



Refugee Council of Australia

RCOA STRATEGIC PLAN – 2011-2015

Context

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is a national non-profit umbrella organisation, formed in 1981 to provide a coordinated community voice on refugee and asylum seeker issues. On behalf of its organisational and individual members, it provides information on refugees and asylum seekers, presenting the case for improvements to policies and support. RCOA's membership includes many of Australia's refugee settlement and asylum related agencies, as well as international development agencies, community groups and organisations concerned about refugee policy. In 2010, RCOA's individual membership increased with the incorporation of members of A Just Australia following its merger with the Council.

A refugee is '... any person who ... owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his (or her) nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself (or herself) of the protection of that country...'¹

RCOA receives funding and other support from a range of organisations and individuals including: members and supporters, the Australian Refugee Foundation, government agencies, philanthropic trusts and non-government organisations.

RCOA is actively involved in dialogue regarding support for refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and internationally, regularly publishing material and speaking on issues of concern through the media, at conferences and public events and through other community forums. The Council works closely with a variety of national peak organisations² and with international bodies including the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies. It engages closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) nationally and internationally, participating in UNHCR-convened meetings to advance discussions with governments of other nations and with non-government organisations with common concerns for refugee protection.

RCOA's niche

RCOA has connections across Australia through its many organisational and individual members. Through its strong links with refugee communities and sector networks, RCOA is well positioned to inform and be informed by the broad spectrum of refugee and asylum activities in Australia and internationally.

The central position RCOA holds within the sector in Australia means that it is able to contribute to refugee policy discussions at the highest levels of government. RCOA coordinates and promotes the national celebration of Refugee Week. It has also promoted a network of Refugee Welcome Zones with local councils across Australia, encouraging local government to take positive action towards welcoming refugees into the community.

¹ Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), Article 1

² The national peak bodies with which RCOA works most closely are the Settlement Council of Australia, the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia and the Australian Council for International Development.

RCOA maintains a series of networks which meet by teleconference, including the National Refugee Settlement Policy Network (coordinated in partnership with the Settlement Council of Australia) and the Asylum Policy Network. Through these forums, RCOA facilitates information sharing and policy development across Australia. Each year, the Department of Immigration commissions RCOA to prepare a community submission on Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program. This comprehensive document, developed through a nationwide consultation process, has helped inform policy development and provided a rich resource for understanding refugee trends in Australia and internationally.

As the key link between Australian NGOs working on refugee issues and UN and international refugee agencies, RCOA coordinates the representation of Australian NGOs on matters of international refugee policy. Through its International Policy Network, RCOA works with member agencies and refugee community representatives to raise common concerns at key global UN meetings.

Vision

To be an effective, respected and representative national voice for humane refugee policies and practices.

Purpose

To work with its members in promoting the development of humane, lawful and constructive policies towards refugees and asylum seekers by Australian and other governments and their communities.

Aims

In order to achieve this purpose, the Council pursues the following aims:

- (a) To act as a unifying organisation and to represent its members.
- (b) To promote the empowerment of refugee communities and individuals in Australia and internationally and support the capacity building of Australia's refugee sector.
- (c) To monitor, research and present information on issues relating to the needs and circumstances of refugees and asylum seekers.
- (d) To assist governments and inter-governmental organisations to formulate policy and improve support and services for refugees and asylum seekers.
- (e) To increase public awareness and media sensitivity towards refugees and asylum seekers.

Goals 2011-2015

During the period 2011-2015 RCOA will work with its members towards:

- 1 Promoting better opportunities and improved services and support for refugees settling in Australia;
- 2 Promoting fairer government policies for people seeking asylum in Australia;
- 3 Promoting more effective systems of international protection for refugees and asylum seekers;
- 4 Promoting increased public support for refugees;
- 5 Enhancing the capacity of RCOA to achieve its organisational goals.

Objectives 2011-2015

1. Promoting better opportunities and improved services and support for refugees settling in Australia

- 1.1 Provide opportunities for refugee services and community organisations to inform RCOA about key settlement issues and to share information on issues, policy and practice.
- 1.2 Support refugee community representatives in their efforts to raise community concerns and ideas.
- 1.3 Conduct research into high priority refugee settlement issues, exploring examples of good practice in responding to the issues identified.
- 1.4 Maintain constructive dialogue with government on issues facing refugee and humanitarian entrants and the services which support them.

2. Promoting fairer government policies people seeking asylum in Australia

- 2.1 Maintain networks to provide members and supporters with opportunities to inform RCOA's work on asylum policy issues.
- 2.2 Monitor and conduct research into critical issues affecting people seeking asylum in Australia.
- 2.3 Maintain constructive dialogue with government on asylum policy issues.

3. Promoting more effective systems of international protection for refugees and asylum seekers

- 3.1 Gather information from national and international networks on issues of international refugee protection relevant to Australian policy and communities in Australia.
- 3.2 Maintain constructive dialogue with UNHCR and (as appropriate) other governments and international bodies on relevant refugee protection and resettlement issues.

4. Promoting increased public support for refugees

- 4.1 Provide information on refugee issues to members, supporters and the general public, including through regular publications, websites, social networking and (as appropriate) emerging technologies.
- 4.2 Engage with the Australian media, encouraging balanced reporting of refugee and asylum issues and giving RCOA's perspectives on relevant issues of public interest.
- 4.3 Provide opportunities for supporters to become actively involved in supporting the work of RCOA and its members.
- 4.4 Inform Australians about international protection needs and enhance support for Australia's continued involvement in refugee protection and resettlement, through public activities (e.g. Refugee Week), awareness-raising strategies (e.g. promotion of Refugee Welcome Zones), presentations and provision of information to the public.

5. Enhancing the capacity of RCOA to achieve its organisational goals

- 5.1 Strengthen the financial viability of RCOA and ensure compliance with legal obligations.
- 5.2 Increase public financial support through membership and fundraising, working closely with the Australian Refugee Foundation.
- 5.3 Maintain an effective staff team, supported by a human resources strategy which monitors workload and provides appropriate training and support to staff.
- 5.4 Increase the board's capacity to undertake its roles in governance, policy setting and representing a diverse, national membership.