

# **Increasing Acceptance and Understanding of Diverse Communities**

**Goal nine: Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy**

## Introduction

Changing international migration patterns have placed greater emphasis on the need for governments to support positive settlement outcomes for all communities. Marginalisation, discrimination and resulting disadvantage can lead to economic and social break-down. There is a growing recognition amongst governments of the need to encourage acceptance, respect and understanding within communities so that diverse peoples can live alongside each other in unity and with mutual benefit.

Here in New Zealand changes in migration patterns, discussed in the Summary chapter to this report, mean that immigration by a range of ethnically-diverse people will continue to increase and impact on New Zealand communities. It is therefore essential to build a future that reinforces fairness, opportunity and security as the common experience for all New Zealand communities and assists migrants and refugees to settle quickly.

Despite the economic and other advantages new migrants bring to this country, many experience challenges to settling in New Zealand for a range of reasons. For some migrants and refugees, particularly those from visibly ethnic backgrounds, one of the main obstacles to integration is the discriminatory behaviour they encounter from host community members<sup>1</sup>.

This chapter focuses on opportunities for community leaders, central and local government and non-government organisations to increase acceptance and understanding of diverse communities within New Zealand. It was developed as a result of engagement with migrants and refugees and people from all of these sectors in Auckland.

It reports on the barriers and challenges migrants and refugees perceive they encounter from host communities which are not new and are reflected in previous literature. It also describes the role and contribution of central and local government and key influencers and suggests ways they can encourage community acceptance of diversity and support migrant and refugee settlement in Auckland.

## Barriers and challenges: what refugees and migrants said

Migrants and refugees from diverse language and cultural backgrounds talked of encountering obstacles to gaining host community acceptance which limited their ability to participate, contribute and settle in New Zealand. Here are some of the obstacles and barriers which migrants and refugees experience and which are particularly pronounced for those with visibly ethnic differences:

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to *host community* definition in Summary Report / Glossary.

- generally being greeted with indifference, or in some cases hostility, rather than friendship;
- a general expectation amongst host communities that migrants and refugees should adapt, without understanding the need for reciprocal adaptation;
- negative stereotypical views and discriminatory attitudes, which can impede access to employment, education, health and housing and increase the time it takes for migrants and refugees to become self-sufficient;
- negative and stereotypical reporting by the news media on immigration issues and events related to migrants and refugees;
- insufficient opportunity to connect with host and own communities and to maintain and share their heritage, cultures and languages;
- a perception of ongoing marginalisation which is seen to profoundly affect the ability of migrants, refugees and their offspring to be respected and accepted<sup>2</sup>.

For the majority of people these experiences were unanticipated, as many migrants from diverse cultural and language backgrounds chose New Zealand as a destination because it is a bi-cultural nation with an increasingly multicultural character.

*'The multi-cultural face of New Zealand attracted me here. I didn't anticipate being discriminated against as a result of my colour.'*

*'With a smaller population I thought it would be easier to build friendships but I have not found it easy to make friends with New Zealanders.'*

*'I thought the size of New Zealand meant there would be greater opportunities to build a better life for me and my family. I was invited to New Zealand for my skills and experience, but I have been unable to use these because of New Zealanders' attitudes. I have not been allowed to positively participate in, and contribute to, New Zealand life.'*

Many migrants and refugees believed these barriers had arisen as a result of a lack of understanding within host communities about the intended outcomes of immigration policies and the mutual benefits for all New Zealanders.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in the United Kingdom, frustration at long-term marginalisation was suggested as a cause of the 2001 riots in Oldham and Burnley. Interestingly, 'it was not immigrants who rioted, but many second and third generation British citizens from Measures of Integration, Commission for Racial Equality, Summer 2003.

*'There is a lack of understanding between hosts and migrants which gets in the way of integration and promotes segregation and cocooning.'*

## **Current environment for increasing community understanding**

Central and local government agencies and non-government organisations identified the current statutory framework and environment to support increased acceptance, respect and understanding amongst communities.

### ***Statutory framework***

New Zealand is a signatory to several international treaties<sup>3</sup> that affirm the right to freedom from racial discrimination and safeguard minority groups' right to preserve their culture in New Zealand. The Treaty of Waitangi provides the framework for bi-cultural and inter-cultural relations in New Zealand. The NZ Bill of Rights Act protects the rights of minorities in all aspects of their lives, including religious, language, economic, social and cultural rights<sup>4</sup>. The Human Rights Act<sup>5</sup> is particularly significant as it advocates and promotes the protection of human rights in New Zealand society and encourages the maintenance and development of harmonious relations between individuals and among diverse groups<sup>6</sup>.

It is this framework that provides the foundation and environment for central and local government and a range of community leaders to influence host communities' perceptions and attitudes towards migrants and refugees.

### ***Existing roles and contributions***

#### *Government ministers, members of parliament, local government politicians*

New Zealand is a democratic country, which allows many different opinions to be expressed, including inaccurate and negative stereotypical views about new migrants and refugees. Ministers, members of parliament and local government politicians are well-placed to shape and lead public opinion and to play a key role in promoting fairness and combating discrimination. They can influence community debate and opinion on this issue and use opportunities to proactively inform host communities about the intended benefits of immigration for all New Zealanders.

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<sup>3</sup> International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), the Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

<sup>4</sup> New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Act, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Commission, 2004:323.

### *Central government*

Government policy-making recognises that New Zealand is becoming an increasingly multi-cultural nation. For example, changes to immigration strategy embodied in the Immigration Act 1987 saw a shift from racially-based criteria to an economic model.<sup>7</sup> However although policy-makers clearly understand the extent to which diverse immigration benefits New Zealand's economy in particular, more needs to be done to ensure that New Zealanders as a whole are also aware of the benefits.

Central government agencies have a range of roles and responsibilities for settlement-related services that assist migrants and refugees achieve their settlement goals as outlined in the Government's *New Zealand Settlement Strategy*<sup>8</sup>. One of these goals is for migrants, refugees and their families to feel safe expressing their ethnic identity and be accepted by, and become part of, the wider community. The *New Zealand Settlement Strategy* is a whole-of-government approach.

### *Local government*

Local bodies, such as city and regional councils, have an important role hosting and supporting the settlement of migrants and refugees locally through a range of activities<sup>9</sup>. Their responsibilities include promoting a welcoming and inclusive climate for migrant and refugee communities. They do this by supporting and resourcing local events to help all communities develop and maintain a strong sense of their own and one another's cultural identity. Councils, with the help of their Maori staff and local iwi, also have the potential to play a more proactive role in increasing understanding and knowledge of their settlement role and to encourage acceptance and understanding between host communities and migrant and refugee communities in their area.

### *Non-government and voluntary agencies*

Non-government and voluntary organisations demonstrate New Zealand's strong humanitarian and volunteer ethic. Host community volunteers, supporting migrants and refugees through the settlement process, gain greater insights into other cultures, as well as the difficulties faced by those who are new to the country<sup>10</sup>. Migrants and refugees can also be offered opportunities to train as volunteers, working alongside host community volunteers<sup>11</sup>. This helps to promote inter-cultural understanding for host community volunteers, migrants and refugees, and provides an opportunity to build acceptance of New Zealand's growing ethnic diversity at the local community level.

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<sup>7</sup> Fleras and Spoonley 1999:219.

<sup>8</sup> The New Zealand Settlement Strategy in Outline: A Future Together, Department of Labour, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> See *Connecting at the Local Level* chapter for more information on local bodies' settlement related activities.

<sup>10</sup> Organisations that recruit host community volunteers specifically to support refugee settlement include RMS Refugee Resettlement and ESOL Home Tutors.

<sup>11</sup> For example with the Citizens Advice Service and Relationship Services.

### *Established community members*

Migrants and refugees can be helped to gain a greater understanding of New Zealand's national cultural identity and to engage with host communities through established members of their own communities who are now themselves settled and part of the host community. Many of these people are held in high regard by their local communities because of their links across wider communities. Not only are they role models for people from similar backgrounds, they also play a key 'bridging role', helping host community members and migrant and refugee communities to develop a greater understanding, acceptance and respect for one another.

### *News media*

Because of its independence, the media is well-placed to influence host communities' perceptions of migrants and refugees. It is an important source of information between migrants, refugees and host communities and influences perceptions of cultural identity and inter-cultural relationships. A recent report<sup>12</sup> noted that since the 1990s the number of positive reports on immigration have increased. However these articles tend to be in newspaper columns and features sections, whereas news reporting often tends to highlight negative and stereotypical reports about migrants and refugees.

## **The way forward: *Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy***

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<sup>12</sup> Immigration, Immigrants and the Media: Making Sense of Multicultural New Zealand, P Spoonley and A Trlin 2004.

*The Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy goal is to increase host community acceptance of migrants and refugees from diverse cultural and language backgrounds within the Auckland region by:*

- facilitating host community understanding of the valuable economic, social and cultural contributions that can be made by migrants and refugees;*
- promoting the benefits positive settlement outcomes bring for New Zealand as a whole, and the mutual adjustments needed to*

*achieve this by host communities and migrant and refugee communities.*

## **Opportunities to support increased acceptance and understanding of diversity**

It is recommended that central and local government agencies, non-government organisations and established community leaders work together to provide strong leadership and develop work programmes through the *New Zealand* and *Auckland Settlement Strategies* to promote community acceptance and understanding of diversity. Opportunities for doing so include:

### *Providing strong leadership for settlement at national and local levels*

- Ministers, members of parliament and local government politicians and community leaders taking opportunities to act as role models by demonstrating positive behaviours and attitudes towards migrants and refugees, and promoting equality;

### *Central government increasing New Zealanders' understanding of national immigration and settlement policies*

- the development by central government of a sustainable strategy and long-term work programme that ensures all New Zealanders are well-informed about the intended outcomes of government immigration policy and its humanitarian commitments to quota refugees;

### *Local government positively influencing community attitudes and acceptance of diversity, and working with community leaders to do so*

- local government working with established community leaders to provide positive leadership and education which helps:
  - host communities adjust to the changing multi-cultural face of their communities;
  - migrants and refugees to develop a greater understanding of New Zealand culture;
  - create, over time, an environment where communities of diverse peoples live alongside each other in unity and with mutual benefit.

### *Working with the media to assist and enhance public understanding on migrant and refugee issues*

- there is a role for the news media to influence accurate and objective reporting and to promote balanced and positive attitudes towards all cultures at both national and regional levels:
  - nationally, central government agencies can work alongside the media to provide well-informed discussion and accurate information on migrant and refugee issues;
  - regionally, local government, other agencies and community organisations can work with the media and provide

information that encourages a balanced picture of migrants and refugees in local communities and increases local and regional understanding and acceptance of diversity.