Annual Report 2025/26



Refugee Council of Australia

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country

We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we now call home, their elders past and present.

We recognise the resilience and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and we honour their connection to the lands, waters and sky.

Some of us have come from afar, seeking shelter, safety or new beginnings. For some, it was our ancestors who made the challenging journey to Australia. We carry our birthplaces and homelands in our hearts and find comfort in being welcomed by those who have inhabited these lands for over 60,000 years, whose sovereignty remains unbroken. As we walk on these lands, we promise to care for Country, which continues to care for us.

We acknowledge that storytelling is essential to keeping cultures alive, passing down traditions and connecting us to ancestors.

As we work towards a more inclusive future with fair and humane policies for those seeking sanctuary, we remain committed to learning from and standing alongside First Nations people and working with them for the achievement of a fully reconciled Australia.

Refugee Council of Australia

Front cover photo: Thu-Trang, a former refugee from Vietnam, with her two children. Photo credit: Attie Mohebali.

Back page photo: Refugee Ambassador Abang Anade Othow speaks to student leaders at Regents Park Public School.

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Our Vision and Purpose

Vision

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

Purpose

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

Guiding Principles

These principles guide how we work and make decisions on refugee and asylum policy.

1 **Justice and the rule of law**
Maintaining a rigorous commitment to justice and the rule of law, in line with the principles outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Refugee Convention, the Conventions on Statelessness and other core international human rights treaties.

2 **Lived experience**
Giving priority to the views, concerns and ideas of refugees and people seeking asylum, privileging their views over the views of people with greater power and influence, emphasising their right to be represented when decisions are being made about their future.

3 **Respecting diversity**
Respecting the diversity within all populations of forcibly displaced people, ensuring that specific attention is given to the needs, concerns and perspectives of people who are even more marginalised because of their race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, identity, faith, or sexuality.

4 **Inclusion and respect**
Promoting a vision of Australia based on inclusion and respect, advocating against policies which exclude or stigmatise, undermine human dignity or punish people for political purposes.

5 **Shared responsibility**
Advocating for appropriate sharing of responsibility between nations for people requiring protection, paying particular attention to Australia's current and potential role.

6 **Non-partisan and collective perspectives**
Developing non-partisan positions based on broad consultation and evidence-based research. Providing leadership by authentically representing a collective view of RCOA's members and refugee communities in Australia on matters relevant to the organisation's mandate.



Videographer David Thom interviews Tahera Nassrat after Sanctuary Runners Australia members participated at Auburn Botanic Gardens parkrun in March.

President's Report



Last November 2025, the Australian Government issued the one millionth permanent refugee and humanitarian visa since its refugee resettlement program began in 1947. The marking of this milestone was a highlight for Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) and our members in 2025-26, a milestone we began planning for two years earlier. In November, we released "Australia's Untold Stories", a series of interviews with former refugees from different decades, and chose "A Million Stories" as the theme of Refugee Week 2026. Across Australia, hundreds of events were held to celebrate Australia's refugee program's contribution to the making of modern Australia. This culminated on World Refugee Day with the launch by the Governor General of Australia Post's commemorative stamp celebrating "A Million Stories: Our Shared Future".

Another milestone for RCOA was the appointment of Adama Kamara and Paul Power as Co-CEOs in February 2026. Adama had served as Deputy CEO since 2021, having come to RCOA with extensive leadership experience in the community sector, local government and voluntary organisations. Born in Sierra Leone, Adama and her family were in Australia for her father's university study when civil war broke out in their home country. Unable to return, the family sought asylum and became involved in sponsoring and supporting refugees displaced by Sierra Leone's civil war to settle in Australia. Paul, who has served as RCOA's CEO since 2006, has led the organisation's growth and championed the inclusion of people with lived refugee experience in advocacy and community engagement. Today, half of RCOA's Board and management team have both lived refugee experience and strong professional expertise. The Co-CEO appointment reflects RCOA's belief that advocating for the rights of refugees is a responsibility shared by people with lived refugee experience and Australians of all backgrounds who are committed to human rights.

In the face of an increasingly challenging political environment, RCOA has continued to advocate constructively for people who have been forcibly displaced. As this report outlines, the RCOA team has been active on a range of local, national and international issues. We have worked with members, supporters and diaspora organisations to advocate for policy change and for fair outcomes for people seeking refugee resettlement, permanent protection, access to other migration pathways, support during the settlement phase in Australia and access to basic rights internationally. While refugee resettlement places globally have been cut by two-thirds in less than two years, the Australian Government has maintained its Refugee and Humanitarian

President's Report

Program at 20,000 places and continued to resolve the status of people remaining for years on temporary protection or bridging visas. Throughout the year, we have been able to share the joy of those beginning a life of permanent safety in Australia.

The RCOA team continues to build connections between people and promote greater understanding of issues affecting people who have been displaced. We are very proud of our Refugee Stories for Change program and the growing team of Refugee Ambassadors involved in sharing their personal stories and perspectives on important issues with Australian and international audiences. RCOA has led the development of the International Refugee Integration and Settlement Exchange (IRISE) to bring people involved in refugee settlement in Australia, New Zealand, United States, Canada and beyond together to share knowledge. In March, RCOA launched a partnership with Sanctuary Runners Ireland to promote running and walking as a way of building friendship and respect between Australians of all backgrounds. In addition, RCOA brings organisations and people together for collective advocacy, is an important source of credible information about refugee issues, and is active in promoting the voices of refugees through social media channels and our engagement with the media.

To continue this work, we rely on the support of Australians who share our vision that our nation can respond justly to people who have experienced persecution. Over the 45 years since our organisation was established, we have continued our work regardless of whether governments have been prepared to support an independent community voice on refugee policy. Since 2014, we have survived almost entirely without government funding



The RCOA team continues to build connections between people and promote greater understanding of issues affecting people who have been displaced.

–something that few peak bodies are able to achieve and maintain. In 2025-26, more than 80% of our income came from donations and membership fees. While current economic conditions had an impact on our income, RCOA continues to remain in a financially sound position, able to speak up on the issues that matter most to people seeking refugee protection.

On behalf of the RCOA Board, I would like to thank the many people who have supported and contributed to our organisation's vital work in 2025-26 –as donors, sponsors, volunteers and partners in our many advocacy and community activities. I am particularly grateful to Adama, Paul and the entire RCOA staff team, whose commitment and tenacity ensure that our organisation continues to have an impact well beyond its resources.

Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward
President, Refugee Council of Australia

Acknowledgement of Supporters

A & R Kaldor Family Foundation

AMES Australia

Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network

Attie Mohebali

Australia Post

Australian Communities Foundation

Australian Migrant Resource Centre

Bruce Hogan Family Foundation

Burton Family Foundation

Canva

City of Sydney

Colin Biggers and Paisley

Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia

Core Community Services

Eric Persson (In Memoriam)

Foundation House: Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture

Glow Worm Foundation

Heather Drew

Human Rights Law Centre

Janet Chauvel

Jesuit Refugee Services Australia

Jesuit Social Services

John McKinnon Family Foundation

Jon Jureidini

Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law

Karen Foley

Krishna Somers Charitable Trust

Life Without Barriers

Lin Fritschi

McDougall Telfer Foundation

Meredith Gray

Melaleuca Australia

Mercy Care

Michael Cranitch SC and Maya Cranitch AM

Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania

Multicultural Australia

Multicultural NSW

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia

Nick Greiner AC

NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors

NSW Teachers Federation

Parliamentary Friends of Refugees Group

Phillips Family Foundation

Presentation Sisters Wagga Wagga

Refugee Education Australia

Refugee Sector Strategy Group

Rusty Crawshaw

St Vincent's Health Australia

Sally Nicolson and Brendan Lillywhite

Sanctuary Runners

SBS Food

Settlement Council of Australia

Skill Path Australia

SSI

STARTTS

SydWest Multicultural Services

The Cath Leary Social Justice Foundation

The George Lewin Foundation

UNHCR

Vivienne Court Trading

Our Advocacy Work

During 2025–26, RCOA's policy development and advocacy focused on defending the Humanitarian Program, resolving long-standing protection issues, strengthening Australia's complementary migration pathways, responding to ongoing international crises, addressing safety net issues like the risk of homelessness for people seeking asylum, and maintaining strong engagement with government, Parliament, civil society and refugee communities. RCOA combined direct policy advice, parliamentary engagement, sector coordination, community consultation, submissions, media work and targeted strategic advocacy to promote fairer and more durable refugee policy outcomes.

Refugee Program and community sponsorship

RCOA advocated to keep the Refugee and Humanitarian Program at 20,000 places, responding to speculation within the Australian Government that the program might be reduced in 2027-28. We developed key messages, briefings and campaign materials to defend the Program, highlighting its achievements over 80 years, and supporting members, community organisations and sector colleagues to contribute to consultations. RCOA's Humanitarian Program submission emphasised Australia's Global Refugee Forum commitments, the need to increase places, the importance of making complementary pathways additional to the core Program and the case for separating the onshore protection program.

RCOA continued to push for reform of the Community Support Program (CSP), the program that enables people to sponsor refugees they nominate (named sponsorship). With more than 20,000 applicants in the CSP backlog for a program previously set at 1,500 places per year, we brought together affected community members, Approved Proposing Organisations involved in the CSP, settlement service providers, Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA) and Home Affairs to explore ways to improve the program. Together with CRSA, RCOA convened multi-stakeholder workshops to develop a policy framework for a reformed named sponsorship model, while linking this work with broader advocacy for complementary pathways.



RCOA Board member Nick Greiner and Senator Paul Scarr at a Parliamentary Friends of Refugees Group event in Canberra.

Our Advocacy Work

Resolving longstanding protection issues

RCOA continued intensive advocacy for people with longstanding need for a resolution of their immigration status. These included people who had been subject to the unfair Fast Track asylum process introduced in 2014, and people sent to detention in Papua New Guinea (PNG) or Nauru in 2013 and then brought to Australia several years ago. RCOA supported sector colleagues and community groups by sharing information and arranging briefings from specialised community legal centres, to help people access updated advice. During 2025-26, 5,828 people who had been on temporary protection or bridging visas for more than a decade were granted permanent Resolution of Status visas.

RCOA maintained regular engagement with Home Affairs on PNG and offshore processing issues, including through an advisory group RCOA helped to initiate. This work brought together RCOA, torture and trauma services, refugee support organisations, community advocates and Home Affairs officials to address the situation of people who remain in PNG after being transferred there under offshore processing arrangements.

Government, parliamentary and sector engagement

RCOA participated in Home Affairs forums and thematic discussions covering the composition of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, immigration compliance, resettlement of LGBTQIA+ and Rohingya refugees, the situations of current and former detainees in PNG and Nauru, ministerial intervention, status resolution, community sponsorship and acute resettlement cases. RCOA also engaged with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), UNHCR Canberra and other stakeholders on international protection, resettlement and crisis response issues.

RCOA undertook sustained cross-party parliamentary engagement throughout the year, including meetings with Ministers, Shadow Ministers, advisers, and crossbench MPs. This engagement supported advocacy to maintain the Humanitarian Program, resolve longstanding protection and offshore processing issues, strengthen complementary pathways, respond to divisive rhetoric and build broader political support for refugee policy reform.



L-R: RCOA Board member Nick Greiner, Senator Paul Scarr (LNP), Sarah Witty MP (ALP), Allegra Spender (Independent), RCOA Co-CEO Adama Kamara and Senator David Shoebridge (Greens) at the launch of the new Parliamentary Friends of Refugees Group.

Our Advocacy Work

RCOA supported the reconvening of the Parliamentary Friends of Refugees Group for the new Parliamentary term, with co-chairs Sarah Witty MP (ALP), Senator Paul Scarr (LNP), Senator David Shoebridge (Greens) and Allegra Spender MP (Independent) leading the group of more than 20 parliamentarians. RCOA supported the Parliamentary Friends group's launch in Canberra in March 2026 and coordinated an event in June to celebrate Refugee Week and share perspectives of refugees settled in Australia through complementary migration pathways.

Advocacy, submissions and legislative reform



RCOA Advocacy Coordinator Dr Graham Thom speaking at a Senate inquiry into offshore detention in Nauru.

RCOA used submissions, letters and briefings to place evidence and community concerns before Ministers, Parliament and international human rights bodies. Key advocacy addressed the Humanitarian Program, offshore processing and resettlement arrangements, Australia's externalisation of its protection responsibilities, the offshore warehousing of refugees, skilled migration pathways for refugees, the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review process, arbitrary detention, civil wars in Myanmar and Sudan, the crisis in Iran, LGBTQIA+ refugee resettlement, hate and extremism legislation, removal of people to Nauru, the use of Arrival Control Determinations and the rights of people seeking protection.

RCOA strongly objected to legislation enabling deportations to Nauru and other undisclosed third countries, raising concerns about the erosion of natural justice and procedural fairness. Despite the rushed parliamentary process, RCOA prepared submissions, wrote to parliamentarians, supported parliamentary scrutiny and worked with sector colleagues to monitor removals, community impacts and media enquiries.

RCOA also responded to new Arrival Control Determination powers, highlighting risks for people already granted temporary visas but not yet in Australia. We also raised concerns about lower standards of evidence and association-based measures in proposed hate and extremism laws that could affect people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds.

International crisis response

RCOA advocated for stronger Australian responses to international crises affecting refugee communities, including the crises in Sudan, Iran, Afghanistan and Myanmar. This included letters to relevant Ministers calling for increased humanitarian aid, diplomatic action, expedited visa processing, evacuation considerations, expanded resettlement pathways and direct engagement with affected diaspora communities.

Homelessness and destitution risks

RCOA coordinated significant advocacy on homelessness and destitution affecting people seeking asylum and other non-residents, focusing particularly on NSW where unmet need is greatest. This included engagement with federal



RCOA Policy Advisors Dr Louise Olliff, Dr Shaheen Whyte, with Hedayat Osyan - the founder and CEO of CommUnity Construction, at the Skilled Migration Inquiry hearing at NSW Parliament House. Credit: RCOA

Our Advocacy Work

and state Ministers, Multicultural NSW, Homes NSW, local councils, Specialist Homelessness Services, frontline asylum agencies, health providers and peak homelessness organisations. RCOA's advocacy highlighted exclusion from services, visible homelessness, gaps in the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) Program, lack of work rights and the urgent need for access to housing products, emergency relief and inclusive homelessness funding.

RCOA contributed to joint sector letters, media advocacy, working groups and briefings, including after the death of Bikram Lama, a Nepalese international student who became homeless and was found deceased in Sydney's Hyde Park. We also supported discussions with Homes NSW on data, quarterly engagement with the asylum sector and practical policy asks to improve access to housing assistance and responses to homelessness.

Key international meetings

In December 2025, Graham Thom and Sidiqa Faqihi from the RCOA staff team and Board member Joseph Youhana attended several high-profile meetings in Geneva, including the Global Refugee Forum Progress Review. In her advocacy as a former refugee from Afghanistan who was resettled from Indonesia to Australia in 2022, Sidiqa focused on expansion of safe settlement pathways (including through expansion of complementary pathways), the impact of storytelling as a powerful advocacy tool, and meaningful refugee participation in decisions affecting displaced people. While in Geneva, RCOA delegates held meetings with delegates from Canada, Indonesia, Australia and UNHCR officials. The RCOA delegation also attended an invitation-only briefing from the World Bank, highlighting funding needs for Rohingya refugees in the camps at Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.



RCOA Advocacy Coordinator Dr Graham Thom with RCOA Project Officer Sidiqa Faqihi in Geneva for the Global Refugee Forum progress report. Photo: RCOA.

The 2026 consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (CRCP) took place in Geneva in June. Due to a restricted format this year, participation was limited to two government representatives and one senior NGO representative per country. As the national peak body and former NGO Co-chair of the CRCP, RCOA was the NGO representative, with co-CEO Adama Kamara attending. Disappointingly, invitations to refugee representatives as a distinct group in the multipartite discussion were not extended beyond four members of the global CRCP Refugee Advisory Group. Lived experience participation in national delegations was limited to individuals in government or NGO delegations. This decision reversed years of successful advocacy on meaningful refugee participation which began in 2012 when RCOA, as dialogue co-chair, successfully pushed for the inclusion of designated refugee representatives for the first time. RCOA coordinated meetings with colleagues at the Canadian and USA refugee councils and organisations in New Zealand to raise our concerns and advocate for inclusion of refugees in the dialogue.

Our Advocacy Work



RCOA Co-CEO Adama Kamara speaking at the 2026 CRCP in Geneva.

Exchanging ideas across borders

Initiated by RCOA in 2025, the International Refugee Integration and Settlement Exchange (IRISE) continued in 2025-26, drawing together agencies and groups involved in supporting newly arrived refugees in Australia, New Zealand, United States and Canada. The network provided opportunities for people engaged at local or national levels to exchange ideas, inspiration and information across international borders with a shared vision of creating communities where refugees resettling or arriving through complementary pathways are welcomed, valued, included, supported and thrive. RCOA supported three online events, with several hundred people attending and participating in the virtual exchanges. Topics covered were addressing the risk of burnout for refugee support workers, the role of sport in the integration of refugees, and creating cohesive and welcoming communities.

Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network

In October, RCOA's Advocacy Coordinator, Dr Graham Thom was elected to the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) Steering Committee (the network's policy-making body) as chair of the network's Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Working Group. In February, Graham was appointed to APRRN's Board (responsible for the network's governance), replacing Paul Power who stepped down after 14 years of service on APRRN's Steering Committee or Board.

RCOA worked closely with APRRN members to prepare submissions from both organisations to the Australian Senate's Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee inquiry into democracy and human rights in Myanmar.

In March, RCOA and the Rohingya Intellectual Group co-hosted a webinar on the Rohingya crisis, including the 2026 Myanmar election and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) case against Myanmar. Keynote speakers were Arsalan Suleman, Lead Counsel representing The Gambia in the ICJ genocide case against Myanmar; and Christopher Sidoti, member of the UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar.

National and international networks

RCOA continued to convene and participate in national, state and international networks, including the Refugee Sector Strategy Group (which coordinates Parliamentary advocacy), the Asylum Policy Network (a monthly national online

Our Advocacy Work

forum) and stated-based interagencies. This coordination enabled shared strategy, collective advocacy, information exchange and stronger alignment across refugee, settlement, legal, health, homelessness and other civil society organisations.

In May, Paul Power and Chloe Harle from the RCOA team joined UNHCR's Representative in Canberra, Soo-Jin Rhee, and UNHCR Senior Protection Officer Mike Clayton for two days of community consultations in Hobart, hosted by Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania. This was the first of what we hope will be regular joint consultations in different cities, with RCOA and UNHCR working together to listen to representatives of refugee communities and local services around Australia about local, national and international issues of importance to them.

Internationally, in addition to the meetings already noted, RCOA participated in complementary pathways coordination meetings and advocacy on meaningful refugee participation, contributed to joint international NGO statements on refugee-related issues, and participated actively in the Forced Migration Network of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).

Community engagement remained central to RCOA's advocacy and policy development. We worked with refugee-led and diaspora communities, including people from the Sudanese, Ezidi, Eritrean, Iranian, Assyrian, Sabean Mandaean and LGBTQIA+ refugee communities, to understand emerging priorities, communicate policy developments and ensure lived experience informed policy advice.

In September, RCOA continued its advocacy on issues affecting Rohingya refugees by helping to launch the Meeras Pavilion at Sydney's Customs House. The large-scale interactive artwork, a celebration of Rohingya culture, storytelling and solidarity, was on prominent display for two weeks. RCOA also coordinated the participation of over 50 high school students in workshops hosted by Rohingya community members, providing opportunities for students to learn and connect with Rohingya culture and stories. Three years in the making, Meeras Pavilion was co-designed by Australian and Rohingya artists based in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, through the Creative Advocacy Partnership.

Submissions, reports and letters

RCOA made submissions and prepared reports on the Humanitarian Program, offshore processing, skilled migration, Myanmar, Australia's externalisation of its protection responsibilities, hate and extremism legislation, the Universal Periodic Review and arbitrary detention.

We also wrote to Ministers and parliamentarians on issues including the conflicts in Sudan and Iran, the forced return of refugees to Afghanistan, LGBTQIA+ refugee resettlement, removals to Nauru, the Humanitarian Program, and homelessness and destitution among people seeking asylum.

RCOA maintained sustained engagement with government and parliament through meetings, briefings, the Parliamentary Friends of Refugees group and targeted cross-party outreach. We worked with refugee-led organisations, affected communities and the broader sector through strategy meetings, working groups, webinars, legal and community briefings and joint advocacy. This engagement informed RCOA's policy positions and advocacy priorities and helped keep the experiences of people directly affected by refugee policy at the centre of our work. Across these activities, RCOA advocated for fair and timely status resolution, strong humanitarian pathways, effective responses to crises, action on homelessness and destitution, meaningful refugee participation, and durable cross-party and community support for refugee policy reform.



The Meeras Pavillion set up in Sydney

Refugee Week



Australian Russian-Chinese Friendship Association perform at an event hosted by Core Community Services. Photo: Core Community Services

Refugee Week 2026 was particularly significant, marking two milestones: Australia welcoming more than one million refugees since 1947, and 40 years since Refugee Week began in Australia. These milestones were reflected in this year's theme, 'A Million Stories'.

The theme resonated strongly, providing a powerful way to recognise the many stories that make up Australia's refugee history, not only the experiences of people seeking refuge, but the lives they have built, the families they have raised, the friendships they have formed and the contributions they have made to Australian society across generations.

Hundreds of events were held across Australia, with thousands of people coming together to celebrate Refugee Week. Events included panel discussions, film screenings, shared meals, community gatherings and talks by Refugee Ambassadors. These events gave communities the opportunity to learn, connect, and share their experiences, and celebrate the contribution refugees continue to make to Australian society.

RCOA also supported Australia Post and UNHCR in the development of a commemorative stamp that recognised the one million milestone, as well as marking 75 years since the Refugee Convention was signed. The stamp was launched by the Governor-General, Her Excellency Sam Mostyn AC, on World Refugee Day at Government House in Canberra. The launch was an important moment of recognition of Australia's refugee history. Refugee Week was also marked in Parliament, with Sarah Witty MP moving a motion acknowledging the occasion and its importance.

Refugee Week received significant media attention, with more than 300 mentions across national, local and community media.

Our campaign included the 2026 Refugee Week poster, which featured Thu-Trang and her two school-aged children. Thu-Trang had arrived in Australia as a child refugee from Vietnam in the 1980s with her family. The image used for the poster captured a mixture of her journey over the last few decades, and the life she has created in Australia with her family. It was a powerful image that also marked the 50 years since the first Vietnamese arrivals to Australia.

Refugee Week



L-R: RCOA Director of Communications and Fundraising Rnita Dacho, Board Observer Faiza Shakori, Assistant Minister for Citizenship, Customs, and Multicultural Affairs Julian Hill, RCOA Advocacy Coordinator Dr Graham Thom, Governor-General of Australia Sam Mostyn AC, and RCOA Co-CEO Paul Power at the launch of the commemorative stamp in Canberra. Photo: RCOA.



Farhan Shah and Sufi Oz perform their debut song, "Refugee", at the Official Launch of 2026 SA Refugee Week, proudly hosted by the Australian Migrant Resource Centre (AMRC) at Adelaide Town Hall. Photo: AMRC.

Operation #Not Forgotten – Long separated families reunited

During 2025-26, 34 more refugees were resettled to Canada under Operation Not Forgotten (ONF), a partnership between RCOA, MOSAIC in Vancouver and Ads Up Canada Refugee Network in Toronto. ONF was set up to support to the sponsorship of refugees who spent years in detention in Papua New Guinea and Nauru under Australia's offshore processing policy and to reunite them with long-separated family members. The 2026-26 year saw many families reunited, with 26 of the 34 refugees resettled being spouses and children of refugees previously sponsored to Canada.

Eight refugees who were previously in detention were resettled from PNG and from temporary residency in Australia.

As of 30 June 2026, ONF has enabled 77 refugees previously held in offshore detention and 59 reunited family members to begin new lives in Canada since the project began in 2019 to offer community-led sponsorship options to refugees with nowhere to go. We hope that the Canadian Government will speed up the processing of applications in 2026-27 to enable the 21 refugees remaining in PNG, Australia and Cambodia and 28 family members to be resettled.

Refugee Welcome Zones



L-R: Mimi, Mayor of Dandenong Sophia Tan, Mark Dreyfus MP, RCOA Manager Rebecca Langton, and Cr Hadi Saab from Kingston Council at this year's ALGA conference.

RCOA is proud to acknowledge the 178 councils that have signed up to be Refugee Welcome Zones. By doing so, the councils have committed to welcoming refugees to their local government areas, endeavouring to create welcoming and supportive networks for refugees and people seeking asylum in their communities. The most recent council to join this network is Frankston City Council in Melbourne's south-east.

In October RCOA held an online event for Refugee Welcome Zones councils to highlight the work being done to promote anti-racism and social cohesion in local communities. Race Discrimination Commissioner, Giri Sivaraman, spoke about the National Anti-Racism Framework and the importance of local council involvement while speakers from Greater Shepparton Regional Council and Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia shared local examples of communities working together to tackle division and racism. In March, council representatives were briefed on options to get involved in Refugee Week 2026. The webinar explained the theme, 'A Million Stories', showcased the resources available, and gave councils opportunity to hear from River Nile School, a school that empowers young women from refugee backgrounds to thrive.

In June, RCOA Manager, Rebecca Langton, attended the Australian Local Government Association National Assembly in Canberra, which was an opportunity to meet with Mayors and Councillors from around the country, join the Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum as an exhibitor, and speak at a side event for Councillors along with delegates of lived experience of seeking asylum in Australia.



The councils have committed to welcoming refugees to their local government areas, endeavouring to create welcoming and supportive networks for refugees and people seeking asylum in their communities.

Australia's Untold Stories

To mark the milestone of one million permanent refugee visas issued since 1947, we filmed a series of interviews with people who had arrived in Australia as refugees over the previous eight decades. The interviews were filmed and produced by documentary filmmakers Mark Gould and Andrew Arestides, who generously offered their services as volunteers. The result was Australia's Untold Stories – a project designed to celebrate the diversity and richness of these many extraordinary stories behind the milestone. The film series featured the personal stories of 12 people who arrived in Australia from countries all around the world including Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan Eritrea, Laos, Myanmar, Uganda, Chile, Bosnia, Iraq, and Vietnam. Each had fled war, persecution and human rights abuses and, in Australia, had set out to build a new life.

> **The film series featured the personal stories of 12 people who arrived in Australia from countries all around the world...**

We previewed the films at our Annual General Meeting at Parramatta NSW in November, with a panel discussion featuring three of the films' participants. We also screened the preview at a Parliamentary Friends of Refugees event in Canberra in June. The videos are available to watch on the RCOA website.



L-R: Australia's Untold Stories participants Naseer, Mirsada and Carlos in a panel discussion at the launch of the series. Photo: Rusty Crawford.

Refugee Stories for Change



Refugee Ambassador Delilah at this year's ambassador training. Photo: Damon AMB.

The Refugee Stories for Change program continued to strengthen the voice, visibility and leadership of people with lived refugee experience, connecting refugee ambassadors with communities, organisations, schools and the broader Australian public. During 2025-26, 17 new ambassadors joined the program, taking the total cohort to 40, and expanding the program's diversity, expertise and capacity. This growth was supported by our partnership with Core Community Services and Unbound Stories, creating new pathways for refugee leadership, participation and community engagement.

Demand for the program remained strong, with 174 enquiries received throughout the year and 99 sessions delivered nationally and internationally. These engagements reached a total of 17,386 people directly. This strong engagement demonstrated the significant reach and impact of the program, and supported a greater understanding of refugee experiences. This contributed to more inclusive and informed workplaces and services.

The program also delivered private sector engagements, creating opportunities to challenge misconceptions and promote diversity, inclusion and social cohesion across the corporate sector. Schools and youth engagement sessions provided young people with opportunities to hear directly from refugee ambassadors, build empathy and understanding, and challenge racism and discrimination. More than 7000 students attended the school sessions, while more than 10,000 people attended organisation presentations. There were a total of 43 school engagements, and 49 organsiation engagements.

Through the leadership and expertise of its refugee ambassadors, RSFC continues to shift the narrative around refugees from one centred on displacement and vulnerability to one that recognises resilience, contribution, leadership and belonging. The program remains a powerful platform for centring lived experience and fostering meaningful connections across Australian communities.

Refugee Ambassadors

Our Refugee Ambassadors have provided a vital voice in reshaping the national conversation on refugees. Travelling across the country, they bring the unique insight of lived experience, transforming it into wisdom, leadership and hope. Their stories challenge perceptions, break down barriers and shift perspectives, while their presence keeps our work authentic and grounded in community. Through courage, compassion and resilience, they guide our initiatives and inspire change beyond our program. Their contribution is not only valuable, but essential.

Our special thanks go to our refugee ambassadors: Abang Anade Othow, Abdul Al-Kayum, Assadullah Khurrami, Atena Kashani, Dalal Sleiman, Delilah Shinko, Delphine Yandamutso, Edita Mujkic, Erfanullah Abidi, Fayhaa Al Zuhairi, George Najarian, Gul Afroz Mohammadi, Innocent Karabagega, Lizzy Kuoth, Masoma Faqihi, Manal Gaber, Mariam Ali, Marian Saba, Marlin Toma, Maryam Alkaskoshaba, Meena Mahboob, Milad Kado, Nawfel Alfaris, Ninawa Nano, Oliver Slewa, Ornina Warda, Rahan Uddin, Ranita Dacho, Roman Abasy, Safiullah Taye, Shabnam Rassoli, Shahrnaz Rafi, Sidiqa Faqihi, Simon Shahin, Somayeh Farahani, Sophie Bejek, Tahera Nassrat, Tariq Kareemi, Yaser Naseri and Zaidoon Abdul Rassak.

Sanctuary Runners

RCOA launches Sanctuary Runners Australia

Since 2018, Sanctuary Runners has been bringing people seeking asylum, refugees and people of all backgrounds together in Ireland to run and walk together to build connection and friendship. In 2024, during our year as co-chair of the global Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (CRCP), RCOA became involved in helping to promote the Sanctuary Runners model, facilitating the organisation to launch its first Global Solidarity Run during the CRCP meeting in Geneva and then facilitating Australians to participate in the run in October 2024 and October 2025.

In March 2026, RCOA and Sanctuary Runners Ireland initiated a partnership to launch Sanctuary Runners Australia, to move beyond annual one-off activities and bring Australians of all backgrounds to run and walk together on a regular basis and in multiple locations. The first Sanctuary Runners Australia activity took place on 21 March 2026 (Harmony Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination) when 31 people ran or walked together at the Auburn Botanic Gardens parkrun in Sydney. By the end of the 2025-26 financial year, around 140 people of 22 different countries of origin had participated together as part of Sanctuary Runners Australia in parkrun events at Auburn, Chipping Norton and Casula in Sydney and at Salisbury in Adelaide. The Adelaide activity was held on World Refugee Day and coordinated by Justice for Refugees SA, Carisbrooke parkrun, City of Salisbury, Circle of Friends Australia and Welcoming Australia.



L-R: Roman, Marian, John and Pat at Auburn Botanic Gardens parkrun for the inaugural Sanctuary Runners Australia event in March 2026.

> *After spending nearly nine years in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, I arrived in Sydney in late March 2026. Transitioning to a new country while carrying the immense emotional and mental burdens of the past decade left me feeling completely overwhelmed. Finding Sanctuary Runners Australia has been a turning point in my relocation journey. Attending your sessions every Saturday has allowed me to build meaningful friendships, improve my physical health, and experience genuine joy. For the first time in many years, I look forward to each day with optimism. The feelings of depression and isolation that once weighed heavily on me are finally lifting, and this supportive community has truly served as a form of therapy for me. Thank you, Sanctuary Runners Australia, for providing a safe sanctuary and a vital sense of belonging when I needed it most.*
>
> ***Aziz, who joined Sanctuary Runners in Sydney in May***

RCOA in The Media

Our media engagement continued to grow in 2025-26, with more than 700 mentions of RCOA in Australian and international media. This included references to our research, media releases and interviews, as well as commentary on current refugee and asylum issues. We issued 28 media releases during the year, covering such issues as homelessness among people seeking asylum, displacement from Afghanistan, the closure of the Afghan Embassy in Canberra, the crisis in Sudan, Myanmar's elections, impacts of the conflict in Ukraine, corruption in offshore processing, legislation to remove people to Nauru, a High Court ruling on ankle monitoring of people released from detention, the arrival control determination blocking temporary entrants from Iran, the Coalition's immigration policies, the 2026 Federal Budget, Refugee Week, the Global Refugee Forum progress review, the Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, and UNHCR's release of global displacement statistics for 2025.

Our media coverage included references to RCOA research, media releases and interviews with RCOA staff. Our work on Iran and Nauru received particularly strong media engagement. RCOA staff were regularly interviewed by media outlets and provided comment on breaking news, government policies and international events. Our work was featured in major outlets including The Guardian, ABC, SBS, CNN and news.com.au.

Our media coverage included references to RCOA research, media releases and interviews with RCOA staff. Our work on Iran and Nauru received particularly strong media engagement.

Digital Impact

For a fourth consecutive year, we saw an increase in all our key social media metrics across Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Bluesky and X. Our total impressions for 2025-26 grew to 1.6 million, an increase of 60% on the previous year. Reactions and likes on our posts increased by 44% to 36,000, while shares of our posts tripled from 3,000 last year to 9,000 this year. Our followers across all social media channels increased 28%, which translated to 4,745 new followers.

Among our key campaigns were another successful Refugee Week campaign, which generated close to 200,000 views, and two advertising campaigns which drew thousands of people to our website. Facebook and Instagram continue to be the platforms most heavily engaged with by our audience, while LinkedIn saw the biggest community growth.







Our Organisation

RCOA Board

Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward (President)
Emeritus Professor William Maley AM (Vice-President)
Kwame Selormey (Secretary)
Frances Wade (Treasurer)
Phil Glendenning AM (Immediate Past President)
David Ajak Ajang (from November 2025)
Nick Greiner AC
Christina Hey-Nguyen
Dr Gillian Long
John Roc
Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin
Joseph Youhana

Board observers

Alina Malyk (to November 2025)
Faiza Shakori (from February 2026)

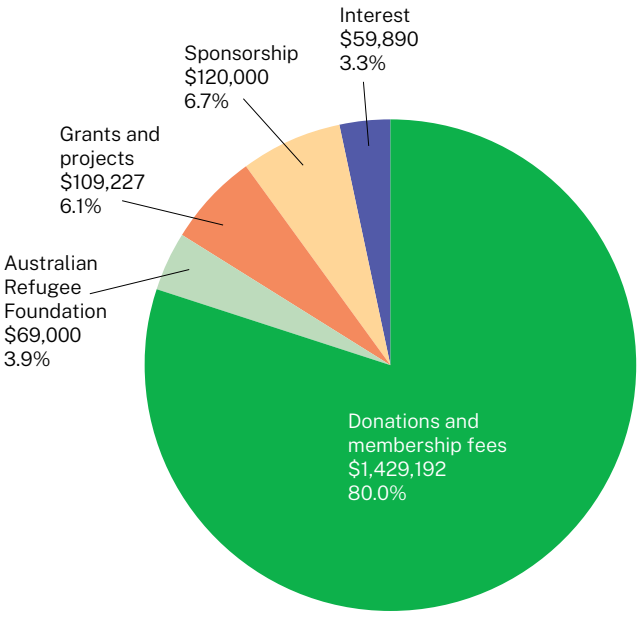
RCOA staff

Adama Kamara, Co-Chief Executive Officer
Paul Power, Co-Chief Executive Officer
Rebecca Eckard, Director of Policy and Research
Rnita Dacho, Director of Communications and Fundraising
Deena Yako, Director of Community Engagement
Rebecca Langton, Manager
Dr Louise Olliff, Senior Policy Advisor
Dr Graham Thom, Advocacy Coordinator
Dr Shaheen Whyte, Senior Policy Officer
Martyn Green, Accounting Officer
Sidiqa Faqihi, Project Officer
Chloe Harle, Fundraising and Policy Officer
Noelle Perera, Digital and Campaigns Coordinator
Georgie McGrillen, Partnership and Relationship Manager
Sophia Duckor-Jones, Media and Communications Coordinator
Moumita Roy, Administration Officer
Kelly Nicholls, Strategic Advisor, Fundraising and Communications (to December 2025)
Laura Stacey, Fundraising Copy Editor

Volunteers and interns

Jana Abdallah
Mariam Naseri Ali
Andrew Arestides
Emily Bai
Joyce Chia
Rusty Crawshaw
Nirary Dacho
Keyvan Dorostkar
Meanelli Erive
Ananya Garg
Mark Gould
Abhinav Goyal
Nova Iqbal
Katie Lee
Clara Carvalhedo Lyra
Jay Rasras
Isabelle Ricafort
Dominic Sebastian
Clodia Stanislaus
Elliese Tjeuw

Our sources of income



TOTAL INCOME $1,787,309

RCOA's Members

Life members

Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO

Phil Glendenning AM

Tuong Quang Luu AO

In memoriam - Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO

RCOA would like to acknowledge the extraordinary contribution of Dame Marie Bashir, life member of RCOA and patron of the Australian Refugee Foundation, who passed away in January 2026. Dame Marie served as Governor of New South Wales from 2001 to 2014, being both the first woman and the first person of Lebanese descent to be appointed to the position. Prior to this appointment, Dame Marie had an impressive career in medicine and tertiary education, and dedicated herself to advocacy for refugees, Indigenous Australians and young people.

Organisational members

Accessible Diversity Services Initiative ADSI Ltd

ActionAid Australia

Advance Diversity Services

Aireys Inlet Rural Australians for Refugees

AMES Australia

Amnesty International Australia

Armidale Sanctuary

Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS)

Assyrian Australian Association

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

Asylum Seekers Centre

Australia for UNHCR

Australia Syrian Alliance Inc

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office

Australian Council For International Development (ACFID)

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 Refugee Volunteers

Bathurst Refugee Support Group

Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group

Cabrini Asylum Seeker and Refugee Health Hub

Canberra Refugee Support Inc

CareerSeekers

Catholic Education Office Wollongong

Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace

Centre for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees

Centrecare Incorporated

Circle Green Community Legal

Circle of Friends Australia Inc

Communify Queensland

Community Migrant Resource Centre

Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia

Companion House

Core Community Services

FamilyCare

Forcibly Displaced People Network

Foundation House (Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture)

House of Welcome

Illawarra Multicultural Services

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

Melaleuca Australia

Metro Assist

Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania

Mosaic Multicultural Connections

Mt Druitt Ethnic Communities Agency

Multicultural Australia

Multicultural NSW

Multicultural Services Centre of WA

Murray Valley Sanctuary Refugee Group

National Council of Churches in Australia

NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)

Overseas Services to Survivors of Torture and Trauma

RCOA's Members

Pax Christi Australia (NSW)
QPASTT
Quaker Service Australia
Refugee Advice and Casework Service
Refugee and Immigration Legal Service (RAILS)
Refugee Legal
Reledev
River Nile School
Settlement Services International (SSI)
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
Tawasul Foundation
The Mercy Foundation
Think+DO Tank Foundation
Thrive Refugee Enterprise
Townsville Multicultural Support Group
Uniting Church National Assembly
Uniting Vic Tas
Valerio Daniel de Simoni Association Inc
Welcome Merchant
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 and Maureen Arnott
Kevin Bain
Ron Baumann
Martin Bibby
Elizabeth Biok
Charles Body
Jill Brook
Meredith Burgmann
Stephen Cadusch
Teresa Cannon
John Clark
Judith Copleston
Jane Cox
Ann Curthoys
Mary Daley
Gillian Dooley
Malcolm Dunning
Judith Dwyer
Bruce Errol
Temesgen Muche Ewunie
Vicki Fairfax
Claire Foley
Jack Frawley
Anne Gibbins
Sharon Goldschmidt
Jan Govett
Catherine Grant
Nick Greiner AC
Heather Gridley
Catherine Halliday
Farida Hani
Frances Hanna
Donald Harvey
Paul Henning
Christina Hey-Nguyen
Bruce Hogben
Lauren Honcope
William Hood
Alison Howell
David Hunter
Ivan James
David Kay
Matthew Kirwan
Peter Krinks
Rebecca Lim
Andrew Lynch
Tim and Alice-Anne Macnaught
William Maley
Effie Mitchell
Lucy Morgan
Amy Nethery
Mika Nielsen
Paul Perini
Jennifer Perry
Margaret Piper
Nola Randall
Bronia Renison
John Roc
Catherine Russell
Dr James Russell
Natalie Shea
Susan Sheridan
Margaret Smith
Kevin Sweeney
Kapil Talwar
Janet Thompson
Philip Tubb
Frances Wade
Andrew Whalan
Deb Willcocks
Meredith Williams
Sara Wills
Anne Yuille

Financial Reports

Refugee Council of Australia Inc - ABN 87 956 673 083

Statement of Surplus or Deficit and Other Comprehensive Income

For the Year Ended 30 June 2026

	2026 ($)	2025 ($)
Revenue	1,787,309	2,096,803
Employee benefits expense	(1,677,430)	(1,512,998)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(5,047)	(1,569)
Other expenses	(499,418)	(611,409)
Deficit for the year	**(394,586)**	**(29,173)**
Income tax expense	–	
Deficit for the year	**(394,586)**	**(29,173)**
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	–	
Total comprehensive deficit for the year	**(394,586)**	**(29,173)**

Statement of Financial Position

As at 30 June 2026

	2026 ($)	2025 ($)
ASSETS		
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,697,919	2,117,264
Trade and other receivables	292,922	239,080
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	**1,990,841**	**2,356,344**
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant and equipment	10,773	3,692
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	**10,773**	**3,692**
TOTAL ASSETS	**2,001,614**	**2,360,036**
LIABILITIES		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and other payables	92,386	89,307
Employee benefits	241,936	193,893
Other liabilities	128,197	140,400
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	**462,519**	**423,600**
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Employee benefits	41,256	31,387
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	41,256	31,387
TOTAL LIABILITIES	**503,775**	**454,987**
NET ASSETS	**1,497,839**	**1,905,049**
EQUITY		
Restricted Reserves	374,167	386,791
Retained surplus	1,123,672	1,518,258
TOTAL EQUITY	**1,497,839**	**1,905,049**

Full audited financial statements on RCOA website



Refugee Council of Australia

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