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FACT SHEET

REFUGEES IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

DEFINITIONS

Refugee: a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country..."¹

Asylum seeker: Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) states that, "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." Asylum seekers are people who allege to be suffering persecution in their country of origin, and are looking for refuge in another country. Although the UNDHR is not legally binding, it is accepted that joining the United Nations is by implication agreeing to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Convention Refugees: former asylum seekers whose refugee status has been recognised in Aotearoa New Zealand by domestic authorities.

Refugee Family Quota refugees: have been sponsored by refugee family members already living in Aotearoa New Zealand, under the Refugee Family Quota. This quota allows New Zealanders who were granted residence as refugees to sponsor a family member and that person's partner and dependent children to Aotearoa New Zealand. It is possible to sponsor only one family member (and that person's partner and dependent children). In 2006 there were 300 places available in this quota.²

Quota Refugees

Aotearoa New Zealand accepts up to 750 refugees each year under the Refugee Quota Programme. Refugees in this category have been referred by the UNHCR to the Aotearoa New Zealand Immigration Service (NZIS) for consideration. The annual Refugee Quota is divided into sub-categories. In 2005/06 the three sub-categories are family reunification cases; UNHCR emergency cases; and UNHCR protection cases.³

Between July 2001 and May 2005, 2927 refugees and displaced persons were resettled in Aotearoa New Zealand under the Refugee Quota Programme⁴.

QUOTA PROGRAMMES

Aotearoa New Zealand is one of only 10 countries that operate a regular refugee quota programme for third country* resettlement of refugees. The others are Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the UK and the United States of America. In addition, Argentina, Benin, Burkina Faso, Brazil, Chile, Iceland, Spain, and the United Kingdom have recently started resettlement programmes. Other countries accept refugees on a case by case basis. Of the countries which have quota programmes, USA and Canada accept the most refugees. However, Aotearoa New Zealand has one of the highest rates of acceptance in the world proportionate to population.

How does the New Zealand government help refugees?

The rights of resettled refugees are protected under New Zealand law, which covers all forms of discrimination and racism and upholds human rights. Bodies such as the Human Rights Commission, Office of the Race Relations Conciliator, refugee councils and incorporated associations also support the rights and interests of resettled refugees. Increasingly, local councils are appointing ethnic community coordinators to further understanding of ethnic and racial diversity and to provide assistance and support to ethnic communities. Government and non-governmental agencies also support multicultural festivals and promote community awareness as part of on-going programmes.⁵

- 1 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951.
- 2 www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/general/generalinformation/qanda/refugeefamilyquota.htm#top
- 3 Refugee Factsheet 06, NZ Department of Labour, emailed to the author of this factsheet by the DoL Communications Advisor, Gemma Cunningham.
- 4 RQ1 – Refugee quota.exl, www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/general/generalinformation/statistics/
- * The 'first country' is the country of origin, the 'second country' is the country of asylum, the 'third country' is any country to which a refugee is then resettled.
- 5 New Zealand, By the Government of New Zealand, January 2002, www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/protect/opendoc.pdf?tbl=PROTECTION&id=3c5e59d04



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In 2003, the New Zealand Government agreed to a New Zealand Immigration Settlement Strategy for refugees, migrants, and their families. The six goals are that they obtain employment appropriate to their qualifications and skills; are confident using English in a New Zealand setting, or can access appropriate language support to bridge the gap; are able to access appropriate information and responsive services that are available to the wider community (for example housing, education, and services for children); form supportive social networks and establish a sustainable community identity; feel safe expressing their ethnic identity and are accepted by, and are part of, the wider host community; and participate in civic, community and social activities. Funding for achieving these goals has been provided for in the government's budget.⁶

HOW DO REFUGEES GET TO AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND?

The Government of Aotearoa New Zealand pays for the travel of refugees accepted under the Refugee Quota Programme. Where possible, the Department of Labour (DoL) sends an escort officer to accompany refugees on their journey to Aotearoa New Zealand.

In Refugee Family Quota cases, either the successful family sponsors or the sponsored refugees arrange and pay for the sponsored refugee family members to travel to Aotearoa New Zealand.

Convention refugees must find their own way to Aotearoa New Zealand. This may mean flying to Aotearoa New Zealand from the country of origin, or it could mean years of travel; including by walking, hitch-hiking, and risking passage on overcrowded boats.

HOW MANY REFUGEES ARE ACCEPTED INTO AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND EACH YEAR?

Aotearoa New Zealand resettles an average of 750 Quota refugees each year and an additional 200 to 500 Convention refugees per year. In addition to these two groups, there are an estimated 300 people from 'refugee-like' situations admitted into Aotearoa New Zealand every year through family sponsored immigration policies.

Less than 1% of all the refugees and displaced people worldwide ever resettle in a new country.⁷ This is because many return to their native country, while others spend the remainder of their lives displaced or in refugee camps.

Origin of refugees

The countries of origin for Aotearoa New Zealand's refugee intake shift constantly in response to changing global circumstances and humanitarian needs. The top five source countries for Quota refugees coming to Aotearoa New Zealand in recent years have been Iraq, Somalia, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Myanmar. For Convention refugees, the top five source countries are currently Iran, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Iraq.

Refugees mainly resettle in Aotearoa New Zealand's major urban areas as these provide the greatest opportunities for employment, and are also places where refugee communities have become established over the years. A high proportion of refugees are located in Auckland.

What do refugees know about Aotearoa New Zealand before they arrive?

Many refugees know very little about Aotearoa New Zealand prior to arrival. Family reunification refugees are usually the most informed, as their family in Aotearoa New Zealand often let them know what to expect.

"New Zealand was the only option, however, saving my life was more important than choosing where to go." Iranian Refugee⁸

What happens to refugees when they first arrive in Aotearoa New Zealand?

Although Quota, Convention and Refugee Family Quota refugees may come from similar refugee situations, they are treated differently in terms of accessing services like housing and welfare.

⁶ www.immigration.govt.nz/community/stream/support/nzimmigrationsettlementstrategy/

⁷ Refugees: Who they are and where they come from, Ministry of Health, New Zealand, [http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/0/85ce7cd090faaa4cc256b050007d7cb/\\$FILE/Section1.pdf](http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/0/85ce7cd090faaa4cc256b050007d7cb/$FILE/Section1.pdf)

⁸ All quotes in this factsheet are taken from the document: Refugee Voices: A Journey Towards Resettlement.


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Quota Refugees

Quota refugees become Aotearoa New Zealand residents on arrival. As Aotearoa New Zealand residents, they are entitled to live in Aotearoa New Zealand permanently and enjoy similar rights to Aotearoa New Zealand citizens in terms of access to education, health care, employment and social welfare. After a period of five years residence⁹, these refugees are eligible to apply for Aotearoa New Zealand citizenship.

Quota refugees accepted for resettlement spend their first six weeks at the DoL funded Mangere Refugee Reception Centre (MRRRC) in Auckland. The centre provides accommodation, orientation services and medical screening/treatment. At the end of the six weeks, RMS Refugee Resettlement, contracted by the DoL, assists refugees for the next six months to settle into local communities around the country.

Convention Refugees

As a signatory to the United Nations 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, Aotearoa New Zealand must consider all claims for refugee status (or political asylum) made at the border in Aotearoa New Zealand. In addition, Aotearoa New Zealand must allow refugee status claimants to remain in the country, until their refugee status has been assessed. The law gives immigration officials the discretion to deny temporary visas to asylum seekers, which effectively leads to detention. However, according to UNHCR, Aotearoa New Zealand officials have "exercised this discretion with much restraint," thereby granting temporary visas to most asylum seekers.

Convention refugees are former asylum seekers whose refugee status claim has been accepted. They are not provided with access to the MRRRC services; but are eligible for government-funded legal representation and the DoL funds a hostel where asylum seekers can stay for up to three months. Convention refugee claimants can apply for a work permit while their claim is being determined. They can also receive some welfare assistance (such as income support, accommodation assistance, healthcare and education). In the past, asylum seekers may have been in Aotearoa New Zealand for up to two or three years before their refugee status was determined, this has been shortened to three months.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY REFUGEES IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND?
Finding appropriate housing

Many (though not all) refugees prefer to be located near their ethnic community; as it can provide both social and emotional support and prevent feelings of isolation. However, in situations where refugee communities have been established for a long time (such as in Newtown in Wellington, and Mount Roskill in Auckland), affordable housing can be difficult to find. Furthermore, refugees often have families that are larger than the average Aotearoa New Zealand household. This means there can be up to 12 people living in a house.

While Quota refugees are assisted with housing, Convention refugees must find their own accommodation. Family Reunion refugees generally rely on the people who sponsored them and may move into houses with family already in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Finding a job

Many refugees arrive in Aotearoa New Zealand hoping to find a job quickly; and some other refugees initially focus on improving their English language skills before embarking on job-hunting.

Finding employment is difficult for refugees. In Aotearoa New Zealand, refugees find that the main barriers to them finding work are: a lack of Aotearoa New Zealand work experience, a lack of understanding by employers about applicants from other countries; a lack of Aotearoa New Zealand qualifications; limited English; bias or racism; and discrimination by recruitment consultants.¹⁰

⁹ Until recently, this was three years.

¹⁰ Page 242, Refugee Voices: A Journey Towards Resettlement, NZIS, New Zealand, 2004.



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"They come here thinking they are going to find a job and support a family, but they wind up on a benefit in a little house. Their self-esteem is already damaged. This causes it to fall through the floor." Service provider

Learning a new language

Although some refugees arrive in Aotearoa New Zealand with English language skills, many do not. Factors which may impact on a refugee's ability to learn English include: access to educational resources (if refugees do not have transport or access to appropriate childcare), their health, and proficiency in their own language.

Quota Refugees

While at the MRRC, refugees receive free English language classes, childcare, and special education support. Children receive primary and secondary classes (to prepare them for school in Aotearoa New Zealand). Once in school, refugee children are provided with ESOL tuition.

Convention Refugees

Until their refugee status is confirmed, Convention refugees must pay for their own English language learning. After their refugee status is confirmed, they are eligible for the same training as Quota refugees.

The ESOL Home Tutor Service (as well as some other community groups) provides tutors to refugee and migrant ESOL learners free of charge.

Mental Health issues

A 1999 study found that 20% of refugees passing through MRRC had suffered significant to severe physical abuse. About 14% reported significant psychological symptoms and about 7% were diagnosed as having post-traumatic stress disorder¹¹. Another study showed that the experience of being driven from their homes and the trauma that followed were never far from the refugees' thoughts. In addition, many refugees have left family members behind in their country of origin and this can lead to depression and worry.

"My wife and my children are the closest people to me. I can't leave my mother who gave me my life, and while I have a happy life in New Zealand, my brother and my sisters have a hard life in Vietnam. I can't bear it." Vietnamese refugee

Cultural differences

"I want to keep my culture, but I want to live and learn New Zealand culture as well. It's good to learn about New Zealand's different cultures" Afghan teenage refugee

Most refugees feel that it is important to retain their own culture, while at the same time learning about Aotearoa New Zealand culture. Some difficulties can arise as the result of the differences between Aotearoa New Zealand and other cultures. Difficulties may include: teenagers, particularly girls, wanting a level of freedom greater than what parents were used to giving in their home country; difficulty maintaining some aspects of culture because prayer rooms or other places to pray were not provided at work or school; differences in parenting styles; equality between men and women, sometimes leading to a loss of status for men (or a gain in status for women); and the Aotearoa New Zealand lifestyle being considered too liberal.

WHAT ARE REFUGEES' IMPRESSIONS OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND?

Refugees' impressions of Aotearoa New Zealand are influenced by their background and experiences prior to arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand. The *Refugee Voices* study by the NZIS showed that the refugees who took part in the study liked the safety, security, and freedom of Aotearoa New Zealand; and thought that New Zealanders were kind and friendly people. The main aspect of life in Aotearoa New Zealand that refugees didn't like was being separated from family members.

11 Reeve, M. Refugee Health: An assessment of the Medical Screening Programme at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre, referred to on page 167 in *Refugee Voices: A Journey Towards Resettlement*.



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"I feel safe. I am able to go out and do anything I want to do without fear."
Somali refugee

"There's a very big difference here. You have food, income, peace of mind, it's much better. But difficult when they have got their families on their mind all the time." Kurdish refugee

REFUGEE AGENCIES IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

- The **Mangere Refugee Reception Centre** helps Quota refugees to settle in during the 6 weeks immediately following arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- **RMS Refugee Resettlement** provides advice, information and advocacy; crisis intervention and home-based family support programmes; community orientation; community linkages and referrals services; and volunteer training, deployment and support for refugees.
- **RAS Refugees as Survivors** provides mental health services for refugees and migrants, and helps people resettle in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- **ESOL Home Tutor Service** provides English language and social support for adult refugees and migrants coming to live in Aotearoa New Zealand.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This factsheet has drawn heavily upon the document *Refugee Voices: A Journey Towards Resettlement*, New Zealand Immigration Service, New Zealand, 2004. © Crown. This document is available online at:

www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/general/generalinformation/research/generalresearch/Refugees/refugeevoices

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