

# New Land, New Life: Long-Term Settlement of Refugees in New Zealand

## Summary Report



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## Introduction

Quota Refugees Ten Years On: Perspectives on Integration, Community and Identity is a multi-year research programme that was developed to better understand the long-term journeys of refugees in New Zealand. The research programme was led by the Department of Labour, with the Ministry of Social Development and the Department of Internal Affairs acting as key partner agencies.

The first phase of the research was an annotated bibliography and thematic review of the relevant literature, which provided evidence on the factors that act as facilitators or barriers to integration. The second phase gathered stakeholders' perspectives on significant changes in the refugee resettlement sector since 1987 and on the development of refugee communities in New Zealand.

The third phase, covered in this report, was a face-to-face survey of 512 former refugees who arrived in New Zealand under the Refugee Quota Programme between 1993 and 1999. The survey was designed to be representative of the population of refugees who arrived during this period and achieved a response rate of 41.5 percent. The report also includes findings from in-depth interviews and focus groups that were used to explore certain aspects of the survey in greater depth.

The research is based on the concept of 'integration' as articulated by Atfield, Brahmhatt and O'Toole (2007) as follows:

- Integration is a two-way process – it involves adjustment and participation on the part of the host society as well as the newcomer.
- Integration is a non-linear process – integration may be fractured, and integration experiences in one area can sit alongside continued exclusion in other areas.
- Integration is a subjective process – perceptions are central to the process of integration, and therefore it is important to explore refugees' own experiences of the integration process.

The report is being written at a time when a new approach to improving refugee resettlement outcomes is being proposed through the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy (a whole of Government Refugee Resettlement Strategy has been developed with work currently underway on the detailed business case). The strategy's overarching objective is that:

Refugees are participating fully and integrated socially and economically as soon as possible so that they are living independently, undertaking the same responsibilities and exercising the same rights as other New Zealanders and have a strong sense of belonging to their own community and to New Zealand.

Former refugees experience unique challenges due to their backgrounds and have higher levels of disadvantage than the population in general. The findings from the Quota Refugees Ten Years On programme of research show that, after 10 or

more years of living in New Zealand, former refugees are doing well in a number of areas but continue to face challenges in others. Former refugees have a strong sense of identity and belonging to New Zealand, and almost all were satisfied with their life in New Zealand. The majority had made close friends from outside their community, and most were involved with groups or organisations. Those who arrived in the country as children and young people are doing well in most areas of integration.

Ten years on, employment is still the main area of challenge and, along with English language for older people and women, remains the main challenge going forward. However, former refugees have a strong desire to seek meaningful employment and contribute to life in New Zealand.

## **Key findings from the survey**

### ***Demographic characteristics***

On arrival in New Zealand, around one in five former refugees who arrived in New Zealand between 1993 and 1999 were aged 12 years and under (21 percent) and almost two-thirds were aged 30 years or under (62 percent). Only one in 10 was aged 45 years and over. The top four countries of origin were Iraq, Somalia, Vietnam and Ethiopia. In terms of gender, there were more male (56 percent) than female (44 percent) former refugees who arrived between 1993 and 1999.

Two-thirds of former refugees had children (66 percent), nearly a quarter of whom (23 percent) had five or more children. Where former refugees had children, a third had a youngest child aged under 5 (33 percent), and a third had a youngest child aged between 5 and 14 (33 percent).

Half of all refugees arriving between 1993 and 1999 were settled in Auckland and a quarter in Wellington. One out of every five former refugees (20 percent) was currently living in a different city to that in which they had been settled when they first arrived in New Zealand. There has been a clear move towards Auckland and away from other centres.

### ***Movements to and from New Zealand***

A third (33 percent or 1,336) of the former refugees who arrived in New Zealand between 1993 and 1999 and were aged 18 at the time of the survey were no longer in New Zealand when the survey was done. A third of those from Iraq and Ethiopia and almost half of those from Somalia were no longer in New Zealand.

Eleven percent of former refugees in the survey had plans to live outside New Zealand in the next few years. Those aged 18–29 were significantly more likely to say they had plans to live outside New Zealand (22 percent) than older people. Work opportunities and wanting to reunite with family were the main reasons for wanting to leave. Refugees, like other New Zealanders, saw Australia as offering significant economic advantages, including the ability to get a job, have better wages, save money, buy a house, provide for family and visit family overseas.

## ***Housing***

The majority of former refugees (73 percent) were satisfied with their housing. Former refugees who owned their own home were most likely to be satisfied with their housing, followed by those living in the home of a family member.

Sixteen percent of former refugees owned or partly owned their home, with those from Vietnam being the most likely to be home owners. Home ownership was lower among former refugees than for the country as a whole.

Almost half (47 percent) of those who did not own their own home lived in a house/flat owned by Housing New Zealand Corporation. Former refugees from African nations were more likely to live in a Housing New Zealand Corporation property, while those from non-African nations were more likely to live in a house/flat owned by a family member or to rent privately.

## ***Language and literacy***

Proficiency in English is a key facilitator of refugee integration. It helps people to access paid work, education, higher incomes and wider personal relationships and provides a feeling of belonging. Not being able to speak the host language is not only a barrier to economic integration but also to social interaction and full participation in New Zealand society.

Former refugees significantly improved their ability to speak English after 10 years living in New Zealand. Only 9 percent of former refugees spoke English well or very well on arrival, but after 10 or more years in New Zealand, over two-thirds spoke English well or very well. Watching television, having English-speaking friends and being in an English-speaking context such as a school, university or workplace helped them learn English. Older people and mothers with children found it harder to learn and practise English. Cost, transport, childcare and service location were barriers to language acquisition.

Thirty percent of former refugees, including three-quarters of those aged 65 and over, were unable to read and write in English at the time of the survey. Refugee Voices (New Zealand Immigration Service 2004) found that one-third of former refugees who had been in New Zealand for 5 years needed help with interpreting. After 10 or more years living in New Zealand, 29 percent needed an interpreter or someone else to help them with English language. The proportion needing an interpreter increased with age. Former refugees from Vietnam were significantly more likely to need help with interpreting than those from other countries.

## ***Education***

Many refugees arriving in New Zealand had not had the opportunity to gain any formal education in their country of origin or while living in refugee camps. As such, they were more likely than the New Zealand population as a whole to have no formal education and less likely to have post-school qualifications.

A third of those in the survey had no formal education or only primary schooling, and a third had secondary schooling. A third had a post-secondary qualification.

By comparison, the proportion of the New Zealand population as a whole who had a post-secondary qualification is estimated at 58 percent.

Former refugees aged 18–29 were significantly more likely than every other age group to have gained a bachelor’s qualification or a post-graduate degree as their highest qualification (27 percent). This compares to 23 percent for the overall population in New Zealand who had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Those aged 65 and over were significantly more likely to have received no formal education (53 percent compared to 15 percent overall).

### ***Employment***

Employment provides former refugees with an income, a social context and identity. Refugees themselves identify employment as pivotal to the process of settlement and integration. Almost half of all former refugees said that having a job and/or a better job was a personal goal for the next 5 years.

#### ***Employment prior to arrival***

Nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of those aged 13 and over on arrival had worked prior to coming to New Zealand – a third in labouring occupations, 18 percent as technicians and in trades and 15 percent in professional occupations. Twelve percent were housewives and 11 percent were students.

#### ***Employment since arrival***

Seventy-three percent of former refugees had worked in a paid job since they arrived in New Zealand, with men more likely to have done so than women. Women aged 18–29 were most likely to have worked at some stage in New Zealand (90 percent), but only a third of women aged 45–64 and 17 percent of those aged 65 and over had done so.

For nearly half, their first paid job was as a labourer (47 percent), 18 percent were sales workers and just 3 percent worked in a professional occupation (none reported working as a manager).

Of those currently working, 18 percent were labourers, 23 percent were technicians or in trades, 13 percent were community and personal service workers, 13 percent were sales workers and 11 percent worked as a manager or in a professional occupation.

Forty percent got their current job through friends and relatives, 18 percent had answered a job advertisement and 16 percent had contacted an employer.

Fourteen percent of former refugees aged 18–64 had been made redundant or lost their main job or had had their hours or overtime reduced in the past 6–12 months.

#### ***Activities in the last 7 days***

Overall, 42 percent of working-age former refugees had worked in the 7 days prior to taking part in the survey, but this differed significantly by gender with over half of men (55 percent) working compared to a quarter of women (27 percent). This compares to 73 percent of the New Zealand population aged 15–64

who were employed in the year ended December 2009 (Ministry of Social Development 2010), with women being less likely than men to be employed (67 percent compared to 79 percent).

Former refugees from Somalia were most likely to have been seeking work (28 percent), while those from Vietnam were least likely to have been doing so (10 percent).

Overall, 43 percent of former refugees had been involved in some form of unpaid work in the 7 days prior to the survey. Women were more likely than men to have been involved in unpaid work (59 percent compared to 30 percent).

Former refugees from Somalia were significantly more likely than those from every other country to have been involved in unpaid work in the past 7 days, once age differences were taken into account.

### ***Support to find work***

Participants in the in-depth interviews were asked what they thought would most help people from a refugee background to find work. The two key factors were access to work experience and targeted employment services. Other helpful strategies were additional educational support, help for young people from a refugee background and educating the host society, particularly employers, about refugees.

### ***Income***

Around two-thirds of participants were willing or able to specify their normal weekly income, which varied from none to a maximum of \$1,700 per week. The average weekly personal income was \$381. This compares to an average weekly income of \$687 for the New Zealand population aged 15 years and over in the June quarter 2010.

Fifty-one percent of former refugees received government benefits as their main source of income, while 27 percent received wages or salaries and 8 percent were self-employed. Nearly three-quarters of those aged 45–64 received a benefit, significantly higher than for every other age group.

Sixty-three percent of former refugees said they did not have enough money to meet their everyday needs, 35 percent had enough money and 2 percent had more than enough. Those in receipt of wages or salaries or who were self-employed were significantly more likely than those in receipt of a government benefit or superannuation to say that their income was enough to meet their need for everyday things.

### ***Health and wellbeing***

Former refugees experience high levels of psychological disorder or direct physical consequences of torture, chronic conditions and infectious diseases. Many refugees who come to New Zealand under the Refugee Quota Programme were previously living in refugee camps with minimal services and poor

conditions. In addition, New Zealand has up to 75 places in its annual quota for refugees with medical or physical conditions or disabilities.

Not surprisingly then, 38 percent of former refugees had had a physical or emotional health problem or disability for 6 months or more, many of whom reported more than one. Eighty percent of former refugees who had a health problem or disability said that this caused difficulty with or stopped them from working, and 72 percent had difficulty with or were stopped from doing the everyday activities that people their age can usually do. Those former refugees who reported a health problem or disability were significantly more likely than others to feel lonely most or all of the time.

Most former refugees were registered with a primary healthcare provider and had visited their doctor in the past 12 months. Results were similar to those for the New Zealand population as a whole.

Health provider use increased with age, similar to national trends. There were no differences in the number of visits by gender, in contrast to national trends where women tend to visit a doctor more often than men.

Despite the high levels of chronic conditions, 47 percent of former refugees rated their health as excellent or very good. This compares to 61 percent of the general population in the 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey. When adjusted to the age profile of the New Zealand population, the proportion of former refugees having excellent or very good health status decreased to an estimated 41 percent.

Sixteen percent of former refugees felt lonely or isolated always or most of the time in the last 12 months, compared to less than 2 percent of respondents to the Quality of Life Survey 2008. There were no differences in loneliness by gender and only small differences by nationality once findings were age adjusted.

### ***Social networks***

Social connections play a fundamental role in successful settlement. Within-group networks (bonds) provide information and emotional and material support. Connections with other groups (bridges) can also provide information and emotional support and help with employment.

### ***Social bonds***

Ninety-four percent of former refugees had close friends from within their own ethnic community. Eighty-five percent of former refugees lived with family. Seventy percent had other family members living in New Zealand, while 88 percent had family members living overseas.

Most former refugees, but especially those aged 65 and over, had contact with family and friends overseas, and 35 percent regularly sent money to people living outside of New Zealand.

Half of former refugees had tried to sponsor family to come to live in New Zealand. Of these, nearly two-thirds (64 percent) had been successful. The challenges they faced included financial or resource difficulties, the length of time

for decisions, the process itself, difficulties getting the required documentation and not meeting the policy/criteria.

### ***Social bridges***

Seventy-three percent had close friends who were New Zealand European or Māori, and the same proportion reported having close friends from other ethnic groups (73 percent). Men and younger people were more likely to have close friends outside their community than women or older people.

Sixty-two percent of former refugees had visited a marae at some stage. Those in older age groups were more likely than younger people to say that they knew nothing about Māori language and culture.

Sixteen percent of former refugees had experienced discrimination in the past 12 months. Former refugees from Somalia were significantly more likely than those from every country except other African countries (excluding Somalia and Ethiopia) to have experienced discrimination.

Around 90 percent of former refugees felt safe or very safe in New Zealand, at work and in their neighbourhood.

### ***Community participation and support***

Eighty-five percent of former refugees had been involved in groups or organisations in the past 12 months. Sixty-five percent had provided some form of support to members of their community in New Zealand, including family members, in the past 12 months.

### ***Citizenship, identity and belonging***

#### ***Citizenship and voting***

Ninety-four percent of former refugees had either taken up New Zealand citizenship or were in the process of doing so. Most reported taking up citizenship because they saw New Zealand as their home, they wanted to feel part of New Zealand or because they have lived in New Zealand for many years. Nine out of 10 former refugees had voted in a general election since they arrived – a higher proportion than for the population as a whole on the electoral roll.

#### ***Language and religion***

Most former refugees (97 percent) thought it was important or very important to be able to speak their own language. Those from Somalia, Ethiopia and other African countries felt particularly strongly about this.

Two-thirds of those who had children said that their children in New Zealand could speak their language fluently. Those from Somalia and Ethiopia felt strongly that their children should be able to speak their own language.

Religion was very important to former refugees from Somalia, Iraq, Ethiopia and other African countries, but less important to those from Vietnam.

### ***Identity and belonging***

Most former refugees identified with their own ethnic community (95 percent) but also felt part of New Zealand (94 percent). The main factors that helped them feel part of New Zealand life were having a job, having family members in New Zealand, feeling safe and being able to use English well.

A similar proportion of women (20 percent) and men (23 percent) had difficulties associated with their gender. Women had difficulties being a sole parent and with differences between their culture and New Zealand culture, such as in dress and the role of women. Men had problems with health, finding a partner, loneliness, racism and discrimination.

### ***Service provision***

#### ***Help sought***

In the last 12 months, former refugees sought help with:

- claiming a benefit or other government assistance (35 percent)
- interpretation or translation (23 percent)
- bringing family into New Zealand (21 percent) – those from Ethiopia were most likely to have required help (34 percent)
- finding work (20 percent) – this increased to 34 percent for those aged 18–29.

Older former refugees were more likely to need help with interpreting or translation – 69 percent of those 65 and over required help in the past 12 months compared to 2 percent of those aged 18–29.

Former refugees most commonly required the services of a doctor (82 percent), with almost all of those aged 65 and over (97 percent) having done so in the past 12 months.

Those from Somalia were most likely to have sought help from other services/organisations, apart from a doctor, in the past 12 months.

#### ***Satisfaction with help provided***

Those former refugees who sought help were most satisfied with the help they received from universities or polytechnics (90 percent), followed by doctors (89 percent), schools (87 percent) and groups or services that help refugees (86 percent). They were most dissatisfied with help received from Housing New Zealand (53 percent) and Immigration New Zealand (50 percent).

Former refugees saw the health system (88 percent) and the education system (66 percent) as the fairest organisations. On the other hand, around one in five felt that Work and Income New Zealand (20 percent) and Immigration New Zealand (19 percent) do not treat everyone fairly or equally, regardless of what group they are from.

#### ***Advice to agencies***

Former refugees' advice to agencies centred around more support for learning English and finding employment. Focus group participants' suggestions centred

on better communication between agencies and upskilling agency staff in cultural/refugee-specific issues.

Although focus group participants were grateful for the services and assistance they received, they identified service delivery issues with Housing New Zealand, Work and Income New Zealand and Immigration New Zealand.<sup>1</sup>

Issues related to lack of response and/or long response times, lack of caseworker sensitivity to and understanding of refugee-specific issues and inconsistent treatment and/or application of policy within these agencies.

Participants spoke positively of schools, Plunket and public health nurses, and the Citizens Advice Bureau, noting that staff from these organisations were more culturally responsive to and knowledgeable about refugee issues.

### ***Youth and children***

In general, former refugees who arrived as children or youth had more positive outcomes in English literacy, employment and health than the total former refugee population.

Former refugees who arrived as children had the highest levels of English ability, achieved higher qualifications than those who arrived as youth, were most likely to be seeking work (30 percent), were most likely to have close friends from outside their ethnic group (100 percent) and were most likely to have excellent or very good health (76 percent).

Former refugees who arrived as youth were more likely than the total former refugee population to speak English well or very well (86 percent), to have close friends outside their ethnic group (83 percent) and to have excellent or very good health (66 percent). They were also most likely to say that having help with English helped them settle at school and to have worked in a paid job in New Zealand (94 percent).

### ***Looking back and looking forward***

In the early years, family support, community support and government services, including income support, helped participants and their family most in getting to where they are today. Seventy percent of former refugees found English language and communication hardest for them and their family in the early years.

Almost all (93 percent) former refugees were satisfied with their life in New Zealand. They were most satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live (89 percent), followed by how they are treated by other New Zealanders (82 percent) and their relationships with other New Zealanders (81 percent).

They were most dissatisfied with the number of family members they have in New Zealand (34 percent), their education or qualifications (25 percent), their work situation (21 percent) and their housing (21 percent).

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<sup>1</sup> Immigration New Zealand is part of the Department of Labour.

## **Conclusion**

The New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy acknowledges that relevant services must be provided at each stage of the settlement continuum to support refugees to achieve integration outcomes. After 10 or more years living in New Zealand, former refugees still need assistance in a number of areas. The agencies most commonly accessed were Housing New Zealand, Work and Income and Immigration New Zealand (for family reunion). Research has highlighted the need for better communication and co-ordination between agencies on the delivery of services that support refugee resettlement (Gruner and Searle 2010). The Refugee Resettlement Strategy outlines the importance of developing new and innovative ways of improving co-ordination and delivery of refugee service across every phase of settlement. In particular, the following areas for consideration are suggested:

- Employment is both a means and a marker of integration. It is associated with a number of positive outcomes on a range of domains and has been identified as an area where significant progress is needed (Gruner and Searle 2010). The research has suggested that access to local work experience, specifically targeted employment services and use of community networks are ways that could be considered. It is also crucial that employment initiatives are targeted towards the needs of youth transitioning from education and training into employment.
- It is crucial that language training is provided appropriate for use in the workplace. It is also important that appropriate English language opportunities are provided to groups who cannot attend classes or training in the workplace or find it difficult to do so.
- Where illness or disability limit the ability of people to live fully independent lives, support from families, other networks and agencies needs to be available to help overcome barriers to participation. It is also important to recognise that many former refugees may be involved in caring for family members with disabilities or health issues, and this, in turn, may impact on their ability to participate in the labour market.
- It is important that appropriate and affordable housing is available in areas close to transport and employment opportunities and that culturally appropriate services are available to provide budgeting training and advice and finance.

### ***Areas for further research***

The Refugee Resettlement Strategy is a whole-of-government approach to delivering improved refugee resettlement outcomes within existing reprioritised baseline funding. Its aims are to ensure that more refugees become self-sufficient at the earliest opportunity and live independently of state support. It is important that the effectiveness of the strategy in meeting its aims is monitored and evaluated. Further research to support the strategy could include the development of Good Practice Guidelines of what works in providing assistance into employment, evaluation of pilot employment programmes and associated strategies, and research with employers.

### ***The final word***

The Quota Refugees Ten Years On programme of research has clearly shown the importance of employment as a key marker of integration for those who originally come to New Zealand as refugees. Ten years on, employment is still the main area of dissatisfaction and, along with English language for older people and women, remains the main challenge going forward.

However, it is also important to recognise and build on the successes of this group. Former refugees have a strong sense of national identity and belonging to New Zealand. In addition, those who came to New Zealand as youth are doing well in most areas of integration, although transitions from education into employment need to be managed carefully. The findings from this research suggest a way forward to improving resettlement outcomes and approaches that might support the Refugee Resettlement Strategy.

The final word in this report comes from a participant in the in-depth interviews. It articulates the central importance of paid work in the settlement process and the aspirations of former refugees:

The biggest message is we come here for a better life ... [A] better life comes out within work, for example. So how do we [achieve this]? Our background is totally from a working background, we don't have social welfare ... if we have this piece of land, we earn out of this, and we feed our family, we do a lot of things. That shows we don't come here to sit down and do nothing. Sitting down and doing nothing is depressing and [it] is making us think backwards, [it] is not taking us anywhere. We want to be engaged in the workforce equally.

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