

Refugee Rescue – Trustees’ Annual Report for the financial year 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

Charity Name: Refugee Rescue

Charity Number: NIC105156,

**Principal Address: 58 Leyland Meadows,
Ballycastle, BT54 6JX**

Structure, Governance, and Management

Refugee Rescue is governed by a formally adopted constitution. The charity is managed by a Board of Trustees who meet regularly to oversee the organisation’s strategic direction, operations, and compliance. Trustees serving during this period included Mr. Paul Kerrigan, Joby Fox, Mr. Richie Heard and Mr. Jamie Bourke. The trustees are responsible for ensuring that the charity adheres to its legal obligations under the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and continues to serve its beneficiaries effectively.

Objectives and Activities

The primary purpose of Refugee Rescue is the relief of human suffering and the saving of lives among refugees and displaced people affected by war, conflict, or humanitarian crises. This is achieved by providing or assisting in sea rescue operations, offering shelter, safety, and humanitarian aid, and advocating for safe and legal routes to asylum. The trustees confirm that all activities undertaken during the year were carried out in line with the public benefit requirements set out by the Charity Commission.

Achievements and Performance

The 2022–2023 reporting period marked a defining chapter in the development of Refugee Rescue as a humanitarian maritime organisation. Building on its transition from operations along the northern shore of Lesvos to the far more perilous Central Mediterranean, the organisation consolidated its operational identity as a skilled search and rescue (SAR) partner embedded within the broader civil fleet response. Most notably, Refugee Rescue continued its partnership with the German NGO Sea-Eye, maintaining an active crew presence aboard the SEA-EYE 4, a 53-metre SAR vessel that operates off the coasts of Libya, Tunisia, and Malta. In this context, Refugee Rescue provided both personnel and equipment, most significantly through the deployment of its dedicated RHIB (rigid-hulled inflatable boat), Mo Chara, which served as the vessel’s primary on-scene rescue craft. These operations took place in what remains the most lethal migratory sea route in the world.

Over the course of this period, Refugee Rescue directly contributed to the rescue and onboard care of over a thousand individuals, many of whom had fled violence, detention, or trafficking in countries such as Libya, Eritrea, Sudan, and Afghanistan. Among those rescued were pregnant women, children as young as five, unaccompanied minors, and survivors of extreme physical and psychological trauma. The organisation's crew carried out high-risk SAR operations in international waters, often in conditions of high swell and poor visibility, and increasingly in the absence of meaningful support from coastal state authorities. Several rescue missions took place

in Malta's SAR zone, with no engagement from Maltese authorities, and there were multiple recorded encounters where state or EU-funded assets, such as the Libyan Coast Guard, actively impeded or endangered the safety of the rescuers. In one such incident in early 2023, Libyan personnel pointed weapons at Mo Chara's unarmed crew during a live rescue.

Despite these challenges, Refugee Rescue continued to uphold international maritime obligations and humanitarian principles. The RHIB team launched repeatedly from SEA-EYE 4, distributing lifejackets, stabilising overcrowded rubber boats and wooden vessels, and transferring survivors back to the main ship for medical attention and shelter. In a single December 2023 deployment, Mo Chara was instrumental in the rescue of 106 people from two unseaworthy vessels in rough seas. In several cases, the teams operated through the night and in worsening weather, demonstrating the high level of training and commitment among the crew.

This operational presence was made possible by Refugee Rescue's careful stewardship of its limited resources and its strategic partnership with Sea-Eye. By embedding skilled RHIB operators and support crew within Sea-Eye's framework, Refugee Rescue was able to participate in sustained missions of up to three weeks' duration, something that would be impossible to undertake independently. During this period, Mo Chara underwent a comprehensive maintenance and refitting programme, ensuring the vessel remained compliant with safety regulations and fully functional as a rapid-response asset. Volunteers and engineering staff dedicated significant time to maintaining the vessel between missions, and the organisation continued to plan for its eventual replacement or retirement with dignity, having played a role in the rescue of more than 16,000 people since its launch.

A core component of the organisation's work remained the recruitment and training of professional volunteer crew. Refugee Rescue facilitated a rolling programme of onboarding and capacity-building, ensuring that each team deployed aboard SEA-EYE 4 had the necessary technical and interpersonal skills to conduct rescues safely and compassionately. Training modules included SAR fundamentals, small boat handling, trauma response, and intercultural communication. New crew members were mentored by experienced personnel, including professionals with previous service in the RNLI, Royal Canadian Marine SAR, or other civilian rescue institutions. A number of volunteers progressed to lead positions within the RHIB team or deck operations after repeat deployments, contributing to a growing internal knowledge base and a culture of peer learning and accountability.

Onshore, Refugee Rescue remained active in public engagement and advocacy. The organisation contributed to international efforts to resist the growing criminalisation of SAR NGOs, particularly in response to legal action taken against rescuers in Italy, such as the high-profile Trapani case. Refugee Rescue joined joint statements and legal advocacy coalitions to assert the fundamental human right to be rescued at sea and to defend the legitimacy of civil rescue actors. These statements emphasised that saving lives must never be considered a criminal act, even as several European states moved to restrict the operations of independent humanitarian vessels.

Public communications remained a priority. Refugee Rescue issued statements, gave interviews, and participated in education and outreach events to raise awareness about the conditions faced by displaced people crossing the Mediterranean. Through social media and supporter networks,

the organisation highlighted both the individual stories of those rescued and the systemic issues driving migration and mortality at sea. These communications often included urgent calls for donations, as the organisation faced growing costs, including fuel, repairs, and medical supplies, while experiencing a reduction in unrestricted donor income across the sector. Despite this, the organisation managed to maintain full operational capacity during 2022 and much of 2023, launching multiple joint missions that collectively rescued more than 500 people in the latter year alone

During this period, Refugee Rescue further deepened its collaboration with other SAR and medical NGOs, including German Doctors and United4Rescue. These partnerships were not only logistical but ethical in nature, demonstrating the shared commitment of several civil society organisations to uphold life-saving norms even as EU migration policy moved increasingly toward deterrence and containment. Refugee Rescue contributed to shared safety protocols, operational debriefs, and policy discussions aimed at improving both mission effectiveness and survivor care standards.

In the face of political hostility, regulatory obstruction, and persistent funding challenges, Refugee Rescue remained steadfast in its mission. The organisation's ability to carry out rescue operations in this environment is a testament to the courage and competence of its crew, the support of its partners and donors, and its unwavering belief that every life at sea is worth saving. The period 2022–2023 demonstrated not only the strategic value of cooperation across civil SAR actors, but also the moral urgency of maintaining a presence in waters where so many continue to disappear unseen. Through its work aboard SEA-EYE 4, its ongoing advocacy, and the enduring symbol of Mo Chara, Refugee Rescue continues to represent a vital, independent voice in one of the defining humanitarian challenges of our time.

Financial Review

From 2019–2020 to 2022–2023, Refugee Rescue experienced a sustained decline in income, reflecting the cessation of grant funding and a reduction in voluntary donations. Total income fell from £186,317.00 in 2019–2020 to £57,895.92 in 2020–2021, and then to £23,311.47 in both 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 — an overall reduction of 88% compared to 2020 levels.

Expenditure followed a similar trajectory, though the rate of reduction was less severe. Spending fell from £162,719.49 in 2019–2020 to £61,997.84 in 2020–2021, and then to £41,211.66 in 2021–2022, remaining at the same level in 2022–2023. These reductions reflect the charity’s strategic scaling back of activity in response to reduced income. However, the fall in income outpaced cost reductions, resulting in a surplus of £23,597.51 in 2019–2020, followed by a deficit of £4,101.92 in 2020–2021, and significant shortfalls of £17,900.19 in both 2021–2022 and 2022–2023.

These sustained deficits over two consecutive years placed the charity under financial pressure and required careful management to ensure that core operations could continue. Expenditure in 2022–2023 totaled £41,211.66, comprising £1,321.76 in fundraising costs and £39,889.90 on charitable activities. Income for the year was £23,311.47 — all of which was unrestricted. No restricted funds or grant income were received during the year.

The resulting net deficit of £17,900.19 reduced the charity’s available reserves significantly. Unrestricted funds brought forward at the start of the year (1 April 2022) stood at £20,713.45. By year-end (31 March 2023), reserves had fallen to £2,813.26, highlighting the urgency of renewed fundraising and donor engagement to support the charity’s continued humanitarian operations.

Trends and Considerations

The significant reduction in income over the reporting period, primarily due to the cessation of grant funding and reduced voluntary donations, has placed substantial financial strain on the charity. While expenditure has been reduced accordingly, it has not been sufficient to offset the decline in income, leading to consecutive deficits. Moving forward, the charity must:

- **Diversify Funding Sources:** Explore new revenue streams, including partnerships, corporate sponsorships, and expanded donor outreach.
- **Improve Cost Management:** Identify further opportunities to streamline operations and reduce expenditure without compromising core activities.
- **Strengthen Donor Engagement:** Maintain transparency and highlight the impact of donations to inspire continued support.

Despite these challenges, Refugee Rescue remains steadfast in its mission. The organisation continues to rely on the generosity of individual donors and strategic partnerships to fund its vital work.

Statement of Compliance

In setting our objectives and planning our activities for the year, the trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that the activities have helped to achieve the charity's purposes and provide a benefit to beneficiaries.

Responsibilities of the Trustees

The Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity at the end of the year and of the incoming and outgoing resources for the year then ended.

In preparing those financial statements, the Trustees are required to select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently, making judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent. The Trustees must also prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue its activities.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and applicable accounting standards. The Trustees are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Trustees' approval of financial accounts

I confirm that:

- (i) To the best of my knowledge and belief, the accounting records reflect all the transactions entered into by the charity in the years 2022 and 2023¹.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees.

Paul Kerrigan

Date: Sunday, April 20, 2025

Name: PAUL KERRIGAN

Position: Treasurer

¹ These accounts were ratified by the Board of Trustees via email communication on 18 April 2025, in accordance with the provisions of the charity's governing document permitting decisions by written resolution. Unanimous approval was recorded, and a quorum of trustees participated in the decision.

Independent examiner's report to the charity trustees of Refugee Rescue.

I report on the accounts of the Group for the year ended 31st March 2023, which are set out in this report.

Respective responsibilities of charity trustees and examiner

As the charity's trustees you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

It is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts under section 65 of the Charities Act
- follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Commission under section 65(9)(b) of the Charities Act
- state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's report

I have examined your charity accounts as required under section 65 of the Charities Act and my examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland under section 65(9)(b) of the Charities Act.

My examination included a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also included consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeking explanations from you as charity trustees concerning any such matters. My role is to state whether any material matters have come to my attention giving me cause to believe:

1. That accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 63 of the Charities Act
2. That the accounts do not accord with those accounting records
3. That the accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements of the Charities Act
4. That there is further information needed for a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination and have no concerns in respect of the matters (1) to (4) listed above and, in connection with following the Directions of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, I have found no matters that require drawing to your attention.

Signed:

Kennith Cruickshank

Name: KENNITH CRUICKSHANK

Date: Sunday, April 20, 2025

	Unrestricted Funds	Total Funds 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023	Total Funds 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022
	£	£	£
Incoming resources			
Incoming resources from generating funds:			
Voluntary income	23,311.47	23,311.47	28,473.25
Grants			29,422.67
Total incoming resources	23,311.47	23,311.47	57,895.92
Resources expended			
Costs of generating funds			
Fundraising costs	1,321.76	1,321.76	103.9
Charitable activities	39,889.90	39,889.90	60,676.08
of which: Wages ²	19,600.00	19,600.00	-
Total resources expended	41,211.66	41,211.66	61,997.84
Net incoming/outgoing resources for the year	-(17,900.19)	-(17,900.19)	-(4,101.92)
Reconciliation of funds Total funds brought forward	20,713.45	20,713.45	23,597.51
Total funds carried forward	2,813.26	2,813.26	19,495.59

² During the accounting period, two trustees received payments for professional services specifically relating to the technical maintenance of the Search and Rescue (SAR) craft and delivery of specialist training essential to Refugee Rescue's operational activities. Due to the specific nature of our SAR craft (Atlantic 75), both trustees are RNLI volunteers who have extensive operational knowledge of this type of vessel. These services were integral to the charity's mission and could not be sourced externally without compromising operational continuity and safety standards.

Notes to the Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2023

Accounting Basis

These accounts have been prepared on a receipts and payments basis in accordance with the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and related regulations.

Funds

All funds held during the year were unrestricted. No restricted or endowment funds were received or held.

Charitable Activities

Expenditure of £39,889.90 was incurred on charitable activities, which includes:

Wages: £19,200.00

Equipment, training, fuel and running costs associated with operational delivery

Fundraising Costs

Fundraising costs of £1,321.76 relate to event expenses and associated promotional materials.

Fixed Assets

Although not required under receipts and payments accounting, the charity maintains records of fixed assets for internal management purposes.

Assets are shown net of depreciation as follows:

Statement of Assets and Liabilities (2022–2023)

Asset	2021 Net Value (£)	Depreciation (£)	Net Value 2022 (£)
RHIB Boat	12,000.00	3,000.00	9,000.00
Two Outboard Engines	16,000.00	6,000.00	10,000.00
PPE & Safety Equipment	4,000.00	1,000.00	3,000.00
Total Fixed Assets	32,000.00	10,000.00	22,000.00
Current Assets	–	–	2,813.26
Creditors	–	–	–
Net Assets	–	–	26,813.26

Related Party Transactions

There were no related party transactions during the year.

