



# Refugee Social Services Annual Report – 2024

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**Refugee Social Services (RSS)** is a **Durban-based registered NPO**, operating primarily in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, with main offices in **Durban and Pietermaritzburg**.

**Vision:** To be a global leader in delivering holistic, high-quality, innovative services towards integration and independence.

**Mission:** Provide programmes promoting psychological well-being and socio-economic independence; advocate in partnerships; engage in evidence-informed research; and deliver multidisciplinary support [refugeesocialservices.co.za](http://refugeesocialservices.co.za).

**Service offerings include:** emergency support (food, medical care, accommodation), psychosocial counselling, referrals, legal and documentation assistance, English and French language training, livelihood skills, child protection, outreach, and more.

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Director's Report | Annual General Meeting – 30 July 2025

## 1. Context and Impact

In 2024, Refugee Social Services (RSS) operated in a challenging funding environment, starting with a reduced budget compared to 2023 and a smaller staff complement due to retirements and retrenchments. Our client communities continued to face intense pressure, particularly due to:

- Documentation issues,
- Anti-migrant rhetoric and narratives,
- High levels of vulnerability (health issues, child protection, and GBV-related risks).

Despite the challenges, RSS maintained a prioritised and person-centred approach, offering tailored assistance to people with heightened vulnerabilities, including refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, and South Africans, aged between 0 and 92 years.

## 2. Overview of People Served

Our support reached:

- Women, men, boys, girls, and gender non-specific persons.
- Nationalities included DR Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and others.
- People with disabilities, chronic illnesses, and special needs.
- Unaccompanied, separated, orphaned, and abandoned children.
- Elderly persons.

## 3. Key Programmes and Achievements

### A. Direct Services (Case Management)

- 1,105 households served (3,868 individuals).
- Support included psychosocial counselling, advocacy, referrals, and cash/livelihood

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assistance.

- A decrease of 340 households compared to 2023.

#### B. Heightened Vulnerabilities

- 230 households received comprehensive support (an increase of 25 from 2023).
- Services included counselling, referrals, livelihood support, and cash assistance.
- Established support groups for:
  - Fathers/male caregivers of children with disabilities.
  - Siblings of children with disabilities.
  - Elderly and caregivers.
- 30% of these households also experienced GBV.

#### Highlights:

- Fathers' groups improved care-sharing and reportedly reduced household GBV.
- Workshop with UKZN's Occupational Therapy Dept. for 31 parents (40% fathers) of children with autism or cerebral palsy.

#### C. Child Protection

- 277 children served — double the number in 2023.
- Services included counselling, safe housing, family tracing, and referrals.
- 14 cases presented to the BID panel for durable solutions.
- Ongoing challenge: lengthy family reunification processes.
- Advocacy role: Birth Registration Task Team, BID Panel, and Provincial Steering Committee for UASC.

#### D. Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

- 206 survivors supported: 98% women, 2% men.
- Established 12 therapeutic groups (Durban, Richards Bay, PMB).
- Training + start-ups for 51 GBV survivors and youth at risk, including LGBTQI+ individuals.
- 4 community workshops for religious leaders (Durban & PMB).

#### E. Community Outreach and Education

- 24 peer educators reached 12,576 community members province-wide.
- Peer sessions covered refugee rights, documentation, health, GBV, and child protection.
- Conducted in multiple languages (English, refugee languages, Zulu).
- 10 new peer educators trained.
- Challenge: sustainability of this impactful program.

#### F. Capacity Building

- Workshops held on:
  - General parenting skills,
  - Disability support for parents,

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- Community and religious leadership,
- Livelihoods and financial literacy for vulnerable youth and GBV survivors.

#### G. Safe Spaces

- 24 therapeutic groups formed, reaching 265 people including children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

#### H. Durable Solutions

- 85 cases flagged to UNHCR for resettlement or voluntary repatriation.
- 15 individuals from 5 households repatriated.

### 4. Partnerships and Collaboration

#### Key Highlights:

- Partnership with UKZN: Weekly audiology screenings & OT support.
- Internships for 2 UKZN social work students.
- Collaborations for World Refugee Day, Heritage Day, and 16 Days of Activism.
- Creative art by beneficiaries exhibited at Phansi Museum.
- Research partnerships: University of Exeter and Université Paris 8.
- Recognition by South African Human Rights Commission.

### 5. Advocacy and Networks

RSS continues to be an active member and/or lead in:

- Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in SA (RSS chairs the Executive Committee),
- UNHCR/UNICEF-led Birth Registration Task Team,
- BID Panel and Protection Working Group,
- Durban Coalition and Social Cohesion Network,
- Provincial Steering Committee for Unaccompanied Minors.

We maintain strategic partnerships with:

- Universities,
- Government departments,
- Civil society movements,
- Refugee-led organisations.

### 6. Challenges

- Precarious funding.
- Slow and inconsistent documentation processes.
- Deportations, family separations, restricted livelihoods.

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- Anti-migrant sentiment impacting service access.
- Emotional toll and burnout among staff.

## **7. Our Strengths**

- Dedicated staff, volunteers, and board.
- Supportive donors.
- Strong partner network.
- Recognised credibility in the sector.

## **8. Gratitude**

Thank You | Asante Sana | Merci Beaucoup | Siyabonga

To our team, partners, donors, and the communities we serve—your trust and collaboration sustain our work.