

“BIRDS IN A GILDED CAGE”

RESETTLEMENT PROSPECTS FOR ADULT REFUGEES IN NEW ZEALAND

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ABSTRACT

The provision of a safe haven and a durable solution for quota refugees is an obligation that New Zealand has fulfilled since it accepted 753 Polish children and 105 accompanying adults in 1944. This paper details some of the current policy issues that impact upon the effectiveness of New Zealand's humanitarian gestures. One important factor for refugees in building their new lives in New Zealand is the ability to communicate in English and this paper provides a key focus on this topic. Further, in recognition of the International Year of Older Persons, this paper makes specific reference to the conditions for, and impacts on, the resettlement of older refugees in New Zealand. It should be noted that the references to older refugees in this paper does not deny the validity of the same experiences applying to all adult refugees.

BACKGROUND

Refugees are “people who, because of a well-founded fear of persecution, for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, leave their country of origin and are unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country”

(Definition from the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees).

In accepting refugees for resettlement, New Zealand has made a commitment to provide them with a safe haven and a durable solution to their plight. Refugee resettlement involves the permanent settlement of people in another nation. Removing people far from their country and culture and requiring them to make major readjustments to their lives, such as changing their language, their way of life and their livelihood, is not the most desirable solution for refugees.

In recognition of these factors, the UNHCR seeks resettlement for less than one percent of the world's refugees who totaled over 12 million in 1998. Resettlement is sought only in situations of last resort where the alternative mechanisms (including local integration or voluntary repatriation) are not

available or feasible, and is primarily used to guarantee security or to provide humanitarian protection for refugees in “vulnerable categories”. These may include women at risk, victims of torture, medical cases, those with disabilities and longstayers in refugee camps. Resettlement provides the most needy refugees with a chance to begin a new life and New Zealand is one of only twelve nations out of the 188 member states of the United Nations that undertakes, through a quota system, to accept refugees. New Zealand has been formally accepting refugees for resettlement since 1944, when 858 Polish children and adults were accepted.

In 1987, New Zealand refined the refugee quota system to allow up to 800 refugees per year under a number of specific categories including ethnicity, religion and special needs. These have since been revised in 1997 with the removal of the family reunion category to allow the Government greater flexibility to respond to international protection needs and the annual quota now stands at 750 individuals. The primary reason for the reduction in the annual maximum is that the New Zealand government undertook the responsibility of paying the airfares for refugees’ travel to New Zealand.

While New Zealand takes a small total number of refugees, the country does admit a high number of people when the number is considered on a per capita basis, and is very responsive to global circumstances and needs. For example, a large percentage of refugees during the late 1970s and 1980s were ‘Indo-Chinese’, while the numbers of Somali, Ethiopian, and Middle Eastern refugees increased during the mid 1990s in response to events in those areas (refer Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: New Zealand's Quota Intake of Refugees by Ethnicity, 1979-1989

NATIONALITY	1.4.79 31.3.80	1.4.80 31.3.81	1.4.81 31.3.82	1.4.82 31.3.83	1.4.83 31.3.84	1.4.84 31.3.85	1.4.85 31.3.86	1.4.86 31.3.87	1.4.87 31.3.88	1.4.88 31.3.89	TOTAL
Kampuchean	280	379	375	525	428	500	413	192	333	644	4,069
Vietnamese	622	852	256	131	68	141	124	164	157	200	2,715
Laotian	6	152	67	20	63	79	139	174	155	118	973
Year Total	908	1383	698	676	559	720	676	530	645	962	7,757
Grand Total	908	2291	2989	3665	4224	4944	5620	6150	6795	7757	7,757

Source: New Zealand Immigration Service

Table 2: New Zealand's Quota Intake of Refugees by Ethnicity, 1989-1998

NATIONALITY	1.4.89 31.3.90	1.4.90 31.3.91	1.4.91 31.3.92	1.4.92 31.3.93	1.4.93 31.3.94	1.4.94 31.3.95	1.4.95 31.3.96	1.4.96 31.3.97	1.4.97 31.3.98	TOTAL
Afghan	1						1			2
Bosnian				31	83	21	4	4	3	146
Burmese			1	1	2					4
Burundi							13		17	30
Chinese						2				2
Congolese								1	1	2
Czech	16	28								44
El Salvadoran		22								22
Eritrean							21		10	31
Ethiopian					45	50	130	72	151	448
Guatemalan		4								4
Hungarian	1									1
Iranian	100	40	20	2	13	6		24	70	275
Iraqi	104	203	97	7	215	318	136	266	241	1,587
Kampuchean	177	70	295	50		3		2		597
Kuwaiti						11				11
Laotian	105	20	59		3		5	62		254
Liberian								5		5
Libyan							2	5		7
Nigerian					2	1	1			4
Pakistani									1	1
Palestinian							6			6
Polish	59	50								109
Rwandan							14		6	20
Saudi Arabian						1			8	9
Somali				94	309	39	299	21	137	899
Sri Lankan			1	8	13	21	25	12	3	83
Sudanese						8	1	14	10	33
Syrian					7			13	4	24
Tunisian					3				6	9
Turkish							4			4
Ugandan							1			1
Vietnamese	247	245	146	219	42	341	116	23	8	1,387
Yemenese									1	1
Yugoslavian							1	3		4
Year Total	810	682	619	412	737	822	780	527	677	6,066
Grand Total	810	1492	2111	2523	3260	4082	4862	5389	6,066	6,066

Source: New Zealand Immigration Service

New Zealand also admits a large proportion of 'at-risk' cases compared with other nations. While some may characterise this policy as naïve, acceptance of these cases is important as some, such as women-at-risk or the elderly, experience discrimination by many nations in the refugee selection process. These nations have selection criteria that focus on the individual's ability to resettle and provide positive work skills to the nation, rather than on the needs and security issues of the refugees. This means that, while large proportions of refugees are women and children, a higher percentage of working-aged men are admitted to other nations under their selection processes.

In New Zealand, the selection process allocates one quarter of the quota to women-at-risk and medical cases, but still favours younger refugees "who are generally perceived as being able to resettle more easily than older refugees." (*New Zealand Immigration Service (1994) Refugee Women. The New Zealand Refugee Quota Programme, Department of Labour, Wellington, New Zealand. P.33*)

RESETTLEMENT

Most refugees have experienced severe and protracted traumatic events that can dramatically impact on their ability to resettle in New Zealand. Yet, while the basics of life are well catered for and a safe haven is generally found, *overall* New Zealand is performing less effectively in the co-ordination and provision of services that allow all refugees (including older persons) to participate fully in our society.

Services that cater for the needs of refugees who have suffered extreme trauma have only recently been established in Auckland (1995) and in Wellington (1997). Other urban centres with high intakes of refugees such as Hamilton or Christchurch, have recognised the need but must use local mainstream approaches to provide a service. Outside of these main centres even mainstream services may be unavailable. However, it is worth noting

that as most refugees settle in major urban areas, some form of targeted services should be available, if required.

Older refugees may be particularly vulnerable to stress and other responses to trauma. Many older people have moved from a situation where they are an integral support within the family structure, and are even more dislocated by the transition and resettlement in a very different cultural environment. Lack of support, or the lack of ready access to appropriate support services that exist, can complicate the issue further.

Any physical hardships that have already been suffered by refugees are compounded if they are frail or vulnerable to illness. Many refugees have had little or no “professional” medical care throughout their lives, and suffer the residual effects of illnesses that have gone untreated. A lack of family support during this period places additional stresses on vulnerable refugees as they adapt to a new environment. The link between psychological distress and physical illness is widely accepted.

However, the common assumption that an older refugee is helpless, passive and dependent is often quite different from the reality. Emphasising the difficulties faced by older refugees can result in a skewed picture that does nothing to recognise the resilience and stamina of people who have experienced events that we are unlikely to face and cannot easily imagine.

Many older persons are highly motivated and they have come from an environment where they were more likely to be givers than receivers of aid. *“The tragedy of older people who have been forcibly displaced is not so much that they become dependent on others, but that they have been robbed of the means to provide for others in the manner they would wish.”* (For a fuller discussion of this area, see the UNHCR Notes on Resettlement of Refugees with Special Needs, 1998 Tripartite Meetings in Canberra).

UNHCR asks that the older refugee be reunited with other family members, as there are often demonstrated benefits for all family members including the

elderly. A durable solution for refugees must ensure that the potential dislocation and issues of exile are not then compounded by neglect and isolation in the host nation. Family reunification is a critical aspect of this, so it is important that older refugees are given the opportunity to join their families.

Effective resettlement in a host country must include the means whereby individuals can fully participate in society. There are a number of important resettlement services that must be considered by the host nation as a refugee enters the country. These are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Resettlement Services Required By Refugees

Resettlement Service	Activities
Arrival	reception, orientation, interpreting, translation, health referrals, registration with services and documentation preparation;
Language Training	formal English classes, work-readiness classes, non-formal and community-based English language training;
Employment	career counselling and support, C.V. preparation, skills training, workplace orientation, job referrals, work placement and support;
Social Support	individual and family counselling, family and child services, crisis intervention, housing and budget advice;
Health	health promotion, health education, interpreting services, peer support groups, mental health counselling and support services;
Legal	immigration, housing, family law, income maintenance, employment standards, workers' compensation;
Community Participation	inter-agency referrals, community outreach programmes, needs assessments, community support, advocacy on access issues, language and cultural maintenance, and community development.

English Language Training

Of all of the factors that will assist with resettlement within New Zealand, proficiency in English is one of the most important, refer NZIS Settlement Kit, (1997); High Hopes (1996); Waite(1992); Coghill & Gubbay, (1988). Appropriate language training and integration with other support structures is therefore a crucial part of the resettlement process.

Many refugees come from countries where English may not be spoken at all, as Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate. Very few refugees can become full participants in New Zealand society without formal English education and/or skill upgrading. The marginalisation of refugee learners within the predominately user-pays framework of post-compulsory educational provision in New Zealand requires immediate attention.

In some cases, the time and skills required for refugees to become functionally literate in English may be underestimated. This is particularly the case for older refugees who may have more limited exposure to New Zealand society and may find it more difficult than a younger person to learn and remember a new language.

Few of those who do not speak English and come to live in New Zealand appreciate the barriers that will be present when they want to learn English. Many wrongly assume that it will not be difficult to learn, and that classes will be readily available. A report commissioned by NZIS outlines some of the contributions and barriers to learning English in New Zealand, as perceived by general and business immigrants who lacked proficiency in English and who had paid a bond of \$20,000 (Refer Forsythe Research 1988, P.7). Formidable as the barriers may have seemed to participants in this report, they are even higher for refugees who lack the funds to purchase English tuition. Further, older refugees are likely to face even higher barriers to learning opportunities due to a lack of prioritisation, and overall availability of tuition. For an older (particularly female) refugee, childcare or other family responsibilities that keep them at home allow fewer opportunities to improve language skills via regular daily interaction with others in the New Zealand community.

Under current immigration legislation pertaining to general and business immigrants, they are considered functionally literate and able to gain employment when they have passed IELTS (International English Language Testing System) level 5 General, prior to their application for residency in New Zealand. General skills migrants who do not reach level 5 must, prior to arrival in New Zealand, pre-purchase English language tuition at a cost of up

to \$6,000. This figure can represent two years of full time study at an institution. No such provision is made for refugees.

It must be recognised that New Zealand has a special obligation to refugees to provide English language and other information that may not be required by general immigrants. Refugees did not come to New Zealand by choice, and may not have chosen New Zealand as their permanent home.

Refugees require a range of support services, such as health and housing, on admission to New Zealand, and may have past experiences or personal concerns (e.g. for family still overseas) that will impact on learning. They often come from situations where their formal education has been limited, or otherwise disrupted, so that the transition to formal learning may take longer, or require additional literacy support.

In addition to these issues, refugees are unlikely to have the financial resources that will cover the costs of tuition (White, 1996). Upon entry to New Zealand refugees are eligible for a Special Needs Grant of \$1200 to cover re-establishment costs, an accommodation supplement, and the Emergency Unemployment Benefit. There is little money available for English tuition. At its current level, the entire refugee resettlement grant would barely cover the fees of a six-month course, and learning English is only one of a number of pressing priorities facing the refugee in setting up a new home in a new country (Altinkaya, 1999).

At best, an adult refugee might be able to afford a very part-time English course. Places on WINZ-funded courses with an employment focus are limited, and tend not to focus on the English required for everyday use. For many the only option for learning lies with local, often church-based, classes or with the free ESOL Home Tutor Service, whose trained volunteers offer 2 – 6 hours of tuition a week. The *“local solutions for local needs”* approach that government currently advocates for provision of services does not work without a framework of entitlement. In the absence of such a framework provision of ESOL support varies greatly between locations. It is apparent

that the current ad hoc provision of ESOL tuition does not recognise some of the distinct learning needs of refugees, particularly women, older refugees, and the non-literate.

“For those with children to look after, or a tight budget, or more than one adult in the house needing to learn English, the options are really very limited. There is no system to ensure that ESOL education is effectively and equitably delivered to all those who need it.” (White, 1996)

The New Zealand government, whilst being very clear about the importance of English in its entry requirement of immigrants to pre-purchase English tuition, does not appear to acknowledge any such obligation towards the successful resettlement of refugees. At the very least it would appear fair to offer refugees, who are not in a financial position to pay for their tuition, a minimum provision of English tuition to the level that immigrants are deemed to require.

Greer (1998) states that, as the elderly refugees are essentially unemployable, they “have less reason (to learn English). They don’t do it. It’s difficult and one must be really motivated to learn another language. They don’t mingle or interact with English-speaking people. They are very alone, at risk for health problems, and certainly not learning about or getting the services that they need.” For these reasons older refugees are likely to be at the end of the line in a queue for most services, including English.

The difficulty faced by refugees in accessing English tuition is likely to result in the creation and expansion of a sector of individuals who will have neither the ability nor the will to become an integral part of our society. The lack of accessible English classes, interpreters, or translated material has the potential to create an *underclass of refugees* who subsequently experience significant direct and indirect discrimination. This will incur significant social costs and some economic costs (from foregone earnings and productivity) to New Zealand.

Apart from these considerations, it seems strange that New Zealand would accept refugees as a humanitarian gesture, yet effectively limit the means by which they can join and participate within society. This would appear to be contrary to the overall purpose of offering a safe haven.

It appears that New Zealand has also breached ratified international obligations in the area of language provision. However, as White (1996) notes, the weak sanctions and applicability of the International Conventions within New Zealand law leave little recourse for action. Overall, New Zealand policy lacks clarity (beyond provision for Maori and Pacific Islanders) on the issues many non-English speaking groups in society face - including difficulties in access - and the necessary mechanisms to address this.

In addition, the number of non-English speaking migrants has increased dramatically over the past ten years and this has had an impact on the provision of services to all ESOL learners. Recent statistics (Altinkaya, 1995) indicate that three polytechnics in Auckland alone had a combined waiting list for ESOL classes of over 2,000 people. Since that time the use of waiting lists has been abandoned by these education institutions and those who wish to enter classes must come under the normal enrolment procedures for the January and July semesters. Refugee intakes occur at intervals throughout the year and thus those wishing to learn English often wait considerable time for a class.

When a refugee does find an accessible English class, it is interesting to observe that the learning needs of the refugee, and especially the older refugee, are not always clearly recognised by training providers. In a recent Australian survey (Nicholls and Raleigh, 1998), teachers indicated that they perceived successful English language learning topics for older learners to include banking, hobbies, grandchildren, celebrations, food, previous occupations. Interestingly, the older learners indicated that the language learning topics that interested them were managing disputes, conversation, form-filling for health and social welfare, reading medical labels, describing

symptoms, and news and current affairs. The focus on seemingly simple everyday functional and interactive language activities that had the potential to affect the learners' current life was often undervalued by the teachers, who had placed more emphasis on reflective topics from the learners' past. Whilst no similar research study has been undertaken in New Zealand, ESOL tuition topics and teaching style here varies little from those used in Australia.

Older learners certainly need additional effort in learning languages compared to that required by children or young adults, but the difficulties they face can be misperceived as "learning difficulties". Often other factors are very important and should be considered. For example, the physical health and the well-being of the older learner is important, and this may be even more important for refugees, who are likely to have suffered from traumatic experiences. The lack of professional medical care during their lives may limit physical mobility, or the ability to sit for long periods of time. Like other elderly adults, refugees may be affected by hearing and vision problems.

Some strategies for teaching the older refugee learner are already well known and these include:

- elimination of barriers to participation, such as transport and childcare,
- focusing on the learners' expressed needs, rather than a pre-set teaching programme,
- making the teaching materials relevant and local,
- consulting with the members of the learners' ethnic community.

Grognet (1998) states that these strategies are likely to reduce drop-out rates, and increase the speed and depth of the learning within the programme.

In addition, cultural expectations affect the learning process and, to maximise the learning experience, programmes must be cognisant of this as well as the factors listed above. The capacity of ESOL provision will obviously be less effective if it does not encompass cultural and social needs in a linguistically relevant programme.

Ideally, a managed programme would incorporate a choice of English classes that enhance both the social orientation and language acquisition process. To

do this effectively, New Zealand must closely examine current assumptions about fees, providers, programme outcomes and refugee involvement in the resettlement process. In particular, it would be strongly advised that the voice and presence of refugee communities in the development and delivery of the programme, particularly at the lower levels, is likely to improve the quality of the services offered. An encouraging pilot programme has recently been set up in West Auckland through a WINZ/Unitec partnership where bilingual Kurdish, Somali and Ethiopian refugees are being trained to secure funding for, and provide literacy classes to learners from within their own communities.

A Framework For Refugee Resettlement

In the absence of any planned and comprehensive post-arrival service provision for the refugees that New Zealand resettles in 1999, non-government agencies (NGOs) providing services for refugees have commenced a consultation strategy for drawing together a framework for refugee resettlement. Their efforts stem from the recognition that refugee resettlement requires more effective planning and implementation than is currently undertaken. The Terms of Reference for the Working Group Lead Sector Advisers of the NGO Policy Framework for Refugee Resettlement note that it is anticipated that their combined expertise will highlight the holistic nature of resettlement, where gaps identified in any one area of service provision impact upon the effectiveness of provision in other areas.

This NGO initiative aims to produce a document that details the needs of all refugees (including older refugees, women at risk, and other special cases) and outlines how these needs can best be met. Once developed, the document could be useful in the development of policies and programmes and should assist the development of a more durable solution.

The marginalisation of refugees within our society in the past decade should be addressed through the implementation of a national refugee resettlement programme and the provision of the necessary support structures. In addition,

appropriate consultation processes and resources need to be put into place to reach the refugees directly, and indirectly via NGOs and community groups, to ensure that issues, trends and priorities are brought forward for further discussion. (RRDR, 1999). This is likely to involve some increased spending by the Government, but the resultant clarification of the resettlement process for refugees within a defined and cohesive framework of provision will ensure more equitable and effective coverage. The overall cost of refugee resettlement is likely to fall with a more co-ordinated and comprehensive approach, when those who currently fall through the gaps are provided for in a more managed resettlement programme.

Effective resettlement should follow a case management approach so that individuals are quickly referred to services appropriately tailored to refugee needs. Case management would address the current issue of lack of co-ordination among NGO refugee service providers, which can result in duplication of services. It will also be essential to offer targeted assistance for refugees who may require additional assistance, such as non-literate adults.

The second major issue for these service providers that needs addressing is the current inadequacy of funding. Some NGO service providers have been funded at the same level for the past decade and there is inconsistency in funding levels for NGOs that operate within the same field. Most agencies provide services that utilise piecemeal grants. Administratively, grant funding increases labour and overall costs for NGOs, especially when multiple grants are received as this increases both the level and complexity of administration. Single funding over multiple years can go a long way toward mitigating the issue of a durable solution for all refugees in allowing the NGO to focus its activities and expenditure on the provision of support services by reducing administrative needs, and providing assurance for planning.

Conclusion

Overall, there is a need for clarification in refugee resettlement provision about service provision and entitlements; expectations of funders, NGO service providers and clients; and the parameters of the assistance available to clients. It is unrealistic for clients to expect agencies to be “all things to all people” and for agencies even to attempt to provide unlimited services. Better case management, better networking, more inter-agency referrals, and improvements in the planning and funding of services within a cohesive resettlement framework must replace the current situation.

The current situation of ad hoc service provision results in a large number of refugees, especially older persons and women, who are unable to utilise the services that are there, even when reasonably effective and inexpensive programmes are available. A bi-cultural refugee worker recently observed to an NZIS employee that older refugees in New Zealand lived their lives “like birds in a gilded cage.” The observation could well apply to more than the older refugees who have been placed in a safe haven in New Zealand in the past decade. Under the current situation, NGOs have commenced a process which policymakers can progress through the implementation of the suggestions in the preceding paragraph. Collaboration between Government and NGOs toward an integrated, efficient and effective approach to resettlement must be a priority if New Zealand is going to honestly offer a safe haven for all refugees.

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Appendix

Contributors and Barriers To Learning English in New Zealand

Contributors

- Access to television, radio and newspapers
- English language courses
- Wide range of textbooks and tapes available
- Good quality tutors
- Everyone in New Zealand speaks English

Key Barriers

- Language courses very expensive
- Kiwi slang and idioms
- Kiwi pronunciation
- Few opportunities to speak English with Kiwis
- Racism/Kiwis don't like speaking with migrants



Ethnicity-Specific Contributors

- English language courses cheaper than home (Japan)

Gender-Specific Barriers

- Shy/lack confidence (females)
- Work long hours – no time to learn (males)

Location-Specific Barriers

- No English courses available Hamilton)
- Large ethnic community (Auckland)

Other Barriers

- Beginner courses are too difficult
- Too old/difficulties remembering
- Poor quality tutors
- Child care responsibilities
- Differences in handwriting styles
- Limited information about courses available
- No standard Kiwi English
- Differences between Kiwi and American vocabulary
- New Zealanders do not have much experience speaking with non-English speakers