



Global trends and refugee settlement in New Zealand

J Marlowe & S Elliott

To cite this article: J Marlowe & S Elliott (2014) Global trends and refugee settlement in New Zealand, Kotuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online, 9:2, 43-49, DOI: [10.1080/1177083X.2014.953186](https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2014.953186)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2014.953186>



© 2014 The Royal Society of New Zealand



Published online: 23 Sep 2014.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2289



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)

INTRODUCTION

Global trends and refugee settlement in New Zealand

J Marlowe^{a*} and S Elliott^b

^a*Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand;* ^b*Department of Social Practice, Unitec, Auckland, New Zealand*

(Received 30 July 2014; accepted 7 August 2014)

Current global trends: populations of concern

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2014) there were approximately 51.2 million forcibly displaced individuals worldwide by the end of 2013—the highest number on record since monitoring of these global trends began in 1993. Of this total number, approximately 16.7 million people were refugees and nearly 1.2 million were asylum seekers. A total of 98,400 refugees were offered resettlement places from 21 countries last year (UNHCR 2014, p. 2).

Obtaining refugee status can be critical for people living in protracted and tenuous situations where their safety and security is seriously compromised, as it affords access to critical support and resources from the 142 states signatory to the 1951 Convention and the associated 1967 Protocol (UNHCR 2014). The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees formally defined a refugee as:

[A] person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution. (UNHCR 2012a)

The UNHCR presents what it calls three durable solutions as long term outcomes for people living in protracted situations:

1. voluntary repatriation to country of origin;
2. local integration in the country of first asylum; or,
3. integration in a third country of resettlement.

Of these durable solutions, resettlement opportunities represent the least common pathway and are available to less than 1% of refugees. Whilst in the minority, it is an important pathway as it is useful in resolving protracted refugee situations. Resettlement is defined as the ‘transfer of refugees from a state in which they have initially sought protection to a third state that has agreed to admit them—as refugees—with permanent-residence status.’ (UNHCR 2011, p. 3). The numbers of refugees who are resettled has decreased over the past few years due to processing delays and security concerns in Western countries (UNHCR 2012a). Nevertheless, countries such as New Zealand, USA, Australia and others have provided nearly 900,000 refugees the opportunity to resettle over the last 10 years (UNHCR 2014). This total number, however, only accommodates 10% of the number of refugees needing protection through resettlement identified by the UNHCR as needing a resettlement pathway as the other durable solutions are not likely to be realised in the immediate to medium term (UNHCR 2014). Though the people who are resettled represent the minority of people living in tenuous circumstances as refugees worldwide, resettlement offers crucial human rights protection and a durable

*Corresponding author. Email: jm.marlowe@auckland.ac.nz

solution whereby people can begin a new life free from previous untenable and unsafe circumstances.

Resettlement provides access to rights similar to other New Zealanders and the opportunity to eventually gain citizenship. It also provides an avenue for countries like New Zealand to share international responsibility for the most vulnerable refugees as a contribution to our international human rights obligations. The ways in which these obligations are met through domestic and international legislation and particular social policies represent a key consideration in how well people from refugee backgrounds are able to integrate into, and participate within, a new host country.

Refugee resettlement in New Zealand

New Zealand ratified the 1951 UN Convention in 1960, and has also ratified the 1967 Protocol (Human Rights Commission 2014). It has operated a formal annual quota of 750 refugees for permanent resettlement since 1987. Overall, it is estimated that over 50,000 people have been resettled in New Zealand since World War II (Mortensen et al. 2012), greatly adding to the country's ethnic diversity (Manning 2013). The Refugee Quota Programme is New Zealand's major contribution to refugee protection, although, as is the case globally, there is a potential for it to play a far greater role (UNHCR 2012b).

The formal resettlement programme initiated in 1987 extends New Zealand's history of settling refugee groups since 1944 when the country settled a group of 900 Polish children and their guardians (see Beaglehole 2013). Since then, the source countries of refugees have varied with changing global conditions—Europe being the main source after World War II, Indochinese populations comprising the main from the late 1970s to mid-1980s, and a more global focus from that point forward leading to a more diverse range of source countries. Table 1 outlines the different refugee groups that have settled in New Zealand since 1944.

The New Zealand government currently sets the intake countries on three-yearly planning cycles to give a greater sense of certainty for particular communities and agencies; but it also

sets a particular political agenda, thereby allowing for political priorities to be reset. This quota usually comprises up to six intakes of approximately 125 people with three primary streams:

- protection cases (up to 600 places)
- women-at-risk (up to 75 places)
- medical/disabled (up to 75 places).

The people who are part of these 750 spaces are referred to as 'quota refugees'. A number of these 750 places will be family linked. It is important to note that there is a distinction between a 'quota' refugee, who is a previously vetted person that New Zealand agrees to accept, and a 'convention' refugee who makes a claim for refugee status once in New Zealand's jurisdiction.

Quota refugees receive permanent residence on arrival and spend their first six weeks at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre (MRRC) where they participate in an orientation about New Zealand life, laws and expectations, and receive English language tuition. This six-week period also provides an opportunity to screen for any special needs that a new arrival might need (in relation to education, physical and mental healthcare, etc.). As permanent residents (who can eventually apply for citizenship after five years), quota refugees are entitled to the same social services and supports for which most New Zealanders are eligible. This includes access to the public school system, public healthcare, social security, etc.

Becoming New Zealand citizens appears to be particularly important for resettled refugees. Searle et al. (2012) note that after 10 years of living in New Zealand, more than 90% of resettled refugees had become New Zealand citizens because they felt New Zealand was their home or because they had lived here for a long time. Similarly, 90% of refugees had voted in a general election in New Zealand, which is a greater percentage than the voting age population as a whole (Searle et al. 2012).

Primary resettlement sites

In the past decade, Mortensen et al. (2012) note that 7305 people from 55 countries have been

Table 1 Nationalities of refugees settled in New Zealand (1944–2009).

Year	Refugee groups
1944	Polish children and adults
1949–1952	Displaced persons in Europe
1956–1958	Hungarian
1962–1971	Chinese (in Hong Kong and Indonesia)
1965	Russian Christian ‘Old Believers’ (in China)
1968–1971	Czechoslovakian
1972–1973	Asian Ugandan
1974–1991	Bulgarian, Chilean, Czechoslovakian, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, Russian Jews, Yugoslav
1977–2000	Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese
1979–1989	Iranian Bahasi
1991	El Salvadorian, Guatemalan
1985–2002	Iraqi
1992–2006	Afghan, Albanian, Algerian, Assyrian, Bosnian, Burundi, Cambodian, Chinese, Congolese, Djibouti, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Indonesian, Iranian, Iraqi, Kuwaiti, Libyan, Khmer Krom (Cambodian Vietnamese), Liberian, Myanmarese, Nigerian, Pakistani, Palestinian, Rwandan, Saudi, Sierra Leone, Somali, Sri Lankan, Sudanese, Syrian, Tanzanian, Tunisian, Turkish, Ugandan, Vietnamese, Yemeni, Yugoslav
2006–2007	<i>(Main source countries)</i> Afghanistan, Republic of Congo (i.e. Congo-Brazzaville), Democratic Republic of Congo, Burma/Myanmar
2007–2009	<i>(Main source countries)</i> Same as previous period plus Iraq, Colombia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Bhutan, Indonesia, Nepal
2010–present	<i>(Main source countries)</i> Burma/Myanmar, Iraq, Bhutan, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan [and 15 other countries]

Adapted from Human Rights Commission (2010, p. 342) and updated with current source countries from 2010–present from Immigration New Zealand (2014) statistics on refugee quota arrivals.

received through the quota refugee programme. The top source countries from which these people originated include Afghanistan, Burma, Iraq, Somalia, Bhutan, Iran and Ethiopia. Along with Auckland as a key resettlement locality, there are another five main resettlement centres—Hamilton, Nelson, Palmerston North, Wellington and Christchurch. Due to the Canterbury earthquakes, Christchurch is not currently receiving new settlement spaces as there is a housing shortage that needs to be addressed first. It is hoped resettlement will recommence in 2015/2016 with a limited number of family reunification cases.

Seeking asylum: convention refugees

In addition to the Refugee Quota Programme, New Zealand also receives approximately 300

claims for refugee status from asylum seekers each year. Approximately one third to a half of these claims are approved. Asylum seekers claims for refugee status are considered by the Immigration New Zealand Refugee Status Branch (INZRSB) in the first instance. If unsuccessful, asylum seekers can appeal to the Immigration Protection Tribunal. Once recognised as refugees, successful asylum claimants can apply for permanent residence; although this is not granted automatically.

The government made changes to the Immigration Act in 2013 to deter large groups of asylum seekers arriving in New Zealand. A different set of rules now apply to ‘mass arrivals’ (i.e. any asylum seekers arriving in a group of more than 30 people). If they are successful in gaining refugee status, their situation will be re-determined after

three years; only then will they be able to apply for permanent residence, and there will be limited family reunification provision (see Immigration Amendment Act 2013). Whilst waiting for their claims to be heard, asylum seekers receive limited support and rights under the UNHCR Convention (Human Rights Commission 2010). A recent report highlights the difficulties faced by asylum seekers whilst waiting for their refugee status determination, and also the economic and social disparities they face as convention refugees when compared to the levels of support that quota refugees receive (Bloom & O'Donovan 2013).

Family reunification

The annual Refugee Quota Programme provides for a family reunification subcategory for nuclear family members referred by the UNHCR. Apart from this, the main government policy under which family reunification occurs is the Refugee Family Support Category (RFSC), which aims to support the settlement of refugees living in New Zealand by allowing them to sponsor family members for residence. The RFSC operates as a two tier system and allows for up to '300 sponsored people (including their partners and dependent children)' to settle in New Zealand each year. To be eligible to apply under the tier 1 category, refugees must be living alone in New Zealand or be the sole carer of dependent relatives and have no other family member eligible to apply for residency under any other category of New Zealand's immigration policy (Immigration New Zealand 2013).¹

New Zealand refugee policy

New Zealand's human rights framework is central to the country's refugee system. New Zealand has ratified most United Nations human rights treaties. Further human rights protections are provided through the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, which reinforces New Zealand's commitment to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Human Rights Act 1993, which sets out grounds for unlawful discrimination. Nevertheless, the Human Rights Commission is

constrained by the Human Rights Act in that it is prohibited from commenting on, or intervening in regards to, discrimination under the implementation of the Immigration Act (2009).

Despite a nearly 70-year history of refugee resettlement, New Zealand does not have a formal refugee policy. However, part of the purpose of the Immigration Act 2009 is to provide a process for New Zealand to meet its international obligations and support the settlement of refugees. It requires immigration officers to have regard to the UNHCR Convention in their decision making. Partly in response to this situation, in 2012, the New Zealand government launched the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy (Immigration New Zealand 2012). The strategy sets out the government's views on integration and responsibilities (both those of the host community and for refugees' themselves). It builds on the principle that successful settlement is about willingness and capacity to participate fully in community and becoming 'self-sufficient'. The strategy's vision statement takes this position further:

The overarching vision for the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy is: 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. (Immigration New Zealand 2012, p. 4)

The five goals of the strategy are as follows:

1. Self-sufficiency—all working-age refugees are in paid work or are supported by a family member in paid work.
2. Participation—refugees actively participate in New Zealand life and have a strong sense of belonging here.
3. Health and wellbeing—refugees and their families enjoy healthy, safe and independent lives.
4. Education—English language skills help refugees participate in education and in daily life.
5. Housing—refugees live in safe, secure, healthy and affordable homes, without needing government housing assistance.

Implementation of the strategy will emphasise employment in line with the government's priorities of boosting skills and employment as part of its 10 priority results and targets (State Services Commission 2013). Currently, there are only plans to implement the Refugee Resettlement Strategy in regards to quota refugees. It is critical to acknowledge that those arriving as asylum seekers or under family reunification policies will not be eligible for services and entitlements outlined in the strategy. Concerns with this distinction are noted in several papers within this special issue.

The resettlement experience: an integration framework

Ager & Strang (2008) introduce a framework that provides normative conceptions of what might constitute 'successful' integration. Within this framework they present four main themes under which 10 domains are identified as providing important markers in the experience of integration and the wider structural policies and systems that are in place to support this process.

1. *Means and markers*: employment, housing, education and health.
2. *Social connection*: social bridges, social bonds, social links.
3. *Facilitators*: language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability.
4. *Foundation*: rights and citizenship.

The contributions of this special issue are focused on covering several of the key areas related to Ager & Strang's (2008) model as these pertain to settlement in New Zealand. Some of these 10 domains are more prominent in the New Zealand based literature whereas others have had less research and formal inquiry. Within the 'foundation' theme, this introductory paper has introduced rights and citizenship as a key consideration of any resettlement programme by focusing first on global trends and then resettlement to New Zealand as a third country. Bloom & Udahehuka's (2014) paper on experiences of asylum seekers and convention refugees provides a critical understanding of a

relatively under researched group in New Zealand. The different entitlements and rights that quota refugees and convention refugees receive provide a stark picture demonstrating that how one arrives as a refugee truly matters.

Under the 'markers and means' theme, Mortensen et al. (2014) provide an important paper on the experience of settlement and how this intersects with considerations of physical health and disability. They then comment how cultural case-workers can play an important role in developing practitioner capacities and the ways in which they can work across culturally and linguistically diverse groups. Choumanivong et al. (2014) then present a paper on family reunification (an area that has had limited research in settlement contexts) to make powerful statements about the importance and impact of reunification or the lack thereof. O'Donovan & Sheikh (2014) report on research conducted through a non-government organisation with people from refugee backgrounds on their experiences of and perspectives on employment in New Zealand—this paper provides a sobering awareness of the challenges that refugees face when trying to find ways to participate in the labour market. The two remaining 'means and markers', education and housing, are not reported on as specific papers in this special issue though both are reported upon as key settlement indicators and considerations.

Within the 'facilitators' theme, Bloom & Udahehuka's (2014) paper provides a discussion on safety and security and an understanding of how convention refugees have fewer entitlements and protections than quota refugees. The paper raises concerns how asylum seekers and those who receive refugee status via this pathway are discriminated against. Marlowe et al. (2014) use a segmented assimilation thesis to unpack the Refugee Resettlement Strategy and to examine both the opportunities and possible contestations of the 'whole of government' approach. Central to this analysis are how notions of family, family dynamics, identity and acculturation intersect with the strategy aims. Finally, under the 'social connections' theme, Elliott & Yusuf (2014) use the concepts of social capital (bonding, bridging and linking) to discuss the role

of community organisations and their members in ensuring connections within and across those with refugee backgrounds and other communities in New Zealand.

The papers that comprise this special issue therefore relate in some way to the model presented by Ager & Strang (2008). Whilst there are some gaps, we hope that this special issue goes some way towards providing a contemporary understanding of settlement opportunities and challenges in New Zealand. One of the strengths of the New Zealand refugee sector is the strength of the refugee voice within it (Gruner & Searle 2011). This voice enlivens the special issue, which is in turn underpinned by a normative commitment to the rights of refugees to participate in all aspects of life in New Zealand. In keeping with this, all of the articles included have been written or co-authored by someone from a refugee background. This approach provides a perspective that is often lacking in the literature and helps validate the experiences of resettled refugees.

Conclusion: refugee resettlement and seeking asylum in Aotearoa New Zealand

The experiences of forced migration often mean that individuals, families or particular groups must adapt to very new social and political contexts within a new host society. The ways in which they navigate the associated complexities must be considered alongside how the host society not only receives them, but also makes some of its newest members feel welcome. Central to this interaction is the role of both government and non-governmental agencies to ensure that refugees (regardless of whether they are via the quota or convention pathways) are able to participate as fully as possible in New Zealand society. Ager & Strang's (2008) model provides a conceptual map that targets key areas relating to a person's experience of settlement. The Refugee Resettlement Strategy also has similar aims and foci. However, the articulation of particular social policies, incorporation of domestic and international law/obligations and the resourcing that is put into any particular settlement initiatives are just a part of the overall picture. A person and their family's lived

experiences of the actual implementation of policy and legislation is central to this analysis. This special issue has endeavoured to give greater voice to the experiences of former refugees living in New Zealand—both as participants and authors. We hope that this collection provides helpful and contemporary understandings of the settlement challenges, future directions for further inquiry and, importantly, highlights that everyone can have a role to play.

Note

1. Information on the RFSC is updated regularly and can be viewed at <http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/live/refugeefamilysupport/>.

References

- Ager A., Strang A. 2008. Understanding integration: a conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21(2): 166–191.
- Beaglehole A 2013. *Refuge New Zealand: a nation's response to refugees and asylum seekers*. Wellington, Otago University Press.
- Bloom A, O'Donovan T 2013. 'Marking time': experiences of successful asylum seekers in Aotearoa New Zealand. Wellington, Changemakers Refugee Forum.
- Bloom A, Udahehuka M 2014. 'Going through the doors of pain': asylum seeker and convention refugee experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* 9: 70–81.
- Choummavong C, Poole G, Cooper A 2014. Refugee family reunification and mental health in resettlement. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* 9: 89–100.
- Elliott S, Yusuf I 2014. 'Yes, we can; but together': social capital and refugee resettlement. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* 9: 101–110.
- Gruner A, Searle W 2011. *New Zealand's refugee sector: perspectives and developments, 1987–2010*. Wellington, Department of Labour.
- Human Rights Commission 2010. *Human rights in New Zealand: Ngā Tika Tangata O Aotearoa*. Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, Human Rights Commission. http://www.hrc.co.nz/hrc_new/hrc/cms/files/documents/Human_Rights_Review_2010_Full.pdf (accessed 12 August 2014).
- Human Rights Commission 2014. *Convention relating to the status of refugees*. Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, Human Rights Commission. <http://>

- www.hrc.co.nz/international-human-rights-new-zealands-international-obligations/convention-relating-to-the-status-of-refugees (accessed 5 July 2014).
- Immigration New Zealand 2012. Refugee resettlement: New Zealand resettlement strategy. Wellington, Immigration New Zealand.
- Immigration New Zealand 2013. Refugee family support category. Wellington, Immigration New Zealand. <http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/live/refugeefamilysupport/> (accessed 5 July 2014).
- Immigration New Zealand 2014. Refugee and protection unit: refugee quota branch statistics. Wellington, Immigration New Zealand. <http://www.immigration.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/2BBF70DC-6C0B-4041-B914-FE20566D068A/0/RQBStatPakInternet.pdf> (accessed 5 July 2014).
- Manning B 2013. Census 2013: more ethnicities than the world's countries. *New Zealand Herald*, 11 December. http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11170288 (accessed 12 August 2014).
- Marlowe J, Bartley A, Hibbit A 2014. The New Zealand refugee resettlement strategy: implications for identity, acculturation and civic participation. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* 9: 60–69.
- Mortensen A, Rainger W, Hughes S 2012. Refugee health care: a handbook for professionals. Wellington, Ministry of Health.
- Mortensen A, Yusuf I, Latimer S 2014. Cultural case workers in child disability services: an evidence-based model of cultural responsiveness for refugee families. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* 9: 50–59.
- O'Donovan T, Sheikh M 2014. Welfare reforms and the refugee resettlement strategy: an opportunity to achieve meaningful employment outcomes for New Zealanders from refugee backgrounds? *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* 9: 82–88.
- Searle W, Prouse E, L'Ami E, Gray A, Gruner A 2012. New land, new life: long-term settlement of refugees in New Zealand. Main Report. Wellington, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.
- State Services Commission 2013. Better public services. Wellington, State Services Commission. <http://www.ssc.govt.nz/better-public-services> (accessed 5 July 2014).
- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) 2011. Chapter one: resettlement within UNHCR's mandate: international protection and the search for durable solutions. *UNHCR resettlement handbook*. Geneva, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- UNHCR 2012a. UNHCR global appeal 2012–2013. Geneva, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- UNHCR 2012b. The state of the world's refugees: in search of solidarity. A synthesis. Geneva, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- UNHCR 2014. Global trends 2013. Geneva, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.