Refugees and asylum seekers

Refugees

- Refugees are people who cannot return to their home country because they have a well-founded fear of persecution because of their religion, race, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

- New Zealand is a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

- New Zealand has a long and proud history of refugee resettlement. New Zealand has been supporting refugee resettlement in various forms since 1870 when Danish refugees fled the suppression of their culture and language under German occupation.

- New Zealand has been resettling refugees on a regular basis since 1979 and the Refugee Quota Programme was introduced in 1987.

New Zealand’s Refugee Quota Programme

- New Zealand’s Refugee Quota is a reflection of the Government’s commitment to fulfilling its international humanitarian commitments to provide protection to refugees who are not able to return safely to their home country.

- The Government announced in September 2018 that the annual Refugee Quota will increase to 1,500 places annually from July 2020.

- Refugees are identified for resettlement by the UNHCR according to internationally accepted guidelines that take account of physical and legal protection needs, as well as family reunification. They are submitted for consideration for resettlement in New Zealand in accordance with New Zealand’s agreed annual resettlement plan. INZ is only able to consider the case of a refugee for resettlement under the refugee quota following a formal referral by UNHCR.

- It is entirely the decision of the UNHCR whether resettlement is the best option for a refugee and whether their case will be referred to a safe third country. New Zealand is not in a position to request particular cases, nor advocate with the UNHCR on behalf of individual refugees.

- All those selected for resettlement under New Zealand’s Refugee Quota Programme undergo comprehensive on and off-shore screening and assessment processes focusing on credibility, security, risk and settlement and are required to meet health requirements.
On arrival in New Zealand quota refugees become permanent residents and are eligible to access government funded services the same as other residents and New Zealand citizens. They are eligible to apply for New Zealand citizenship after five years of residence in New Zealand.

All quota refugees currently spend their first six weeks in New Zealand at INZ’s Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre in Auckland, where they participate in a comprehensive reception programme that prepares them to live and work in the community. The reception programme will change to five weeks from July 2020 with the increase in the Refugee Quota. The content of the programme will continue to focus on living and working in New Zealand.

The reception programme includes sessions on Taha Māori (Māori perspectives), living in a multicultural society, New Zealand Police and the law, moving into the community, health (including parenting and healthy families), English language learning, and preparing working-age adults for employment and children for school.

During the reception programme a Settlement Plan is developed with each quota refugee family that outlines the types of services they will be connected with to support their successful settlement in their community.

Quota refugees are settled in one of the eight settlement locations (Auckland region, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Wellington region, Nelson, Christchurch, Dunedin and Invercargill) based on community links, employment opportunities and access to services to help support their integration.

An additional six settlement locations have been selected following the Government’s decision to increase the annual Refugee Quota to 1,500 from July 2020. The extra locations are Timaru, Whanganui, Blenheim, Masterton, Levin and Ashburton.

Currently, INZ contracts the New Zealand Red Cross to provide settlement support services to quota refugees in the already established settlement locations during their first 12 months in the community. This support includes coordinating a community orientation programme and linking quota refugees to the services they need, such as GP enrolment, employment and English language classes.

Refugee Family Support Category

In addition to the Refugee Quota, the Refugee Family Support Category (RFSC) provides people who were granted residence as refugees or protected persons the opportunity to sponsor a family member and that person’s partner and dependent children for New Zealand residence. Each year there are 300 places available.

The RFSC has a two-tier registration system with priority given to tier one sponsors who meet a high threshold of need. The first step is for eligible people to register as a sponsor of their family members who are offshore. If they meet the eligibility criteria to sponsor their family members, then they will be sent an Invitation to Apply (ITA) and their family members who are offshore will then complete the relevant residence application.
Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship category


The key objectives of the category include:
- Providing an opportunity for community organisations to be actively engaged in refugee resettlement and to build local communities that welcome refugees,
- Enabling sponsored refugees to quickly become independent and self-sufficient in New Zealand, and
- Providing an alternative form of admission for refugees to complement our annual refugee quota.

Principal and secondary applicants must be mandated as refugees and meet relevant immigration policies for the category, including security, risk and health assessments. Principal applicants need to have a basic understanding of English, have a minimum of three years’ work experience (or a qualification requiring at least two years’ tertiary study), have an acceptable standard of health and be aged between 18 and 45.

Four community-based organisations help the sponsored refugees to settle into their new communities - Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand (Wellington), Gleniti Baptist Church (Timaru), South West Baptist Church (Christchurch) and the Society of St Vincent de Paul (Nelson).

Sponsored refugees all arrived in New Zealand by July 2018 and spent two weeks at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre before settling in communities with the support of the approved sponsors.

New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy


The implementation of the Strategy is a cross-government effort and participating agencies lead implementation in their respective areas. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) as the lead agency in refugee settlement, coordinates the overall implementation of the Strategy and the annual reporting against the agreed measures and success indicators.

The Strategy’s goals include:
- Increasing the number of former refugees in paid employment and reducing the number receiving unemployment-related benefits.
- Reducing the proportion of former refugees receiving housing assistance
- Increasing the proportion of former refugee school leavers achieving NCEA Level 2 after five years or more in the New Zealand education system
- Increasing the number of refugee children who receive age-appropriate immunisations, and
- Ensuring better use of GP services and greater access to mental health services.
As part of the Strategy, the Government reaffirmed the reception programme for quota refugees at MRRC and announced that the ageing buildings at the centre would be replaced. The new MRRC opened in June 2016.

Two new accommodation blocks as well as dining and education facilities are being built to extend the lifespan of MRRC and accommodate the increase in the Refugee Quota.

Since implementation of the Strategy began in July 2013, the mix of services provided to refugees has been changed to place a greater emphasis on living and working in New Zealand and linking refugees to services in the community, including employment. In addition, work has been undertaken to better support refugees’ access to English language learning and work is underway to address interpreter and translation services barriers for refugees accessing mainstream services. A driver training programme has been established to enable refugees to obtain their restricted licence, which is anticipated to provide support to refugees accessing employment opportunities.

Detailed progress on the implementation of the Strategy is available on a dedicated page on the INZ website at:


Detailed statistics are available on our website:

Refugee Quota arrivals -

Refugee Quota settlement -

Refugee Family Support Category -

Asylum seekers

New Zealand is a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

New Zealand is obligated under United Nations conventions to consider claims from asylum seekers who claim refugee or protected person status while in New Zealand.

Asylum seekers are people who formally request permission to live in another country because they claim to have a well-founded fear of persecution in their country of origin, or otherwise fear returning there.

A refugee is a person who meets the definition of a refugee provided by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, as amended by the 1967 protocol.

A protected person is a person for whom there are substantial grounds for believing he or she would be in danger of torture, arbitrary deprivation of life or cruel treatment if deported from New Zealand.
- Immigration New Zealand is obligated to keep refugee and protection claims confidential under section 151 of the Immigration Act 2009.
- Refugee or protection status can be claimed on arrival at a New Zealand airport or port, or at a later time after arrival in New Zealand.
- The majority of people who claim asylum in New Zealand arrive in the country on valid visas or are issued visas on arrival and live in the community. A very small number of people claim asylum on arrival at New Zealand’s borders.
- The Refugee Status Branch of INZ decides all claims for refugee or protection status at first instance. The Refugee Status Branch determination examines the credibility of the claim and the risk of the person being persecuted or otherwise suffering cruel treatment if deported to any place.
- If the claim is approved by the Refugee Status Branch, the asylum seeker is recognised as a refugee or protected person.
- Refugees and protected persons are eligible to apply for permanent residence and New Zealand citizenship after five years of residence.
- Refugees and protected persons are also eligible to access employment and income support and public health services, the same as New Zealand residents or citizens.
- If the claim is declined by the Refugee Status Branch, he/she can appeal to the independent Immigration and Protection Tribunal.
- The Refugee Status Branch also decides whether a person’s refugee or protected person status should be cancelled because it was obtained through fraud; whether a person no longer needs to be protected because of changes in their or their country’s circumstances and whether a refugee should be deported because they have committed serious crimes and pose a risk to the community. These decisions can also be appealed to the Immigration and Protection Tribunal.
- Detailed statistics are available on our website:
  
  **Refugee and Protection Status (asylum seekers)** -