

participating in fulltime English language classes and/or attending some form of vocational training, while women had fewer opportunities to improve their English and enrol in courses predominantly due to issues with childcare, transportation and the availability of Home Tutors.

■ Experiences of finding employment

With the exception of two, none of the interviewees had gained any employment since arriving in New Zealand. As English language levels improved this was increasingly a high priority. Many have not had the opportunity to work during their time in the camps in Nepal, and therefore have not worked since leaving Bhutan up to 18 years ago. There was reluctance from interviewees to remain on benefit and a desire to be independent and contribute to New Zealand society. The type of help they thought they needed to find a job was; better information sharing across the Bhutanese community, for jobs to be brokered for them, up-skilling and vocational training and community support.

■ Needs for a safe home and family life

Most of those interviewed were happy with their current housing and their location. There were some problems experienced in terms of living in cold and damp conditions, particularly for those resettled in Christchurch and with the size and cost of housing. All but one person reported feeling safe in New Zealand, and were enjoying a more 'peaceful' environment to Nepal. In general interviewees were in good health, and were able to access doctors and the medications needed. However, the cost of healthcare was an issue.

■ Social interactions and cultural maintenance

The Bhutanese communities within New Zealand have maintained a high degree of contact with one another and get together frequently to socialise and worship. They have also maintained links with those resettled around the world and still in the camps in Nepal. Most had been able to freely practice their Hindu or Christian religion and celebrate their ethnic festivals, albeit on a smaller scale. Maintaining the Nepali Bhutanese culture and identity in New Zealand is of high importance and efforts have been made to educate children and continue traditions within New Zealand.

■ Resettlement experiences, aspirations and plans for the future

After spending the last 18 years living in limbo in refugee camps, the Nepali Bhutanese have had the opportunity to move forward with their lives with the offer of third-country resettlement. The experience of resettling in New Zealand has been positive overall. There were some suggestions for ways in which New Zealand could better aid the resettlement process such as increasing the amount of resettlement grants and to make up-skilling and vocational training more of a priority. For most interviewees the focus for the next few years was to find a job, continue to improve their English and ultimately make their own living and give back to a country they see as giving them so much.

Conclusion

Research into the needs, expectations and experiences of Bhutanese refugees, has provided a unique insight into the resettlement journey, providing evidence of expectations prior to departure, the challenges associated with resettlement, and how these have impacted on settlement outcomes in the community. Despite these challenges, former Bhutanese refugees are a highly motivated, cohesive and determined group who are likely to support each other, advocate for themselves and pro-actively work towards achieving their goals in New Zealand.

The information provided by the Bhutanese on their resettlement journey provides greater understanding of the specific needs of a new cohort of arrivals to New Zealand. This information will help to inform development of future pre-arrival and on arrival settlement information and orientation for Bhutanese refugees and quota refugees generally.

Further Information

The full reports: *The Bhutanese refugee resettlement journey – Part 1: Pre-departure; Part 2: On-arrival; and, Part 3: Settlement* can be found at: <http://dol.govt.nz/research/migration/refugees/bhutanese-refugees.asp>

For further information please visit www.dol.govt.nz or email research@dol.govt.nz.

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Te Pokapū a Mahi me Te Manene Rangahau

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The Bhutanese Refugee Resettlement Journey

SUMMARY



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'An environment that encourages you to work hard, erasing the present tag of refugee.'

Aim of this study

The Bhutanese Refugee Resettlement Research followed a group of Bhutanese refugees from camps in Nepal through to settlement in New Zealand. The aims of this study were to:

- › find out about the pre-settlement hopes and expectations of the Bhutanese refugees,
- › look at their short-term settlement outcomes
- › suggest implications of these findings to enable better support for the resettlement of Bhutanese refugee groups and of refugees more generally.



Background to the Bhutanese refugee crisis

Since the 1990s, over 100,000 Lhotshampa (Bhutanese of Nepali origin) have been confined to seven refugee camps in south-eastern Nepal after the Government of Bhutan revoked their citizenship and forced them to flee the country. These Nepali Bhutanese spent 18 years in refugee camps, being denied integration into the local Nepal community or their return to Bhutan before the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) offered third-country resettlement as a solution. In 2007, New Zealand announced its inclusion of Bhutanese refugees into its annual refugee quota.

Overview of the research

The research involved three phases of data collection: interviews in refugee camps in Nepal prior to departure to New Zealand; follow-up interviews at the end of the orientation process at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre, and interviews in the community 18–20 months after the refugees' arrival in New Zealand.

Part 1: Pre-departure

In October 2008 the second selection mission to the refugee camps in Nepal took place. As part of the selection mission, 33 Bhutanese refugees gave their permission to be interviewed about their pre-settlement needs, expectations and experiences.

■ Pre-departure knowledge and understanding of resettlement

At the time of selection interviews, pre-departure knowledge was found to be limited; gaining assurance of resettlement rather than information about a country was the priority. In addition, official information received about resettlement in New Zealand was only minimally absorbed, with most information being gained from family members resettled in New Zealand. What little knowledge interviewees did have about New Zealand tended to revolve around New Zealand's clean, green environment.

More timely and factual information on what to expect on arrival to New Zealand is required in order to be of greater use for those to be resettled in New Zealand.

Using family and friends already settled in New Zealand as a conduit of information to those in camps could be a valuable resource, helping to manage expectations and allay anxieties prior to departure.

■ Short- and long-term expectations

Despite the lack of certainty and knowledge of resettlement, there was a general sense of optimism that outweighed concerns. The study participants had an overwhelming sense of optimism for their first 12 months in New Zealand and a sense that any change would be better than their current facilities and opportunities within the refugee camps of Nepal.

Although optimistic, the refugees were also realistic acknowledging that they expected there to be a period of transition and adaptation and that their first year would be difficult but manageable.

The refugees' longer-term expectations were somewhat higher than their short-term expectations with an emphasis on self-reliance and personal advancement.

■ Need for a safe home and family life in New Zealand

After living in cramped conditions in bamboo huts, most of the study participants did not know what to expect in terms of housing in New Zealand, but stated they would be happy with whatever was provided.

In general, the refugees had high expectations for neighbours who would be 'like' them and with whom they would interact frequently and be able to rely on. Likewise, refugees generally hoped that they would be able to practise their culture and religion freely. However, many voiced uncertainty about whether this would be possible.

The reality of how to maintain links with others whilst dispersed throughout the world was becoming apparent, and many expected that it would be difficult to maintain contact. Most intended to keep in touch with friends and families through the internet and telephone.

■ Perspectives on education and English language acquisition

Overall, the study participants were well educated and had a high level of English language literacy compared to other cohorts of refugees. Those interviewed held high hopes for further education in New Zealand. Many clearly stated that they wanted to take up the opportunities available to them in New Zealand to further their studies. Almost all of the refugees acknowledged that their first step in New Zealand

would be to enrol in English language classes and that learning English was vital to their ability to resettle.

■ Employment and the future

Nearly half of the study participants had not had any paid work since living in the refugee camps and expected to have opportunities to work in New Zealand. Most of the refugees, although expressing their will to undertake paid work, did not know what kind of work they would like to have. Overall, most interviewees felt they would be fit for work within a short period of their arrival in New Zealand and that a job would be brokered for them through a government agency.



Part 2: On arrival

On arrival to New Zealand all quota refugees spend their first 6 weeks at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre undergoing orientation to life in New Zealand. Interviews provided a unique opportunity to explore specific aspects of the orientation programme and process.

■ First Impressions

Initial impressions of New Zealand for most of those interviewed were positive. The most common first impressions were of the environment and scenery, the helpfulness of New Zealanders and the facilities at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre, which were better than expected.

Some difficulties, understandably experienced, were concerned adapting to the different physical environment, the impact of leaving friends and family behind in camps and adjusting to a new culture and food.

■ Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre

There were many aspects to the orientation programme that were found to be valuable, in particular the English language and information sessions run by the Auckland University of Technology. However there were areas where the orientation could better meet the needs of refugees, for example appropriate cross-cultural workers available on-site at the Centre, awareness around acceptable food / preparation, and practical help with banking and shopping.

■ Pre-Departure information needs

Interviewees consistently commented on the lack of information available, particularly before departure, and identified more information would be useful in relation to:

- › New Zealand generally – what to expect on arrival
- › customs processes – what was allowed to be brought to New Zealand
- › what to bring to New Zealand and baggage allowances
- › the journey, including the transit process.

■ Plans for after the orientation programme

At the time of interviews, most people's plans for the coming months were to learn English. Either in conjunction with this, or after this, many planned to find study and/or paid work. Another immediate priority on arrival to the community was to enrol children in school and to get to know their new surroundings and community.

■ Living in the community

Most of those interviewed had no concerns about going out into the community, and felt prepared for this. Few interviewees knew much about the city in which they were to be resettled. Some would have liked more information about their local area and where to find things, but thought they would find out what they needed to know when they arrived. Others were anxious about where they were to be resettled, what their house would be like and how to find the services and facilities they would need.



Phase 3: Settlement

The third and final phase of the research explored the post-settlement experiences of the former Bhutanese refugees. Interviews completed within the community 18–20 months after resettlement investigated specific elements of settlement into New Zealand society including what life has been like since arriving in New Zealand.

■ First impressions and settling in

First impressions of New Zealand were predominantly positive, but there was an inevitable period of adjustment to a new culture and country. The main challenges faced in the initial resettlement period were; communication difficulties, using money and modern technologies, lack of transportation, and feelings of loneliness and isolation. Volunteers were found to be invaluable in overcoming challenges, providing a source of practical support as well as a key social contact. Likewise, the skills and knowledge gained during the orientation programme such as familiarisation with electrical appliances, English language classes, information on how to form relationships with New Zealanders, the schooling received, and the availability of learner licensing, all helped on arrival to the community.

■ English language attainment and the uptake of educational opportunities

The Bhutanese are a highly motivated group, who are determined to further educate themselves. Most interviewees had had access to English language tuition and educational opportunities. Young adults in particular, engaged in full-time English language classes initially, and then soon enrolled in mainstream courses. There was a clear gender divide, with men

