

6 July 2026

IMMIGRATION NEW ZEALAND INSTRUCTIONS: Amendment Circular No. 2026-18
AMENDMENTS TO THE IMMIGRATION NEW ZEALAND OPERATIONAL MANUAL

Introduction

This circular outlines changes to immigration instructions. A copy of the amended instructions is attached.

All immigration officers dealing with immigration applications should read the amendments and operate in accordance with the amended instructions from the effective date.

Note

The amendments described in this circular will be published in the Immigration New Zealand Operational Manual in due course.

Information about these changes is available on our website www.immigration.govt.nz

Description of changes

S3.5 Categories of refugees and protected persons

S4.25 Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Category

Immigration instructions have been amended to implement the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Category (CORS) as a permanent visa category. These include the following features:

- In 2026/27, 50 places will be available under CORS, followed by 200 places available annually per year thereafter.
- INZ may prioritise the selection of expressions of interest to effectively fill places in the annual intake within the 12-month period.
- Processes for granting and revoking approved community organisation status have been updated.
- Requirements related to English language, work experience, and qualifications have been clarified and strengthened.
- Requirements relating to the provision of false and misleading information at expression of interest stage.

All amendments take effect from 3 July 2026.

Appendix 1: Amendments to Residence instructions effective on and after 3 July 2026

S3.5 Categories of refugees and protected persons

- a. New Zealand provides assistance to two categories of refugee:
 - i. Mandated refugees – people determined to be refugees before arrival in New Zealand by:
 - o the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR); or
 - o recognition by the International Referral Partner engaged by the New Zealand Government for the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) category, as meeting the definition of refugee under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees; and
 - ii. Convention refugees – people given refugee status by the New Zealand Government under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (see C2.5).
- b. The CORS visa category requires all applicants to engage with the international referral partner, for offshore recognition assessment (similar to the UNHCR selection process for Refugee Quota). If any applicant under CORS has previously had their refugee status assessed by the UNHCR or host country government, they must still have the international referral partner determine recognition as meeting the definition of refugee under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, to be eligible to be brought to New Zealand under the CORS complimentary refugee resettlement programme.
- c. The Government sets the annual number of places available for mandated refugees under:
 - i. The Refugee Quota (1,450 in the year 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027, and 1,300 persons per year thereafter).
 - ii. CORS (50 persons in the year 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027; and 200 persons per year thereafter).
- d. To allow for circumstances outside of INZ's control, the number of places available under the Refugee Quota and the CORS category may vary by up to 10% more or less in a year.
- e. If the annual number of places available under CORS is not filled in the year 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027 or any year thereafter, INZ may approve further resident visa applications under the Refugee Quota within that year, to ensure that the overall annual number of places available for mandated refugees is maintained.
- f. New Zealand also provides assistance to people recognised as a protected person in New Zealand in accordance with certain obligations under the 1984 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment or the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

S4.25 Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Category

S4.25.1 Objective

The objective of the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) category is to:

- a. provide an opportunity for community organisations to actively engage in supporting successful refugee settlement and to build local communities that welcome refugees; and
- b. enable sponsored mandated refugees and any associated partners and dependent children, with the support of community organisations, to quickly become independent and self-sufficient so that they are able to enter the labour market, navigate their communities and access mainstream services without requiring additional support; and
- c. provide an alternative form of admission for refugees and any associated partners and dependent children to complement New Zealand's refugee quota and, in doing so, demonstrate New Zealand's response to the scale of refugee movement and commitment to international responsibility sharing.

Note: A 'Mandated Refugee' is someone who has been recognised as a mandated refugee as set out at S3.5(a)(i).

S4.25.5 Overview

- a. Approved community organisations are selected through an application process (S4.25.7).
- b. An approved community organisation may elect to support any combination of the following:
 - i. mandated refugees and any associated partners and dependent children, which the organisation has nominated; and/or
 - ii. mandated refugees who have been:
 - o identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); and
 - o recognised by the international referral partner organisation through a refugee status determination, as meeting the definition of refugee under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees; and
 - o matched by Immigration New Zealand (INZ) with an approved community organisation and any associated partners and dependent children; and/or
 - iii. mandated refugees who have been:
 - o identified by the international referral partner organisation; and
 - o recognised by the international referral partner organisation through a refugee status determination, as meeting the definition of refugee under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees; and
 - o matched by Immigration New Zealand (INZ) with an approved community organisation and any associated partners and dependent children.
- c. The CORS category is only open to:
 - i. mandated refugees who are residing in a country in one of the international regions INZ's Refugee Quota Programme resettles from (Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East), and where the offshore logistics partner and international referral partner are able to operate to deliver their services required; and
 - ii. any associated partners and dependent children (who may reside elsewhere and are not required to be mandated refugees).

Note: For clarity, associated partners and dependent children under (c)(ii) above may be recognised as mandated refugees, but this is not required for their inclusion in a CORS application.

- d. An approved community organisation must provide settlement services to sponsored mandated refugees and any associated partners and dependent children for two years.

S4.25.7 Requirements for a Community Organisation to become an approved organisation

- a. Approved community organisation status will be granted where an immigration officer who is the National Manager of Refugee and Migrant Support is satisfied that a community organisation:
 - i. is a legal entity (such as incorporated society, registered company, registered charitable trust or religious organisation with legal standing); and
 - ii. has the financial resources to provide settlement services to sponsored mandated refugees, including any associated partners and dependent children, for two years; and
 - iii. has experience working successfully with refugees or other vulnerable people; and
 - iv. has capability and capacity to secure suitable accommodation (this may include acceptable boarding or flatting arrangements) at short notice; and
 - v. has capability and capacity to support mandated refugees and associated partners to enter the labour market and secure meaningful and sustainable employment; and

- vi. has entered into a Deed of Agreement for Services for the provision of settlement services to the agreed standard.
- b. An application for approved community organisation status will be declined if it is considered approval would create unacceptable risks to the integrity of New Zealand's immigration laws or policies.
- c. To apply for approval, a community organisation must complete the Approved Community Organisation application form (INZ 1238) and provide evidence that demonstrates they meet requirements set out in (a) above.

Note: The Deed of Agreement for Services is a legal document containing a binding commitment, which sets out the settlement services the approved Community Organisation will provide to refugees it supports along with the performance measurement framework to assess the provision of settlement services, evaluation and reporting requirements.

S4.25.8 Determining applications for Approved Community Organisation status

- a. An application for approved community organisation status will be approved in principle at such time as the National Manager of Refugee and Migrant Support is satisfied that all requirements necessary to demonstrate eligibility under the relevant instructions have been met with the exception of S4.25.7(a)(vi).
- b. The National Manager of Refugee and Migrant Support will consult with Refugee and Migrant Services (RMS) Senior Advisors when determining whether the community organisation meets the requirements for approval in principle.
- c. Where, in consulting with RMS Senior Advisors, information is received which may be prejudicial to the positive outcome of the community organisation status application, that adverse information will be put to the community organisation for comment before a decision is made on their application.
- d. The date of approval in principle is the date of the letter to the community organisation advising that approval in principle has been given.
- e. If the outstanding requirement is not fulfilled within 90 days, the application must be declined.

S4.25.10 Approved Community Organisation status review and revocation

- a. Once approved, an Approved Community Organisation's status remains unless revoked.
- b. INZ will review, at least every three years, whether an Approved Community Organisation continues to meet requirements for Approved Community Organisation status. Factors relevant to the review include:
 - i. An assessment report provided by the Umbrella Organisation.
 - ii. Whether in the preceding three years, they have met the requirements for Approved Community Organisation status set out at S4.25.7 (including all of the requirements in the Deed of Agreement for Services at S4.25.7(a)(vi)).
 - iii. Whether they meet any new requirements for Approved Community Organisation status set out at S4.25.7 (including all of the requirements in the Deed of Agreement for Services at S4.25.7(a)(vi)) effective at the date of the review).
- c. Approved Community Organisation status may be revoked if:
 - i. it is considered the organisation's approval status would create unacceptable risks to the integrity of New Zealand's immigration laws or policies; or
 - ii. there is no longer confidence the organisation has the capacity to sponsor each refugee they support or propose to support in future, including, but not limited to:
 - o if the Deed of Agreement for Services expires or is not renewed or is otherwise terminated (in accordance with its terms)
 - o the organisation fails to meet any of the other requirements at S4.25.7(a).
- d. Where information is received that may be prejudicial to an organisations' ongoing Approved Community Organisation status, the community organisation will be notified in writing and provided an opportunity to provide comment before any decision to revoke approval is made.
- e. Any decision to revoke approval status under these instructions must be approved by the National Manager of Refugee and Migrant Support.
- f. Community organisations that have their approval status revoked will be notified of this and informed of the reasons in writing.

Note: If the Deed of Agreement is terminated or Approved Community Organisation status is revoked, if any refugees the community organisation is sponsoring are still receiving settlement support at that time, the community organisation must discuss a plan with INZ and the Umbrella Organisation for the ongoing support of the sponsored refugees.

S4.25.15 Expression of interest and invitation to apply for a CORS category permanent resident visa

See also *Immigration Act 2009* ss 92-95

See also *Immigration (Visa, Entry Permission, and Related Matters) Regulations 2010* reg 9

- a. A person may express interest in applying for a CORS permanent resident visa if he or she is:
 - i. a mandated refugee; and
 - ii. residing in a country in one of the international regions Immigration New Zealand's Refugee Quota Programme resettles from (Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East), and where the offshore logistics partner and international referral partner are able to operate to deliver their services required; and
 - iii. either:
 - nominated by an approved community organisation; or
 - identified by the international referral partner as a potential candidate for the CORS category.
- b. A person may express interest in applying by completing the CORS expression of interest (EOI) form and submitting it to an immigration officer.
- c. An EOI made in the prescribed manner may be entered into the EOI Pool, and will be valid for a period of six months. EOIs that are still in the Pool after six months, or rejected because they do not meet the criteria to be invited to apply, will be withdrawn.
- d. A person expressing interest who has been nominated by an approved community organisation must indicate whether they have evidence of the following and provide it to enable the international referral partner to determine refugee status:
 - i. A UNHCR Refugee Status Determination (RSD);
 - ii. Evidence of recognition of refugee status by responsible government authorities in their current country of refuge;
 - iii. Evidence that they are known to UNHCR as a Person of Concern.
- e. EOIs are selected from the EOI Pool for consideration in the order in which they are received.
- f. Despite (e) above, INZ may prioritise the selection of EOIs for the purpose of filling remaining places in the annual CORS intake within the allotted 12-month period, where:
 - i. The person listed as the principal applicant in the EOI is accompanied by their partner and/or dependent children; or
 - ii. The person listed as the principal applicant in the EOI is from a location assessed by INZ as a priority location; or
 - iii. The person listed as the principal applicant in the EOI and any associated partner and dependent children have been identified by the international referral partner and matched by INZ with an approved community organisation.
- g. An immigration officer may invite a person who has expressed interest to apply (as the principal applicant) if:
 - i. the person expressing interest has been nominated by, or matched to, an approved community organisation; and
 - ii. the person expressing interest is a mandated refugee; and
 - iii. the information provided:
 - does not indicate the presence of health or character issues that may adversely affect the ability of any person included in the expression of interest to be granted a CORS permanent resident visa; and
 - does not indicate any person included in the expression of interest is eligible to be sponsored for residence under any other family category, including the Refugee Family Support Category; and
 - indicates the information provided regarding the principal applicant's age, English language proficiency, and work experience or qualifications, appears credible at face value.
 - iv. An invitation to apply for a visa may at any time be revoked by the Minister of Immigration or an immigration officer. A revocation takes immediate effect.
 - v. An immigration officer's decision to issue an invitation to apply does not guarantee a positive assessment of any factor in any subsequent application for a residence class visa, or that the person will be granted a permanent resident visa.

S4.25.20 Lodging an application for a CORS category permanent resident visa

See also *Immigration Act ss 71(2) and (3)*, 92

See also *Immigration (Visa, Entry Permission, and Related Matters) Regulations 2010 reg 5*

- a. A person may only apply for a CORS permanent resident visa if they invited to do so. Applications must be made within four months of the date INZ advises of that invitation.
- b. Applications for a CORS permanent resident visa must be made in the prescribed manner (subject to any applicable special direction) and be processed and decided by immigration officers from the Refugee Quota Programme.
- c. If an original or certified copy of a birth certificate or identity card for any person included in the application is unavailable, a signed declaration confirming their full name, date and place of birth and the full names of both parents must be submitted.
- d. If documents relating to the custody of any child under the age of 16 included in the application are unavailable, a Best Interest Determination conducted by the international referral partner or a statutory declaration confirming the legal custody of the child and right to remove the child from the country of residence must be submitted.
- e. The principal applicant and partner included in the application must supply evidence to show the nature and duration of their partnership, and that it is a genuine and stable partnership (see F2.20). A signed declaration confirming the duration and nature of the partnership must be submitted by the applicants if an immigration officer is satisfied that such evidence would be unduly difficult to obtain because there are circumstances beyond their control which prevent them obtaining that evidence.
- f. All applicants aged 17 and over must provide a police clearance certificate, less than 6 months old at the time the application is lodged, for each country in which they have lived for 12 months or more during the past 10 years except where:
 - i. the certificate is required from the applicant's home country, where they have a well-founded fear of approaching the authorities; or
 - ii. the authorities of any such country do not generally provide police certificates; or
 - iii. the immigration officer deems it unsafe for the applicant to approach the authorities of that country.
- g. If overseas police clearances are unavailable, a signed declaration must be provided by each applicant aged 17 years or older, stating whether they have been convicted, or found guilty of, or charged with, any offences against the law in the country or countries for which police clearance certificates are unavailable.

Notes:

- Applicants under this category are exempt under immigration regulations from paying the prescribed application fee. There is no immigration levy payable for this application.
- Appropriately delegated immigration officers may waive by special direction any other mandatory requirement for lodgement.
- Any lodgement requirement waived by special direction may be required by an immigration officer at a later date.

S4.25.30 Determining a CORS category permanent resident visa application

Permanent resident visas under the CORS category may be granted if an immigration officer is satisfied that:

- a. The identity of all applicants has been confirmed; and
- b. the principal applicant is aged between 18 and 45 years old (inclusive); and
- c. the principal applicant is a mandated refugee, and their claim is credible; and
- d. all applicants have an acceptable standard of health (see A4.10); and
- e. all applicants meet character requirements at A5, except the requirement to provide police certificates at A5.10 (applicants must instead meet the requirements of S4.25.20(f)); and
- f. the principal applicant can demonstrate English language ability that is sufficient that they can read, understand and respond to basic questions in English by completion of an INZ approved assessment (see S4.25.40); and
- g. the principal applicant has:
 - i. a minimum of three years' work experience that meets the requirements at S4.25.45.1; or
 - ii. a qualification that required a minimum of two years' post-secondary level study that meets the requirements at S4.25.45.5; and
- h. the principal applicant has been nominated by an approved community organisation, or identified by the UNHCR or the international referral partner and matched by INZ to an approved community organisation; and
- i. all applicants have been interviewed by an immigration officer; and

- j. there are no significant barriers to the ability of any of the applicants to settle in New Zealand; and
- k. no applicant is eligible to be sponsored for residence under any family category, including the Refugee Family Support Category; and

S4.25.35 Evidence of principal applicant's attempts to obtain required documents

- a. If the principal applicant has indicated in their EOI that they are unable to obtain any document required under CORS and is invited to apply with any such documents waived for lodgement by special direction, they must provide information in their application detailing their attempts to obtain these documents.
- b. If, having assessed any information provided by the applicant at (a) above, an appropriately delegated immigration officer is satisfied that any such document is not available, they may proceed to determine the application on the information provided (including any declarations that have been required to be provided with the application under S4.25.20 and subject to (c) below).
- c. Where (a) above occurs, the immigration officer will require the applicant to provide a separate signed declaration in English or the applicant's own language, witnessed by the immigration officer, in place of the waived document and any statutory declaration that would otherwise be required to be provided under generic immigration instructions.

S4.25.40 Assessment of English language requirements for principal applicant

- a. Principal applicants in a CORS application are considered to meet the English language requirements if they pass an INZ approved assessment.
- b. If the principal applicant fails to pass the INZ approved assessment:
 - i. an immigration officer may determine the English language requirements have not been met and the CORS application may be declined; or
 - ii. subject to the discretion of an immigration officer, the principal applicant may be given the opportunity to undertake the assessment a second time, within three months of their first attempt; and
 - iii. if the principal applicant fails to successfully complete the INZ approved assessment a second time, the applicant has not met the English language requirements, and the CORS application must be declined.

S4.25.45 CORS work experience and qualification requirements

The purpose of the CORS work experience and qualification requirements is to ensure that the principal applicant has the skills necessary to obtain paid employment in New Zealand, to enable them to support themselves.

S4.25.45.1 Recognition of work experience

- a. For work experience to be recognised, an immigration officer must be satisfied that:
 - i. it is comparable to paid employment (regular, structured, with set tasks); and
 - ii. each period of work experience claimed is in the same occupation or within the same or related sector; and
 - iii. it gives the applicant experience that would support them being able to obtain paid employment in New Zealand; and
 - iv. it meets evidential requirements at S4.25.45.10.
- b. If part-time work experience (whether paid or voluntary) is recognised:
 - i. credit for part-time work experience may be given on a proportional basis; and
 - ii. together with any full-time work experience, must total three years of full-time experience (30 hours per week) to the satisfaction of an immigration officer.

Example: Work experience gained over six years for 15 hours per week would equal three years' work experience based on a 30-hour week.

- c. Work experience may include self-employment, part-time, remote and voluntary roles.

S4.25.45.5 Recognition of qualifications

- a. For a qualification or qualifications to be recognised, an immigration officer must be satisfied that the qualification:
 - i. required a minimum of two years post-secondary level study; and
 - ii. meets evidential requirements at S4.25.45.10; and either
 - iii. was awarded by a recognised institution; or
 - iv. can be independently verified.

- b. If the applicant has completed a series of certificates or qualifications over a period of two years or more, each of these qualifications or certificates must be:
 - i. at a post-secondary level of study; and
 - ii. in the same or related field of study.

S4.25.45.10 Evidence of work experience or qualification

- a. Evidence of work experience may include but is not limited to:
 - i. written confirmation from the employer of the duration of employment, role and responsibilities; or
 - ii. evidence from an organisation that the applicant has volunteered with, of the duration of role and responsibilities.
- b. Evidence of qualification may include but is not limited to a copy of the qualification gained or an academic transcript.
- c. If evidence of work experience or qualifications are unavailable, an immigration officer may consider any information provided by the principal applicant about the details of their employment or study that is provided:
 - i. in their application; and
 - ii. to an immigration officer in an interview; and
 - iii. in a declaration signed by the principal applicant, which may be witnessed by an immigration officer.

S4.25.50 False and misleading information in an Expression of Interest

- a. It is sufficient grounds to decline a Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship category permanent resident visa application made under S4 instructions if:
 - i. false or misleading information was provided as part of the associated Expression of Interest (EOI); or
 - ii. relevant, potentially prejudicial information was withheld from the associated EOI; or
 - iii. an applicant or their agent failed to advise an immigration officer of any fact or material change in circumstances that occurs after an EOI is submitted that may affect a decision to invite the person to apply for a resident visa or to grant a resident visa.
- b. A decision that false or misleading information was provided does not require an immigration officer to determine whether or not the applicant personally:
 - i. knew that the information was false or misleading; or
 - ii. knew that such information was provided to INZ (for example by their agent); or
 - iii. intended to deceive Immigration New Zealand through their actions or inaction.
- c. A decision that relevant, potentially prejudicial information was withheld requires an immigration officer to be satisfied that the applicant, or their agent, knew that information, but does not require an immigration officer to determine whether or not the applicant personally intended to withhold information, or deceive Immigration New Zealand through their actions or inaction.
- d. In cases where an applicant had an agent acting on their behalf, a decision that false or misleading information was provided does not require an immigration officer to determine whether or not the agent knew that the information was false or misleading.

S4.25.50.1 Deciding whether to decline a CORS application for false, misleading or withheld information in the associated Expression of Interest

- a. Where an immigration officer determines that false or misleading information was provided, or relevant, potentially prejudicial information was withheld, in an associated EOI, the residence application under CORS is to be normally declined.
- b. Despite (a), an immigration officer must not decline the application under (a) without considering the circumstances of the application.

S4.25.55 Glossary of terms under the CORS category

Note: the following is a glossary of terms explaining the role of the organisations involved in the delivery and implementation of CORS.

- a. An 'Approved Community Organisation' is an organisation approved by Immigration New Zealand (INZ) as eligible to sponsor applicants for residence under CORS.
- b. The 'International Referral Partner' is the organisation engaged by the New Zealand Government to:
 - i. conduct refugee status determinations consistent with the UNHCR requirements for the recognition of refugees as set out in Section 126 of the Immigration Act 2009; and
 - ii. identify mandated refugees to be matched by INZ with an approved community organisation.

- c. The 'Umbrella Organisation' is responsible for:
- i. advising Immigration New Zealand about the capacity of the approved community organisations to sponsor each refugee they propose to support; and
 - ii. liaising with and delivering training and support to approved community organisations, to ensure the provision of settlement services to the mandated refugees they sponsor; and
 - iii. providing an assessment report at least every three years to INZ on the ability of an Approved Community Organisation to meet settlement objectives.
- d. The 'Offshore Logistics Partner' assists INZ with the delivery of CORS by facilitating identification (including collection of biometric information), interviews, English language and health assessments, and transport for mandated refugees and their partner and dependent children (if any).