



Three Years On: English and employment outcomes of former refugees

February 2021





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Executive Summary

Context

The New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy was developed and implemented in 2013 with the aim of improving outcomes for former refugees. The overarching aim of the strategy is to ensure that:¹

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.

The purpose of the current research was to explore employment and English language outcomes for former quota refugees three years post-arrival in New Zealand. Its aim was twofold: to understand how services (including provision of information²) have contributed to settlement outcomes or acted as barriers and to understand former refugees' perspectives on gaps in services.

Twenty-eight former quota refugees who arrived in New Zealand in 2016 were interviewed for the research. Around half of those interviewed were men (15) and half were women (13) and the top countries of origin were Bhutan (8), Syria (5) and Colombia (4). Six participants were aged 18 to 24, 17 were aged 25 to 44, and five were aged 45 and over. This group of former refugees had been interviewed at six weeks and nine months after arrival by Cognition Education Limited as part of the evaluation of the Refugee Reception Programme.

In addition, this report includes monitoring data on employment outcomes for quota refugee arrivals from 2013/14 to 2018/19.

English and employment are former refugees' greatest successes and greatest challenges

Research shows that being employed and learning the local language are key markers of integration and identified by former refugees as their greatest challenge.³

In this study, interviews with former refugees who had been in New Zealand for three years showed that success for many was a better life in New Zealand. They said they had been given freedom and the possibility of a future for themselves and their families. In addition, many participants spoke proudly of their achievements over the last three years. Several participants said their greatest success or what they were most proud of was having improved their English. English enabled them to make friends, gain confidence and participate in society.

For several other participants, success was getting paid work and moving towards independence. A few spoke about their desire to give back to the country that had helped them. However, learning English and gaining employment were also significant challenges for

¹ MBIE. (2012). *Refugee Settlement: New Zealand Resettlement Strategy*. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, p 3.

<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/documents/refugees/refugeeresettlementstrategy.pdf>

² Refugees receive a variety of information at the Mangere Refugee Reception Centre and from the Red Cross.

³ W Searle, E Prouse, E L'Ami, A Gray, and A Gruner. (2014). *New Land, New Life: Long-term settlement of refugees in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

<https://www.mbie.govt.nz/document-library/search?keywords=New+Land+New+Life&df=&dt=&submit=Search>

participants or their families. Challenges included difficulties not being able to communicate, and a couple of participants spoke about the impact on them and their families of not having found work in New Zealand.

Successes and challenges for some participants related to their families. Several participants spoke proudly of their children's achievements such as doing well in their education and more generally that they were coping well with life in New Zealand. For others, family-related issues were their biggest challenges in New Zealand, particularly being separated from family.

A lack of English fluency limits employment and study opportunities

The level of English fluency had the most impact on former refugees' work situation. A few participants who had yet to find work in New Zealand said their lack of English fluency was the reason for this. Others said that the type of work they had been able to get in New Zealand was limited by their level of English. A few participants also mentioned that their level of English was the reason they had not undertaken study or that it was making studying more difficult.

Participants were asked what advice they would give to new refugees about working in New Zealand. Most commonly, this advice was to learn English before committing to a job. Having a good grasp of English meant the jobs available would be of a better quality. The most common advice around learning English was to simply commit to classes and study diligently.

Three years on, some former refugees still need additional English and employment support

Many former refugees still want to improve their English fluency

Research shows that fluency in a language increases over time, but that former refugees who are older struggle the most to learn the main language of their new country.⁴ Similarly, participants most likely to say they found their level of English to be limiting them tended to be older.

While most participants in the current study spoke positively about their progress with English, three years on many still felt the need to improve. Several were still undertaking some form of English language training, and others spoke about their desire to keep studying through further classes and learning opportunities.

Participants were asked if they had any insights into what the government and other organisations could do differently to help former refugees learn English. Most commonly, participants wanted access to one-on-one tutoring or bilingual teachers. A few participants suggested that having a teacher who understood their first language would be beneficial for learning English in a class setting.

Former refugees who are older with significant prior experience struggle to get into the labour market

Data shows that at three years around a third of former refugees are employed. However, some former refugees have better outcomes than others. Those not doing so well are former refugees aged 51 and over and those from Iraq, Myanmar, Syria and Afghanistan.

⁴ W Searle, E Prouse, E L'Ami, A Gray, and A Gruner. (2014). *New Land, New Life: Long-term settlement of refugees in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.
<https://www.mbie.govt.nz/document-library/search?keywords=New+Land+New+Life&df=&dt=&submit=Search>

Three-year interviews supported these findings: all former refugees from Syria had never worked in New Zealand in that period. Interestingly, several of this group had come to New Zealand with extensive experience in trade or professions, including owning a business, and they were also among the oldest interviewed. They expressed frustration at not being able to get a job in their area of expertise.

Targeted employment assistance and services to enable this group of former refugees to re-train may help them into employment. Assistance might also include managing their expectations about the type of work they might have to consider as a stepping-stone towards their desired job.

Former refugees aspire to improve their employment outcomes

Improving English is a pathway to sustainable and meaningful employment

Employment that is part time, casual or temporary tends to dominate former refugees' early years of working in New Zealand. While the majority of participants were working at three years, only a few were still working in the job they first obtained in New Zealand. In addition, many of those working at three years were in part-time and low-skilled employment.

Some former refugees felt the need to get into employment as soon as possible for financial reasons and to support their families. Participants raised this as one of the major barriers to undertaking further English study. While a few participants did comment that employment helped them to improve their English, there needs to be a balance between the emphasis on gaining employment and learning English. Where former refugees trade off learning English for employment, they still need to have opportunities to develop their English, particularly if their work is solitary or with those speaking their own language.

Education and training are pathways to better employment outcomes

Over half of the participants were studying or said they would like to study in the future. Those who were currently studying were doing university, polytechnic and community education courses. Participants saw study as a pathway to meet their goals for the type of work they would like to do in the future. While a couple of those who were studying arrived in New Zealand as teenagers, others arrived in their 30s and 40s.

When asked what had helped them get into study, participants mentioned a variety of factors, including support from teachers, their own initiative and their improving English. Barriers to study included financial and family pressures and lack of English ability.

For many participants, undertaking study appears to be something that occurs two or three years after arriving in the country. This time has afforded them the opportunity to learn enough English for academic study and to understand the New Zealand education system. Career advice for former refugees needs to include discussion around pathways into study and how prior skills can be built on. Expectations also need to be managed around the fact academic study may not be possible for many in the first year or two after arrival, but can be part of a longer-term plan.

Several former refugees hoped to set up their own businesses

Three participants had established their own businesses: one had just started their business full time following an unpaid apprenticeship, and two were using their businesses to help fund their study. In addition, several mentioned their desire to start a business; studying and improving English were pathways to that dream.

Support for former refugees to start businesses is an important feature of pathways into employment. However, consideration needs to be given as to whether some former refugees see setting up a business as the only option for themselves given the difficulties of getting employment. Further research could explore their motivations for establishing businesses and the sustainability of these businesses.

Support is significant for the first step into employment, but one size does not fit all

Perceptions of support from agencies were mixed

Most participants could recall support from the New Zealand Red Cross in becoming work-ready and gaining employment. This support included career advice, support to develop a CV and training in how to do an interview. Some said the Red Cross had helped them get their first job or had found them work experience opportunities. Several participants commented positively on the support of the Red Cross and the government more generally and the support they had in getting into work specifically.

However, several spoke negatively about the support from the Red Cross or other agencies. Negative perceptions related to unmet expectations or difficult experiences with particular staff or volunteers. In addition, the level of support from agencies appeared to vary across different regions.

One size does not fit all

Participants had insights into how the government or other organisations could help refugees into work. Several participants suggested that when considering training and employment opportunities, the government and other organisations should consider the individual needs of each former refugee and their specific skills, background and aspirations. This included the need for the Red Cross to tailor training to former refugees with very different skill levels and education. Another suggestion along these lines was to consider work opportunities in settlement locations and match these to former refugees' skill sets when deciding where to settle former refugees.

Providing work experience is crucial

Over half of the participants had been involved in some form of voluntary work. For many this was within their ethnic community. For others, voluntary work included coaching or working in shops or sales, community gardens, and hairdressers and barbershops. Voluntary work was a way of gaining experience, learning English and giving back to society.

A few participants suggested that former refugees be provided with work experience early on in settlement, even if this work was in a voluntary capacity. Work experience was seen as beneficial for learning English and practical skills and ensuring people do not end up on the unemployment benefit with very little to do.

Former refugees provided a variety of insights

Table ES1 gathers together the advice participants provided to other former refugees on learning English and gaining employment. It also brings together the insights provided by former refugees throughout the report. Where advice or insights were most common, these have been bolded. The shaded boxes provide insights or suggestions for further research made by the researchers based on the evidence from the interviews.

Table ES1: Participants' advice to other former refugees and insights for the government and other organisations

Advice to other former refugees		Section
English	<p>Commit to classes and studying English</p> <p>Practice English as much as possible and socialise</p>	2.7
Employment	<p>Have a good grasp of English before committing to a job</p> <p>If working, get a job that will support increased fluency in English</p> <p>Study for a New Zealand qualification, particularly those who are younger</p> <p>Network and seek support with finding work</p> <p>Understand your employment rights and obligations</p> <p>Be willing to persevere when looking for work</p> <p>Learn to drive</p> <p>Be willing to take any job to start with</p>	3.7
Insights for the government and other organisations		Section
English	<p>Provide further opportunities for home tutor/one-on-one tutoring</p> <p>Having bilingual teachers would be beneficial for learning English in a class setting</p> <p>Collaborate with former refugee communities on the provision of English classes with the community</p> <p>Don't move learners between English class levels prematurely</p> <p>Special tailored English classes based on level and situation would be useful</p> <p>Incorporate volunteer work or hands-on training into English courses</p>	2.8
<p>Overall insight</p> <p>Provide opportunities to learn and use English in the workplace, particularly where work is solitary or where speaking own language.</p>		

Employment	<p>One size does not fit all – consider individual needs in advice and employment opportunities</p> <p>Providing work experience is crucial</p> <p>Help former refugees to move towards independence</p> <p>Train and employ refugees in areas of shortages</p> <p>Provide off-shore classes preparing former refugees for work in New Zealand</p> <p>Help former refugees set up businesses.</p>	3.8
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Overall insights

- Target employment assistance and services to enable older former refugees with prior qualifications to retrain and/or manage expectations about the type of work that may be possible as a stepping-stone.
- Further research could explore motivations of former refugees for establishing businesses and the sustainability of these businesses.

Other	<p>Provide extra support for former refugees (health, drivers' licence, vulnerable people)</p> <p>Former refugees are overwhelmed by information in their first few months – provide refresher courses/follow-up</p> <p>Plan carefully where to settle former refugees so that it is in safe neighbourhoods and near work opportunities</p> <p>Ensure former refugees arriving in holiday periods don't fall through the gaps</p> <p>Support the development and strengthening of former refugee communities</p>	6.3
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Overall insight

The expectation of former refugees needs to be managed that for some, academic study may not necessarily be possible in their first year or two after arrival, but is part of a long-term plan.

Conclusion

After three years of living in New Zealand, former refugees are making good progress towards integrating socially and economically. However, challenges remain, and former refugees aspire to better employment outcomes and to keep improving their English fluency. Information and support they receive from the government and other organisations, particularly in their first year in New Zealand, is crucial to help former refugees achieve their aspirations. However, there may be ways to better target this support and ways in which those who need support over the long term can continue to receive this support.

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1 Introduction

The New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy was developed and implemented in 2013, with the aim of improving settlement outcomes for refugees. The overarching outcome of the strategy is to ensure that:⁵

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.

The purpose of the current research was to explore employment and English language outcomes for former refugees three years post-arrival in New Zealand. Its aim was twofold: to understand the ways in which services (including provision of information⁶) have contributed to settlement outcomes or acted as barriers and to understand former refugees' perspectives on gaps in services.

1.1 Refugee Quota Programme

New Zealand operates a refugee quota system that allows for the settlement of 1,000 (plus or minus 10%) refugees each year.⁷ Refugees are referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and subsequently selected by Immigration New Zealand for residence.

Quota refugees have their travel to New Zealand paid for by the government and have access to a variety of on-arrival services, including health and education assessments and orientation. The settlement process includes six weeks at Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre before their move into communities around New Zealand where they receive specific settlement support. This support is provided to them during their first 12 months in the community by the New Zealand Red Cross⁸, which the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment contracts to provide these services. The services include a community orientation programme that complements the reception programme at the resettlement centre. This links refugees to the mainstream services they require to support their settlement in communities, including health services, schools, English language classes and employment services.

The top four source countries of quota refugee arrivals from 2014/15 to 2017/18 were Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Colombia.

⁵ MBIE. (2012). *Refugee Settlement: New Zealand Resettlement Strategy*. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, p 3. <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/document-library/search?keywords=New+Land+New+Life&df=&dt=&submit=Search>

⁶ Former refugees receive a variety of information at the Mangere Refugee Reception Centre and from the Red Cross.

⁷ The refugee quota will increase to 1,500 from July 2020: J Arden and I Lees-Galloway. (2018). Refugee quota increases to 1,500 in 2020. Release 19 September 2018. www.beehive.govt.nz/release/refugee-quota-increases-1500-2020

⁸ The New Zealand Red Cross is also referred to as the Red Cross throughout the report.

1.2 New Zealand Red Cross is government funded to provide services to former refugees

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment contracts New Zealand Red Cross to provide refugee resettlement support services for the first year after new refugee families and individuals arrive in their communities. Former refugees are supported by qualified social workers, case workers, cross-cultural workers and trained refugee support volunteers who help them understand Kiwi culture, learn to manage systems and find work. The services include:

- **settlement support** – practical support with day-to-day settling into the community
- **settlement planning with families** – long-term thinking and planning
- **orientation information sessions** – which are provided by a variety of local government and non-governmental organisations.
- **community integration** – linking former refugee families to their wider communities, for example doctors (GPs) and other health providers, schools and English language classes.

The Ministry of Social Development funds the New Zealand Red Cross to run the Pathways to Employment Programme, which is available to anyone from a refugee background aged 18 to 64 who is receiving a Work and Income benefit. This programme helps former refugees plan their employment, education, training and career goals and, ultimately, find work. Services include:

- helping to plan employment and career goals
- assessing skills, including English language skills
- referring to English or vocational training opportunities
- assisting with the writing of CVs and cover letters
- helping make appointments and get job interviews, as well as coaching on interview skills
- finding work trials and work experience
- encouraging employers to employ people from refugee backgrounds
- assisting with workplace integration.

1.3 Employment and English language are key markers of integration and the greatest challenges for former refugees

Employment is identified in the literature as a key component of settlement and integration. It gives former refugees an income, a social context and identity. Refugees themselves identify employment as pivotal to the process of settlement and integration. Proficiency in the language of their new country is identified as a key facilitator of refugee integration and the literature is clear that a lack of proficiency in the local language is a major barrier to employment and accessing training.

Refugee Voices identified entry into the labour market as the greatest challenge for former refugees.⁹ This finding was reiterated in *New Land, New Life*, where former refugees identified employment as a key to integration.¹⁰ Nearly half said that having a good job was one of the three most important factors for feeling part of New Zealand life, and when asked what their goals were for the next five years, former refugees most commonly wanted a job or a better job. However, only 42% of former refugees had worked in the seven days before taking part in the research. The research showed that 10 years after arrival, employment was the main source of dissatisfaction of living in New Zealand and along with English, for women and older people it remained the main challenge.

1.4 Refugee Resettlement Strategy was developed and implemented in 2013 to improve settlement outcomes

The Refugee Resettlement Strategy supports five key outcomes: self-sufficiency, participation, health and wellbeing, education and housing. The strategy intent is for refugees (regardless of their refugee category) to have access to support services that would improve their overall settlement outcomes. Table A1 in Appendix 1 explains these outcomes in more detail.

Progress in improving the integration outcomes is measured annually against seven success indicators and one target approved by the government. The indicators for self-sufficiency are the proportion of working-age refugees in paid employment and the proportion of working-age refugees receiving unemployment-related benefits. The rate of employment increases as length of time in New Zealand increases. Fourteen percent of refugees who arrived from 2012 to 2017 were in employment at one year post-arrival. This rate increased to 35% at three years and 43% at five years.¹¹

1.5 Evaluation of the Refugee Reception Programme

In 2015, Cognition Education Ltd was commissioned to undertake interviews with cohorts of quota refugees at the end of their six-week stay at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre and at nine months after they had moved into the community. These interviews were structured interviews to examine the extent to which immediate and intermediate outcomes outlined in the Refugee Resettlement Strategy were being met. In 2017 and 2018, based on the findings from these interviews, changes were made to the reception programme and the community orientation programme.

The changes to the reception and orientation programmes included a stronger focus on employment and were intended to combine the provision of information with activities designed to engage working-age refugees in practical preparations for work.

In 2018, Cognition Education Ltd interviewed two groups of refugees who had been in New Zealand for one and three years (34 people were interviewed at one year and 30 at three years). These interviews gathered information on a broad range of areas related to the five outcome areas of the strategy. The interviews found that at one year, few refugees were in

⁹ New Zealand Immigration Service (2004). *Refugee Voices: A journey towards resettlement*. Wellington: Department of Labour. <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/document-library/search?keywords=Refugee+Voices&df=&dt=&submit=Search>

¹⁰ W Searle, E Prouse, E L'Ami, A Gray, and A Gruner. (2014). *New Land, New Life: Long-term settlement of refugees in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/document-library/search?keywords=New+Land+New+Life&df=&dt=&submit=Search>

¹¹ MBIE. (2018). *New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy: Success indicators and measures – outcomes update for 2017/18*. <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/documents/refugees/nzrrs-dashboard.pdf>

employment and most were concentrating on learning English. At three years, around half of working-age refugees were in employment, though some expressed frustration with their employment and wanted to improve the type of work they were doing.

While the above Cognition interviews touched on services and support that refugees received, they does not examine in detail the ways in which these supports have contributed or acted as barriers to settlement outcomes. Cognition Education Ltd recommended that further interviews concentrate on employment outcomes.

1.6 Current report is based primarily on interviews as well as some monitoring data

For this report, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 28 former refugees who arrived in New Zealand in the July 2016 intake. Around half of those interviewed were men (15) and half were women (13), and the top countries of origin were Bhutan (8), Syria (5) and Colombia (4). However, a variety of other countries were represented among those interviewed. Six participants were aged 18 to 24, 17 were aged 25 to 45, and five were aged 46 or over.

All participants had been interviewed by Cognition Education Ltd at the end of their six-week reception programme at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre and at nine months in the community. Of the original 39 interviewed at six weeks, nine could not be located and one did not wish to participate in an interview. Appendix 2 provides further details about the methodology.

Monitoring data on employment outcomes for former refugees is presented in chapter 3. The 'self-sufficiency' indicator in the Refugee Resettlement Strategy is monitored each year using the Integrated Data Infrastructure. This report presents employment outcomes at one, two, three and five years for quota refugees who arrived in New Zealand from 2013/14 to 2017/18. In addition, we present breakdowns of the characteristics of refugees in employment, including industries of employment and employment rates by region of settlement. All quota refugees arriving from 2013/14 to 2018/19 are included in this analysis.

1.7 There are limitations to the research

This research was based primarily on a qualitative study of a small sample of former refugees who had been in New Zealand for three years. Qualitative research helps us gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It does not provide an analysis of the extent of the issues raised.

In addition, former refugees were asked to talk about support and services they had received up to three years ago – as a result their recall for specific details was limited. This included clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the different agencies involved in settlement. While the New Zealand Red Cross is contracted to provide services to former refugees in their first year of settlement, they are also able to access mainstream services. However, former refugees were able to talk more broadly about what had helped them or barriers to settlement.

All interviews were conducted face to face and in English with the support of interpreters over the phone. Interviews were worded simply. However, the interview data will reflect participants' understanding of the meaning and intent of each question. In addition, while interpreters are trained to repeat each question and response word for word, in some cases they paraphrased.

1.8 Structure of this report

This report is structured around the main research questions.

- Chapter 2 examines former refugees' progress in learning English language, including barriers to learning English and insights for the government and other organisations.
- Chapter 3 presents information on employment outcomes for former refugees, including barriers to employment, former refugees' aspirations and insights for the government or other organisations.
- Chapter 4 examines what former refugees perceive to be their successes and challenges in their first few years in New Zealand.
- Chapter 5 presents information from interviews around family and community issues.
- Chapter 6 examines more general insights that participants had for ways in which the government or other organisations could support former refugees.

2 After three years, improving English is still a major focus for former refugees

English language fluency has been identified as one of the most important factors in the settlement process and an avenue into paid work and education, among other outcomes.¹² Learning a new language takes time – research shows that a quarter of former refugees who had been in New Zealand for five years said they still could not speak English well.¹³ Research also shows that it is older people and people with childcare responsibilities who find it harder to learn English.¹⁴

This chapter highlights findings around experiences in learning English from interviews with former refugees three years after their arrival in New Zealand.

2.1 Former refugees undertook a variety of English courses

One of the many focuses in the orientation at Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre is education, with an emphasis on language skills to enable former refugees to participate in education. On arrival at the centre, refugees undergo a diagnostic assessment to identify their English level. Working-age adults then receive English as an Additional Language course that supports language skills required to live, learn and work in New Zealand.

The New Zealand Red Cross includes an outline of English services locally available as part of its orientation service.

Almost all former refugees had taken an English course in New Zealand

Almost all of the former refugees mentioned participating in at least one English language course in New Zealand. These were provided by a wide variety of sources and at a variety of levels. Participants were not always sure who provided the courses they attended. However, the most commonly referenced courses were offered by English Language Partners, other English language providers and universities.

When asked about the courses they had done since coming to New Zealand, the majority of participants mentioned having taken only one class, while several mentioned having taken multiple classes.

Only a couple of participants mentioned never having participated in an English class. Both said their level of English on arrival was good enough, so they went straight into other education.

I was okay with it, like when I came here. They planned to put me in the ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] class. Then they said no your English is fine so you can go to the language class.

¹² W Searle, E Prouse, E L'Ami, A Gray, and A Gruner. (2014). *New Land, New Life: Long-term settlement of refugees in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

<https://www.mbie.govt.nz/document-library/search?keywords=New+Land+New+Life&df=&dt=&submit=Search>

¹³ New Zealand Immigration Service (2004). *Refugee Voices*. Wellington: Department of Labour.

<https://www.mbie.govt.nz/document-library/search?keywords=Refugee+Voices&df=&dt=&submit=Search>

¹⁴ W Searle, E Prouse, E L'Ami, A Gray, and A Gruner. (2014). *New Land, New Life: Long-term settlement of refugees in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

<https://www.mbie.govt.nz/document-library/search?keywords=New+Land+New+Life&df=&dt=&submit=Search>

Several former refugees were still studying English

Just over half of all participants were no longer studying English at the time of the interview. In a few cases, this was because they had found a job:

I was really interested to try and complete Level 4 but because also my husband wasn't working so I had to go to work.

A few mentioned going on to further study after completing an English course. These were all former refugees who had completed higher-level courses, such as Level 4 or a university-provided English course targeted toward academic study:

I did a six months course for English. It helped me a lot. After that I applied to go to university because I passed the exam.

Several participants mentioned that they were currently participating in an English class. Almost all of those still studying were doing so part time, with most studying no more than three days a week.

Only some former refugees had accessed home tutors

Of those interviewed, some mentioned receiving the help of a one-on-one or home tutor since their arrival and spoke positively about the support:

Whatever I don't understand I will take a note of it and put it aside. When I get there the home tutor she explains it to me far more thoroughly the stuff that I don't understand.

However, of those who talked about home tutoring, a few made comments around not getting the services promised:

They assigned someone but the gentleman was never able to come.

Despite this, many who did not receive a home tutor expressed that a home tutor or one-on-one session would have been useful in their learning. See further section 2.8.

2.2 Most former refugees spoke positively about their progress with English

Participants were asked how they felt about the progress they had made learning English and how they felt about their current level of English after being in New Zealand for three years.

Growing confidence aids communication

Several former refugees reflected on their growing confidence when commenting on their progress:

Now I feel a bit confident and can speak.

Ability to communicate is indicative of progress

Being able to converse and understand effectively were identified by several former refugees as key indicators of their progress in learning English:

I can express myself and I can converse well with other Kiwis.

Over half said English is a difficult language to learn

Just over half of the participants mentioned that they found learning English harder than they expected. They mentioned several difficulties, including vocabulary, slang, and writing:

You know when you want to use an English vocabulary, for every single word that you want to use, vocabulary, there are maybe 10 other vocabulary that can be considered the synonym and have somehow the same meaning.

Several participants also commented more generally negatively on their progress in learning English:

To be honest my English hasn't developed much since being here.

Specific issues with reading and writing English and its complexity were raised by a few participants:

Because English language is very different than Arabic because some letters in English you can read letter but you don't speak and the change. The silent letter ... Always I talk to my teacher why this letter?

English was easier to learn than they expected

When asked whether they had found it easier or harder to learn English than they expected, several former refugees mentioned that it had been easier than they had expected:

I think on the contrary it has been easier. Now it has been easier because I have been familiarising myself with the people who are speaking English in the street or anywhere.

Around a third of participants mentioned that learning English was neither easier nor harder than they expected, so it matched their expectations, and agreed that their English was at the level they had hoped it would be by now:

Well it hasn't been easy but it's not hard as well.

Former refugees want to keep learning

Several participants spoke of how they wanted to continue to improve their English language ability through further classes and learning opportunities:

Much better now but I still need to learn. I am much better now than compared to when I first came, but still I am keeping progressing.

2.3 Children were thriving

Research shows that former refugees who arrive as children do well in terms of learning English. *New Land, New Life* found that three-quarters of those who arrived as children (under 13 years) identified English as their best language 10 years on.¹⁵

Participants in this current study were asked what had helped their families most with learning English. Most of those who commented on their family's English progress reflected on the

¹⁵ W Searle, E Prouse, E L'Ami, A Gray, and A Gruner. (2014). *New Land, New Life: Long-term settlement of refugees in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.
<https://www.mbie.govt.nz/document-library/search?keywords=New+Land+New+Life&df=&dt=&submit=Search>

substantial improvement their children were making with English. Friendships were a significant factor in progress:

I think their friends in school especially. I am talking about my daughter. She mingles with everybody.

Commenting on their children's progress, several former refugees mentioned that children have a great ability to learn and pick up languages faster:

For example, children are like a sponge. It can absorb the water as much as it can. It is not like someone who is getting older and have a lot on their mind.

2.4 English has an impact on work and study opportunities

Participants were asked if their level of English had stopped them from doing anything. Just over half of those interviewed reported that they didn't think it had limited them in any way:

It hasn't stopped me because I have a good job.

However, several participants indicated that their level of English had stopped them from doing things since they came to New Zealand, including work, study or everyday tasks.

Level of English was most limiting in the workplace or in finding a job

Several former refugees talked about how their level of English had been an issue both in seeking work and in the work-place. They indicated that it limited the type of work they could apply for or their progression in the job.

Yes I think that I need more English because in the work that I am working now I need more English. So if I want to progress obviously I need more English.

Level of English negatively affected future study

A few participants mentioned that their level of English was the reason they had not gone on to additional study or sought formal qualifications, or that it was making their attempt to study more difficult:

Maybe I would have done a few more courses, not English but other courses if I had good English.

Occasionally, the level of English was a barrier in everyday life

There were a few references to participants' level of English limiting their success in daily tasks such as using services, reading documents and helping their children with the school curriculum:

It is a problem because even if I go to the bank, because of the lack of the language it is quite difficult for me to converse with them, say what I want to say to them ...

2.5 Formal study and socialising help most with English

Participants were asked what had helped them most in learning English. The majority of those interviewed referred to formal English study administered by a variety of education providers as a key aid in learning English:

Basically attending class, not missing classes, trying not to get sick in this class, weekly study, paying attention, arriving on time to class.

Participants credited agencies, particularly the Red Cross, with helping former refugees find these language classes. The schools that provided the classes were also strongly acknowledged as helping English language learning:

Well it started with Red Cross enrolling me in this class, you know the [class] to learn English. Then they were here with me for the first six months supporting me, Red Cross.

The majority of participants mentioned socialising as being the most helpful way to learn English:

I think just going out and talking to people is the most important thing, and listening to people.

Several also credited employment as help in learning English, mainly due to the necessity of English at work. A few also mentioned media found on the internet, movies and music had helped them to learn English.

2.6 Main barriers to learning English were a lack of support and time constraints

Time constraints prevented attendance at English classes

Several participants spoke of a lack of time preventing them from attending English classes or achieving the level of English they wanted. Of those who mentioned time constraints, all but one indicated that work or looking for work was a main barrier to studying English:

I finished Level 1 but I aimed to go to Level 2 but because of my work I am not able to continue.

A few participants also spoke of childcare as a barrier to attending English classes, and the difficulty in navigating looking after their children, working and studying:

I cannot study full time because when my brother was here he used to help me and then I used to study full time ... Now I have to pick up my daughter and I have to go to work and then I cannot study full time.

Frustrations with education providers, the Red Cross and other organisations former refugees

A few participants outlined specific issues they had with the classes they were sent to. Some thought they were placed at an inappropriate level, and others didn't like the way they were taught:

They came and decided to shift me to another level, a higher level ... I wasn't able to participate much but still they decided to move me to another level higher and that was much more difficult.

A lack of support from various agencies was also mentioned by several participants as a barrier to learning English:

They [the agency] had nothing to offer if you could speak English. All they had to offer was for some who couldn't speak English.

Personal characteristics as barriers to learning English

Participants who said they found their level of English limited them tended to be older. A few older participants specifically attributed their difficulty with learning English and lack of progress to their age:

When I was a child I was able to learn quickly, but as I am getting older it is not the same.

A few others said shyness or fear of making mistakes inhibited their learning and practising English.

Kiwi accent is difficult to understand

The New Zealand accent was mentioned by a few participants as a barrier to improving and using English since they arrived. Participants spoke of how any experience with English they had before arriving in New Zealand did not help them to understand the accent:

We are more familiar with American English, so when we come to New Zealand and we are dealing with New Zealand British accent, especially slang ...

Other barriers to learning English – health issues and distance

Other barriers to learning English mentioned by one or two participants were health issues preventing English study and the distance to the course making attendance difficult.

2.7 Most common advice to former refugees was to commit to study

Participants were asked what advice they would give to new refugees about learning English. Half of the participants emphasised the importance of committing to classes and studying English to be successful:

They need more study. They need to get off the couch. They need to go and study.

Several participants also talked about how former refugees just have to practise as much as possible and in as many situations as possible to improve their English:

If they want to learn just don't be shy. Just be confident to yourself, take it easy and you will learn it.

Socialising was also recommended by several former refugees:

Make new friends and just get along and spend time communicating.

A few participants also advised that getting work was an effective way for new refugees to learn English in New Zealand.

2.8 Participants had insights into how the government and other organisations could help former refugees to learn English

Participants were asked if they had any insights on what the government and other organisations could do differently to help former refugees learn English.

Home tutors would help English language learning

While a few participants mentioned receiving one-on-one tuition or a home tutor, others suggested this as a way of helping former refugees to improve their English.

Maybe providing a home tutor or something that could help my English better.

Participants said a home tutor would provide more opportunity for conversational English practice and to ask questions than was possible in a class situation. There was also more flexibility with having a home tutor, allowing former refugees to also work and keep learning English.

Bilingual teachers would be useful for learning English

A few former refugees mentioned that having a teacher who understood their first language would be beneficial for learning English in a class setting:

I think the best option for us to learn is just to have somebody who speaks Arabic and English to come and teach us. It would be much better.

Other insights

Other insights for the government and other organisations made by one or two participants included:

- collaborate with former refugee communities on the provision of English classes in the community
- have special English classes based on level and situation
- don't move learners between English class levels prematurely
- incorporate volunteer work or hands-on training into English courses.

3 Former refugees aspire to improve their employment outcomes

This chapter brings together administrative data on former quota refugees' employment outcomes from 2013/14 to 2017/18 and findings from interviews with former refugees about their experiences of working in New Zealand.

3.1 Employment outcomes for former refugees are monitored annually

The 'self-sufficiency' indicator in the Refugee Resettlement Strategy is monitored yearly using the Integrated Data Infrastructure.¹⁶ Data on those employed is reported for cohorts at one, two, three and five years post-arrival. This section presents information of employment outcomes for cohorts from 2013/14 to 2017/18. It also includes analysis by industry and region of employment and age, gender and nationality for cohorts from 2013/14 to 2018/19 which are combined to ensure sufficient numbers for the analysis¹⁷.

About a third of former quota refugees are in work three years after they arrive, primarily in low-skilled and low-paying industries

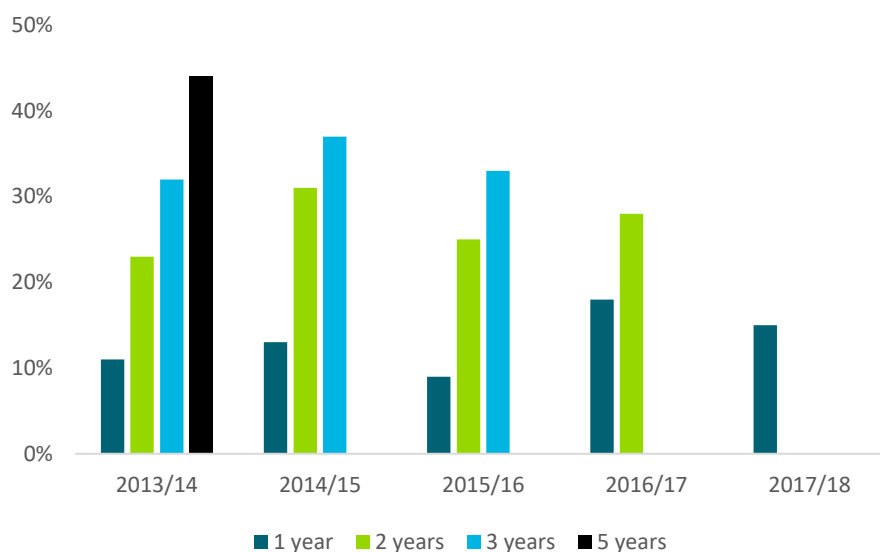
Figure 3.1 shows results for former refugee cohorts from 2013/14 to 2017/18 on employment rates at one, two, three and five years. It shows that employment outcomes steadily increase over time. At three years, around a third of former refugees are in employment. This data does not include former refugees in self-employment.

Analysis shows that 18% of the 2016/17 cohort (from which the sample of refugees for the interviews was drawn) were employed at one year and 28% at two years. Employment data at three years is not yet available.

¹⁶ Refugees are counted as being in paid employment if they are recorded in the Integrated Data Infrastructure taxation tables (from Inland Revenue) as having received income from wages/salaries in the month of the reference period (that is, at 12, 24, 36 and 60 months post-arrival) and if they are present in New Zealand on the relevant date.

¹⁷ The numbers in the 2018/19 cohort were too small to report separately in the employment outcomes analysis include in Figure 3.1 but have been included where cohorts are combined.

Figure 3.1: Working-age former refugees in employment at one, two, three and five years, 2013/14 to 2017/18¹⁸



The top three industries of employment for refugees arriving in 2013/14 to 2018/19 at three years are Administrative and Support Services; Manufacturing; and Accommodation and Food Services (see Appendix 3, Table A2).

Former refugees working in Nelson have the highest employment rates

Over half of former refugees arriving from 2013/14 to 2018/19 who were living in Nelson were working three years after they arrived in New Zealand (see Appendix 3, Table A3). This compares with nearly a quarter (23%) in the Auckland region. Different employment outcomes between regions may be a result of the different characteristics of the refugees settled in the areas or different employment opportunities in the regions.

Employment outcomes vary by age, gender and nationality

Employment rates for former refugees three years after arriving in New Zealand differ considerably depending on various demographic characteristics. Those aged 51 to 64 were considerably less likely to be employed than younger people. Only 15% were employed at three years compared with around a third or more of younger groups (see Appendix 3, Table A4).

Men were more likely than women to be working at all time periods. Three years after arriving in New Zealand, nearly half of men were employed compared with a quarter of women.

Data also shows that some nationalities have better outcomes than others. Former refugees from Colombia and Bhutan were much more likely to be in employment at three years than those from other countries (see Appendix 3, Table A5). Those not doing so well are former from Iraq, Myanmar, Syria and Afghanistan.

¹⁸ See Disclaimer in Footnote 20

3.2 In their first few years of employment, former refugees tend to be in part-time, casual and temporary employment

Research shows that refugees who do get work in New Zealand tend to be employed in jobs with low rates of pay and high levels of temporary work. *New Land, New Life* showed that for nearly half of former refugees (47%) their first job in New Zealand was as a labourer.¹⁹ However, after 10 years or more, a quarter were working in technician or trades occupations and 11% were working as a manager or in a professional occupation, indicating that the first job can serve as a stepping stone into more skilled occupations.

After three years, only a few former refugees were still in the job they first obtained

Interviews by Cognition Education Ltd at nine months after arrival, showed that around a third of those interviewed were employed. Jobs had been secured through friends and connections or the Red Cross. Interviews for the current report showed that jobs first obtained were wide-ranging, including work in restaurants, manufacturing, supermarkets, and orchards. A small number had got work as interpreters or community workers.

Participants were generally positive about the jobs they first had in New Zealand, stating that they found the work interesting, it broadened their social networks, and they had good support from employers and colleagues:

It was a tiring job ... But at the same time it make me know people like [occupation].
It made me learn so many cultures like the Kiwi culture and ... the Māori.

However, several expressed dissatisfaction with their first jobs. Only a few were still in their job and reasons for leaving included that the hours of work were difficult for them or that they were mistreated by colleagues or employers. Others left their first job because of health issues or because they were working on their own and not learning English. Others were on a casual contract that came to an end or had simply found another job they preferred.

The guy who was already working there ... He didn't want me to work there. He was treating me very bad.

It was not going to help me learn English because I was by myself.

The majority of former refugees were working, and many were satisfied with their employment

Around two-thirds of the participants in this study were working at the time of the interview, including a few who were self-employed. This is a higher proportion than that shown in the data on outcomes at three years (section 3.1) and this may be, in part, because that data does not include those who were self-employed. Other reasons may be that those interviewed were more successfully settling into New Zealand or that some jobs that former refugees are working in were paid in cash, so not captured by tax data.

In many cases these jobs were part time, and some former refugees were working a couple of jobs at the same time. Five participants were working part-time jobs as cleaners. In some cases, they had two separate cleaning jobs or they were cleaning in addition to another type of job. Four participants were working as community support workers or interpreters and a couple were working as taxi drivers. Other jobs included working in security or maintenance, as a courier driver or as a kitchen hand. Three participants had established their own

¹⁹ W Searle, E Prouse, E L'Ami, A Gray, and A Gruner. (2014). *New Land, New Life: Long-term settlement of refugees in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.
<https://www.mbie.govt.nz/document-library/search?keywords=New+Land+New+Life&df=&dt=&submit=Search>

businesses: one had just started the business full time following an unpaid apprenticeship and two were using the business to fund their studies.

The majority of participants working expressed satisfaction with their work. Several mentioned generally that they enjoyed it. Others mentioned that they enjoyed it because it helped them with their English and it meant they could afford to buy things they wanted, and that they were treated well by their employer and colleagues:

Also, because I work with the Kiwi people so they teach me.

A couple of participants indicated that they were happy with their current employment because it was building on their existing skills and experience. One former refugee said that they had never expected to get such a good job in New Zealand:

I was thinking like maybe I had to go for the cleaning work in New Zealand but I fortunately got this kind of job.

A few also mentioned satisfaction in being able to contribute to others through their work.

A few former refugees expressed dissatisfaction with their employment

Dissatisfaction with work was primarily related to the type of job not being what the participant wanted to do. They were working at the particular job only because it was all they were able to get or they were financially under pressure to take a job:

For my education I can only do jobs like this.

Other difficulties included financial struggles from being able to work only part time:

When working part-time it is not enough so it is tough ... When people become independent and financially independent they can go on easily.

Voluntary work experience is crucial

Over half the participants had been involved in some form of voluntary work. For many this was being engaged in their ethnic community in various ways (discussed in chapter 5). For others voluntary work included coaching or working in shops or sales, community gardens and hairdressers.

Voluntary work was a way of gaining work experience, learning English and giving back to society. In a few instances, the Red Cross had suggested or obtained the voluntary work:

Red Cross shows us that [voluntary] job. They said it was good for work experience, so you get to know how to work, how to act in a work-place.

3.3 Main barriers to work are lack of English fluency and inability to use previous qualifications and skills

Former refugees with previous qualifications were re-training or taking any jobs they could get

Around a third of participants had qualifications and skills from their own or another country, including qualifications in engineering, nursing, teaching and information technology. However, they were not able to use these qualifications in New Zealand without further training. While a few had managed to get their qualification recognised in New Zealand, they still needed to do further study to work in their field:

...we came here with different skills and different qualifications and then when we come to New Zealand we have to start from the beginning ...

A few mentioned that they had experience working in a trade but that in New Zealand a certificate or diploma was required to get a job in that trade.

Some participants had decided to move in a different direction and re-train or take jobs that they could do. A few were still hoping they might be able to do further training to work in their area of expertise.

A couple of participants mentioned that it was difficult to prove their qualifications because they had fled their country without documents.

A minority of former refugees had never worked since coming to New Zealand, and they tended to have extensive prior work experience

A minority of participants had never worked in New Zealand, including all the Syrians who were interviewed. Data on employment outcomes in section 3.2 shows that Syrians have lower employment rates than former refugees from other nations.

Interestingly, several of this group of former refugees had come to New Zealand with extensive experience in trades or professions, including owning their own businesses. They were also among the oldest of those interviewed. A few of these participants expressed frustration at not being able to get a job in their area of expertise:

Of course I do want to work but I don't believe I will have an opportunity to work with the trade that I am experienced ... and enjoy working.'

Two people in this group had childcare responsibilities but were also studying, trying to re-train in their area of expertise. A few others were looking for work but were feeling despondent about their possibilities. As one participant put it, they were:

Talented with no job.

Lack of English fluency limits the type of job former refugees can do

A lack of English fluency was mentioned by a few participants as the reason they had not yet found work in New Zealand:

Without the language it is not going to be possible to do the job that I know how to do well.

Several participants also said that the type of job they could get in New Zealand was limited by their level of English:

I want to work full time at other work, not this part-time job ... I wanted to go into [type of job] but I need to improve my English.

Several former refugees raised concerns about a lack of job opportunities

A few participants indicated that there were no job opportunities where they were living or that the only work available was seasonal and casual:

Well in general in [city] there isn't work. I didn't find manufacturers or factories around here that gives a chance for people to work. Maybe if we were talking somewhere else, another city ... But here there isn't much.

A few others mentioned that the type of work they were interested in or were able to do was not available:

I was expecting to work as [type of job]. That was my huge expectation. Now it has changed.

Other barriers to employment

Other barriers to working in New Zealand that one or two participants mentioned were:

- not having a driver licence
- age (the type of work they wanted was available only to younger people)
- that the system makes it easier to be on the benefit than to work
- discrimination against former refugees by employers and colleagues
- the stress of resettlement
- other responsibilities (for example, child care or study), which mean only part-time work is possible.

3.4 Red Cross provides significant support around work, but perspectives on this support are mixed

Red Cross is contracted to provide employment services to former refugees

The Ministry of Social Development contracts the New Zealand Red Cross to provide the Pathways to Employment Programme. (See section 1.2 for further details about these services.)

In 2016/17, outcomes from the Red Cross Pathways to Employment programme were:²⁰

- 205 former refugees employed in roles with more than 15 hours of paid employment
- 156 former refugees engaged in work experience, volunteering, casual work and/or paid work of less than 15 hours per week
- 40 former refugees exited from a benefit as a result of commencing full-time study.

Interviews by Cognition Education Ltd at nine months after arrival showed that most former refugees had undertaken work-preparation activities, including two-thirds who had undertaken the Pathways to Employment programme. Other job preparation activities included studying English and learning to drive.

Several former refugees commented positively about the support they received to find employment

Most participants could recall support from the Red Cross in becoming work-ready and gaining employment. Several commented on support to develop or re-draft a CV:

It was really helpful. They helped me write a CV.

Several mentioned work orientation, career advice or help preparing for interviews. They recalled being given advice on how to get a job, discussions around their skills and career aspirations, and how to do an interview:

They [Red Cross] just interviewed us and they just illuminated what skills we have. They matched our skill with the local companies.

²⁰ This group includes quota refugees, convention refugees, and people arriving through the family support category.

However, one participant said the information provided was too much all at once.

Some said the Red Cross had helped them get their first job or had found them work experience opportunities. The Red Cross helped by applying for jobs on their behalf and informing them about available jobs:

The Red Cross has helped to get me to work at that seasonal work in the farm. Then I have done it by myself.

A couple of participants said it was Work and Income (Ministry of Social Development) that had supported them to undertake training, find work or find work experience. Another couple of participants said the Red Cross was helping them to find work.²¹

Several participants commented positively on the Red Cross and the government more generally and the support they had received in getting work:

The government is trying really hard for people to find jobs. They are doing everything they are able to do.

Several former refugees spoke negatively about the support they received to find employment

In a few cases where participants spoke negatively of the Red Cross, this was because they had expected the Red Cross to find them a job and they were disappointed when this did not happen:

There is this Red Cross Pathways to Employment. They were not great at finding jobs.

Reasons for lack of support from the Red Cross or Work and Income included that the former refugee was capable on their own or simply that there were no jobs for them in their areas of expertise:

When I was with the Red Cross, because I was capable ... they had this impression we really did not need them.

When I go to Work and income I told them what I am good at. I am good to be a plumber. Then they say ... we will find you a job as a butcher.

Lack of good communication from the Red Cross was raised by a couple of participants:

I have gone to the Red Cross and they made me fill some forms. Then I don't know what happened.

A couple of other participants were concerned that the Red Cross supports former refugees for only six months, or a year at the most, and then people are on their own. One participant mentioned that, as a result, established former refugees end up helping a lot of people in their community who still need support.

3.5 Former refugees aspire to improve their employment outcomes

Participants were asked what sort of work they would like to be doing in five years' time. Responses varied and included starting up a business and getting a better job or any job. Some spoke about their aspirations to study.

²¹ The Red Cross Pathways to Employment Programme does not have a time limit.

Those who mentioned the desire to start a business said that studying, improving English and saving money were pathways to that dream:

If I can improve my English I just want to do this on my own, like a business.

Studying is a pathway to employment for many former refugees, but it has challenges

Over half of the participants were studying or said that they hoped to study in the future. Study was seen as a pathway to meet their goals or the type of work they would like to do in the future.

I want to study too. Because you know my dream before I came to New Zealand, my dream [was] to be a [occupation].

Around a third of participants were studying. They were studying at universities, at polytechnics and in community education courses. Studies included engineering, design, political science, business, accounting and finance, social work and hairdressing. Some were doing foundation or preparatory courses to do nursing or to apply to join the police.

While a couple of those who were studying had arrived in New Zealand as teenagers, all the others were in their 30s and 40s. A few had qualifications gained previously but had decided to study completely new fields. A couple of participants were doing further studies in their area of expertise in the hope of working in that field in New Zealand.

Those who were studying spoke positively about the opportunities that this presented and their hopes for the future. Some said they were studying topics that were their passions, and some commented that a qualification is a ticket to a good job.

I am hoping to get into a good field and help my family financially.

When asked what had helped them get into study, participants mentioned a variety of factors including support from teachers or tutors, their own initiative, having previously studied and improving their English.

Several of those who were studying spoke about the difficulties they had encountered. These included financial pressures paying for study; a lack of information about how StudyLink works, resulting in financial problems; and struggles with English language.

They didn't even give me this important information ... that when you are getting money from StudyLink, if there's a holiday ... the StudyLink will not pay you.

A few of those not studying mentioned barriers, including family and financial pressures and lack of English ability.

If I was alone here ... I would think of studying straight away. But if you are coming with your family there will be a huge responsibility ...

A few former refugees were happy with their current employment

A few participants indicated that they were happy with their current job or they were happy to just be able to do any job when they came to New Zealand:

I was just so happy coming here to New Zealand, and I was happy to do any type of jobs.

A couple of participants hoped that they could get a better job when their English improved:

I wanted to go to aged care full time but I need to improve my English.

3.6 Social networks and initiative are key to getting employment

Participants were asked what had helped them most in finding employment. The majority of those who were employed or who had been employed at some stage in New Zealand credited finding work to the support of their social networks. These networks included friends, family members, teachers and Red Cross volunteers. Support had been in various forms. In some cases, a friend or family member had seen the job and encouraged the participant to apply for it. In other cases, a family member or friend had recommended them for the job because they worked at the same place or knew the employer. And in other cases, a contact in their social group had offered them a job:

It was actually from my football coach who helped me.

Several participants also credited their own initiative in getting work. They searched on the internet using websites such as Neighbourly and approached employers and job agencies.

A couple of participants mentioned that studying English was the most helpful factor in getting them work, and a couple of other participants mentioned courses helping them to prepare for work were most helpful.

3.7 Advice to new refugees, 'learn English before working'

Participants were asked what advice they would give to new refugees about working in New Zealand. Most commonly, this advice was to learn English before committing to a job. Having a good grasp of English meant the types of jobs available would be of better quality; otherwise former refugees would end up in jobs where little English is required and there is little opportunity to improve their English.

If you can speak English you can get a job.

A few mentioned the importance of studying for a qualification in New Zealand. This was particularly important for those who had come to New Zealand when young:

For newcomers I would advise them if they are young to go to school, go to university. If they are older, they need to get some sort of courses and start working.

Networking and seeking support from government agencies were other suggestions for new refugees:

Go to the government agencies that their job is to find work for you. So it is to get in touch with those people.

The easy way to get a job like recommendations through friends...

A couple of participants mentioned that it is important new refugees understand their rights and responsibilities when working in New Zealand. This includes understanding why it is important to pay tax and not work in the hidden economy and the need for employment agreements.

Other advice for new refugees included:

- persevere when looking for work
- get work as that will help with English fluency
- learn to drive
- take any job to start with.

3.8 Former refugees had insights into how the government or other organisations could help refugees into work

Participants were asked if they had any insights on what the government or other organisations could do differently to help former refugees into work. A wide variety of responses were provided.

One size does not fit all

Several participants suggested the government or other organisations consider the individual needs of each former refugee and their specific skills, background and aspirations when considering employment training and opportunities. This included the need for agencies to tailor their programmes to the unique needs of former refugees, for example, different skill levels and education:

The Pathway to Employment programme should not be the same for everyone. Because the people who come with educational qualifications should be getting a different type of training from those who don't have any skills or qualifications.

Other suggestions along this line were to consider work opportunities when deciding what region to settle former refugees in:

what was their reason that they sent me to [place]? Was there a job opportunity for me there? No.

Work experience is crucial

A few participants suggested that former refugees should be provided with work experience early on in settlement, even if this work was in a voluntary capacity. Work experience was seen as beneficial for learning English, learning practical skills and ensuring people did not end up on the unemployment benefit with little to do. A couple of participants indicated that it was important not to let former refugees be on the unemployment benefit for too long and to educate them on the need to find employment:

these are people that in the past they always had to be very busy and didn't have time to think through. Now being idle they fall into a sort of a hole.

Former refugees suggested that more support is needed than is offered

Several participants mentioned that they would like help from the government in finding work, including support with upgrading their qualifications. They indicated that it is difficult for former refugees to get work and that some, particularly with difficult backgrounds, need a lot of support:

So if there is a possibility that whatever skills we have ... and that qualification is upgraded ... that would be better.

Other insights included moving former refugees towards independence

The importance of moving former refugees towards independence by teaching them skills was mentioned by a couple of participants:

Maybe teach us how to put together a CV and not do it for us.

Participants made a variety of other suggestions for ways in which the government could help former refugees into work. These included:

- help former refugees set up businesses

- train and employ former refugees in areas of labour and skill shortages
- provide off-shore classes preparing refugees to work in New Zealand
- don't overwhelm former refugees at the start with lots of information.

4 Former refugees talked about successes, but also many challenges

Participants were asked about their greatest successes since coming to New Zealand and their biggest challenge. They were asked to answer this personally and on behalf of their families. As an introductory question, they were also asked about the good things that had happened to them in the last three years and these are included in the discussion of their successes.

4.1 All former refugees were able to talk about successes and good things in their lives

Success for many former refugees is a better life in New Zealand

For many participants, a new life in New Zealand was one of the highlights of their last three years. Some mentioned that they felt fortunate to live in New Zealand and that it was a beautiful country:

So the greatest success or the greatest happiness is that because of the New Zealand Government I am able to settle in this country.

Others talked about the freedom and safety they felt living in New Zealand:

After 40 years my chance to call myself as a human or maybe get my identification as a New Zealand permanent resident. This is really successful.

Some also spoke about the possibility of a future for themselves and their families:

After we came to New Zealand, now we know there is a bright future for us.

A couple of participants said that coming to the point of feeling settled in New Zealand was a success:

Now I can relate to this country and I can feel this is my country .. that is feel is a success.

Many former refugees spoke proudly of their achievements over the last three years

Several participants said that their greatest success or what they were most proud of was having improved their English. English had enabled them to make friends, gain confidence and participate in society, including gaining employment for some:

The best thing that happened to me is because now I can speak with people.

For others, success was finishing college or going on to study in higher education:

It's the best thing that can happen [going to university] after those things happened to me in the last 10 years.

Several participants said that their biggest success was getting work and moving towards independence. A few spoke about their desire to give back to the country that had helped them:

To be able to support ourselves without the help from the government because the government helped us a lot.

One participant spoke of how proud their first pay, including paying tax, had made them feel:
when I got full paid and paid tax. It is a different feeling when you get it. You can't believe it.

Success for former refugees is their family's achievements

Several participants spoke proudly of their children's achievements. This included that their children were doing well in their education, and, more generally, that they were coping well with life in New Zealand:

I am proud of them and how they [the children] are doing. They don't have issues.

Success for others was that their families were still together despite many changes. One participant spoke about some former refugee families separating due to stress and financial difficulties:

We are still together ... There have been issues in the families when women get job and the males don't have jobs. Not in my family.

A couple of participants had had children since arriving in New Zealand and for them this was the greatest success:

I have a daughter ... and this is another result of having a safe and calm life here.

Former refugees credit the support they received for getting them to where they are three years on

Participants were asked what had helped them and their family most in the last three years. A wide variety of responses were given, but the common theme was the support they received from various sources. Specific support for English or employment is discussed in earlier chapters. In this section, participants talk about more general support with settlement.

Several participants spoke about the support they had had from the New Zealand Government. Some mentioned the government generally, while others spoke about specific agencies (this is covered in more depth in chapter 6).

Support from friends, neighbours, community and family were also common themes as to what had helped participants most in their first few years in New Zealand. Participants spoke about the support and acceptance they had received from those around them:

It is the schools, safe area and the love that we have seen from the people around us and the respect from everyone.

A few participants said that specific achievements had helped them most in their first few years in New Zealand, including improving their English or learning to drive.

4.2 Former refugees face wide-ranging challenges

While several participants said they or their family had not faced any significant challenges or difficulties since coming to New Zealand, the majority had experienced challenges that they spoke about.

Many experienced family-related challenges

Several participants spoke about the difficulties of being separated from family or not being able to bring family to New Zealand:

We don't have any relatives or supporters ... When you have a sibling here that makes you feel much better.

A couple of participants were very frustrated at what they saw as bureaucratic difficulties of bringing family to New Zealand and the prohibitive cost of sponsoring them.

Other significant challenges for participants around their family included family violence, divorce and deaths in the family.

Learning English or obtaining work is a significant challenge

Several participants spoke about the challenges they or their families had experienced learning English or looking for work.

Challenges included difficulties or learning English and not being able to communicate well:

The challenge is the language barrier. If you have a job but don't understand the language it is very hard to do the job.

A few participants said their most significant challenges were around work, looking for work or the impact of not having work. A couple of participants spoke about the difficulties of not having work:

The saddest part is because my husband don't have a job because he is very able to.

Other significant challenges experienced in the last three years

Other significant challenges raised by participants were around health issues, racism and the difficulties of settling into a new country. A couple who raised health issues felt they had not received the treatment they should have had:

We are having problems with the health services. We are not getting the proper treatment we were expecting.

One participant mentioned they had approached the Red Cross for advice about a health issue but were told 'go and find yourself a solution'.

A few participants said they had experienced racism and discrimination, including from agencies. One participant said they were given fewer opportunities at work or were underestimated because they were a former refugee. Another spoke about the bullying their children had received at school because they were different:

My children heard many times that you are [nationality] and you came here just to destroy this country and you should go back home.

Challenges of settling into a new country were raised by a few participants, including stress and isolation. A couple of others raised challenges around the housing they had been placed in, indicating that it was unsuitable.

Other significant challenges were:

- being settled in neighbourhoods or regions they felt were inappropriate due to a prevalence of violence in the area or isolation
- a lack of support from their ethnic community
- the cold weather in New Zealand.

4.3 Acceptance and participation in society are key to feeling part of New Zealand

While the majority of participants said they felt part of New Zealand, several said they did not. For those who did not feel part of New Zealand this was primarily because they had not managed to get work or were experiencing other difficulties:

I want to feel that way but sometimes because of some certain problems I cannot feel it here.

A couple of participants also mentioned that getting citizenship was an important step to feeling part of New Zealand, but that it involved a wait of five years. One participant also mentioned that having their wider family in New Zealand would help them feel a part of society.

Feeling accepted was commonly mentioned as a significant factor in feeling part of New Zealand.

The kiwi people and the New Zealand society they really welcome us.

However, a few participants also said that former refugees also need to take responsibility to learn about New Zealand and its diverse cultures. Acceptance of their new society was important:

Those who come to New Zealand they have to accept New Zealand culture ... learn the culture so they can be part of the community.

Several participants said that contributing and being part of society is key to feeling part of New Zealand. This included working in New Zealand and contributing through taxes.

Once you start working and providing and giving back to the country then you feel part of society.

Other factors that helped people feel part of New Zealand were a feeling a peace here and being able to speak English.

5 Former refugees provide a lot of support to their families and communities

Participants were asked how they maintain their culture, support their families, and are involved in their own and wider communities.

5.1 Maintaining their own culture is important to majority of former refugees

Maintaining their culture is important to the majority of former refugees. This is accomplished through speaking their own language at home, cooking their own food and celebrating festival days. A few participants raised the importance of children speaking their parents' language, and one participant was concerned some children forget where they have come from.

However, a couple of participants said it was also really important to be willing to adapt to New Zealand customs and cultures and this may mean giving up parts of their own culture:

I think that we should be putting aside our traditions a little bit and being willing to adapt more to the traditions and culture of this country because we are here now.

5.2 Adult children are often the interpreters for their families

Most participants were living with another member of their family – a partner, children or parents. Participants were asked what help they provided to their families.

Adult children living at home supported their families by acting as translators or interpreters and some provided financial assistance to the family as well. One participant said:

But here as soon as we arrive ... all the individuals are on my shoulders. They rely on me.

Men were often involved in providing transport, shopping and taking children out. This was mainly because they were the ones who could drive or who spoke better English. Women were primarily involved in caring for the home and children.

5.3 The majority were involved in their ethnic community, but several spoke of difficulties and divisions

While the majority of participants were involved at some level with their own ethnic community, a substantial minority said they were not involved. Reasons given included that they were too busy with work and family or that they were isolated from their community:

I am not so close to them, my own community, because everyone has got their own family and often are busy with their own stuff.

Several spoke about divisions within their ethnic community or a lack of support from their community. Divisions were due to personality or ideological differences. For a couple of participants, divisions were why they weren't involved in their community:

In our community some women don't like single women because they thought that was my fault.

A few participants were involved at a leadership level in their ethnic community, and several commented that they provide support to their community in various ways. This support included accompanying new refugees to appointments and providing advice and settlement support. A few participants had supported two families through the Red Cross. One participant made this comment about giving back to the community:

The teacher in Mangere said that it is always giving back to your community, what really hit me I really like those words ... it is always giving back to the community.

A few participants mentioned that they were involved in clubs, including university associations and sports clubs.

6 Government and other organisations supported former refugees, but improvement still needed

Comments about the government and other organisations with respect to employment or English language are covered in earlier sections. In this section, we talk about general comments participants made, both positive and negative, including suggestions for improved support.

6.1 Former refugees spoke positively about the support from the government and other organisations

The majority of participants spoke positively about the support they had received from the government or other organisations since arriving in New Zealand. Most often they mentioned the New Zealand Government, but in a few cases they mentioned the Red Cross, the Ministry of Social Development or volunteers.

In several cases, participants said that the New Zealand Government had met their needs, including financial and housing needs:

There was always the housing that they provided, the income and the safe place. So just like so grateful for what New Zealand provided for us.

A few spoke about how supportive the Red Cross, including volunteers, had been:

The Red Cross they picked us up from the airport. We don't forget that they came and picked us up. Because when someone does good things for you, you will never forget it.

A few spoke about the kindness of their volunteers or people they had met through various agencies, some of whom had become friends:

She [the case manager] was very nice, very kind to me at Mangere [Refugee Resettlement Centre].

Several participants spoke about the support they had received from the Red Cross and at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre in getting their driver's licence.

Another positive comment was how supported they had felt at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre:

I say Mangere was the best thing that happened to us, it's a great place, so I think the New Zealand Government is doing really well.

One participant simply said:

I would like to tell the New Zealand Government we really appreciate and really thanks.

6.2 Several former refugees spoke about challenges they had faced with services

Challenges experienced by participants were primarily around not receiving the support they felt they needed. This included support for health matters and getting their driver licence. A couple of participants had been settled in neighbourhoods with a lot of violence and disruption, which had had a significant negative impact on them.

6.3 Former refugees made general suggestions for improvement

Participants' suggestions for improvement centred on the extra support former refugees need when settling in New Zealand. This included support with health needs and getting a driver licence and extra support for vulnerable refugees:

Those who are vulnerable people, they need another programme ... about the New Zealand health system, and everything how to live healthy, how to make themselves independent.

A couple of participants spoke about information overload in their first few months in New Zealand. As a result, former refugees forgot crucial information about agencies that are available to support them and they turned to community members for advice, especially once they no longer had the support of the Red Cross. Suggestions were for refresher courses or a follow-up to the orientation programme. One participant suggested former refugees need a couple of months' break once they arrive in their new settlement region before they start anything significant:

....when you arrive in your city and settle ... just let them a little bit chill ... get relaxed for 1 month, 2 months ... after 2 months ... the majority of refugees are ready ... to do something.

Another participant also spoke about former refugees needing more information on wider community support other than the Red Cross:

....people are relying on Red Cross and they don't know other organisations [that] can support them.

Other suggestions included:

- plan carefully where to settle former refugees so it is in safe neighbourhoods and near job opportunities
- ensure former refugees arriving around Christmas time don't fall through the gaps while people are on holiday
- support the development and strengthening of former refugee communities.

Appendix 1: Refugee Resettlement Strategy outcomes

Outcome	Explanation	Success indicator
Self-sufficiency	All working-age refugees are in paid work or are supported by a family member in paid work	Increased proportion of working-age refugees in paid employment Reduced proportion of working-age refugees receiving unemployment-related benefits
Housing	Refugees live in safe, secure, healthy and affordable homes without needing government housing help	Reduced proportion of refugees receiving housing assistance
Education	English language skills help refugees participate in education and daily life	Proportion of refugee school leavers attaining the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 2 after five years or more in the New Zealand education system.
Health and Wellbeing	Refugees and their families enjoy health, safe and independent lives	Refugees' utilisation of GP services. Refugees' access to mental health services. Proportion of Quota refugee children receiving age-appropriate immunisations.
Participation	Refugees actively participate in New Zealand life and have a strong sense of belonging	

Appendix 2: Method

Objectives

The overall objective of this research was to understand how services (including the provision of information) have contributed or acted as barriers to settlement outcomes and former refugees' perspectives on gaps in services. The research focused on two outcome areas: employment and English language proficiency.

More specifically, the research questions were as follows.

- **Employment**
 - What are former refugees' perspectives on their employment outcomes at one year and three years? What are refugees' goals around employment in both the short term and long term?
 - What services and information have former refugees received around employment? In what ways have these services/information been facilitators of or barriers to employment outcomes?
 - Do former refugees feel their goals around employment have been achieved? If not, why not?
 - What are former refugees' perspectives on the further support they need to meet their employment goals?
- **English proficiency**
 - What are former refugees' perspectives on their progress in English at one year and three years post-arrival?
 - What information/services have former refugees received to progress their English? In what ways have these services/information been facilitators of or barriers to English language outcomes?
 - Do former refugees feel their goals around English language progress have been achieved? Why or why not?
 - What are former refugees' perspectives on the further support they need to meet their English language goals?
- **General**
 - What have been former refugees' biggest challenges in the last year and three years? In what ways have they dealt with this and what helped them?
 - What do former refugees consider to be their greatest achievement in the last year and three years? What helped them achieve this?
 - What do former refugees consider to be their current greatest frustration? How do they plan to deal with it? What would help them?

Method

Sample

The sample for the three-year interviews was drawn from former refugees interviewed at six weeks and nine months for the evaluation of the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Programme. This was a cohort of refugees who were selected from the July 2016 intake and had given their consent to participate in interviews over three years. Table A1 shows the breakdown by nationality, gender, age and current region of those interviewed.

Twenty-eight former refugees were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Of the original 39 who were interviewed at six weeks, nine could not be located and one did not wish to participate in an interview.

Table A1: Characteristics of former refugees interviewed at three years

Nationality	N
Bhutan	8
Syria	5
Colombia	4
Other	11
Gender	
Male	15
Female	13
Age	
Under 25 years	6
25 to 44 years	17
45 years and over	5
Region	
Auckland	5
Waikato	3
Manawatu	7
Wellington	6
Nelson	4
Dunedin	3
Total	28

Recruitment

Interpreters contacted former refugees to ask them if they were willing to participate in an interview and checked whether their contact details (address and email) had changed. Former refugees were sent an information sheet about the research translated into their first language. Participants were asked whether they wished to conduct the interview in English or in their first language.

Where an interpreter was requested, the interpretation was provided over the phone.

Ethics

This research involved contact with highly vulnerable participants (former refugees) and access to confidential and sensitive information. The research was designed, conducted and reported in a manner that respects the rights, privacy and dignity of those affected by and contributing to the project. The research adhered to the standards set out in the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's Human Research and Evaluation Ethics Guidelines and was guided by a recognised code of ethics (the Australasian Evaluation Society's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Evaluations). The project plan for the research was reviewed

by the Research and Evaluation Ethics Panel of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were made aware of what information would be sought and the purpose of the evaluation. It was made clear that all participation was voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw their involvement at any time. The informed consent process was conducted in an appropriate style and language.

Storage of data

The physical data for this project is stored in a secure (locked) cabinet, and electronic data is in restricted folders in the electronic document and records management system of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. All data is accessible only by the immediate project team and will be destroyed after five years. When sending information, care was taken to ensure that data was sent securely and encryption was used.

Confidentiality

Participants were informed that all contact details and personal information gathered for the evaluation would be confidential to the project team and that no names of individuals would be included in the report.

Interacting with vulnerable groups

There is the potential for sponsored refugees to feel under pressure to participate in an interview because they are grateful to New Zealand for providing an opportunity for them to be resettled. To mitigate this, the informed consent process reinforced that participation was voluntary and that their residence status and ability to sponsor family would not be affected by their choice to participate or not. In addition, the information sheet providing background information about the evaluation was translated into relevant languages.

Safety protocols were put in place to ensure the safety of participants and interviewers. The safety protocols focused on ensuring the safety of the people being interviewed, other members of the public and members of the research team. The protocols described the procedures interviewers should follow if it becomes clear during an interview that someone's safety was seriously at risk.

The interview process could raise issues for participants that they might want to discuss further or that might be distressing for some participants and interviewers. A list of appropriate community and support organisations was left with participants in case they needed to revisit issues or seek support. Former refugees were invited to bring a support person to the interview if they wanted to.

As mentioned previously, former refugees were given the option of having an interpreter assist with the interview.

Appendix 3: Additional tables²²

Table A2: Industry of employment, by year (all cohorts 2013/14 to 2018/19)

Industry	Industry at 12 months (%)	Industry at 36 months (%)	Industry at 60 months (%)
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	13	9	5
Manufacturing	18	18	22
Construction	7	9	13
Wholesale Trade	5	4	5
Retail Trade	8	5	8
Accommodation and Food Services	14	11	8
Administrative and Support Services	17	20	17
Education and Training	6	4	3
Health Care and Social Assistance	4	7	9
Other	9	13	11

Table A3: Region by employment (all cohorts 2013/14 to 2018/19)

Region	Employed at 12 months (%)	Employed at 36 months (%)	Employed at 60 months (%)
Auckland	11	23	30
Waikato	9	38	64
Manawatū–Wanganui	17	41	50
Wellington	13	37	45
Nelson	20	56	x
Other	18	37	x

²² The results in these tables and graphs are not official statistics. They have been created for research purposes from the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), managed by Statistics New Zealand. The opinions, findings, recommendations, and conclusions expressed in these tables and graphs are those of MBIE, not Statistics NZ or MSD.

Access to the anonymised data used in this study was provided by Statistics NZ under the security and confidentiality provisions of the Statistics Act 1975. Only people authorised by the Statistics Act 1975 are allowed to see data about a particular person, household, business, or organisation, and the results in tables and graphs have been confidentialised to protect these groups from identification and to keep their data safe.

Careful consideration has been given to the privacy, security, and confidentiality issues associated with using administrative and survey data in the IDI. Further detail can be found in the Privacy impact assessment for the Integrated Data Infrastructure available from www.stats.govt.nz.

The results are based in part on tax data supplied by Inland Revenue to Statistics NZ under the Tax Administration Act 1994. This tax data must be used only for statistical purposes, and no individual information may be published or disclosed in any other form, or provided to Inland Revenue for administrative or regulatory purposes.

Any person who has had access to the unit record data has certified that they have been shown, have read, and have understood section 81 of the Tax Administration Act 1994, which relates to secrecy. Any discussion of data limitations or weaknesses is in the context of using the IDI for statistical purposes, and is not related to the data's ability to support Inland Revenue's core operational requirements.

Table A4: Employment by age (all cohorts 2013/14 to 2018/19)

Age	Employed at 12 months (%)	Employed at 36 months (%)	Employed at 60 months (%)
18 to 30 years	15	33	53
31 to 40 years	13	36	44
41 to 50 years	13	35	44
51 to 64 years	5	15	25

Table A5: Employment by nationality (all cohorts 2013/14 to 2018/19)

Nationality	Employed at 12 months (%)	Employed at 36 months (%)	Employed at 60 months (%)
Afghanistan	15	27	x
Bhutan	20	57	60
Colombia	18	48	55
Iraq	9	21	25
Myanmar	10	23	33
Syria	8	25	x
Other	17	39	48

Note – x denotes that there are insufficient numbers for analysis.

