Refugee Council of Australia

Annual Report 2023/24



Contents

Refugee Council of Australia

Our 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.

Our purpose

To advocate for the development of humane, lawful and constructive policies towards refugees and people seeking asylum by Australia and other governments and their communities.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this country. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and to the unique role that First Nations people play in welcoming refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

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President's **Report**

As the 2023-24 year drew to a close, UNHCR released its annual Global Trends assessment, recording unprecedented numbers of people forcibly displaced by conflict and persecution – 43.4 million refugees, 6.9 million people seeking asylum and 67.1 million people internally displaced. The year saw deeply disturbing increases in numbers of civilians targeted and killed in war – in Gaza, Israel, Lebanon, Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Somalia, Syria and elsewhere.

In such a challenging international environment, the need for an effective and credible national voice for just and humane refugee policies is as great as it ever has been. With such strong support from donors, members and supporters across the country, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) was able to focus attention during 2023-24 on issues of pressing importance to refugee communities, contributing to constructive policy change and practical solutions for forcibly displaced people.

In its role as NGO co-chair of the global Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (CRCP), RCOA was at the heart of the international dialogue about solutions for refugees. Our team encouraged states to take practical pledges to the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, enabled Australian organisations to share good practices on refugee settlement support and supported an even stronger voice on solutions for people with lived experience of forced displacement.

We led a national campaign for a broader safety net for people seeking asylum, achieving changes to some policies that previously excluded people from assistance while continuing to make the case for the extension of support to others in critical need. Our advocacy for refugees affected by Australia's offshore processing policy resulted in renewed support for those in PNG and the successful sponsorship of 70 refugees so far through our Operation Not Forgotten partnership.



RCOA president Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward speaks at a site visit during the 2024 Working Group on Resettlement meeting in Sydney in February 2024

We continue to push for expanded resettlement and migration options for refugees, lobbying the government and working with NGOs to develop strategies that include skilled labour, sponsorship, and educational pathways. Our efforts also extend to advocating for equitable and coherent responses to international crises, such as those in Gaza, Ukraine, Israel, Afghanistan Sudan and Myanmar.

This year, we published 25 key submissions, reports, and briefings, responding to new legislation and raising concerns with United Nations agencies. We expanded the international voice of refugee representatives, supported their participation in key events, and delivered 87 Refugee Stories for Change presentations to over 7,000 people. Additionally, we hosted and promoted Refugee Week, which has grown into a global event since its inception in Australia in 1986.

President's **Report**

Looking ahead to the 2024-25 financial year, we will continue to advocate for fair and humane treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum.

As President of RCOA, I am very grateful for the efforts of the hard-working staff team, led by CEO Paul Power and Deputy CEO Adama Kamara. As a national umbrella body on refugee policy, RCOA's role is to listen carefully to the concerns and ideas of people who are directly affected by forced displacement, and then to work with them and others in raising those concerns and ideas with key decision makers. RCOA's credibility is based on the staff team's ability to listen, to share what they learn and engage members of our network in constructive advocacy for change.

Looking ahead to the 2024-25 financial year, we will continue to advocate for fair and humane treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum. Our efforts leading up to the 2025 Federal election will focus on expanding refugee visas, addressing long-term family separation, and continuing our campaign for a better safety net for people in the asylum process. We will also persist in our efforts to resolve the uncertainty faced by those impacted by offshore processing and the unfair "fast track" assessment.

In addition, we will continue our work on improving Australia's emergency response framework in 2025, recognizing that the need for a more equitable and coherent approach to international crises remains critical. We will work closely with refugee communities, our members, supporters, and the many Australians who share our vision of a just and inclusive nation that celebrates the contributions of all.

Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward
President, Refugee Council of Australia

Acknowledgements

A & R Kaldor Family Foundation
Ads Up Canada Refugee Network
Afghan Peace Foundation
AMES Australia
Amnesty International
Asia Pacific Network of Refugees
Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network
Assyrian Resource Centre
Australia Post
Australian Afghan Hassanian Youth Association
Australian Communities Foundation (Sunning Hill Fund)
Australian Migrant Resource Centre
Australian Red Cross
Bennelong Foundation
Burton Family Foundation
Canva
Cath Leary Foundation
CatholicCare Social Services
City of Melbourne
City of Sydney
Colin Biggers and Paisley
Community Migrant Resource Centre
Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia
Companion House
Core Community Services
Cumberland City Council
David and Suzi Nelson
Department of Home Affairs
Foundation House
George Lewin Foundation
Glow Worm Foundation
Great Lakes Agency for Peace and Development
Greengib Foundation
Harry Kestin Foundation
Ian Newman
Janet Chauvel
Janet Holmes a Court
Jesuit Social Services
Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law
Krishna Somers Charitable Trust
Life Without Barriers
Manus Lives Matter
Mary Choate
McKinnon Family Foundation
Melaleuca Australia
Mercy Care
MOSAIC, Vancouver
Multicultural Australia
Multicultural NSW
Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia
National Refugee-led Advisory and Advocacy Group
NSW Refugee Health Service
NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors
NSW Teachers Federation
Orange City Council
Ordinatim
Overseas Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma
Parliamentary Friends of Refugees Group
Phillips Family Foundation
Refugee Communities Advocacy Network NSW
Refugee Sector Strategy Group
Sally Nicolson and Brendan Lillywhite
SBS Food
Settlement Council of Australia
SSI
Sue and Sam Foundation
SydWest Multicultural Services
TAFE NSW
Tarun and Karen Weeramanthri
Thrive Refugee Enterprise
Treehouse Theatre
UNHCR
Victorian Government
Vivienne Court Trading Pty Ltd
Whitlam Institute within Western Sydney University

International **Advocacy**

RCOA leads global resettlement dialogue

RCOA and the Australian Government shared the leadership of the global dialogue on refugee resettlement throughout 2023-24, culminating in the largest gathering in the dialogue's 30-year history in Geneva from 5-7 June 2024. The Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (CRCP) is the most important multilateral forum for UNHCR, States, NGOs, refugee leaders, private sector representatives and academics to come together to discuss global issues of resettlement and alternative migration pathways available to refugees. Each year, a government agency and an NGO from a resettlement state co-chair the dialogue with UNHCR and the CRCP Refugee Advisory Group. In taking over the chairing responsibility from Ireland in June 2023, the Australian co-chairs focused the dialogue on "Solutions in Action: Advancing the 2030 Roadmap," aligned with the UNHCR's strategy to resettle one million refugees and find alternative migration pathways for two million refugees between 2019 and 2030.



Dr Louise Olliff of RCOA co-chairs an open forum on the final day of the 2024 Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways in Geneva © UNHCR/Jose Cendon



RCOA's Deena Yako speaks on WGR panel on combatting negative narratives and creating welcoming communities

The Australian Government and RCOA previously co-chaired this dialogue in 2012, then known as the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement. In that year, RCOA succeeded in pushing for the inclusion of refugee representatives for the first time and co-hosted a Working Group on Resettlement (WGR) meeting in Melbourne, the first meeting in this dialogue to focus on post-arrival support for resettled refugees and only the second held outside of Geneva. In 2023-24, RCOA and the Australian Government built on the work done together in 2012, expanding the number of places available at CRCP meetings for refugee representatives and organisations involved in complementary migration pathways for refugees, and hosting a highly successful WGR meeting on post-arrival support in Sydney from 26-29 February 2024.

Australia's first meeting as CRCP co-chair in 2023-24 was a virtual meeting in October, held to share information about the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF) and coordinate GRF pledges on resettlement and complementary pathways. The February WGR meeting brought together 125 representatives from 14 countries in Sydney for two days of site visits to settlement programs and two days of discussions on challenges involved in supporting refugees after their arrival. The June 2024 CRCP meeting involved 350 delegates from 44 countries. RCOA played a key role, providing input from NGOs, co-organising the three-day agenda,

International **Advocacy**



Mohammed Naeem, co-chair of the global CRCP Refugee Advisory Group, speaks at a seminar in Sydney during the 2024 Working Group on Resettlement gathering.

drafting and delivering the NGO statement, and sharing in the moderation of the event. RCOA's co-chairing of the CRCP process during 2023-24 was strongly supported by numerous Australian NGOs and refugee-led organisations who were very active in supporting, participating in and making significant in-kind contributions to the meetings in Sydney and Geneva.



Paul Power speaks at the closing session of the 2024 CRCP, Geneva. © UNHCR/Jose Cendon



Najeeba Wazefadost, co-founder of Asia Pacific Network of Refugees, speaks at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva

Australia pledges at Global Refugee Forum

With strong encouragement from RCOA and organisations in our network, the Australian Government made 23 pledges and committed $265 million in funding at the second Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in Geneva in December 2023. The three-day forum, attended by more than 4000 participants from 170 countries, resulted in 1700 pledges worth US$2.2 billion for action over the next four years on practical steps to improve the lives of refugees and host communities. The Australian Government's pledges related to resettlement, community sponsorship, refugee labour mobility, education, mental health, immigration detention, refugee participation, gender, refugee travel documents, statelessness, international cooperation, peacebuilding, the needs of Rohingya refugees and displacement in and from Afghanistan and Sudan.

Deputy CEO Adama Kamara and CEO Paul Power represented RCOA at the GRF. Adama joined the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees team, and she spoke on financing refugee-led organisations and about her role as co-chair of the Refugee Leadership Alliance. At the high-level event on resettlement, run in parallel to the GRF plenary, Paul spoke about the joint Australian civil society pledge led by RCOA to advocate and mobilise support to increase resettlement and complementary pathways to Australia.

Australia's Refugee Program

Humanitarian Program expands

In response to years of lobbying on the pressing global need to expand resettlement options, in August 2023 the Australian Government announced an increase in its annual Refugee and Humanitarian Program to 20,000 places, adding 2,125 more spots each year. RCOA welcomed this move as a valuable step towards the Australian Labor Party's national platform commitment to increase the program progressively to 27,000 places per year, along with 10,000 additional pathways.

In our June 2024 submission on Australia's 2024-25 Humanitarian Program, RCOA recommended further increases to the program as well as prioritising protection needs identified by UNHCR, and expanding family reunion and skilled refugee pathways. We also suggested numerically separating the offshore resettlement and onshore protection programs, creating a principled and predictable framework for responses to humanitarian crises, and reforming the Community Support Program to better meet the need for a sponsorship process which enables community members to identify and support refugees needing resettlement.

UNHCR statistics released in June 2024 noted that in the 2023 calendar year, Australia resettled 15,223 refugees, the second-highest number in over 40 years, and gave permanent residency onshore to 14,669 refugees (including people previously on temporary protection visas). Despite these achievements, Australia's global contribution remains modest, ranking 26th overall, 39th per capita, and 62nd relative to GDP for refugees recognised or resettled in 2023

Exploring complementary pathways options

Welcoming the Australian Government's GRF pledge to gradually increase community-sponsored and other pathways to 10,000 places per year, RCOA worked throughout 2023-24 with



RCOA CEO Paul Power speaks at the launch of the Australian Refugee Welcome University Sponsorship Consortium at Old Parliament House, Canberra in November 2023.

key interested organisations to explore how to the government's goal could be achieved. RCOA supported a coordination group that brings together organisations including Talent Beyond Boundaries, Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA), and the Refugee Education Special Interest Group, drafting a set of policy principles on complementary pathways on behalf of the group.

In May 2024, RCOA organised a workshop in Canberra with 24 leaders from government, NGOs, UNHCR, academia, and refugee communities to plan the steps to achieve 10,000 complementary pathway places. RCOA also co-hosted a workshop in Melbourne with CRSA to discuss a future community sponsorship model. In November 2023, RCOA participated in the launch of the Australian Refugee Welcome University Sponsorship Consortium (ARWUSC), formed by 12 universities to advance the development of an education pathway for refugees.

National Policy **Priorities**

Working together on policy priorities

RCOA continued and deepened our work on our policy priorities. As well as continuing our work with refugee communities and advocacy groups on the collective platform for reform of refugee policy, we have also been working with the National Refugee-led Advisory and Advocacy Group (NRAAG) to coordinate a Refugee Sector Strategy Group, a coalition of organisations to raise key issues with the Federal Government. These priorities include securing a safety net for people seeking asylum, resolving uncertainty for those without durable solutions, expanding the Humanitarian Program, and reuniting refugee families. In October 2023, RCOA convened 35 representatives to develop practical solutions for improving the lives of people affected by these policies. Building on this work, RCOA partnered with consultancy Tanck to refine their advocacy efforts, meeting fortnightly with sector partners to coordinate and strategise on efforts to engage Parliamentarians, advisors and senior government officials.

Fighting for a safety net

RCOA relentlessly campaigned during 2023-24 on the need for a basic safety net for people seeking protection in Australia. Following major to cuts since 2016 to the Australian Government's Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) Program, thousands of individuals and families have been left with no income and no support in circumstances where they cannot work because of health or caring needs or the denial of work rights.

We consistently advocated for financial support for people in need who have sought protection, pressing the case in submissions and correspondence with the government and in meetings with Parliamentarians and government officials. During Homelessness Week in August 2023, we held special briefings for the Parliamentary Friends of Refugees, Ministers, MPs, Senators and the Canberra press gallery, supporting people seeking asylum and frontline staff in community agencies to share their experiences. RCOA also co-facilitated workshops with NGOs and the Department of Home Affairs to discuss issues such as SRSS eligibility, remittances, medical evidence and procedural fairness. These workshops resulted in changes to some policies which prevented eligible people from accessing SRSS support–but the battle to expand eligibility to others in dire need of support continues.



RCOA CEO Paul Power joins Neil Para during Neil's 1000km walk from Ballarat to Sydney to draw attention to the plight of thousands of people seeking asylum whose cases have remained unresolved for more than a decade.

Addressing visa backlogs

The need for a stronger safety net has been exacerbated by a growing backlog in the processing of asylum applications, an issue RCOA has been raising with government for the past seven years. In October 2023, we welcomed the Australian Government's announcement of a $160 million funding package aimed at reducing the backlog, which affects over 30,000 people waiting for an initial assessment, 40,000 waiting for merits review, and 5,000 awaiting judicial review. In May 2024, we welcomed the passage of legislation to replace the highly inefficient Administrative Appeals Tribunal and the unfairness of the Immigration Assessment Authority with a new Administrative Review Tribunal (ART). This new tribunal is due to commence in October 2024.

Throughout 2023-24, the Department of Home Affairs continued the implementation of the Government's February 2023 announcement that it would grant permanent Resolution of Status

National Policy **Priorities**

(RoS) visas to refugees who had lived for years on Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas. By 30 June 2024, 18,026 refugees had received RoS visas and 3,228 applications were on hand. RCOA is continuing to advocate, through meetings and correspondence with key decision makers, for a fair reassessment of the 7,376 people denied protection through the unfair "fast track" process which applied under the temporary protection policy for people who arrived by boat to seek asylum.

Reuniting separated families

The granting of permanent residency to more than 18,000 refugees previously restricted to temporary protection has resulted in a massive increase in the numbers of refugee families seeking to reunite after many years apart. Highlighting the inefficiencies in the family reunion process and the inability to meet current need, RCOA has been calling for reform. To enable refugee families to better utilise opportunities for reunion under the general Migration Program, we continue to advocate for costs to be reduced, for barriers for family members to be removed, and for greater flexibility regarding required documents. We have called for a government review of family reunion for refugees and the implementation of a refugee family reunion stream within the Migration Program.

We continue to advocate for costs to be reduced, for barriers for family members to be removed, and for greater flexibility regarding required documents.

Australia's response to emergencies

The deepening of existing displacement crises during 2023-24 and the shocking human toll of the Israel-Hamas war which erupted on 7 October 2023 highlighted the need for the Australian Government to develop a more effective and consistent approach to people seeking entry to Australia during humanitarian emergencies. Throughout the year, we lobbied the Australian Government on the need for an immediate ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas conflict, for action regarding the forced expulsion of Afghan refugees from Pakistan, for protection for refugees displaced by the worsening civil war in Myanmar and the impact of the newly enacted military service law, and for support for people fleeing the serious internal conflict in Sudan. We supported the Ukrainian community's advocacy for greater certainty for people in Australia displaced by the war in their country and raised community concerns about the high numbers of visa refusals and cancellations for displaced Palestinians from Gaza. We actively engaged Jewish community members about the impacts of the 7 October terrorist attacks, and met with Palestinian community members and the services supporting new temporary arrivals, passing on their concerns to government officials.

As 2023-24 progressed, we began to draw the Australian Government's attention to growing community concerns about the absence of a consistent national policy for displaced individuals fleeing conflicts. In June, we outlined the need for Australia to develop a principled approach to humanitarian evacuations, both in our response to the Government's 2024-25 Humanitarian Program discussion paper and in correspondence to the Government about visa cancellations. This principled approach should include establishing safe and timely emergency pathways, ensuring support and flexibility for displaced individuals, providing a safety net, and fostering partnerships with multicultural and diaspora communities, along with transparent communication. We are working closely with our members, networks, and diaspora communities to develop these ideas further, pushing for a broader review of Australia's current and future responses to humanitarian crises.

National Policy **Priorities**

Impacts of offshore detention policy

As the 2023-24 year began, we welcomed the news that the last person originally sent to Nauru in 2013 had been brought to Australia. However, this relief was short-lived as new arrivals by sea in September 2023 were sent to detention at the Nauru Regional Processing Centre. By the end of June 2024, around 100 people were held on Nauru. We wrote to then Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil and expressed our concerns about the fairness of their refugee processing, access to legal help, communication, and proper healthcare.

Following the effective closure of Nauru, we urged the Minister to help the remaining 80 people stranded in Papua New Guinea (PNG) since 2013. Shortly after, an investigation revealed that millions of taxpayer dollars were allegedly misused for offshore detention payments to officials in Nauru and PNG. We renewed our call for a Royal Commission to investigate the harm, negligence, and corruption associated with offshore processing over the past decade.

In November 2023, we learned that Australian Government assistance to the PNG Government had run out, leaving many refugees without essential services. Mismanagement of funds by PNG officials worsened the situation, cutting off aid completely. We worked with Australian volunteers collecting donations for the refugees and wrote to the Minister, urgently requesting intervention to prevent starvation. We also met regularly with senior officials from the Department of Home Affairs and Ministerial advisers to share updates and find ways to support the refugees while they waited for resettlement decisions. In July 2024, the Government informed us of plans to allocate additional funds to PNG to support the remaining refugees, acknowledging RCOA's effort to advocate on this issue.



Myo Win welcomes his wife, daughter and son to Vancouver after 10 years of separation, the first family to be reunited through Operation Not Forgotten.

Operation Not Forgotten

During 2023-24, RCOA continued to work with MOSAIC in Vancouver and Ads Up Canada Refugee Network in Toronto to support the sponsorship to Canada of refugees who spent years in detention in PNG and Nauru under Australia's offshore processing policy. Developed in 2019 as a response to refugees affected by this policy who were left with no resettlement option, this partnership, known as Operation Not Forgotten, has so far enabled 63 refugees and 7 separated family members to begin new lives in Canada, supported by funds raised by Australian donors. Many tears of joy were shed when the initiative's first family reunion took place in September 2023, as Myo Win was reunited with his wife and two children after more than 10 years of forced separation. The Canadian Government is currently considering applications from another 45 refugees remaining in Australia and PNG, with 97 separated family members linked to the applications of refugees who have already arrived or have active applications. In July 2023, RCOA CEO Paul Power visited Vancouver to meet RCOA's local partners in person for the first time and to hear first-hand from the refugees resettled in Canada about life in their new country.

Advocacy and Campaigns

Legislation, submissions and advocacy

During 2023-24, RCOA produced 25 submissions, reports and briefings on legislation, policy changes and significant national and international issues. We welcomed the November 2023 High Court ruling against indefinite detention but raised concerns about strict conditions for those released from detention and limitations in visa processes. In opposing the Migration Amendment (Removal and Other Measures) Bill 2024, we made a submission to and then appeared before a Senate committee inquiry, mobilising 730 letters in opposition to the legislation. The legislation did not proceed. We put forward ideas for the review of Australia's Multicultural Framework, produced an analysis on the 2024 Federal Budget's impacts on refugees and people seeking asylum, highlighted refugees' contributions in Australia to a review being conducted by the UN Special Rapporteur on migrants, and engaged with the Department of Home Affairs on delays in refugee resettlement and visa grants. In August 2023, RCOA CEO Paul Power co-chaired a roundtable with crossbench MPs and experts on asylum, detention and offshore processing.

Building networks

RCOA continues to hold monthly policy network meetings at both national and state levels. Staff actively participate in regular and ad-hoc meetings on issues related to legal services, settlement support, international displacement, skills assessment and accreditation, employment support, refugee health, disability, mental health support, human rights, visa cancellations, issues for young people and children, housing and homelessness, and immigration detention.

RCOA also continued its consultative work, meeting with over 25 refugee community groups from across Australia in both metropolitan and regional Australia. Consultations focused on matters prioritised by communities, including visa issues, international protection issues, access to social support services, access to education and employment, family reunion concerns, the use of interpreters, access to healthcare, and concerns about the citizenship test. From these consultations, RCOA then used the information, ideas, and solutions proposed by community representatives in its policy and advocacy work.

Highlighting issues in Asia-Pacific

In March 2024, leaders from the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) visited Australia to discuss how the country could better protect refugees in Southeast Asia. Hosted by RCOA, APRRN's Co-Secretaries General, Hafsar Tameesuddin and Klaus Dik Nielsen, met with Federal Parliamentarians, government officials, UNHCR, NGOs, and refugee community leaders. Discussions with members of the Parliamentary Friends of Refugees group focused on how Australia could fulfill its commitments from the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. Throughout 2023-24, RCOA actively participated as an APRRN member, including attending regional consultations in Bangkok, lobbying UN member states in Geneva, and contributing to the APRRN Board through RCOA's CEO, Paul Power.



RCOA Deputy CEO Adama Kamara leads group discussions at the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network conference in Bangkok.

Advocacy and Campaigns

Supporting refugee-led advocacy

During 2023-24, RCOA maintained its long-held commitment to supporting the advocacy of people with lived experience of forced displacement through its close cooperation with the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR) and the National Refugee-led Advocacy and Advisory Group (NRAAG), and through efforts to support and advocate for the inclusion of refugee representatives at major international events.

Adama Kamara joined Najeeba Wazefadost, founder of APNOR, in giving presentations on their joint work to support funding to local refugee-led organisations across the Asia-Pacific through the Refugee Leadership Alliance, speaking at UNHCR's Asia-Pacific NGO Consultations in Bangkok in September 2023 and at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva in December. Adama was also a speaker and moderator at APNOR's third Asia-Pacific Summit of Refugees in Kuala Lumpur in May 2024, which connected 300 refugee leaders for three days in dialogue through hubs in 11 countries from Afghanistan to New Zealand. RCOA also contributed to travel costs for refugee representatives attending the main hub in Malaysia.

As co-chair of the CRCP, RCOA advocated successfully for the expansion of places for refugee representatives at the major annual international dialogue on refugee resettlement and worked with six Australian organisations to fund the participation of refugee representatives nominated by the Australian Refugee Advisory Panel.

Refugee Stories for Change

Our refugee speakers program, previously known as the Face to Face program, was renamed Refugee Stories for Change in 2024. Now in its 10th year, the program promotes social cohesion, raises awareness about the challenges faced by refugees and celebrates their contributions to Australia. During 2023-24, 87 sessions were successfully delivered to around 7000 people in government agencies, non-government organisations, the private sector, schools and community groups across Australia and internationally.

The program has effectively worked with 27 Refugee Ambassadors originally from Afghanistan, Bosnia, Burundi, Iran, Iraq, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Sudan, South Sudan and Ukraine to deliver these impactful sessions. Our Refugee Ambassadors are the heart of this program, with their stories challenging negative perceptions about refugees and people seeking asylum and building support for humane and constructive responses to people who have been forcibly displaced.

Our heartfelt thanks go to our Refugee Ambassadors: Abang Anade Othow, Assadullah Khurrami, Atena Kashani, Dalal Sleiman, Edita Mujkic, Erfanullah Abidi, George Najarian, Innocent Karabagega, Lizzy Kuoth, Milad Kado, Niththiyananthan Kanakarathinam, Oliver Slewa, Rahan Uddin, Rnita Dacho, Safiullah Taye, Samah Shda, Sarab Shada, Shahrnaz Rafi, Shankar Kasynathan, Sidiqa Faqihi, Simon Shahin, Somayeh Farahani, Sophie Bejek, Tahera Nassrat, Tariq Kareemi and Yaser Naseri.



NSW Governor Margaret Beazley congratulates Ahmad Zarar Mujahid on his award in sport category of the NSW Humanitarian Awards during Refugee Week 2024. Photo: Salty Dingo

Refugee Week

Refugee Week 2024 was celebrated from 16-22 June with the theme "Finding Freedom." The focus for 2024 was on the meaning of freedom for families, highlighting the vital role of familial and chosen bonds in providing support, solace, and a sense of belonging for those forced to flee their homelands. As part of the celebrations, we

Advocacy and Campaigns

shared "Stories of Freedom," a series of portraits featuring former refugee families in Toowoomba, Queensland, showcasing their strength, resilience, and the importance of family bonds.

Hundreds of events were held nationwide by schools, businesses, and community organisations to celebrate and welcome refugees. Agencies also reflected on improving their practices when working with refugees. In partnership with STARTTS, we hosted the NSW Humanitarian Awards at Government House, Sydney, recognising exceptional contributions to the lives of refugees and asylum seekers.

Refugee Ambassadors played a key role in the week, delivering 32 presentations to over 3,768 people across the country. Our digital campaign saw significant growth, with over 177,000 impressions on social media, a 45% increase from 2023. From 1 April to 30 June 2024, Refugee Week received 364 media mentions, a 243% increase from the previous year, with interviews featuring RCOA staff, the CEO, President, and Refugee Ambassadors.

Refugee Welcome Zones

Local governments are crucial in welcoming refugees and fostering inclusive communities. The Refugee Welcome Zone initiative encourages councils to create welcoming environments for refugees by publicly committing to uphold their human rights, show compassion, and support cultural diversity. This year, Warrnambool City Council, Clarence Valley Council, and Alice Springs Town Council joined the initiative, increasing the number of Refugee Welcome Zones across Australia to 177. RCOA supports these councils by highlighting best practices, sharing policy updates, and offering networking opportunities. In October, RCOA held an online forum featuring CEO Paul Power, Refugee Ambassador Oliver Slewa, and local councils discussing their innovative work in areas like employment and social inclusion.

During Refugee Week 2024, councils were encouraged to celebrate refugees' contributions and engage speakers through RCOA's Refugee Ambassador program. Additionally, a Refugee Welcome Zone Leadership Group, including councils such as City of Sydney and Blacktown City Council, provided guidance to the initiative throughout the year. We appreciate their support, including their annual subscription fees that help sustain this work.

Engagement with media and social media

For the second consecutive year, we saw an increase in all our social media metrics. We saw the following increases on key metrics for organic content: impressions 1.75%, shares 15.6%, reactions 73.4% and new followers 110%. We also ran several successful advertising campaigns on Facebook and Instagram. These yielded 1,380 new potential supporters, over 4,000 visits to the RCOA and Refugee Week websites, and over 420,000 impressions of our content.

Our annual Refugee Week campaign was once again a significant highlight of the year, accounting for a third of organic impressions in 2023-24. The engagement rates for our content across all our social media channels also outperformed general benchmarks.

RCOA governance

In August 2023, Nick Greiner AC, a former Premier of New South Wales with extensive experience in business, politics and government, was co-opted to the RCOA Board for a two-year term. The Board is made up of 10 members directly elected by RCOA's organisational and individual members, with the elected Board able to co-opt up to six additional members to broaden the Board's skills and representation.



Nick Greiner (second right) with members of the RCOA Board

Board, Staff and Volunteers

Board
1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024

Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward (President)
Emeritus Professor William Maley AM (Vice-President)
Maya Cranitch AM (Chair)
Kwame Selormey (Secretary)
Frances Wade (Treasurer)
Phil Glendenning AM (Immediate Past President)
Ella Dixon
Caroline Fleay (until November 2023)
Nick Greiner AC (from August 2023)
Elizabeth Lang (from November 2023)
John Roc
Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin
Joseph Youhana

Board Observers

Jacob Muller (to November 2023)
Matthew D'Cruz (from March 2024)

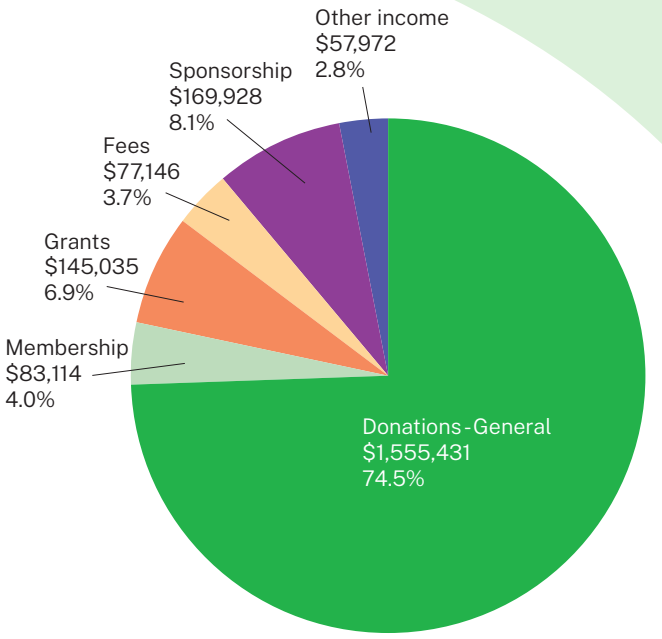
Staff

Paul Power, Chief Executive Officer
Adama Kamara, Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Rebecca Eckard, Director of Policy and Research
Kelly Nicholls, Director of Strategy, Communications and Fundraising
Deena Yako, Director of Community Engagement
Rebecca Langton, Manager
Dr Louise Olliff, Senior Policy Advisor
Dr Asher Hirsch, Senior Policy Officer
Dr Shaheen Whyte, Senior Policy Officer (from January 2024)
Madina Mohmood, Policy Officer (to November 2023)
Rnita Dacho, Fundraising Coordinator
Georgie McGrillen, Partnership and Relationship Manager
Caroline Batchler, Fundraising Coordinator
Chloe Harle, Administration and Fundraising Officer
Sidiqa Faqihi, Project Officer
Noelle Perera, Digital and Campaigns Officer
Elly Kohistani, Media Advisor
Martyn Green, Accounting Officer

Volunteers

John Baker
Jensy Calli
Josie Carter
Joyce Chia
Martina Comastri
Keyvan Dorostkar
Ilene Hyman
Eliza Morgan
Susana Perez Vazquez
Jam Rodolfo
Naavya Thapa

Our Sources of Income



Our **Members**

Life Members

Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO
Phil Glendenning AM
Tuong Quang Luu AO

Organisational Members

ActionAid Australia
Advance Diversity Services
Aireys Inlet Rural Australians for Refugees
Ames Australia
Amnesty International
Anglicare Migrant and Refugee Services (Sydney)
Armidale Rural Australians for Refugees
Armidale Sanctuary
Ashiana Humanitarian Network Limited
Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS)
Assyrian Australian Association
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
Asylum Seekers Centre
Australia for UNHCR
Australian Assyrian Chaldean Syriac Advocacy Network
Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office
Australian Council for International Development
Australian Education Union (Federal Office)
Australian Education Union New South Wales -Teachers Federation Branch
Australian Karen Organisation Inc
Australian Migrant Resource Centre
Australian Red Cross
Australian Refugee Association Inc
Australian Western Sahara Association (NSW)
Baptcare
Bathurst Refugee Support Group
Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group
Brotherhood of St Laurence
Canberra Refugee Support Inc
CARAD-Centre for Asylum Seekers Refugees and Detainees
Career Seekers
Catholic Education Office Wollongong
Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace
Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University
Centrecare Incorporated
Circle Green Community Legal
Communify Queensland
Companion House
Core Community Services
Dominican Sisters of Eastern Australia and the Solomon Islands
Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education
Executive Council of Australian Jewry
FamilyCare
Forcibly Displaced People Network
Foundation House (Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture)
Friends of Refugee Communities Tasmania
Horn of Africa Relief and Development Agency (HARDA)
Host International
House of Welcome
Humanists Victoria
Illawarra Multicultural Services
Immigration Advice and Rights Centre
Institute of the Sisters of Mercy Australia PNG
International Commission of Jurists, Australian Section
Jesuit Refugee Service Australia
Jesuit Social Services
Justice for Refugees SA
Life Without Barriers
Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services
Marist Sisters
Melaleuca Refugee Centre
Metro Assist
Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services of the ACT
Migrant Resource Centre (Northern Tasmania) Inc
Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania
Mosaic Multicultural Connections
Mt Druitt Ethnic Communities Agency
Multicultural Australia
Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra, SCARF Program
Multicultural NSW
Multicultural Services Centre of WA
Murray Valley Sanctuary Refugee Group

Our **Members**

National Council of Churches in Australia
NSW Council for Civil Liberties
NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)
Overseas Services to Survivors of Torture and Trauma
Pax Christi Australia
Presentation Sisters Wagga Wagga
QPASTT
Quaker Service Australia
Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS)
Refugee and Immigration Legal Service (RAILS)
Refugee Legal
Settlement Services International
Sisters of Charity of Australia
Sisters of the Good Samaritan NSW
Socio-Cultural Syriac Incorporated
Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre
Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre
St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia
Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service (STTARS)
Sydney Multicultural Community Services
SydWest Multicultural Services
The Mercy Foundation
The Tasmania Opportunity
Think+DO Tank Foundation c/o Jane Stratton
Thrive Refugee Enterprise
Townsville Multicultural Support Group
Uniting Church National Assembly
Uniting Vic Tas
Valerio Daniel de Simoni Association Inc
Vicseg New Futures
Welcoming Australia
West Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office
West Wagga San Isidore Refugee Committee
Western Region Ethnic Communities Council
Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre
Wyndham Community and Education Centre Inc

Individual Members

Nick Armitage
Brian Arnott
Maureen Arnott
Kevin Bain
John Ball
Martin Bibby
Elizabeth Biok
Nina Boydell
Carol Bristow
Jill Brook
Meredith Burgmann
Stephen Cadusch
Teresa Cannon
Bill Castleden
Philippa Catchpole
Carmel Clark
Judith Copleston
Maya Cranitch AM
Ann Curthoys AM
Gillian Dooley
Judith Dwyer
Mary Edmunds
Bruce Errol
Claire Foley
Jack Frawley
Anne Gibbins
Sharon Goldschmidt
Renee Goossens
Jan Govett
Nick Greiner AC
Gabriella Gresz
Frances Hanna
Roy Harvey
Michael Henry
Bruce Hogben
Lauren Honcope
William Hood
David Hotchkiss
Alison Howell
David Hunter
Barbara Jackson
Norman James
Ivan James AO
David Kay
Mary Lack
William Maley
Kathryn McArdle
Rodney Mitchell
Effie Mitchell
Jennifer Perry
Melissa Phillips
Margaret Piper AM
Max Pouwer
Maree Raftis-Zika
Shanti Raman
Nola Randall
Janice Reid
Bronia Renison
Margaret Roc
John Roc
Natalie Shea
Susan Sheridan
Keith Simpson-Lyttle
Margaret Smith
Matthew Stokes
Andrew Whalan
Deb Willcocks
Meredith Williams
Sara Wills
Anne Yuille

Financial Reports

Refugee Council of Australia Inc - ABN 87 956 673 083

Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income

For the year ended 30 June 2024

	2024 ($)	2023 ($)
Revenue	2,088,394	2,451,583
Employee benefits expense	(1,558,011)	(1,442,545)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(2,317)	-
Other expenses	(593,678)	(868,274)
(Deficit)/Surplus for the year	**(65,612)**	**140,764**
Income tax expense 2(a)	-	-
(Deficit)/Surplus for the year	**(65,612)**	**140,764**
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	-	
Total comprehensive (deficit)/surplus for the year	**(65,612)**	**140,764**

Statement of Financial Position

As at 30 June 2024

	2024 ($)	2023 ($)
ASSETS		
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	2,073,186	2,190,583
Trade and other receivables	248,697	256,266
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	**2,321,883**	**2,446,849**
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant and equipment	2,131	-
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	**2,131**	**-**
TOTAL ASSETS	**2,324,014**	**2,446,849**
LIABILITIES		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and other payables	55,300	66,165
Employee benefits	186,244	155,879
Other liabilities	117,023	185,528
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	**358,567**	**407,572**
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Employee benefits	31,225	39,443
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	31,225	9,443
TOTAL LIABILITIES 3	**89,792**	**447,015**
NET ASSETS	**1,934,222**	**1,999,834**
EQUITY		
Restricted Reserves	469,631	500,737
Retained surplus	1,464,591	1,499,097
TOTAL EQUITY	**1,934,222**	**1,999,834**

Full audited financial statement on RCOA website



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Refugee Council of Australia

Suite 4A6, 410 Elizabeth Street,
Surry Hills NSW 2010
Ph: (02) 9211 9333
Email: admin@refugeecouncil.org.au

www.refugeecouncil.org.au