expert legal help that gives hope and transforms lives - work that has flowed from our founding conviction and continues to propel us forward 37 years on. That conviction remains as true today as it was on the day we began - and it remains the foundation upon which change, safety and justice are built.

Our Year - Action, Growth, Milestones

This year, Refugee Legal continued to respond to escalating global and local humanitarian need, while also expanding our service footprint and strengthening our capacity to deliver expert legal assistance, education and advocacy for systemic reform. Our work this year has again demonstrated that progress is not only measured by scale, but by impact delivered at the most critical moments - and by standing ready to render help when the door to safety feels shut for so many.

A major milestone was the establishment of Refugee Legal NT - the first specialist free legal service for refugees and migrants in the Northern Territory - born of community will, collaboration and shared conviction.



From one lawyer part-time at a coffee table in Melbourne 37 years ago to a full-time service in Darwin, this launch reflects not only demand but possibility: where from little things, big things grow. This is history-making in its own right - ensuring that people in the Territory can receive local, expert legal help on matters that determine nothing less than their future - and that of their loved ones.

This expansion builds on decades of work rooted in partnership - with communities, volunteers, pro bono law firms, philanthropic supporters, service agencies and government - all contributing to stronger, more accessible pathways to safety, fairness and participation. These partnerships are not ancillary; they are core to how Refugee Legal grows, adapts and leads in this changing landscape.

From our President and CEO (cont.)

Impact and Reach

Client assistance reached 21,020. Volunteers nationally now total 650. Pro bono corporate law firm partners now total 26.

Our national footprint includes Victoria, South Australia and the Northern Territory. We have ongoing service delivery through remote and national clinic models and have continued specialist crisis-activated clinics.

These numbers represent people, not statistics, stories of lives changed, rights defended, families reconnected, liberty restored, safety secured and futures rebuilt. They reflect a level of demand that is not diminishing, and a service model that must remain ready, rapid and resilient.

The Battle for Justice - Challenge and Opportunity

Right now, we're at a critical juncture in our history where we must seize the opportunity for real change. While some progress has been made, it does not come close to meeting our international obligations nor the values that underpin them: humanity, compassion, fairness and justice. The reality is: a very big battle for justice still lies ahead.

Through our collective advocacy, major steps have been taken. Recent TPV reforms have lifted over 20,000 refugees out of a decade of cruel limbo, granting them permanency - a home. And the Humanitarian Program



has increased to 20,000, delivering safety to over 6,000 additional people annually. These are life-changing developments - clear proof that advocacy works and that, where injustice is confronted, hope can prevail.

Yet harm and inhumanity still pervade refugee policy, and the situation has deteriorated further.

Many people have been left behind. Reform is far from complete. More than 7,000 people were still trapped in an endless cycle of uncertainty and injustice, refused protection under a fundamentally flawed process and still not eligible for permanency. These are not statistics - they are people, families, futures.

And no sooner does the High Court rule that it is unlawful to strip people of their liberty indefinitely - and then unlawful to impose ankle bracelet monitoring and curfews upon release - then some of the most draconian laws we have ever seen were rushed through Parliament: laws designed to rob people of their liberty again, coerce people to sign up to their own deportation to possible death, and expand powers to exile people to human warehousing on Nauru yet again.

These events have reinforced an undeniable truth: reform is not linear, and progress is fragile. For this reason, we must again step up our battle to turn things around - to restore the deep generosity of spirit long embedded in our history and in our hearts.

Powered by People and Partnership

The work of Refugee Legal could not be done without our staff, volunteers, pro bono lawyers, Committee, partners, donors, funders and supporters - all of whom personify compassion, courage, expertise and commitment in service of those who need it most. Their contribution is not peripheral; it is foundational - embodying the lived expression of that community will on which Refugee Legal was founded. Through collective action, we have shown that reform is possible, that systems can be changed, that lives can be rebuilt - and that legal assistance, grounded in humanity, has unparalleled power to transform the course of a person's future.

Looking Ahead

The year ahead brings both challenge and opportunity - and we will continue our work to secure deep, lasting, structural reform, while delivering direct, expert, compassionate legal help to all who need it. In overcoming inhumanity, our greatest asset is our own humanity.

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.

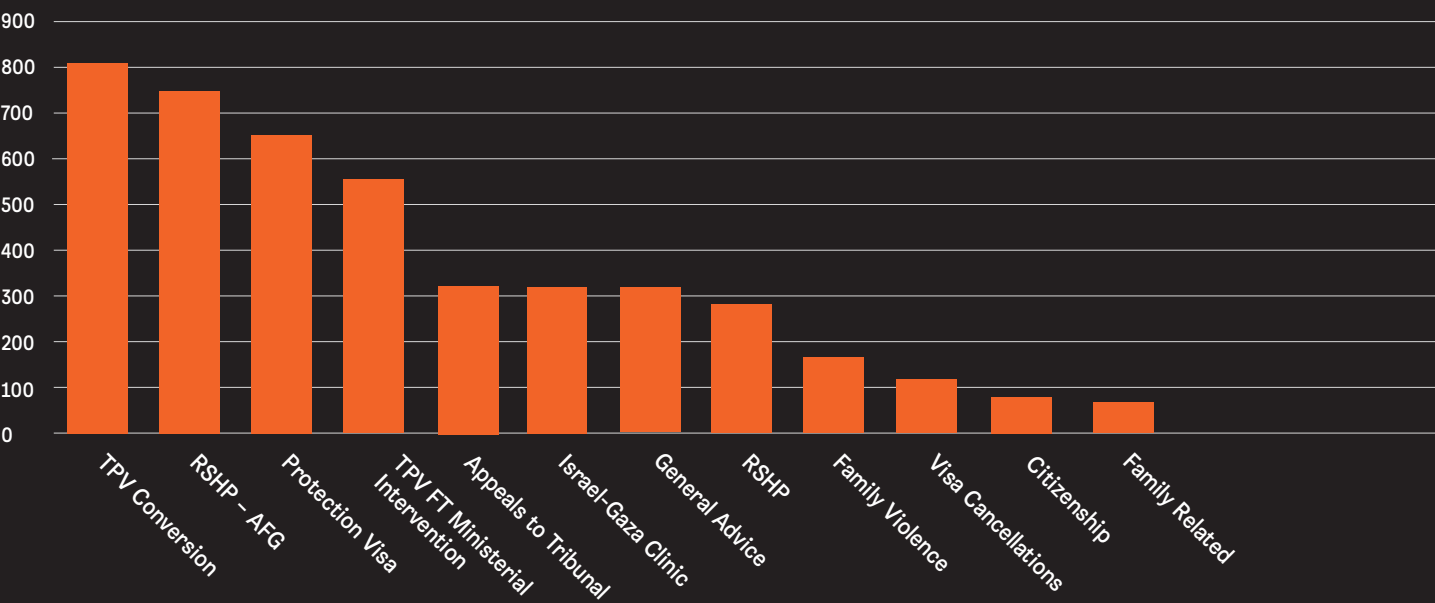
Advocate

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.

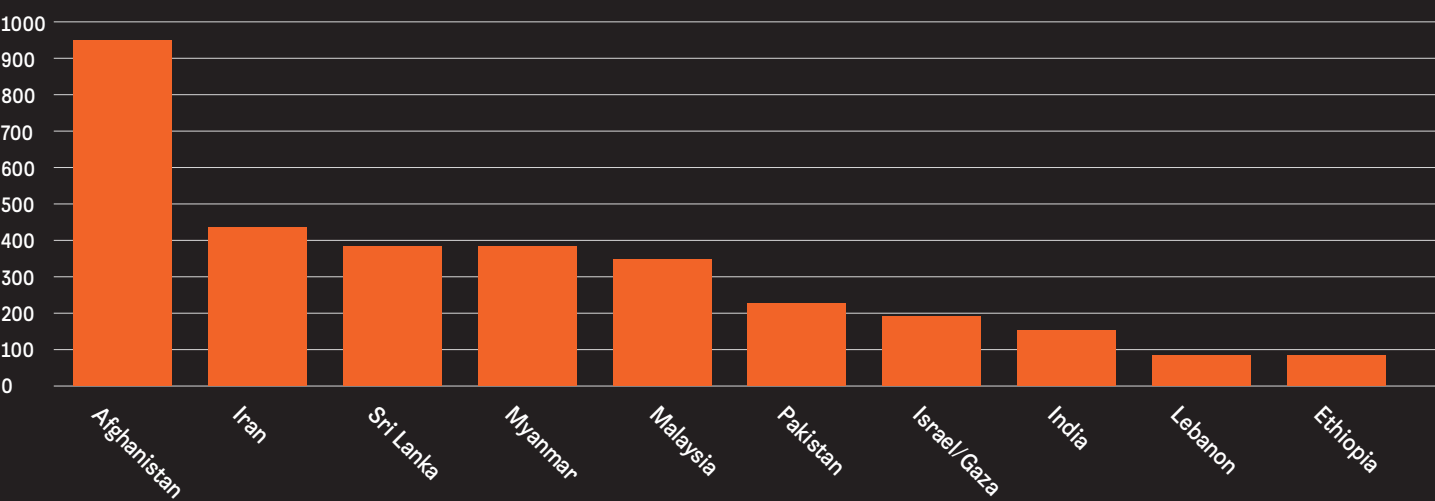
The Numbers for 2024/2025

Total Client Assistance	21,020
Telephone Advice	6,618
Face-to-face Advice	6,149
People Represented	2,239
Clinic assistance	6,014

Top Matter Types



Top Ten Client Country of Origin



Advise and Assist

"Once again, we provided record numbers of clients with high quality, essential legal advice and assistance across our services."

From first call to High Court

Our advice and assistance work is life-changing and adaptable - expanding to meet growing demand with flexible, person-centred legal support. From first phone calls to High Court victories, we help people navigate a complex visa system, assert their rights and move closer to safety, family unity and freedom.

Once again, we provided record numbers of clients with high quality, essential legal advice and assistance across our services.

Our telephone and evening advice services continued to reach capacity every week, with our lawyers providing advice and information across the range

of family and humanitarian visa options, citizenship applications and visa cancellations, as well as providing full representation for clients in their matters.

Many people who contacted us had very limited understanding of the complex visa system in Australia, previous visa applications they may have made or what visa they could be entitled to apply for.

We were able to provide vital help to people to understand where they stood in the process and what avenues were available for them going forward.

Our clients continued to seek a safe future from the persecution they faced, in their homelands or elsewhere, including seeking

freedom to practise their religion, express their political beliefs, live openly with their sexuality and gender and to be free from gender-based and family violence. Many others were seeking refuge from conflicts in Gaza, Myanmar and Ukraine.

We continued to provide high-volume advice, merits assessment and ongoing application assistance for people seeking protection in Australia at both the primary and merits review stages.

This included preparing initial applications for people with protection claims, including family violence matters, preparing statutory declarations of claims, collating evidence, responding to requests for further information



from the Department of Home Affairs, preparing written legal submissions and attending interviews and hearings with clients.

For clients seeking review of the refusal of their applications for protection at the Administrative Review Tribunal (the Tribunal), we created a separate intake line and program, enabling more applicants to obtain the vital ongoing assistance they need to properly present their protection claims.

Many others who contacted us had already been through the system and required help to put forward requests to the Minister for another visa application based on fears that had not been assessed, or for a chance to stay permanently in Australia based on

their compelling or compassionate circumstances, such as mothers challenging potential forced separation from their Australian citizen children.

Assistance for vulnerable refugees and migrants needing carers or 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 visa cancellation or refusal of visa applications due to character matters, with ongoing assistance being provided to people through our Character Clinic.

Throughout the year, we also continued to assist people released from indefinite detention and holding bridging R visas to challenge the conditions on these visas and we provided advice on changes to legislation by the Federal Government enabling the potential removal of people found to be owed protection to third countries, namely Nauru.

On behalf of one of our clients, we brought a successful challenge in the High Court to the constitutional validity of certain conditions on the bridging visa R, *YBFZ v Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs*[2024] HCA 40, which constitutes a major victory for fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in Australia.

We continued to advise and support people who had previously been transferred back to Australia from Nauru and Manus Island, helping them to renew their bridging visas to remain lawfully in Australia and advocating with the Federal Government for changes in policy to enable permanent settlement solutions for this group.

Our team of passionate and dedicated lawyers undertake this immensely meaningful, effective and life-changing work with the support of our administrative staff, legal volunteers, paralegals and interns.

Advise and Assist (con't.)

Protection Process Backlog (PPB) program

In response to the Federal Government's aims of reducing the long processing times for protection visa applications and clearing the significant backlog of cases at the Department and the Tribunal, we significantly expanded the team of lawyers and support staff allocated to our Protection Processing Backlog (PPB) program, enabling us to assist high volumes of applicants at the primary and review stage of the protection visa process within short time frames.

The PPB team provided legal advice and ongoing representation to applicants so that they understood the protection visa criteria, presented accurate and relevant information in support of their claims and efficiently engaged in the process. This resulted in positive outcomes for many applicants who had not had access to legal advice or assistance previously.

As part of this program, we conducted various community legal education sessions in regional and remote areas, including Shepparton, Mildura, Adelaide, Bordertown, Naracoorte and Mt Gambier.

Legal clinics – Israel-Gaza, Myanmar and Ukraine

Conflicts around the world continued to directly impact our clients, resulting in high levels of need for legal assistance to those seeking safety in Australia.

Israel-Gaza

Our Israel-Gaza Legal Hotline continued to receive a significant number of calls from people recently arrived in Australia from the conflict zones and from people seeking advice about bringing family to safety.

In late 2024, the Federal Government announced that Palestinians and Israelis impacted by the conflict and already in Australia on temporary visas would be offered three-year temporary humanitarian visas (subclass 786), with a view to progressing to a permanent visa in the future.

We assisted people to lodge expressions of interest for these temporary humanitarian visas, to accept the visa offers and complete the necessary documentation required. Following the successful grant of the temporary humanitarian visa, some of these clients have now transitioned to a permanent visa - the resolution of status visas (subclass 851).

In addition to working directly with clients in Australia, we continue to provide advice to clients in relation to family members still trapped in Gaza.

Myanmar

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

We have assisted these clients to lodge protection visa applications which have resulted in many visa grants.

Ukraine

Many Ukrainian nationals 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 people to lodge applications for protection visas.

As well as providing legal assistance to individuals, we continued to work in partnership with key non-legal organisations in these communities to advocate for appropriate legal pathways to permanent residence, for increased non-legal supports for people arriving in Australia and for appropriate Federal Government funding for their community organisations.

Afghanistan Legal Program



"We saw husbands, wives and children reunited after years of separation."

A critical lifeline

As the crisis in Afghanistan deepens, our dedicated legal work has remained a critical lifeline - reuniting families, protecting those at risk and helping people rebuild their lives in safety.

The Afghanistan Legal Clinic has continued to assist the community with applications for family members under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian visa program.

Our work has focused on applications under the split family provisions for immediate family, including young children proposing their parents for visas and for vulnerable women at risk of gender-based harm.

A number of our clients were granted visas and we saw husbands, wives and children reunited after years of separation.

We are grateful to play a part in reunifying families who have faced the risk of harm and who have been separated for years.

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

Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) Conversion

"This humane, common-sense decision of the Federal government is transforming the lives of more than 20,000 people who have been suffering in limbo for the past decade or more."



The Federal government's 2023 decision to allow Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) holders to move to permanent Resolution of Status (RoS) visas is enabling thousands of people who have lived in limbo for more than a decade to finally secure safety, stability and a future in Australia.

This humane, common-sense decision is transforming the lives of more than 20,000 people who have been suffering in limbo for the past decade or more.

Our Fast Track Clinic was first 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 that year.

Since then, our legal team, with the help of our 26 pro bono law firm partners, has assisted thousands to apply and, more recently, to convert their visas to permanent residence.

Our Clinic continues to provide legal assistance to hundreds of eligible individuals and families who are going through a range of legal processes, including:

Applications for permanent RoS visas

Our team continued to lodge RoS visa applications for eligible individuals and families. While most eligible individuals have had their RoS visas granted, many are still going through the process and are required to provide additional information about their identity.

Requests for reassessment - Ministerial Intervention

We have continued to make requests for Ministerial Intervention for large numbers of people who were previously refused under the now-abolished Fast Track Assessment process. Our requests for Ministerial Intervention have included requests for reassessment of cases or to have a visa granted on compassionate grounds; for example, where clients have significant vulnerabilities or have Australian citizen children.

We have continued to see success with our Ministerial Intervention requests, and many individuals and families have been offered a pathway to permanency or granted permission to have their protection cases reassessed.

Family reunion

Many of our clients who have been granted RoS visas now wish to sponsor the family from whom they have been separated for many years. We are helping them to apply for visas for their partners, children and other close family. We have seen many success stories in our family reunion program, with many families being reunited after being separated for over 12 years.

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 close to 2,000 (out of approximately 30,000) in this situation nationally.

Citizenship

We have continued to provide advice and guidance to RoS visa holders wanting to apply for Australian citizenship. For those who are stateless, or have been refugees their entire lives, the importance of gaining Australian citizenship cannot be overstated.

South Australia and Northern Territory

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



Growing need, expanding services

Across Australia, we are expanding our on-the-ground presence to meet rising need - with dedicated services in South Australia and the establishment of the Northern Territory's first specialist refugee legal service.

South Australia

Refugee Legal South Australia's service continues to develop and grow to meet the pressing legal needs of the local community.

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

Our partnership with Flinders University to provide a clinic program for law students is now in its second year. Under the supervision of our solicitors, Flinders University law students have been exposed to a broad range of our work and the opportunity to work directly with our clients. We look forward to our ongoing collaboration.

We have continued to engage with the broader legal and community sector in South Australia to promote access to our services for vulnerable asylum seekers, refugees and migrants across the state. We work closely with these agencies to receive referrals and to link clients in with other important supports such as housing and employment.

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 Naracoorte, Bordertown and Mt Gambier 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

The past year has seen a development of monumental significance – the formal establishment of the Northern Territory's first dedicated specialist refugee and immigration legal service. After years of providing legal services remotely, we now have an on-site presence offering in-person legal assistance.

Refugee Legal is co-located with Melaleuca Australia in Darwin and services clients across the Territory. Our on-site solicitor advises and represents clients in a range of areas, including protection visa applications, family reunion, family violence, citizenship and more.

In the lead up to the formalisation of our legal service in the NT, we undertook substantial consultations with a range of organisations, local government and community groups. Through these consultations, it became abundantly clear that the need for a local service was great.

We look forward to further developing our services across the NT in the coming year, 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

"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."



Safety and a visa

Family violence remains one of the most pervasive and devastating human rights violations and, for people without secure migration status, the danger is compounded by fear, isolation and lack of legal protection.

This year, demand for our specialist family violence legal services reached unprecedented levels as more women, children and gender-diverse people sought safety, stability and a future free from abuse.

Our work in family violence integrates legal advice and assistance with strategies to advocate for reform and for community empowerment.

Assisting people impacted by family violence has been a significant part of our legal, policy and advocacy work for many years. In the past year, our services have again expanded in response to this burgeoning need.

People on temporary visas, or without visas, affected by family violence are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. We assisted large numbers of people in this group who have multiple and complex vulnerabilities.

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 'family violence' day service clinic continued, with weekly appointments conducted by lawyers from our pro bono partners, supervised by our experienced team of expert female lawyers.

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 continued to hold a key leadership role in policy and advocacy in the area of family violence and migration.

This year there were a number of welcome policy reforms, including expansion of the family violence provisions to more visas. 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 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 we work with our colleagues across a variety of legal and non-legal services continuing to advocate for a new visa for women experiencing family violence.

We engage directly with government on legal and policy issues through consultation and written submissions and, as experts in this area, we have presented at a range of forums and panels on the issue to the community and legal sectors.

No one should be forced to choose between their safety and their visa. Through tailored legal pathways, collaborative partnerships and strong advocacy, we help people break free from violence, secure their own visa status and rebuild their lives - often after years of trauma and exploitation.

The Question of Change

"We can't change the world for everyone, but we can change the world for someone - and that makes all the difference."

The work of the Special Projects and Policy 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 strategic litigation
 - advancing public awareness, understanding and dialogue and building action for change
 - 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 intake composition
- the Ukraine crisis response
- the Israel/Gaza crisis response
- Afghan aid workers
- the abolition of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) and the establishment of the new Administrative Review Tribunal (ART)
- visa processing, including addressing delays and backlogs in primary and merits review.

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

- Refugee Legal submission to the Inquiry into the Administrative Review Tribunal (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2024; Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee
- Joint submission, with RAINCLC, to the Inquiry into the Administrative Review Tribunal (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2024; Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee
- Joint consultation feedback on draft Administrative Review Tribunal Practice Directions
- Testimony at a hearing of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee - Inquiry into the Administrative Review Tribunal (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2024.

Digital Strategy

"We're building a digital backbone that grows with us."



Secure, flexible, connected.

This year, we advanced our Digital Strategy to build a more secure, flexible and connected organisation - strengthening data protection, expanding remote access and equipping our growing national network to deliver vital legal help from anywhere in Australia.

Our digital evolution is not just about technology - it's about understanding how technology can enable us to meet our goal of helping as many people as possible.

Our key focus has been to strengthen security and enhance access to data. This has included:

- Implementing more robust security systems for client data access across all profiles, including volunteers and staff
- Mandatory, regular, cyber security training for all staff and volunteers
- Transfer of all data to an encrypted and secure cloud server system that will continue to support the growth of our expanding network
- Mapping and restructure of client data drives to enhance permissions and further secure data access points

- Standardisation of remote desktops to enable work across Australia
- Implementing Remote Management Monitoring (RMN) and Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR) software solutions
- Implementing the initial stages of a volunteer management and scheduling system that can better manage and track the varied and particular skill sets of our team of over 600 volunteers.

We are building a digital backbone that grows with us.

Stories of Courage and Hope

"Najib was relieved, overjoyed and immediately asked us: 'When can I see my family?' "

The chance to rebuild.

Behind every policy decision and every legal victory are people whose lives have been transformed - these are the stories of people who faced unimaginable danger and who, with our support, found safety, justice and the chance to rebuild.

10 year battle for justice

Najib, a 27-year-old Rohingya man from Myanmar, suffered brutal abuse daily at the hands of the military. He was routinely forced into portering heavy loads up mountains, in constant fear that he would collapse under the unbearable loads and meet the same deadly fate as others.

Najib arrived here by boat 12 years ago, having been forced to flee with no option but to leave his wife, Noor, and son, Hashim, behind. Soon after, he was able to help them to escape to Malaysia. Five years on, despite Najib being from one of the most persecuted minorities in the world, his case was refused on review, without a hearing, under the unfair Fast Track Assessment system.

During Najib's years in legal limbo, his mental health deteriorated so severely that he was regularly hospitalised. But his status meant he was denied access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme – and to crucial treatment. On the back of recent reforms, we pleaded Najib's case for reassessment – and priority – due to his mental health. Through our critical legal help, after a 10-year battle for protection, his case was expedited and approved within months – ultimately resulting in the grant of permanent residence.

Najib was so relieved and overjoyed. He immediately asked us: "When can I see my family?"

And, with the grant of permanency, we helped Najib to travel to Malaysia to reunite with Noor and Hashim, who were able to embrace after 10 years of enforced separation. At the same time, we provided legal help for them to apply for family reunion, which was granted within weeks.

Soon after, Najib, Noor and Hashim embraced again – this time, at Melbourne Airport, and all as permanent residents. And now knowing that they could finally rebuild their lives together, in safety, with dignity and real hope for the future.

Securing freedom from fear

In 2022, Aisha arrived in Australia with her husband, Abdul, their ten-year-old daughter, Fatima, and their twelve-year-old son, Ali. Holding business visas, the family had high hopes of starting a new life here.

Case Studies

Abdul had been violent towards Aisha since the beginning of their marriage, but she hoped that moving to Australia would provide a fresh start for the family. Sadly, this was not to be the case. Abdul continued to subject Aisha to severe violence – often in front of their children.

Aisha, Fatima and Ali lived in terror, not knowing when the next violent incident would occur. Aisha knew that she desperately needed to escape with her children from the violence.

In 2023, after another serious incident of violence, Aisha called the police. The police assisted Aisha and her children to enter a family violence refuge.

Aisha was terrified that she and the children would be forced to return to Pakistan and that Abdul would follow them and continue to harm them. The family violence refuge contacted us on behalf of Aisha for urgent assistance.

We immediately helped Aisha and her children to apply for protection so that they could remain safely in Australia. And, just last month, the Department of Home Affairs determined that Aisha and her children were owed protection and granted them permanent protection visas.

Aisha, Fatima and Ali were ecstatic that they had finally secured safety and freedom from a life filled with fear.

Restoring Rights and Access to Justice

Just months ago, Joyce, a 42-year-old woman from Papua New Guinea (PNG), was served at her home with a 'Notice of Intention to Remove' by Australian Border Force, telling her that she faced forced deportation from detention within weeks.

Petrified and confused, Joyce called us for help. She told us that she had fled from PNG to Australia in 2016, after years of brutal family violence at the hands of her husband. She suffered severe memory and mental health conditions due to the violence.

And she had lived in constant fear of return to more violence and danger at the hands of her husband – without protection – in PNG.

She applied – without any legal help – for a protection visa to stay in Australia. Her case was refused by Home Affairs after a short telephone interview. She lost her right to appeal due to her not receiving the visa refusal letter because of insecure accommodation. She only realised she'd been refused when she was cut off from access to Medicare.

With no appeal rights, no Medicare and facing imminent deportation to danger, Joyce sought our help to lodge an urgent request to the Minister for reassessment of her protection case. Due to the impact of the family violence and the lack of legal help, she had been unable to receive a proper consideration of her claims and had been deprived of a fair hearing. We also sought an undertaking that Joyce not be deported while her case was being considered by the Minister.

Despite this, Joyce was still issued with a 'Notice of Intention to Remove' within two weeks – and at a cost to her of \$5,357.07.

We immediately assembled a legal team and filed an urgent injunction in the Federal Court to prevent her removal. Within hours of filing, Joyce was granted a new bridging visa, releasing her from detention and imminent deportation. Joyce now has work rights and access to Medicare.

The Minister intervened to allow Joyce to lodge a new protection visa application. With our legal help, she has been able to properly present her claims, which are now being assessed by the Government.

The Impact Multiplier

Volunteer Program

"Together, we continue to build a community of hope, ensuring access to justice for those who need it most."

A coalition of impact – professionally rewarding, personally transformative.

Our work is powered by a remarkable coalition of over 650 volunteers, now 26 pro bono law firms and leading universities - a partnership model that expands our reach, multiplies our impact and ensures that people seeking asylum and refuge can access expert legal help when they need it most.

The collective strength of our staff, combined with our pro bono partners, volunteers and university collaborators, has always been fundamental to our ability to help as many people as possible get legal assistance.

This year's record level of assistance would not have been possible without the ongoing commitment and generosity of this 'volunteer coalition' which is not just an add-on to our work; it is a multiplier.

Our pro-bono partnerships remain the cornerstone of our model, allowing us to respond swiftly and effectively to complex and large-scale legal challenges. These partnerships continue to be recognised internationally as a best practice model.

This year, our partnerships grew to 26 leading law firms, reflecting continued commitment from the legal community. We also strengthened relationships through our biannual partner meetings, including a visit to



Sydney to further engage with our interstate partners

Our partnerships with leading universities, including the University of Melbourne, Monash, RMIT, Deakin, Swinburne, Australian Catholic University, and Flinders, continue to grow.

These partnerships provide students with invaluable experience in migration law and in working directly with clients. Through these partnerships, students develop their skills while making a real difference in the lives of our clients.

We were proud to celebrate our volunteers at our annual thank-you event, recognising

the commitment and passion that drives their contribution each year. Many volunteers shared that their experience with Refugee Legal was not only professionally rewarding, but personally transformative.

As the demand for free legal assistance continues to grow, the role of our volunteers and pro-bono partners has never been more vital. We are deeply grateful for the dedication of every individual and partner who has worked alongside us this year. Together, we continue to build a community of hope, ensuring access to justice for those who need it most.

Valuable Insights and Unique Challenges

"I was able to gain invaluable experience, learning how to communicate through interpreters and engage with vulnerable clients."



Invaluable hands-on experience

Each year, dozens of emerging lawyers and law students gain firsthand experience at Refugee Legal – working alongside our team to support people seeking safety, build vital legal skills and shape the next generation of social justice advocates.

Alyssa Davies

I recently completed a three-month internship at Refugee Legal which was an opportunity facilitated by my university. I volunteered two days a week and completed a broad range of tasks, including protection visa applications, client interviews and research for submissions. I spent most of my internship completing work for the Afghanistan Clinic under the supervision of Alexandra Jannetto, who provided amazing insight and guidance. I was able to gain invaluable experience, learning how to communicate through interpreters and engage with vulnerable clients.

My internship helped me understand some of the intricacies of refugee and migration law in Australia, allowing me to understand how it operates at a practical level, as well as some of the challenges that are encountered every day. Since completing my internship, I've been able to continue volunteering at Refugee Legal, allowing me to further develop my legal and people skills.

For anyone enthusiastic or curious about public interest law, volunteering or completing an internship at Refugee Legal is a great introduction and way to develop key skills that are required in the sector. It's exciting to be around passionate, like-minded people and there are always new tasks to tackle. I've really enjoyed my time at Refugee Legal so far and look forward to continuing my role as a volunteer paralegal.



Hailey Maloney

During my placement at Refugee Legal, completed as part of my Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice, I had the privilege of supporting people seeking protection in Australia. I worked closely with my supervising lawyer on a range of client matters. Some of the tasks I completed included detailed country of origin research, interviewing Palestinian families seeking asylum with the assistance of interpreters and drafting a protection visa application for an asylum seeker from the LGBTQIA+ community. It was extremely rewarding to engage in meaningful work that directly supported clients while being part of a passionate and talented team.

The experience strengthened my confidence as an emerging lawyer and confirmed my commitment to building a career in human rights and social justice.



Patrick Sexton

Volunteering at Refugee Legal was an invaluable opportunity to gain practical legal experience in the public interest law field. Over the course of my six-month internship, I deepened my understanding of refugee law and Australia's obligations to people seeking asylum. My work involved researching conditions in various countries of origin to support protection applications and then discussing the legal implications of my findings with my supervising lawyer.

I also had the chance to learn from solicitors about the strategic litigation they pursue, including how they form arguments for test cases that can shape the enforcement of refugee rights in Australia.

Beyond legal research, I was able to develop 'soft skills' that often aren't discussed in law school despite their necessity in legal practice, such as patience and empathy through client calls. Refugee Legal were fantastic in helping us build skills which would prioritise this human-focused approach to our work, rather than treating clients like a problem to be solved.

Educate

"Responsive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and training sessions have allowed practitioners to update their skills and obtain the knowledge needed to address the numerous legislative and policy changes this year."

Responding to legal and policy change

Through our CPD program and community education initiatives, we equip lawyers, migration agents, students and frontline workers with the expertise and up-to-date knowledge needed to respond to constant legal and policy change - ensuring people seeking asylum and refugees receive informed, timely and effective support wherever they are.



Our CPD Workshops

Refugee Legal's CPD Program is a core component of our broader education program. Our workshops are designed to assist lawyers and registered migration agents to develop skills and knowledge in relevant areas of practice. These include all aspects of protection visa processes, responses to international humanitarian crises, family migration and character matters.

Responsive CPD and training sessions have assisted practitioners to update their skills and obtain the knowledge needed to address the numerous legislative and policy changes this year. The introduction of new Ministerial Intervention Guidelines, emergency responses to various international conflicts, changes to the offshore Humanitarian Visa program and the progression of arrangements to remove certain groups of migrants to regional processing countries are some of many challenges the sector has had to respond to.

Our commitment to online workshops ensures 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

In accordance with our Strategic Plan, we prioritised the delivery of community education sessions. These sessions were delivered in person and online across Victoria, South Australia and the Northern Territory. A continued focus on reaching regional communities saw sessions delivered in metropolitan, rural and regional areas of Australia, including Melbourne, Shepparton, Mildura, Castlemaine, Adelaide, Naracoorte, Nhill, Bordertown, Mt Gambier and Darwin.

Our programs are provided directly to refugees, asylum seekers and other migrant communities, as well as to support services that assist them. This is to ensure accurate and effective advice is readily available and communities are properly supported when navigating the migration system and its complexities.

Refugee Legal provided workshops to health providers, multicultural organisations and family violence support services to build capacity and enhance service delivery strategies.

We continue to engage with communities affected by acute legal need, including groups affected by conflict in the Middle East and Africa. The timely provision of information in clear, easy to understand terms has been crucially important in helping communities respond to real-world developments.

Advocate

Shaping State, National and International Policy

"This year there were a number of welcome policy reforms, including allowing further groups of asylum seekers to apply for the Resolution of Status visas and greater expansion of family violence provisions."

Multi-faceted, informed, persistent.

From the meeting halls of the United Nations to the seat of government in Canberra, from roundtables with policymakers to conversations with community allies, our advocacy is multi-faceted, informed and persistent.

We show up wherever decisions are made, to turn lived experience into sound advice and influence, to ensure as best we can that fairness and justice are not just talked about but acted on.

The work of the Special Projects and Policy team underpins Refugee Legal's engagement at 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 has 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 mobilisation 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

This past year, we attended the UNHCR 2025 Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (CRCP), and the UNHCR 13th Annual Strategic Litigation Roundtable in Geneva.

We attended the Strategic Litigation Network Meeting on Migrants and People on the Move in Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, co-led by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, in partnership with the Global Strategic Litigation Council (the Council).

We consulted with key UNHCR officials in Geneva.

Meetings with Members of Parliament and Government Officials

We attended high-level meetings with key members of the Federal 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 in relation to a wide range of refugee and immigration policy issues.

Meetings and roundtables

We participated in numerous 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 - including resettlement to New Zealand
- Administrative Appeals Tribunal reform
- TPV/SHEV transition to permanent visa reform
- Alternatives to indefinite detention
- Policy law reform post the 2025 Federal Election
- Crises in Israel-Gaza, 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 Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS)
- Visa processing, including addressing primary and merits review delays and backlogs

An Active Voice (cont.)

- Women on temporary visas, or without visas, experiencing family violence
- A Federal Human Rights Act
- Refugee and humanitarian program, including an increased intake and related issues about composition.
- Onshore Pathway Support
- Temporary Humanitarian and Permanent Visa Pathways
- Victoria-based refugee legal services and the new Administrative Review Tribunal.

We also sat on a number of 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.

Sector Meetings

We contributed 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 – LGBTIQ+ 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:

- Commemorating 10 Years of Grandmothers for Refugees (Speech)
- Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) Webinar
- Rural Australians for Refugees Conference (Speech)
- Afghan Australian Development Organisation AGM (Speech)
- Bayside Refugee Advocacy and Support Association (Speech)
- Palm Sunday Rally in Canberra – Refugee Action Campaign Canberra (Speech)
- Bartier Perry legal staff and volunteers on our pro bono program
- 13th Annual Strategic Litigation Roundtable in Geneva – UNHCR.

Guest lectures

- Melbourne University Human Rights Class run by Professor John Tobin
- The Melbourne Law School Refugee Law course run by Jade Roberts, joint lecture with Chief Justice Debra Mortimer
- ANU International Refugee Law class run by Ellen Hansen.

Other key events

Attendance at key events included:

- Federation of Community Legal Centre’s (FCLC) Principal Lawyers Annual Meeting
- Meetings with UNHCR Australia and Asia Pacific Regional Bureau Representatives
- Consultation meetings on National Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP)
- CLC Collective meeting on the future of legal assistance under NAJP, convened by Attorney-General’s Department (Cth)
- Ceremonial sitting and formal welcome of The Hon Justice Richard Niall at the Supreme Court of Victoria
- Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations (AFUO) 2025 Gala Dinner & launch of Stefan Romaniw Memorial Fund.

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 including, Noel & Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation, Karen McLeod Adair and Anthony Adair, Jack and Hedy Brent Foundation, B & A Miller Foundation, The Lettisier 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

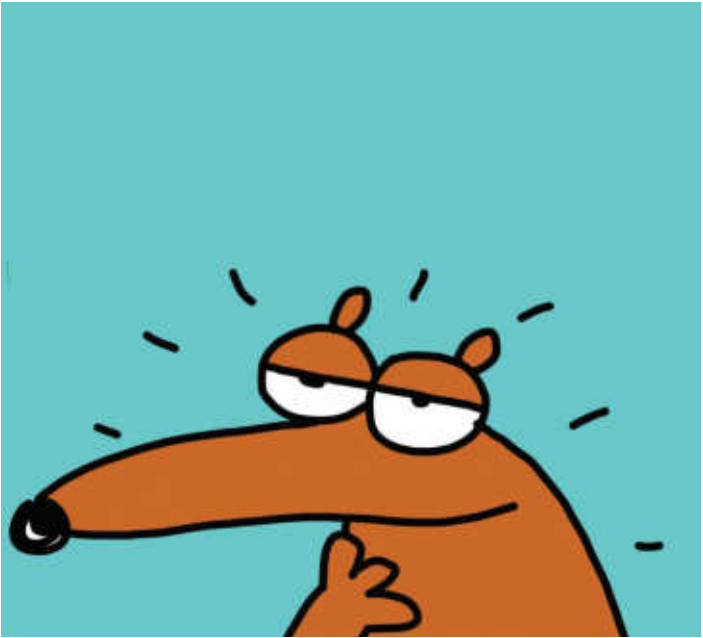


Professor Emerita Gillian Triggs



The Honourable Michael Kirby AC CMG

Ambassadors



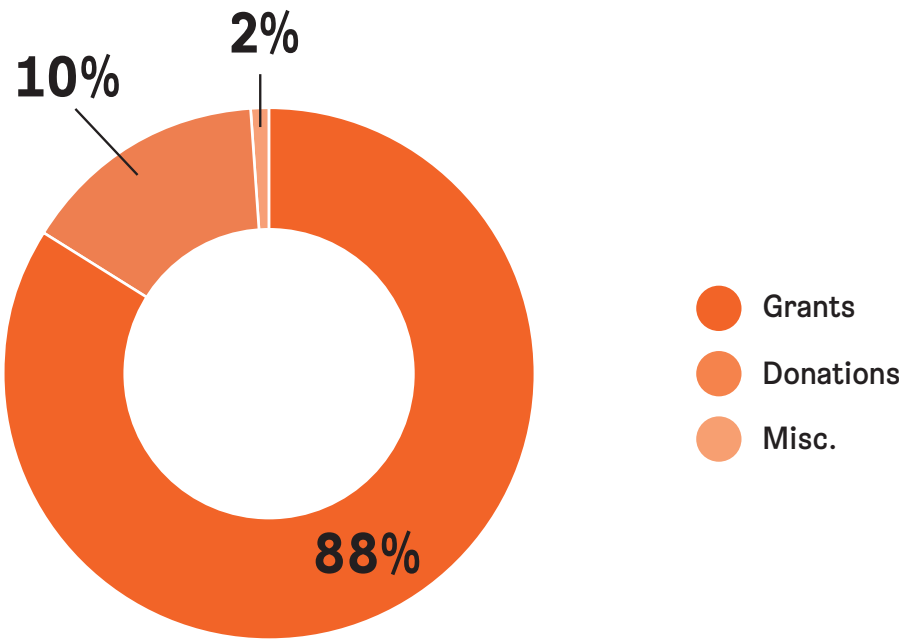
Special thanks go to two of our Ambassadors, Tom Ballard and First Dog on the Moon (aka Andrew Marlton), for helping to build our presence, expand our supporter base and raise much needed funds.

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 \$1,314,244 for the financial year ended 30 June 2025.

Over the course of the financial year, Refugee Legal has experienced significant growth as an organisation. This has involved the employment of new staff and new projects being pursued.

As of 30 June 2025, Refugee Legal has a total equity of \$6,436,954 (compared to \$5,122,710 at the end of 30 June 2024) and total current assets of \$16,589,303 (compared to \$8,708,318 at the end of 30 June 2024). The total current assets include \$8,285,413 of grants received in advance to undertake our core services.

Our expenditure on ordinary activities increased from \$5,770,426 to \$7,338,249. Similarly, total income from ordinary activities increased from \$6,498,916 to \$8,652,493. Part of the increase in both income and expenditure can be attributed to the costs associated with the Protection Processing Backlog Program, at both the primary and merits review stages.

This year, our income from ordinary activities included 10% from Donations and 88% from Other Grants.

Throughout the financial year, Refugee Legal received generous grants and donations from various philanthropic organisations, major donors and individuals in the community, alongside substantial pro bono support from 26 corporate law firms. We also received funding from the Victorian Government and the Federal Government. Refugee Legal remains in a sound financial position to support our core legal services and to respond to new and emerging needs.

To maintain our commitment to sustainable operations, we will implement a variety of essential strategies to secure diversified funding sources, including from donors, philanthropic foundations and State and Federal Government funding. This is especially crucial given the unprecedented and growing demand for our services. Furthermore, 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 2024–25	2025	2024
Other Grants	7,583,553	5,529,622
Professional Development & Training Courses	23,142	30,969
Donations	837,769	902,543
Interest Income	177,683	25,629
Other Income	30,346	10,153
Total	8,652,493	6,498,916
Expenditure 2024–25		
Auditor’s Remuneration	9,000	9,245
Bank Charges	8,145	7,225
Consultants	138,680	99,484
Depreciation	54,338	23,418
General Expenses	169,173	77,377
Insurance	29,430	20,340
Interpreters	480,019	496,354
Postage	5,973	4,965
Professional Development & Training Courses		483
Publications & Subscriptions	20,751	17,798
Refugee Legal SA		3,235
Rent	539,398	514,039
Repairs & Maintenance, Consumables	223,858	133,531
Salaries (including packaged benefits)	4,902,913	3,806,297
Stationery, Office Supplies	31,597	22,844
Staff Training, Seminars & Conferences	19,687	7,948
Superannuation	540,310	395,444
Telephone & Fax	55,129	40,058
Travel & Accommodation	92,494	73,008
Workcover	17,354	17,333
Total	7,338,249	5,770,426
Surplus after income tax expense	1,314,244	728,490
Net Assets	6,436,954	5,122,710

Our Staff

CEO/Principal Solicitor David Manne	Sarah Crosby Alexandra Jannetto Amelia Faraone Lydia Ganci Clare Hughes Asad Khan Gabriella Lauricella Duhita Lewis Catherine Luong Madelyn Madeira Andrea Main Iona Moller Shivya Nath Scott Newton Mary O’Callaghan Sara Ozrain Brianna Partington Mikele Prestia Leah Radatti Tara Rosenberg Sarah Shnider Madeleine Smith Sam Stafford James Stanley Benjamin Stern Penny Thompson Anna Woods	Finance Officer Diana Sguerzi
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The Question of Change

"Ultimately, it is about the people with whom we work in solidarity in overcoming inhumanity, remembering that in doing so, our greatest asset is our own humanity."

Thank you,

David Manne
CEO
Refugee Legal

Refugee Legal:

Refugees Asylum seekers Vulnerable migrants

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