



COVERSHEET

Minister	Hon Casey Costello	Portfolio	Associate Immigration
Title of Cabinet paper	Resetting the Three-Year Refugee Quota Programme (2025/26 to 2027/28)	Date to be published	29 July 2025

List of documents that have been proactively released

Date	Title	Author
28 May 2025	Resetting the Three-Year Refugee Quota Programme (2025/26 to 2027/28)	Office of Hon Casey Costello
16 June 2025	Resetting the Three-year Refugee Quota Programme (2025-26 to 2027-28) CBC-25-MIN-0018 Minute	Cabinet Office

Information redacted

YES

Any information redacted in this document is redacted in accordance with MBIE's policy on Proactive Release and is labelled with the reason for redaction. This may include information that would be redacted if this information was requested under Official Information Act 1982. Where this is the case, the reasons for withholding information are listed below. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Some information has been withheld for the reason of international relations.

In Confidence

Office of the Associate Minister of Immigration

Cabinet Economic Policy Committee

Resetting the Three-Year Refugee Quota Programme (2025/26 to 2027/28)

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks decisions on the international regional allocations and subcategories for the next three-year Refugee Quota Programme (2025/26 to 2027/28, years ending June). I propose retaining the current regional allocations while removing some subcategories and allocations that are either no longer necessary or create operational complexities.

Relation to government priorities

- 2 This is a routine operational adjustment that requires Cabinet approval.

Executive Summary

- 3 New Zealand's Refugee Quota Programme (RQP) provides protection to 1500 refugees in the greatest need per year. This contributes to New Zealand's fulfilment of our international and humanitarian commitments and supports The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the international community in providing protection for refugees who are not able to return safely to their home country.
- 4 Cabinet decisions are required on the regional allocations and the subcategories within the RQP for the next three-year cycle commencing on 1 July 2025.
- 5 I propose to maintain the current regional allocations of the RQP. The current regional allocations include the Asia / Pacific region (50 per cent), the Middle East and Africa regions (20 per cent each) and the Americas region (10 per cent). Global refugee resettlement need remains high, with the most refugees located in the Asia / Pacific region, closely followed by the Middle East and Africa regions. International relations [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- 6 I propose removing a number of subcategories which are International relations [REDACTED]. These include the places set aside for the New Zealand – Australia Refugee Resettlement Arrangement (150 per year), Afghan refugees (300 per year) and large-scale refugee crisis situations (200 +/- 10 per cent per year).

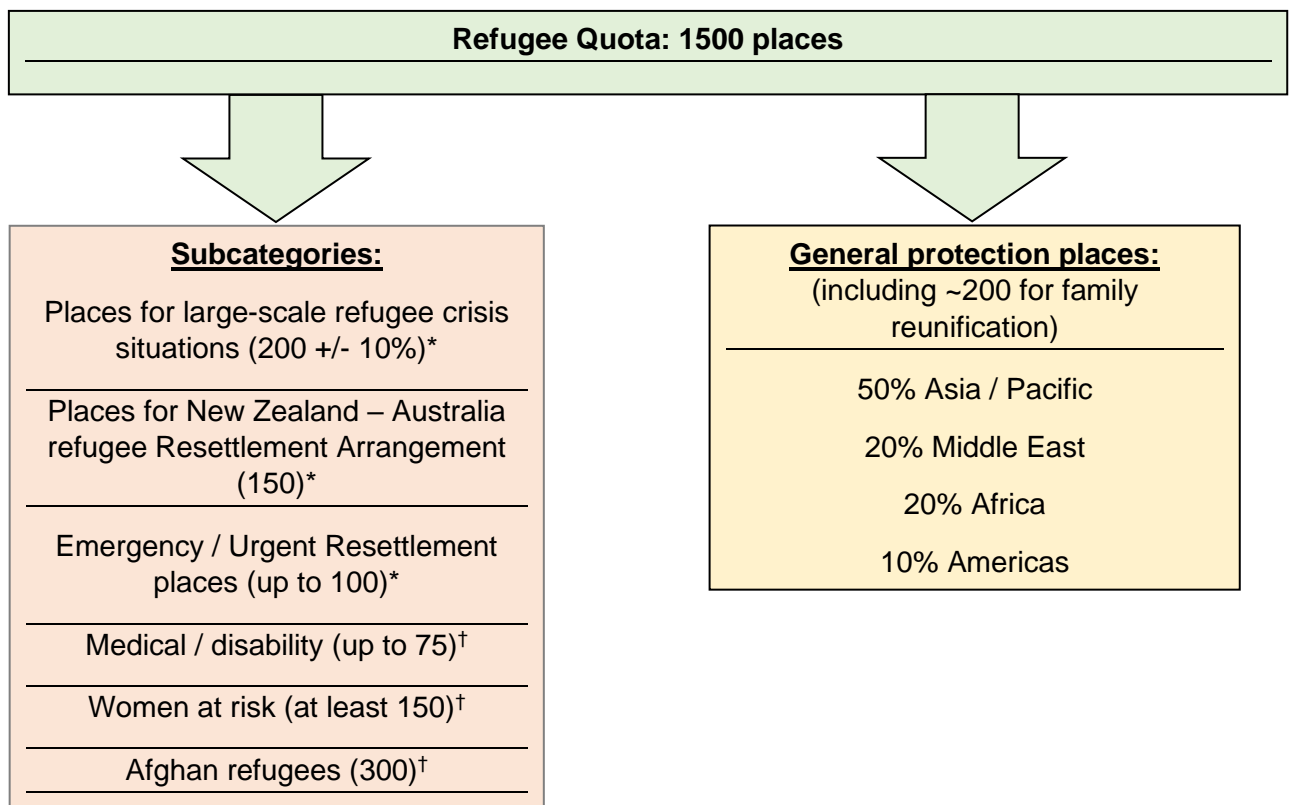
Background

- 7 New Zealand has a strong record in the resettlement of refugees. We are one of a few countries with a regular refugee resettlement programme¹ and have one of the highest refugee quotas in the world per capita. We are valued partners for our flexibility and adaptability in responding to emergency needs, and the high quality of resettlement support that we provide. Our Refugee Resettlement Centre in Māngere is known as the most robust example of a refugee reception centre internationally². Our Refugee Quota Programme creates durable solutions for refugees who cannot safely return to their home country.
- 8 INZ works closely with the UNHCR, who submit the cases of refugees to New Zealand for consideration according to the policy settings that I am seeking agreement to in this paper (regional allocations and subcategories). INZ then travels to countries of asylum on selection missions to interview refugees submitted by the UNHCR and assess cases against New Zealand's policy settings, including identity, security, health and character checks. Once approved applicants travel to New Zealand, they undergo a five-week induction programme at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre before entering communities across New Zealand. The UNHCR play a crucial role in the delivery of the RQP and further in-community settlement support is provided to refugees by organisations such as the Red Cross.
- 9 Key focus areas of the reception programme include health assessments, initial treatment and promotion; education and English language support; and settlement planning including orientation on working and living in New Zealand. These orientation and support measures play an important role in our efforts, outlined in the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy, to ensure former refugees go on to be self-sufficient and healthy participants in New Zealand society who fulfil their personal goals and are recognised for their contributions to New Zealand.
- 10 Within the current refugee Quota, there are several subcategories alongside regional allocations that enable New Zealand to shape the composition of the Quota, respond to humanitarian events **International relations**, and be responsive to global resettlement needs as new situations arise. Regional allocations set the proportion of places available to refugees based on their region of asylum (rather than country of origin). Regional allocations are provided based on the total number of places available after priority places, such as for large-scale refugee crisis situations, and emergency / urgent priority case submissions are allocated. Further subcategories (such as 'Women at Risk' and 'Medical Needs') apply to the entire Quota, placing upper and lower limits on the number of places we dedicate to different groups. **Figure one** contains a summary of the allocation of places in the RQP.

¹ The number of countries varies year-by-year and while not all countries have a regular refugee resettlement programme, a majority (69%) of refugees worldwide are resettled in predominantly low- and middle-income neighbouring countries.

² Benson (2024). Comparing Refugee Resettlement Services: A New Global Dataset and Typology.

Figure One: Current Allocations and Subcategories for the Refugee Quota Programme



*These places are counted separately from regionally allocated general protection places.

†These places are counted as regionally allocated general protection places unless they are Emergency / Urgent priority submissions.

- 11 I propose retaining the current Regional Allocations of 50% Asia / Pacific, 20% Middle East, 20% Africa and 10% Americas. **International relations**

The current regional allocations for the Quota remain fit for purpose and reallocating places from removed subcategories into general protection places would increase our ability to resettle refugees hosted by our Asia / Pacific neighbours. While global refugee resettlement needs have increased considerably since the last time the RQP was renewed in 2022, the regional distribution of needs remains comparable. The UNHCR projects the Asia / Pacific region, which makes up 50% of our regional allocations, will continue to have the largest resettlement needs in 2025, with an increase of six per cent between 2024 and 2025. The Middle East and Africa both continue to have significant refugee resettlement needs.

There are opportunities to streamline and simplify the Quota to improve operational efficiency and flexibility

- 12 The following proposed changes are likely to streamline operational efficiency for both the UNHCR and INZ. These changes will allow greater flexibility for New Zealand to resettle refugees referred by the UNHCR based on protection need rather than nationality.

Removing 'large-scale refugee crisis situations' subcategory

- 13 This subcategory was originally created **International relations** to allow flexibility for the New Zealand Government to respond to emerging situations. Immigration and Foreign Affairs Ministers currently assign these places on an annual basis. This approach was intended to allow the RQP to respond flexibly to international crises, have the option to use these places to resettle refugees impacted by often under-appreciated refugee crises and to show solidarity and raise awareness of these crises. In the current triennium, these places have been used for Rohingya and Syrian refugees.
- 14 Although this flexibility can be advantageous for the reasons above, the current requirement that these places be assigned each year creates inflexibility in how routine refugee resettlement can be carried out. Creating and maintaining a pipeline of applicants for the large-scale crisis subcategory and then facilitating resettlement for this subcategory each year, often from new locations, is significantly challenging for INZ and UNHCR alike. Furthermore, the use of these places can overlap with regional allocations, significantly altering the regional composition of the Quota.
- 15 I consider that the allocation of places in response to refugee crises should be done as and when the situation warrants a response, rather than mandating the use of places for this purpose each year, as is required in the current settings. This change is not expected to result in New Zealand resettling refugees with a lesser need for protection, but rather enable the UNHCR to submit refugees with the greatest protection need, irrespective of country of asylum. I propose removing this subcategory, although I ask that Cabinet agree that the Immigration Ministers responsible for the RQP retain the ability to, in consultation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, allocate RQP places for the same purpose on an ad hoc basis moving forward **International relations**.

Removing places set aside for the New Zealand – Australia Refugee Resettlement Arrangement

- 16 As noted in *figure one*, the current RQP triennium includes places set aside for the New Zealand – Australia Refugee Resettlement Arrangement and Afghan refugees. New Zealand has now met the commitment we made **International relations**, having accepted submissions for the 450 refugees that New Zealand agreed to settle. **International relations**
Any remaining arrivals beyond this date, which officials are working to facilitate as quickly as possible, can be absorbed into the Asia / Pacific regional allocation.

Removing places set aside for Afghan refugees following 2021 Taliban takeover

- 17 I also consider that places set aside for Afghan refugees (300 places or 20% of the Quota in 2024/25) can be re-absorbed into regional allocations moving forward. This aligns with the original policy intent that this subcategory only remain in place for three years before New Zealand resumes using these places to resettle refugees primarily on the basis of protection need. The greater flexibility from reabsorbing

these places into the regional allocations will enable the UNHCR and INZ to better respond to situational developments and emerging crises. The inclusion of places for Afghan refugees **International relations** in the context of the recent Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. My officials consider it likely that New Zealand will continue to settle significant numbers of Afghan refugees, given that approximately two thirds of refugees in the Asia / Pacific region (our largest regional allocation) are Afghan nationals.

Retaining the ‘Women at Risk’, ‘Medical Needs’ and ‘Unallocated – Urgent / Emergency’ subcategories

- 18 I have not proposed changes to the ‘Women at Risk’, ‘Medical Needs’ and ‘Unallocated – Urgent / Emergency’ subcategories. These subcategories play a significant role in ensuring INZ and the UNHCR are able to collaborate and operate flexibly to meet the protection needs of refugees in precarious and often life-threatening situations.
- 19 The ‘Unallocated – Urgent / Emergency’ subcategory enables INZ to accept high priority referrals from the UNHCR outside of planned refugee selection missions and regional allocations. The flexibility that our policy settings create in this regard enables our Quota to be utilised to the greatest impact by enabling the resettlement of individuals who are at extremely high risk and would otherwise spend years awaiting a suitable resettlement pathway.
- 20 The ‘Medical Needs’ subcategory is for individuals at risk of death or irreversible loss of function if they do not receive medical care³. There is a cap of 75 places on the number of people the UNHCR can refer on this basis each year.
- 21 The ‘Women at Risk’ subcategory reflects the particular needs of women who may need additional protection from, for example, abduction, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation in their country of asylum. I consider it important to retain this subcategory to ensure that women awaiting resettlement **International relations** are able to be resettled to avoid instances of gender-based harm.

Cost-of-living Implications

- 22 The proposals in this paper are unlikely to have cost of living implications.

Financial Implications

- 23 The decisions sought in this paper require no additional crown funding as the Refugee Quota will remain the same at 1,500 places and the changes will not change the overall cost of delivering the quota. Separately, Cabinet have recently agreed to a cost pressure bid in Budget 2025 to ensure funding for the delivery of the current Refugee Quota.

³ Some limitations apply which exclude individuals with conditions such as Haemophilia, current drug-resistant Tuberculosis, and conditions requiring full time care.

Legislative Implications

- 24 The proposals in this paper do not have legislative implications.

Impact Analysis

Regulatory Impact Statement

- 25 As the decisions that relate to this paper are routine policy decisions which do not require legislative change, a Regulatory Impact Analysis is not required.

Climate Implications of Policy Assessment

- 26 There are not likely to be any climate implications of the decisions that relate to this paper.

Population Implications

- 27 Decisions relating to subcategories and regional allocations may have impacts on former refugee communities and families already in New Zealand. Removal of, for example, the places set aside for Afghan nationals may reduce the number of Afghan refugees who resettle in New Zealand through the RQP, therefore potentially impacting Afghan communities. However, my officials have advised me it is likely that a significant number of Afghan nationals will continue to be resettled through the regional allocations. The removal of this subcategory, as intended originally, will create opportunities for other refugee communities to benefit from resettlement in New Zealand.

Human Rights

- 28 These proposals are consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993.

Consultation

- 29 MBIE officials have consulted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Police, Treasury, New Zealand Security and Intelligence Service, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Health New Zealand, Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Oranga Tamariki, Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Education.

Communications

- 30 MBIE officials are developing a plan to communicate the RQP regional allocations and subcategories for the next three years.

Proactive Release

- 31 MBIE will proactively release this Cabinet paper on its website within 30 business days of a decision being made by Cabinet. Proactive release will be subject to redaction as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982 and MBIE's proactive release criteria.

Recommendations

- 32 **Note** that Cabinet decisions on regional allocations and sub-categories in the next three-year Refugee Quota Programme (2025/26 to 2027/28) are required;
- 33 **Agree** to continue current regional allocation of places within the Refugee Quota for 2025/26 to 2027/28, as follows:

<i>Region (of asylum)</i>	<i>2024/25 (current)</i>	<i>2025/26 to 2027/28</i>
Asia / Pacific	50 per cent	50 per cent
Americas	10 per cent	10 per cent
Middle East	20 per cent	20 per cent
Africa	20 per cent	20 per cent

- 34 **Agree** to the following subcategories and allocations within the Refugee Quota:

<i>Number of places per year</i>				
<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>2024/25 (current)</i>	<i>2025/26</i>	<i>2026/27</i>	<i>2027/28</i>
Medical Needs	Up to 75	Up to 75	Up to 75	Up to 75
Unallocated – Emergency / Urgent Resettlement*	Up to 100	Up to 100	Up to 100	Up to 100
Afghan refugees	300	0	0	0
New Zealand – Australia Refugee Resettlement Arrangement*	150	0	0	0
Places for large-scale refugee crisis situations*	200 (+/- 10%)	0	0	0
Women at risk	At least 150	At least 150	At least 150	At least 150

*Not included in the regional allocation

- 35 **Note** that although I propose removing some subcategories, the total size of the Quota will remain at 1500 places
- 36 **Agree** that the Minister or Associate Minister of Immigration responsible for the Refugee Quota Programme will still be able to allocate places in response to future refugee crises on an ad hoc basis, in consultation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon Casey Costello

Associate Minister of Immigration

Authorised for lodgement