



Refugee Council
of Australia

RCOA STRATEGIC PLAN – 2016-2020

Updated November 2017

Context

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is a national non-profit peak body, 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 people seeking asylum, 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.

RCOA receives the largest proportion of its income from individual Australians who support its work, through tax-deductible donations and membership fees. Its other sources of income are organisational membership fees, donated funds managed by the Australian Refugee Foundation and grants from philanthropic trusts, government agencies and non-government organisations.

RCOA is actively involved in dialogue regarding support for refugees and people seeking asylum 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 organisations¹ 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 role and priorities

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 in Australia and through international dialogue. It also widely shares information through information and research, active engagement with the media and presentations to schools, community groups and public seminars. RCOA coordinates and promotes the national celebration of Refugee Week. It has promotes involvement in a network of Refugee Welcome Zones with local councils across Australia, encouraging local communities to take positive action towards welcoming refugees.

RCOA maintains a series of networks which meet by teleconference, covering different aspects of asylum policy, domestic refugee settlement issues and international refugee policy. Through these forums, RCOA facilitates information sharing and policy development across Australia. Each year since 1987, RCOA has prepared a community submission on Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian

¹ The national peak bodies with which RCOA maintains regular contact include the Settlement Council of Australia, Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia, Australian Council for International Development, Migration Council Australia, Australian Council of Social Service, Migration Institute of Australia and Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia.

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Program for consideration by the Australian Government. 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.

While working with its member organisations and supporters of all backgrounds, RCOA takes seriously its responsibility to support the advocacy and public voice of Australia's refugee communities. It does this through actively encouraging refugee community members to share their experiences and expertise in its national and international advocacy, community education activities, public events, engagement with the media, network meetings and internal consultation and decision-making processes.

Noting the international impact of Australian policy and, in particular, its impact on conditions experienced by refugees and people seeking asylum in South-East Asia and the Pacific region, RCOA sees the need for Australian civil society to work closely with and support organisations and communities beyond Australia's shores. It does through a two-way sharing of information and, wherever practicable, by facilitating direct support to refugee programs in the Asia-Pacific region.

How RCOA works

As a peak body, RCOA's effectiveness is based not its ability to listen to and work effectively with refugee communities, members and supporters. Four key aspects of this work are:

1. **Listening and learning:** Conducting broad-based consultations, research projects, participation in interagencies and networks, and gathering information and ideas from members and communities.
2. **Building networks for change:** Developing and enhancing links with members, refugee communities, supporters, campaign organisations, coalitions with common interests and international networks.
3. **Sharing collective knowledge:** Publishing the knowledge it has gathered in reports, submissions, media releases, bulletins, web pages, social media, media interviews, education programs, public presentations and information shared with member networks.
4. **Strategic advocacy and action:** Working with like-minded organisations and individuals on national and international advocacy with governments, key decision-makers and opinion leaders, conducting public campaigns and developing or supporting projects to meet identified needs.

RCOA's vision

For the voices of refugees to be heard, the rights of refugees to be respected, the humanity of refugees valued and the contribution of refugees celebrated.

Purpose

To work with its members in promoting the development of humane, lawful and constructive policies towards refugees and people seeking asylum 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 the refugee sector in and beyond Australia.
- (c) To monitor, research and present information on issues relating to the needs and circumstances of refugees and people seeking asylum.

- (d) To assist governments and inter-governmental organisations to formulate policy and improve support and services for refugees and people seeking asylum.
- (e) To increase public awareness and media sensitivity towards refugees and people seeking asylum.

Theory of change

In 2017, RCOA adopted the following theory of change, based on its vision, purpose and aims:

To improve public and political support for refugees and people seeking asylum, and achieve a just policy environment, RCOA will coordinate sector wide campaigns, informed by strong policy, research and refugee voices that we leverage through our members.

Goals 2016-2020

During the period 2016-2020, RCOA will work with its members, refugee communities and other relevant sectoral companions towards:

- 1 Promoting, fostering and achieving better opportunities and improved services and support for refugees settling in Australia;
- 2 Promoting, fostering and achieving fairer government policies for people seeking asylum in Australia;
- 3 Promoting, fostering and achieving more effective systems of international protection for refugees and people seeking asylum;
- 4 Promoting, fostering and achieving increased public support for refugees in Australia;
- 5 Supporting the advocacy and public role of Australia's refugee communities;
- 6 Enhancing the capacity of RCOA to achieve its organisational goals.

Objectives 2016-2020

1. Promoting, fostering and achieving better opportunities and improved services and support for refugees settling in Australia (*Settlement issues*)

1.1 Provide opportunities for refugee services, community organisations and people of refugee background to inform RCOA about key settlement issues and to share information on issues, policy and practice. (*Information gathering and networking*)

1.2 Conduct research into high priority refugee settlement issues, exploring examples of good practice in responding to the issues identified. (*Research*)

1.3 Maintain constructive dialogue with government and key decision makers on issues facing refugee and humanitarian entrants and the services which support them. (*Advocacy*)

2. Promoting, fostering and achieving fairer government policies people seeking asylum in Australia (*Asylum issues*)

2.1 Maintain networks to provide members, supporters and people seeking asylum with opportunities to inform RCOA's work on asylum policy issues. (*Information gathering and networking*)

2.2 Monitor and conduct research into critical issues affecting people seeking asylum in Australia. (*Research*)

2.3 Maintain constructive dialogue with government and key decision makers on asylum policy issues. (*Advocacy*)

3. Promoting, fostering and achieving more effective systems of international protection for refugees and people seeking asylum (*International issues*)

3.1 Gather information from individuals, community groups and national and international networks on issues of international refugee protection relevant to Australian policy and communities in Australia. (*Information gathering and networking*)

3.2 Support the protection of refugees and people seeking asylum in the Asia-Pacific region by, where possible, promoting practical partnerships between Australian NGOs and communities and their counterparts in the region. (*International partnerships*)

3.3 Maintain constructive dialogue with UNHCR and (as appropriate) other governments and international bodies on relevant refugee protection and resettlement issues. (*Advocacy*)

4. Supporting the advocacy and public role of Australia's refugee communities (*Refugee community engagement*)

4.1 Support refugee community representatives in their efforts to raise community concerns and ideas with government agencies in Australia and UN and international bodies. (*Advocacy*)

4.2 Promote opportunities for refugee community members to play a greater role in public education initiatives and engagement with the media. (*Public information*)

5. Promoting, fostering and achieving increased public support for refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia (*Public information and campaigns*)

5.1 Promote awareness of national and international refugee issues through the coordination of Refugee Week, other public events, seminars, education programs and the promotion of community welcome initiatives. (*Awareness raising*)

5.2 Provide information on refugee issues to members, supporters and the general public, through regular publications, websites, social networking and responding to requests for information. (*Publications and information*)

5.3 Engage with the Australian media, encouraging balanced reporting of refugee and asylum issues and giving RCOA's perspectives on relevant issues of public interest. (*Media liaison*)

5.4 Work with members, refugee communities, other networks and concerned individuals to campaign for refugee policy reform. (*Campaigns*)

6. Enhancing the capacity of RCOA to achieve its organisational goals (*Governance and finance*)

6.1 Increase public financial support for RCOA's work through fundraising and promoting membership. (*Fundraising and membership*)

6.2 Strengthen the financial and operational viability of RCOA and ensure compliance with legal obligations. (*Finance and administration*)

6.3 Maintain an effective staff team, supported by a human resources strategy which monitors workload and provides appropriate training and support to staff. (*Staffing*)

6.4 Increase the board's capacity to undertake its roles in governance, policy setting and representing a diverse, national membership. (*Board*)