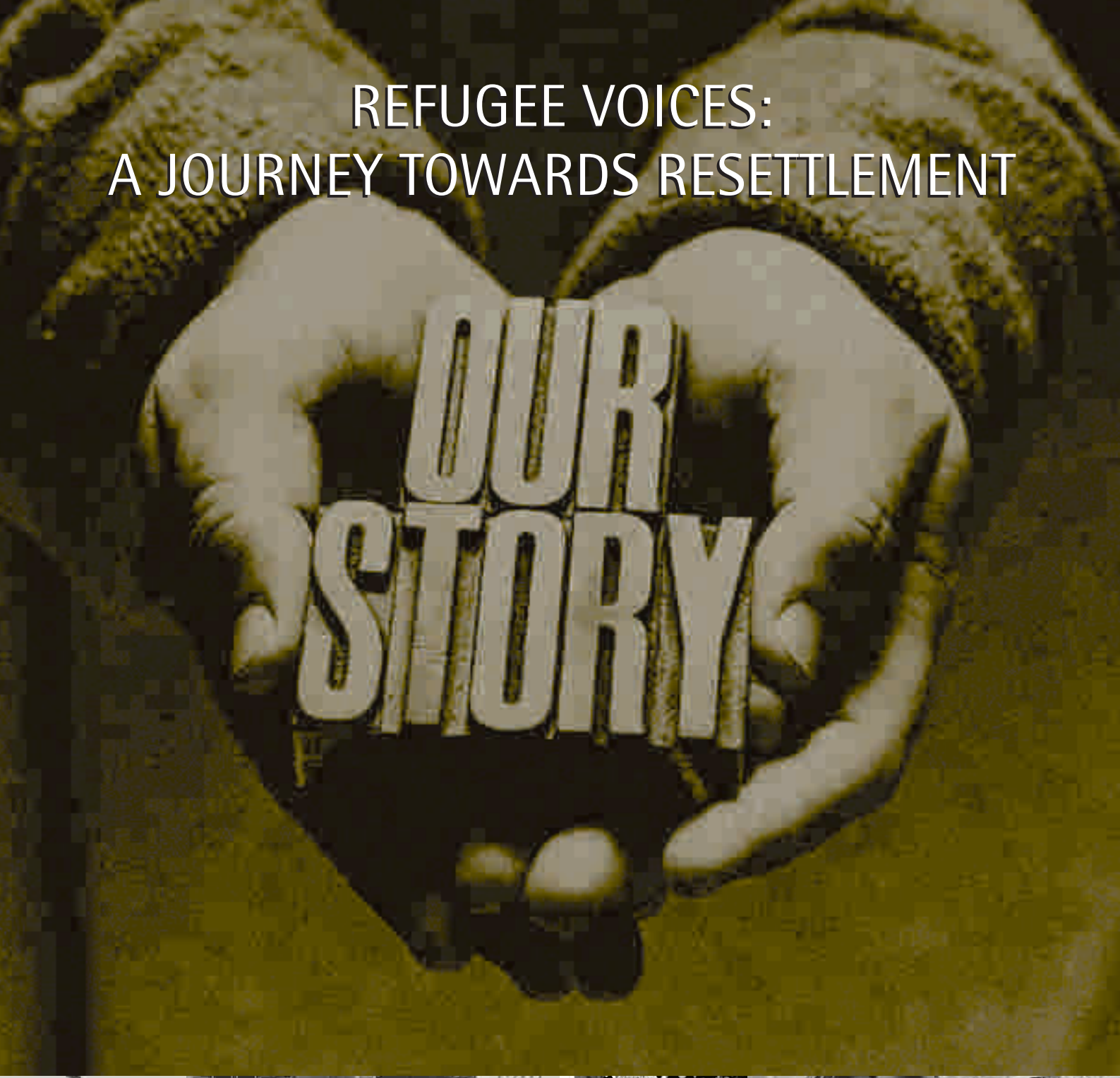
REFUGEE VOICES:
A JOURNEY TOWARDS RESETTLEMENT



Refugee resettlement research project

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR
TE TARI MAHI

NEW ZEALAND IMMIGRATION SERVICE
Te Ratonga Manene

Refugee Voices:
A Journey Towards Resettlement

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction and background

Refugee Voices reports the findings of a Department of Labour (DoL) research project that inquired into the resettlement experiences of refugees in New Zealand.[1] The information will be used to assess and improve refugee support systems and assist with the development of refugee resettlement policy. This report is available from libraries throughout New Zealand and also from the following web-site: www.immigration.govt.nz. A summary report is also available.

The 398 refugees who were interviewed for this research fell into two groups. The first group, *recently arrived* refugees, consisted of Quota, Convention and Family Reunion refugees who were interviewed after six months in New Zealand (209 people) and then again at two years (162 people). The second group, e*stablished* refugees, included Quota refugees who had been in New Zealand for around five years (189 people).

Quota refugees are people whom the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has mandated as refugees offshore. These people are selected for resettlement to New Zealand under the annual Refugee Quota Programme. The annual Quota comprises three main sub-categories: protection cases; women-at-risk; and medical/disabled. Convention refugees are former asylum seekers whose refugee status has been recognised in New Zealand by domestic authorities. Family Reunion refugees have been sponsored by refugee family members already residing in New Zealand.

New Zealand's refugee policy reflects the government's commitment to fulfilling its international humanitarian obligations and responsibilities under the United Nations 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.

A refugee is defined as:

> *". . . a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."* (UNHCR, 1951 and 1967)

New Zealand resettles an average of 750 Quota refugees per annum referred by the UNHCR, and an additional 200 to 500 Convention refugees per annum. Between 1980 and 2002, 16,556 refugees and displaced persons were resettled under the Refugee Quota Programme. The geographic mix of source countries for New Zealand's refugee intake has shifted over the past 25 years in response to changing global circumstances and humanitarian needs. The top five source countries for

[1] The project was managed by the New Zealand Immigration Service (NZIS), a service of the Department of Labour.

Quota refugees coming to New Zealand in recent years are Iraq, Somalia, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Burma/Myanmar. For Convention refugees, the top five source countries are Iran, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq.

Having arrived in New Zealand, the geographic spread of refugees tends to follow the national pattern of population concentrations, with the major urban regions being the main areas of refugee resettlement. A high proportion is located in Auckland.

Objectives and methodology

Participatory research principles guided the project and resulted in the recruitment of research associates from refugee communities who trained as research assistants and interviewers. The research associates had a deep understanding of the cultures of the people they interviewed and were able to build trusting relationships with them. An Advisory Group provided input into the design of the research.

The objective was to describe refugees' resettlement experiences over a broad range of areas including their backgrounds, the information they had about New Zealand prior to arrival, their arrival experiences, housing, getting help, family reunification, health, learning English, adult education, labour force and other activities, financial support, children and teenagers, social networks, discrimination, cultural integration and settling in New Zealand.

The sampling frame was the DoL's immigration database, limited to refugees living in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch, selected to balance gender, nationality, age and family size. Within each stratum, refugees were randomly selected from those aged 13 years and over. The interview instrument was a paper-based questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Vulnerability of participants and a lack of expertise in the mental health area meant that questions were not asked about mental health or about the specific circumstances that led the participants to become refugees.

Face-to-face interviews were carried out in the participants' own languages, which included languages such as Arabic, Assyrian, Kurdish, Tamil, Somali, Farsi, Burmese and Dari. The interviews were supplemented with material from focus groups that were carried out with men, women, teenagers, Burmese refugees resettling in Nelson, and refugee service providers.

2. BACKGROUND

Refugee backgrounds

The refugees interviewed came from diverse backgrounds, with a range of skills and cultural traditions that impacted on their resettlement experiences. In their former countries they had experienced (sometimes extended) periods of civil unrest that threatened their safety and resulted in a lack of adequate food and water, and health and educational resources.

A number of the research participants, mostly Quota refugees, had spent time (in some cases, more than 16 years) in refugee camps before coming to New Zealand.

Most had access to some services such as healthcare, education and training, although others lacked access to anything beyond basic humanitarian aid.
The refugees spoke a variety of languages and dialects. One third of *recently arrived* refugees could speak two languages well, and a further third could speak three or more languages well. Ten percent could not read and/or write any language. Overall, Convention refugees were able to read and write more languages than Quota or Family Reunion refugees. While the range of languages will change year by year depending on the nationality of refugees, there can be little doubt that New Zealand is increasing its linguistic diversity.

Most refugees had completed some education before coming to New Zealand, although a number of Quota refugees had no prior formal education. Convention refugees had completed a higher level of education and a higher proportion had work experience. Female refugees had spent less time in education than males. Just over one half of *recently arrived* refugees and eight in ten *established* refugees had no formal qualifications prior to coming to New Zealand.

More than half of both refugee groups had some prior work experience. For *recently arrived* refugees, this was mainly in a trade, profession or service and sales occupation (such as a shop assistant). *Established* refugees had often previously worked in sales and service occupations or a trade. In the 12 months before arriving in New Zealand, 40 percent of *recently arrived* refugees were working, 21 percent were looking after children at home and 19 percent were studying. Others were in refugee camps, at home without children, working without pay, or looking for work.

Prior information about New Zealand

Many of the refugees knew little about New Zealand prior to arrival, in particular Convention refugees (ex-asylum seekers) who often arranged to come through an intermediary and had little input into arrangements for their relocation. Family Reunion refugees were the most informed, by their family in New Zealand, although a high proportion still did not know much about the country prior to arrival. Refugees' expectations and their perceptions of whether these had been met were mixed – many had expected to find work and had not, and many had expected to find a safe and peaceful country and felt they had.

Arrival experiences

The different refugee types follow different processes on arrival in New Zealand. Quota refugees are the most supported, spending six weeks at the DoL's Mangere Refugee Reception Centre (Mangere) in Auckland. Eighty-seven percent of the Quota refugees interviewed felt that their time at Mangere had prepared them well, and many commented particularly on the English language classes and health checks. Some, however, felt the programme could be longer and a substantial number were dissatisfied with the food as it was very different to their regular diet.

Convention refugees have their status determined by the Refugee Status Branch of the DoL's Immigration Service (or, if initially unsuccessful, they can appeal to the Refugee Status Appeals Authority). The Convention refugees interviewed were generally positive about the process, although about half felt the process took too long. The time before an initial determination has recently been greatly shortened, from two or three years, to three months.

Family Reunion refugees come to New Zealand through family sponsored immigration policies and often family members handle the application process for them. Many of those interviewed felt the application process took too long, and a number felt it was too costly. It is difficult for many refugees to provide the necessary documentation for residence.

3. SETTLEMENT

Housing

The initial priority for refugees upon arrival in New Zealand is access to affordable and good quality housing. More than a third of the refugees interviewed had problems finding suitable housing, mainly due to cost. A number discussed difficulties due to a lack of English language ability and problems finding large enough houses. Participants, particularly Quota refugees, were found to be living with a substantially higher number of people per bedroom than the New Zealand average. This raises the issue of overcrowding and associated health risks.

Refugees had three key concerns when assessing the appropriateness of housing: cost, location and cultural appropriateness. Refugees often have families that are larger than the New Zealand average and so the size of dwellings is important. The majority of refugees interviewed were living in rental accommodation – Housing New Zealand Corporation (HNZC) houses were generally preferred because the rent is income-related. While Quota refugees receive assistance from the Refugee and Migrant Service (RMS) and HNZC, Convention refugees are expected to find their own housing (although emergency accommodation is available through the Auckland Refugee Council).

Family Reunion refugees rely on their sponsors (who are close family), who have been required to ensure accommodation for the first 24 months. *Recently arrived* Quota refugees paid the least rent – an average per household of $105 per week as a number were living in subsidised HNZC houses. Family Reunion refugees paid an average per household of $203 per week and Convention refugees paid $216. *Established* refugees paid an average of $162 per week. Most of those paying over $200 per week lived in Auckland.

Discrimination was found to be an issue for some refugees, who felt they had more success securing accommodation when they viewed the house with a 'Kiwi' companion. This was confirmed by service providers who also noted the difficulty in locating culturally appropriate housing.

Recently arrived Quota refugees had moved the least and, at six months, one half were still living in the house they moved to after leaving Mangere. There was sometimes a feeling of obligation to those who assisted them to find their house to stay in the house that was initially found for them. Convention refugees had moved the most, which can be partly explained by them having been in New Zealand for longer than other participants. Also, a number were in New Zealand alone and therefore more mobile than those living with family members.

Despite receiving the most assistance with finding housing, Quota refugees were the most dissatisfied, mainly due to the size and condition of their houses. Quota refugees had less choice about where they initially lived (since their houses were found for them). They also tended to live in households with more people than other participants, and their houses were often too small for their families. Convention refugees were the most satisfied with their housing.

Getting help

The four main areas *recently arrived* refugees needed help or information at six months were with income support, health services, education and training, and local services. More than half who needed help with finding work did not get this help. Thirty-nine percent of *established* refugees said they still needed help to settle in New Zealand, with their main concern being family reunification. *Established* refugees still needed help with English language training, financial support and finding work.

Service providers who took part in focus groups felt many refugees lacked an understanding of how to access services and their entitlements. A focus group of Burmese refugees living in Nelson stressed the importance of having a dedicated person who can provide information and support.

There was notable variation in the need for ongoing settlement support by region of origin. Of the *recently arrived* refugees, a large proportion from the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and South East Asia, said they still needed help to settle in New Zealand at two years, but relatively few participants from South Asia (Sri Lanka) said they still needed help. These South Asian participants also had good English language skills and were more likely to be in work.

Ethnic community groups were a good source of support for many refugees. Of the *recently arrived* refugees interviewed at six months, half of those from the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, a third from South Asia, and all those from South East Asia said they received support from their ethnic group. Of the *established* refugees, 65 percent said members of their ethnic group had provided them with resettlement help. As with *recently arrived* refugees, less South Asians said they received this support.

The RMS provided most of the initial support for Quota refugees when they first arrived in New Zealand, while family was an important support mechanism for Family Reunion refugees. Convention refugees relied more on friends and government agencies for help.

Family reunification

Research participants were asked about their experiences with, or intentions of, sponsoring family to New Zealand, including any barriers or difficulties they faced. For many, reunification is of primary importance, and the task of sponsoring family was seen to be both difficult and costly. Most participants had family members living overseas, often extended family such as siblings, parents and in-laws. It is important to note that many extended family members, as described by participants, would not be eligible for residence under current family sponsored immigration policy.

Changes were made to the criteria for residence under the Family Category in October 2001, including expanding the definitions of dependent children, adult children and siblings, and parents, to recognise a wider range of family structures. The changes increased the sponsors' legal obligation to take responsibility for family members. The Humanitarian Category was closed and a new balloted Refugee Family Quota Category was created for refugee-linked applicants who do not qualify under the Refugee Quota or standard Family Category. It was introduced in July 2002 and is set annually. The number of places available in 2003/04 was 300.

Participants indicated a diverse range of people that it was important for them to have in New Zealand. For most, the concept of family included, but extended beyond, the nuclear family (including spouse and/or children). When asked why family reunification was important many participants considered the reasons to be self-evident. Common responses were "because they are my family" or "because they are a very important part of my life" or "because I want to be with them".

Seventy-four *established* refugees had tried to sponsor family to New Zealand and just over half of these individuals had been successful with their applications. The most common reason for applications being unsuccessful was that their application was incomplete (in some cases due to difficulties locating documentation), or that they did not meet the criteria. Most *recently arrived* refugees would not have been in New Zealand for long enough to sponsor family to New Zealand.

Of the *recently arrived* refugees, 73 percent at six months and 53 percent at two years said they were intending to sponsor family members to New Zealand in the future. Of the *established* refugees, 61 percent indicated they still were intending to sponsor family members. Some wanted to sponsor family members but felt they were not able to do so, mainly due to the cost (which includes not only the application fee, but costs associated with airfares and needing to initially support the family on arrival) or a lack of understanding of the family sponsored immigration policy and process. Many research participants said they lacked an understanding of the October 2001 immigration policy changes, including why the Humanitarian Category was closed.

Eighty-four percent of *recently arrived* refugees and 88 percent of *established* refugees maintained contact with their families overseas. *Established* refugees were asked if they expected to return or visit their home countries and 65 percent indicated that they did, although more than half did not know when.

Health

Access to healthcare is an important aspect of the resettlement process. Some refugees have not had access to comprehensive healthcare for some time and many are suffering physical and/or psychological effects due to their experience. Refugees are eligible for a Community Services Card and have access to some refugee-specific community education and health programmes funded by the government, as well as community liaison staff and co-ordinators that assist refugees with gaining access to health services.

When interviewed at six months, and two years, about half of *recently arrived* refugees rated their health as excellent or very good, about a third as good and the remainder poor. In general, participants rated their health as better after six months

than they did on arrival, although 16 percent (mostly women) said their health was worse. Forty-one percent of *established* refugees said their health was better at five years, while 19 percent said their health was worse. Common reasons for worse health were having developed a medical condition such as asthma, concern for family overseas and emotional stress.

The most common reasons *recently arrived* refugees gave for improvements to their health were feeling safe and secure and having less stress in their lives. *Established* refugees gave similar reasons for improved health, including access to good healthcare and feeling safe.

The *medical/disabled* category for Quota refugees allows entry for those who either have a medical condition that can be treated or helped in New Zealand or a disability that requires support. Thirty-three *recently arrived* refugees at two years indicated a long term medical problem, including 23 who had the problem prior to coming to New Zealand and 10 who developed the problem in New Zealand. Many noted the impact on their ability to work or carry out daily activities.

Although mental health was deemed too sensitive an issue to include within the scope of this research, a number of service providers who took part in focus groups felt this was an area of serious concern. Wellington providers noted an increase in the need for emergency psychiatric teams to work with refugees. One third of *recently arrived* refugees at six months said they had experienced emotional problems since coming to New Zealand. Convention refugees were most likely to report these problems. At two years, 12 percent of all participants said they had experienced emotional problems in the past 12 months. Just over half of these people sought help, mainly from a medical professional, psychiatrist or specialist, although some sought help from their families or community.

Nearly all participants had registered with a general practitioner (GP) and, at two years, almost three-quarters had visited their doctor in the past 12 months. Most were satisfied with the service. For those who had problems accessing a doctor, the most common reason was cost, followed by appointments not being available. Almost one quarter of *recently arrived* refugees interviewed at two years had used services at, or been admitted to, a hospital in the past 12 months. More than one half of *established* refugees had visited a hospital since arrival. Most said they received an appropriate, good or excellent service. Common complaints related to waiting lists and times and some were dissatisfied with the treatment they had received or were prescribed. Most participants were aware of their entitlement to an interpreter at hospitals, and those who used this service were generally very satisfied.

Overall impressions of healthcare in New Zealand were very good, with particular emphasis on the service, caring and kind staff, low prescription costs, and the check-ups and follow-ups.

At six months, one half of the participants said their children's health was better than when they arrived and attributed this to a better diet, better access to healthcare and a good environment. Thirteen percent said their children's health was worse due to either the development of a medical condition or the change in climate. At two and five years, most participants had arranged for their children to be immunised. Most

parents were happy with the health services provided for their children. Those who had experienced problems were dissatisfied with waiting times.

4. TRAINING, WORK AND INCOME

Learning English

Proficiency in English language is critical to both the economic well-being and social integration of refugees. The diversity of refugees, and their often unique set of characteristics, means there needs to be a variety of learning options available to them on arrival.

Quota refugees are provided with English language tuition at Mangere and are eligible for further training through Training Opportunities courses run by the Tertiary Education Commission.[2] Until their refugee status is confirmed, Convention refugees must fund their own English language learning. Once their status is confirmed they can access Training Opportunities courses if they are registered with the Ministry of Social Development's Work and Income (W&I). Family Reunion refugees can also access English language training if they are registered with W&I and can demonstrate low qualifications and language barriers to entering employment. The ESOL Home Tutor Service provides English language tutors free of charge.

Two thirds of *recently arrived* refugees had learnt some English language before coming to New Zealand, although only 17 percent said they could speak English well on arrival. Convention refugees tended to have better English language ability on arrival than other refugees. At two years, 43 percent of *recently arrived* refugees said they could speak English well, 26 percent fairly well and 32 percent not well. At two years three-quarters of Convention refugees said they could speak English well or very well and none rated their spoken English as poor.

Quota refugees rated their English language ability the lowest, with 46 percent saying they could not speak English well at two years. This compares to 28 percent of Family Reunion refugees who could not speak English well at two years. Twice as many men than women could speak English well on arrival and this gender difference persisted at two years. At two years, 52 percent of men said they could speak English well compared with a low 32 percent of women.

Three quarters of *established* refugees said they could not speak English well on arrival. After five years, 50 percent of *established* refugees could speak English well, although 27 percent indicated they still could not speak English well. Nearly eight in ten *established* refugees were not able to write in the English language on arrival. At five years, four out of ten could write English well.

The main reason cited for improvement in spoken English was daily contact with English language speakers, including via the media. Written language improved through courses, school or study. Those who said they learnt English using more than one method were asked which method they found the most useful. At six months, one quarter said the most useful way to learn English was at an educational institution

[2] Training Opportunities is funded by Work and Income and administered by the Tertiary Education Commission.

such as a school, university or polytechnic. A smaller number cited community courses or Training Opportunities courses. Twelve percent of refugees at two years said the most useful way to learn English was at work, 11 percent cited the media and 10 percent said conversations with family and friends. For those who had paid for English language courses, the main source of financial assistance was W&I. Other sources were student and personal loans or from sponsors.

More women than men had problems accessing English language training mostly due to a lack of childcare, problems with transport or not being allowed out alone. Overall, problems trying to learn English were attributed to not knowing how to access classes, cost, transportation difficulties and health problems. Focus group participants suggested that text books in both the refugee's native language and English would help. Reasons for wanting to improve English language skills were primarily to get a job, to deal with everyday life, to undertake further education, and to communicate and socialise.

Many participants had needed help with interpretation and/or translation at some point, particularly in situations such as visiting W&I, going to the doctor or hospital, shopping or banking, or undertaking immigration procedures. As would be expected, the need for an interpreter decreased over time. Most participants felt they received the help they needed. Those who did not said the main reason was not knowing how to access interpreting assistance. Service providers in Auckland and Wellington expressed concern about the lack of interpreters available free of charge. Many participants had used a family member (often their children) or a friend to interpret or translate, and a number had used a professional.

Adult education

The education needs of refugees extend beyond English language into general study or training which will help them to access work. The refugees interviewed on this topic were over 17 years of age. Participants were asked to exclude English language study. However, during analysis it was found that some were referring to English study and therefore the findings need to be treated with caution.

At both six months and two years, a higher proportion of refugees between the ages of 17 and 24 years had completed study or training than other age groups. Only a small number of participants over the age of 40 years had taken part in study or training. Family Reunion refugees were the least likely to have done study or training.

Seventy-two *established* refugees had taken part in study or training in New Zealand. The main type of study was at secondary school. Other types of study included courses in computer studies, nursing, science, business, hairdressing, interpreting and carpentry. A number of participants encountered difficulties accessing study or training, mostly due to English language ability, health issues, cost or access to childcare. Family Reunion refugees were slightly more likely than other participants to report difficulties.

A number of refugees had applied for student loans. Those who had been in New Zealand longer were more likely to have had a loan approved. Those who experienced difficulties getting a loan said they lacked information about the process, or had not lived in New Zealand long enough to claim entitlement.

Labour force and other activities

Employment is a means of integration and a key indicator of resettlement. Refugees' backgrounds can sometimes place limitations on their ability to enter the workforce due to a lack of work experience, a lack of qualifications, and/or limited English language. Other barriers are employers' lack of understanding of other cultures, racism and discrimination.

Convention refugees, having spent more time in education, having more work experience and better English language ability, and having had access to a work permit as asylum seekers, were more likely to have found work than Quota or Family Reunion refugees.

As could be expected, employment rates were low for all participants – 16 percent of *recently arrived* refugees aged between 15 and 65 years, were working at six months, as were 26 percent at two years. Twenty-nine percent of *established* refugees were working. At six months, half of the 30 *recently arrived* refugees employed were working part-time and half were working full-time, while at two years more than twice as many refugees were working part-time as were working full-time. Of the 49 *established* refugees who were working, 19 were working part-time and 30 were working full-time. More participants said they had worked at some stage in New Zealand than were working at each interview, indicating a higher proportion of participants had got work, although not necessarily sustainable employment.

At both interviews, a substantial proportion of refugees were involved in activities outside of the labour force, especially women. Participants from South Asia had the highest labour force activity rate and, as noted earlier, they had the highest English language capability.

Of those who had looked for work, seven out of ten *recently arrived* refugees and the same proportion of *established* refugees had experienced difficulties. The main problem related to a lack of English language ability. *Established* refugees discussed negative responses and discrimination from employers, such as often being told that recently advertised jobs had been taken. More than half of those refugees who were working had found their job through family, friends or community contacts. A number said their improved English language had helped them secure their job. The most common occupations were in service and sales followed by elementary occupations, such as labouring.

Most refugees who were currently employed were working in a different occupation to that they had held in their home country. More than half were satisfied with their job and said that they liked their fellow employees, the pay rate and the opportunity to extend their English language skills. Those who were dissatisfied did not like the low pay, not having a career path and/or the lack of job satisfaction.

Refugees who were looking for work nominated a wide range of fields including: factory work, supermarket work, cleaning or kitchen-hand work; or more specialised jobs such as a teacher, jeweller, IT worker, car salesperson, food technologist and dental assistant. A number of people said they would take any paid work available. The most common methods of looking for work were through personal contacts and job advertisements.

A small number of refugees had taken part in voluntary work in order to assist their community, gain work experience, or meet people. Others were occupied with study or looking after children. Quota refugees were the most likely to be studying (at both interviews), and Family Reunion refugees the least likely to be studying. Women were more likely than men to be at home with children.

Financial support and income

When Quota refugees first arrive in New Zealand they are eligible to receive an emergency unemployment benefit at the same rate as that provided to other unemployed New Zealanders. They are also provided with a special grant to cover re-establishment costs. Family sponsored immigration policy requires the New Zealand sponsor to support the sponsored person for two years, although emergency benefits are available to Family Reunion refugees if their sponsor is a former refugee. Asylum seekers whose claims have not yet been determined can apply for a work permit. Convention refugees may apply for an emergency unemployment benefit.

The participants were asked about their income sources and their experiences receiving a government benefit or earning a salary or wage. The main source of income for 89 percent of *recently arrived* refugees at both interviews was a government benefit, however 58 percent of Convention refugees at six months had received a salary or wage since arriving in New Zealand and, at two years, 50 percent had received a salary or wage in the past two weeks. At two years, the main source of income for 89 percent of *recently arrived* refugees was a government benefit, while 8 percent depended on a salary or wage. Four Convention refugees were self-employed. The main source of income for 78 percent of *established* refugees was a government benefit, while 19 percent relied on a salary or wage. Many participants supplemented their wage with a government benefit.

Nearly all participants were earning a salary or wage of less than $30,000, many less than $10,000. Low income levels account for the number of participants who received a benefit as well as a salary or wage. Service providers who took part in focus groups suggested that a benefit could sometimes be a barrier to employment. The difference between the amount received on a benefit and wages from working are often small, especially when costs for large families are taken into account. Service providers also felt that some refugees were unaware of their full entitlements from W&I.

Of the *recently arrived* refugees, 13 percent of those interviewed at six months and 6 percent at two years sent money to family overseas. Just over a quarter of *established* refugees regularly sent money overseas. It is possible that refugees under-reported sending money as they would not want to create the impression that they had extra income. Amounts sent overseas ranged from $20 per month to $8000 per annum.

Two thirds of *recently arrived* refugees interviewed at six months felt they did not have enough money to meet their needs. At two years this number fell to just over one half. Many felt the cost of living was expensive, especially for those supporting children. Half of the *established* refugees interviewed felt they did not have sufficient money. A number of these people were providing for family both in New Zealand and overseas.

5. SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Children and teenagers

Many children and teenagers who come to New Zealand as refugees have spent time in refugee camps and know little about their own country, like the Somali teenagers brought up in a refugee camp in Kenya who took part in this research. School is a major part of children and teenagers' lives and can be an important settling factor as well as a difficult experience for young refugees. Teenage refugees experience more pressures than other children their age. They experience peer pressure at school, and may also be struggling with the expectations of their parents and elders to carry out activities in a traditional manner. Teenage refugees are often required to interpret and translate for their parents.

Only one child was reported not to be attending school because he did not like it and his language skills were poor. Several children had changed schools since arriving in New Zealand, mostly due to movement of the family, but in some cases for religious reasons or due to discrimination. A small number of children were reported to have had trouble settling into school due to their lack of English language, difficulties making friends, or feeling 'different'. A good school, kind teachers and help with English language were said to assist the settling process.

More than half of the children received extra help with English through ESOL classes, individual teaching assistance or after-school classes. A small number also reported receiving help from the school with homework or other subjects.

At six months, 89 percent of participants were satisfied with their children's schooling, as were 83 percent at two years. Ninety percent of *established* refugees said they were satisfied with their children's schooling.

Around three quarters of children were involved in activities outside of school, mainly sports but also music, drama, and arts and crafts. Those who were not so involved said the children had just started school, or that cost and/or transport was a barrier.

Particular difficulties for girls, discussed by parents, related to cultural and religious factors. The way girls were required to dress (such as wearing a head scarf or veil) often attracted unwanted attention from others and meant that a school uniform might not be culturally appropriate. Another issue related to socialising being difficult for girls from some cultures, particularly around mixing with boys. Some parents referred to girls in New Zealand having much more freedom and they found it difficult when their daughters wanted this same level of freedom.

A smaller number of parents felt there were difficulties for boys in New Zealand. These mostly related to cultural differences. Some parents said their sons found it very difficult balancing their own culture and the New Zealand culture.

Many of the teenagers who were interviewed noted differences in growing up in New Zealand, compared to what they had previously experienced. The main difference was the level of freedom, but they also cited educational opportunities and that their own cultures had more respect for teachers and parents. They generally liked going to school, taking part in leisure activities, having friends, and the freedom and

opportunities available. Only a small number said they had dislikes, including their peers' lack of respect for adults, the co-educational system, and some New Zealand teenagers' behaviour. *Established* refugees most common dislike was discrimination.

Nearly all of the teenagers interviewed said that school had become easier over time, due to improvements in their English language, making friends, gaining confidence and good teachers. For *recently arrived* teenagers interviewed at six months, the main difficulty with school was language and communication.

In focus group discussions, many teenagers mentioned they liked having the opportunity to make friends at a multi-cultural school. Interestingly, several said they found it easier to make friends with non-Pakeha students.

Most of the teenagers felt it had been easier for them to settle than their parents, and many were required to assist their parents with resettlement. Of the 27 teenagers who responded to the question at six months, 16 said they had interpreted or translated for their parents. Fourteen had provided other help, mainly with household chores, including shopping and looking after younger children.

When asked what advice they might give to other teenagers coming to New Zealand, the most popular response was to study hard and to make the most of school. Burmese, Somali and Afghan teenagers who took part in focus groups all felt it was important to maintain their culture in New Zealand.

Social networks

Social networks can help refugees combat the various problems they face during resettlement. *Recently arrived* refugees at six months were asked how important it was for them to make friends in New Zealand. Eighty-two percent felt it was important or very important. Refugees who did not think it was important to make friends, or who felt it was neither important nor unimportant, gave similar reasons – a number did not know why they felt this way, while others said they had their families or they already had friends. Others commented that they were too busy to make friends.

When *recently arrived* refugees at six months who had made friends in New Zealand were asked how they had met these people, 61 percent referred to the importance of existing friends, relatives and neighbours. Those who had difficulty making friends cited language problems and cultural differences.

Just under one half of refugees interviewed at two years and five years felt it had been easy to make friends outside their ethnic group. Improved English language ability was a major factor, and many also said that New Zealand people were friendly and approachable. There was less interest expressed in joining clubs and groups, although some participants did not understand this question. It is also important to consider cultural background, as in some cultures joining clubs and groups is considered elitist. English language ability was a factor in the ease or difficulty of joining groups or clubs. Those who belonged to clubs were mainly members of sports clubs, ethnic associations or religious groups.

Discrimination

Focus groups found that refugees in New Zealand were often the target of racism or discrimination fuelled by ignorance and a lack of understanding about the issues facing refugees. Aspects of discrimination arose throughout the research including with housing, children and teenagers, around entering the labour force and with other activities. It was felt women in particular could be discriminated against because of the way they dressed. Research associates and service providers commented that refugees often experienced discrimination from landlords.

When asked if they had experienced discrimination because of their ethnic group, 14 out of 207 participants interviewed at six months felt they had. Of those who had experienced discrimination, seven were from the Middle East, six were from the Horn of Africa and one was from South Asia. At two years, seven participants felt they had been discriminated against in the past month, four from the Middle East and three from the Horn of Africa. Of 186 *established* refugees, 14 said they had experienced discrimination in the last month, seven of whom were from the Middle East and seven from the Horn of Africa. There are a number of reasons participants may under-report discrimination. Because the situation in New Zealand is much better than it was in their former countries, participants may not want to report discrimination or may feel that it is not occurring.

Discrimination was also reported when looking for work, at W&I, at school and while doing other study. Other incidents noted were abuse by members of the public or neighbours. Those who sought help with discrimination went to a range of people including friends, the Police, the Race Relations Conciliator and staff at Refugees as Survivors.

Learning about New Zealand culture and maintenance of own culture

Refugees in New Zealand have come to a country with a unique history based on its bi-cultural background. An understanding of this history provides refugees with a better understanding of New Zealand society as a whole. At the same time, refugees' own culture and cultural identity are very important.

Recently arrived refugees interviewed at six months were asked what they knew about the Treaty of Waitangi and the place of Maori in New Zealand society. Many participants lacked an understanding of these issues. At two years, half of this group had some knowledge of these issues. Just under half of *established* refugees said they had some knowledge. For both groups, those over the age of 40 years had the least knowledge. Most refugees got this knowledge from school, an English language class, university or polytechnic, or from classes at Mangere.

At six months, many participants said they knew very little about New Zealand culture. At two years, *recently arrived* refugees were asked how they would describe the New Zealand way of life. Many individuals said New Zealand was a country where individual rights and freedom were respected and that New Zealand was a peaceful and safe country. A number commented on the good qualities of New Zealanders. Some individuals discussed aspects of the New Zealand culture they did not like. These included New Zealanders not caring about education, watching too much television, eating a lot of fast food, not saving money and excessive drinking. *Established* refugees responded similarly.

Ninety-one percent of participants interviewed at six months and 85 percent at two years felt it was important to learn about New Zealand culture, mostly in order to integrate and understand other New Zealanders. The nine participants who at two years said it was not important to learn about New Zealand culture gave a range of reasons. Four said they were not interested in knowing about others, while two said they did not have contact outside of their ethnic group. Two others said they did not think it would make a difference and two said it was not important because they were old.

Eight out of ten *established* refugees felt it was important or very important to learn about New Zealand culture. Some noted that it was important to know about their own culture as well as New Zealand culture and some discussed the importance of maintaining a balance between the two cultures.

The vast majority of refugees felt it was important to maintain their own culture in New Zealand in order to preserve a cultural identity for future generations, to share with others and because they were proud of it. When asked *how* they maintained their culture the most common responses were through eating traditional food, practising religion and speaking their language. Twelve individuals interviewed at six months said it was not important or neither important nor unimportant to maintain their culture in New Zealand. Their reasons included that they were no longer living in the former country and it was important to get used to their new culture.

At six months, many participants said they met regularly with members of their ethnic group, including 57 who said they met daily and 47 who met weekly. Many of the Convention refugees said they did not meet with their ethnic group. At two years, contact remained regular for many, with 97 participants indicating they met either daily or weekly with members of their ethnic group. Eighty-four *established* refugees said they regularly met with members of their ethnic group. These meetings occurred through religious observance, at cultural meetings and celebrations, and through informal visits to family and friends.

Only a small number of participants said they had some difficulty maintaining their culture, due to a lack of community in which to speak the language, certain cultural items being too costly or difficult to source, and a lack of community activity. Some service providers felt that New Zealanders, in general, "tolerated but did not encourage" the maintenance of other cultures.

A number of *recently arrived* refugees said they had shared their culture with people outside their ethnic group, either with friends and neighbours, at school, university or polytechnic, at cultural fairs and festivals, or at work. One hundred and thirty of the 189 *established* refugees had shared aspects of their culture with other groups. The most common reason for not sharing their culture beyond their ethnic group was difficulty with communication.

Settling in New Zealand

At each interview, research participants were asked how settled they felt and what their overall impressions of New Zealand were. Most participants felt safe from

physical harm, with many adding that they felt New Zealand was a peaceful and quiet country. A small group was concerned about crime, mainly theft.

When asked what they liked most about living in New Zealand, *recently arrived* refugees interviewed at six months said kind and friendly people, living in peace and quiet and having access to government services. Similar responses were given at two years and by *established* refugees. Many participants said there was nothing they disliked about New Zealand, while others did not know or did not wish to respond. Some dislikes that were noted were a lack of employment opportunities, crime, the behaviour of some New Zealanders, the weather and discrimination. Ten *established* refugees felt that people had too many rights.

When asked what advice they might offer prospective refugees, a number of participants mentioned learning English, or preparing by gaining qualifications or learning about New Zealand culture, while a smaller number would advise bringing family members and cultural items. Others said that once in New Zealand they would advise others to respect the laws, make the most of educational opportunities and work hard. Some *established* refugees said they would advise others about difficulties they would experience in New Zealand, such as with family reunification, finding work and saving money.

Burmese men in a focus group had difficulty with what they perceived as a lack of discipline in New Zealand. They had expected "a strict country with good rules and regulations" but had found this not to be the case. Iranian and Somali women felt they had a better quality of life in New Zealand. The Iranian women enjoyed the freedom they had in New Zealand compared to Iran but were unhappy with some aspects of life in New Zealand, perhaps because they had come from more privileged backgrounds.

The large majority of refugees interviewed at two and five years felt they were comfortable carrying out daily activities, and that it had become easier over time due to familiarity and developing communication skills in English. At six months, there was variation in the level of feeling settled by refugee type. Only 55 percent of Convention refugees said they felt settled, compared to 78 percent of Quota and 87 percent of Family Reunion refugees. Ninety-three percent of *established* refugees said they felt settled.

A range of factors were said to have assisted settlement, including support from friends and family, access to income support (or work), learning English, and government or non-government organisation (NGO) support in the form of educational opportunities, healthcare and housing.

Almost all refugees (98 percent) intended to stay in New Zealand. At six months their aspirations were to improve their English, reunite with family members, and find employment or engage in study. Some aspirations were more general: to provide a good future for their family; buy a house; or develop a business. At two years the overwhelming aspiration was employment, as was the case with *established* refugees.

Ninety percent of *recently arrived* refugees interviewed at two years intended to apply for New Zealand citizenship. Eighty-three percent of *established* refugees had already gained citizenship.

When asked what might assist resettlement, participants suggested further help with: education and language learning; family reunification; finding accommodation; financial assistance; orientation; and employment. When service providers were asked the same question they said that people within refugee communities were often best placed to help members of their own community, noting that this was easier in a well-established community.

Women and men were asked if they had any gender specific issues with resettlement. Only a small number said this was the case. The women felt their appearance drew unwanted attention, or that looking after children made it more difficult to learn English or find work. The difficulties for men were with finding work and worrying about family overseas, and their perception that men have less power and status in New Zealand. Service providers felt there was a lack of support for refugee men in New Zealand. Focus group participants also discussed the difficulty of adapting to a society where women had equal rights. Some Iranian women interviewed said that this issue had led to problems in their relationships.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Resettlement is a journey. It is a process of learning, adapting and understanding. Coming to a new country with a different culture, language, religion, and traditions, is a challenging venture into the unknown. While this research examined the first five years of refugee resettlement, it is very evident that the process of resettlement is ongoing. On the evidence of this research, some may never get to the place where they can participate in this country's life to the same extent as other residents. Adaptation to New Zealand occurs at a different pace for the diverse groups of refugees. In general, younger people adapted faster.

Nearly all participants reported that New Zealand provided them with a safe and pleasant environment and that for the most part they encountered friendly and helpful people, both in daily life and when dealing with organisations. What participants liked about New Zealand reflected what most did not have in their former countries - freedom and democracy, safety and security, and peace and quiet. These are probably the most important mitigating factors for refugees when dealing with the challenges of resettlement, in particular their ability to become self-supporting. Safety and security and reduced stress were important reasons for improvements in participants' health.

Overall, there was a similarity in responses and issues raised across the *recently arrived* and *established* groups. This finding is important and suggests the trends and issues that emerged are likely to be similar for other refugees.

The research reinforces what is well known. Ability with English language is crucial to all aspects of resettlement and subsequently those with poorer English language ability need more help. The facilitation of English language learning, tailored to the needs to the individual, is vital. Being able to work is vital to refugee well-being.

However, refugees face numerous barriers to entering the workforce and need much assistance with this process.

The teenagers and young people interviewed showed an enthusiasm for their role in New Zealand society, especially a desire to learn about and take part in the New Zealand way of life, coupled with a determination to maintain their home culture. They also had an appreciation of the opportunities available to them. Many of their parents looked to the younger generation to be the ones to succeed. Although older refugees may struggle more with language, employment and integration than their children, the overwhelming majority reported a satisfaction with the services provided and a liking for New Zealand's societal structures and its citizens.

The main report summarises the issues arising from the research and they include:

- the importance of acknowledging and responding to refugee diversity (one size, or type, of service delivery will not meet all needs);
- refugees not having an understanding of available services or their entitlements;
- that entering the labour market is the greatest challenge;
- a need for more help with accessing English language training and suitable housing;
- that the provision of health services and schooling is working well; and
- support agencies are offering a good service to refugees.

It is important to note that facets of the issues noted above are those that face many New Zealanders. Hospital waiting lists, low incomes, and housing difficulties affect many who are not refugees, and the mitigation in these cases will come from the development of policy in a broad range of areas. Discrimination too, is something that must be addressed more broadly as an issue facing all migrants. This research also highlighted issues for particular groups of refugees.

The success of the programme run by the Mangere Refugee Reception Centre and the help provided by the RMS are all positive outcomes that can be further improved by the feedback provided in this report. Most importantly, the research has given a voice to refugees who in the process of resettlement, can disappear into the community. By bringing together their positive and negative impressions of resettlement, government and service providers can work towards improving services and developing policy to best support them on their journey.

On this note it is important that the government (in May 2004) has announced the national Immigration Settlement Strategy for migrants, refugees and their families. The Strategy's six goals for migrants and refugees are that they:

1. obtain employment appropriate to their qualifications and skills;
2. are confident using English in a New Zealand setting, or can access appropriate language support to bridge the gap;
3. are able to access appropriate information and responsive services that are available to the wider community (for example, housing, education, and services for children);
4. form supportive social networks and establish a sustainable community identity;

5. feel safe expressing their ethnic identity and are accepted by, and are part of, the wider host community; and
6. participate in civic, community and social activities.

The initial focus of this Strategy is to address the first three goals by improving the way career and labour market information is tailored to the needs of refugees and migrants, to provide extra funding for adult English language tuition, to increase English language resources in schools, and to improve resourcing for the assessment of refugee qualifications. The establishment of a national network of migrant resource services will provide a point of contact for providing information to refugees and migrants. Additional core funding has been given to the RMS, to assist with the resettlement of refugees.

The issues raised by this research will provide an important feed into the further development of this Strategy and the initiatives that will need to be developed to address gaps in refugee service provision.