



COVERSHEET

Minister	Hon Casey Costello	Portfolio	Associate Immigration
Title of Cabinet paper	Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) pathway	Date to be published	4 August 2026

List of documents that have been proactively released

Date	Title	Author
April 2026	Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category	Office of the Associate Minister of Immigration
22 April 2026	Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship visa category SOU-26-MIN-0037 Minute	Cabinet Office
June 2026	Establishing a Permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) pathway	Office of the Associate Minister of Immigration
June 2026	Appendix One: Key policy settings carried over from the Pilot	Office of the Associate Minister
17 June 2026	Establishing a Permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) Pathway ECO-26-MIN-0102 Minute of Decision	Cabinet Office
25 November 2025- 9 June 2026	Briefings regarding establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) pathway	MBIE

Information redacted

YES / NO (please select)

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 redacted for reasons of national security, international relations, privacy of natural persons, confidential advice to Government, free and frank opinions, and confidentiality and negotiations.



BRIEFING

Policy and funding options for a permanent CORS visa category

Date:	27 November 2025	Priority:	High
Security classification:	Sensitive	Tracking number:	REQ-0023577

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Casey Costello Associate Minister of Immigration	Agree to key policy settings for a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship programme to inform a bid for Budget 2026 Agree to progress other policy and operational adjustments to improve the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship programme, contingent on securing funding	2 December 2025
Hon Erica Stanford Minister of Immigration	Agree that officials will progress a bid for Budget 2026 reflecting the recommended settings in this briefing, as agreed by Minister Costello	2 December 2025

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)				
Name	Position	Telephone		1st contact
Sam Foley	Manager, Immigration (International & Humanitarian) Policy	Privacy of contact	Privacy of contact	✓
Vanessa Jones	Principal Policy Advisor, Immigration (International & Humanitarian) Policy	Privacy of contact		

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Health, Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora, Ministry of Social Development, the Tertiary Education Commission and The Treasury.

Minister's office to complete:

☐ Approved

☐ Declined

☐ Noted

☐ Needs change

☐ Seen

☐ Overtaken by Events

☐ See Minister's Notes

☐ Withdrawn

Comments



BRIEFING

Policy and funding options for a permanent CORS visa category

Date:	27 November 2025	Priority:	High
Security classification:	Sensitive	Tracking number:	REQ-0023577

Purpose

To seek agreement to the key parameters for a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category. These parameters will inform a bid for Budget 2026.

Executive summary

The Minister of Immigration has been invited to submit a budget bid for Budget 2026 for a CORS initiative. The invitation requested that the initiative reflect insights from the recently completed outcomes evaluation.¹

MBIE recommends establishing CORS as a permanent visa pathway for sponsored refugees because it represents a cost-effective approach to refugee protection and settlement, delivers measurable and positive results [REDACTED] Free and frank opinions

The recent outcomes evaluation confirmed that CORS met or exceeded Cabinet's policy objectives, achieving positive settlement outcomes in employment, housing, education and community integration. [REDACTED] Free and frank opinions

Complementary pathways are increasingly recognised by the international community as essential to a comprehensive response to the global refugee situation. Like-minded countries have already established similar programmes. These factors demonstrate that CORS is both an effective and financially prudent way to expand New Zealand's refugee intake and enhance New Zealand's international reputation.

There are choices around the number of places which inform the proposed budget bid for a permanent visa category. MBIE recommends 200 places because it represents the best value for money (cost per refugee reduces with scaling), is most enhancing of our international reputation and best fits with the results of the outcomes evaluation. This would cost \$2.666m per annum. Alternatively, you could have a smaller programme at a lower cost: 50 places at \$1.3m and 100 places at \$1.835m. We seek your direction on your preferred number of places for the 2026 budget bid. If your preferred cap is 200, we will provide scaling options in the budget bid at 100 and 50 places.

Although there are also some choices around requiring sponsors to take on more of the cost to reduce government expenditure, MBIE does not recommend these due to risks of losing sponsor diversity and/or compromising settlement services.

MBIE also recommends a number of policy and operational adjustments informed by the pilot that do not impact the budget bid, such as eligibility requirements for sponsor organisations and sponsored refugees should the budget bid be agreed.

¹ [CORS-Outcomes-Evaluation.pdf](#)

Recommended action

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment recommends that Minister Costello:

- a **Note** that the Minister of Immigration has been invited to submit a bid for Budget 2026 for the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship programme, reflecting insights from the recent outcomes evaluation of the pilot

Noted

Parameters for the budget bid

Permanent or time-bound category

- b **Agree** that the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship programme should be established as a permanent visa category

Agree / Disagree

Annual cap of refugees

- c **Agree** to a budget bid for 200 places (plus or minus ten percent) per year at a cost of \$2.666m per year with the first year limited to 100 places to support a staged implementation pathway, and scaling options at 50 and 100 places (**recommended**)

Agree / Disagree

OR

- d **Agree** that the budget bid is for 100 places (plus or minus ten percent) per year at a cost of \$1.835m per year, with a scaling option at 50 places (**not recommended**)

Agree / Disagree

OR

- e **Agree** that the budget bid is for 50 places (plus or minus ten percent) per year at a cost of \$1.3m per year, and note that officials will consider further scaling options to reduce costs such as cost-sharing alternatives (**not recommended**)

Agree / Disagree

Cost-sharing between government and sponsors

- f **Agree** to maintain the existing cost-sharing arrangements between government and sponsors, consistent with the pilot settings

Agree / Disagree

Other policy settings

- g International relations and free and frank opinions

Noted

- h **agree** that Immigration New Zealand will instead partner with an international organisation that has experience making refugee referrals to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other states

Agree / Disagree

- i **Agree** to the following policy settings (which include some minor adjustments from the pilot phase, none of which impact the budget bid)

# ²	Recommended change	Decision
1	Remove requirement that refugees be residing in a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees priority area and replace with a requirement that they be from an area where the International Organisation for Migration operates	<i>Agree / Disagree</i>
3	Clarify that work-experience of principal applicant can include part-time and voluntary work	<i>Agree / Disagree</i>
4	Clarify the process for returning sponsors and the duration of validity for sponsor approval	<i>Agree / Disagree</i>
5	Require sponsors to have a minimum of five core members in sponsorship team and two on the Deed of Agreement	<i>Agree / Disagree</i>
6	Clarify that suitable accommodation can include flatting/boarding arrangements and require sponsors to be able to find suitable housing "at short notice"	<i>Agree / Disagree</i>

- j **Agree** to discuss this advice with officials on 2 December 2025

Agree / Disagree

Minister of Immigration only:

- k **Agree** that officials will prepare a budget bid reflecting the recommended settings in this briefing, as agreed by Minister Costello

Agree / Disagree



Sam Foley
Manager, Immigration (International & Humanitarian) Policy
Labour, Science and Enterprise Group, MBIE

27/ 11 / 2025

Hon Casey Costello
Associate Minister of Immigration

..... / /

Hon Erica Stanford
Minister of Immigration

..... / /

² Refer to table below in paragraph 60.

Background

1. Complementary pathways complement traditional resettlement programmes and are safe and regulated avenues for persons in need of international protection to come to a safe third country and have their protection needs met.³ Complementary pathways:
 - provide durable protection solutions for refugees;
 - demonstrate commitment to international responsibility sharing;
 - increase protection spaces by providing additional opportunities for refugee resettlement in safe third countries; and
 - build community engagement and support for refugee settlement.
2. CORS was New Zealand's pilot complementary protection category for refugees and operated in addition to the Refugee Quota Programme (Quota). CORS was first piloted in 2018. Under that pilot, 24 sponsored refugees were resettled in New Zealand with the settlement support provided by four approved community organisations. In 2020, the pilot was extended for a further three years to gather more information on the effectiveness of the programme, and again in 2024 to allow decisions in the pipeline to be processed. CORS closed on 30 June 2025. 201 refugees have been approved to come to New Zealand under the CORS extended pilot, supported by 25 community sponsor groups.

Scope of and approach to this advice

3. Following receipt of the briefing *Options for future work on CORS and RFSC* in August (REQ-0018403 refers), you directed officials to progress a targeted review on the future of the CORS programme, subject to securing Budget 2026 funding.
4. The review largely considers CORS within the pilot settings, and for example does not reconsider the role of the umbrella organisation which was found to be a core component of the pilot's success in the outcomes evaluation. You also agreed that a targeted review would not include a review of complementary pathways more broadly (for example labour-mobility and education focussed pathways) or issues with the Refugee Family Support Category (RFSC). Family reunification will be considered as part of the review of the RFSC scheduled to begin in early 2026.
5. The following criteria have been used to evaluate the key choices needed to inform the parameters of a budget bid:
 - Settlement objectives – refugees are resettled in a safe country and supported to settle quickly and successfully
 - Cost-effectiveness – in terms of total cost and value for money
 - Free and frank opinions
6. The choices are outlined in further detail below.

³ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) strongly advocates for complementary pathways as a component of global refugee protection as they expand durable solutions beyond traditional resettlement referral systems, offering refugees safe and legal migration options through community sponsorship, education, employment and family reunification channels.

Key choice one: permanent or time-bound programme

7. We consider there to be strong grounds for establishing a permanent CORS programme. CORS offers a cost-effective approach to refugee protection, delivers measurable and positive outcomes, reflects international best practice and would enhance New Zealand's international reputation.

The pilot was a success

8. The objectives of CORS [CAB-20-MIN-0155.21 refers] were to:
- provide an opportunity for community organisations to be actively engaged in resettlement;
 - enable sponsored refugees, with the support of community organisations, to quickly become independent and self-sufficient; and
 - provide an alternative form of admission to complement the Quota and demonstrate New Zealand's response to the scale of the refugee movement and commitment to international responsibility-sharing.
9. A process evaluation was completed in February 2019 and an outcomes evaluation in June 2025.⁴ The evaluation found that the pilot met the policy objectives agreed by Cabinet (set out in paragraph 8) and met or exceeded expectations across all evaluation criteria.
10. Although resettlement is still in its early stages and the sample size is small, the evaluation showed strong employment and housing outcomes, successful school integration for children, and well-established community connections among sponsored refugees. There were also positive impacts on receiving communities.

Free and frank opinions

11. Although CORS and the Quota fulfil different purposes⁵, it is useful to draw some comparisons between the two pathways when considering whether CORS is an outcomes-focussed and cost-effective way of resettling refugees in New Zealand.

IDI data demonstrates CORS has positive settlement outcomes

12. Officials have drawn on Statistics New Zealand's integrated data infrastructure (IDI) to consider employment, welfare and education outcomes for both Quota and CORS refugees. While the data is not directly comparable due to differences in settlement times and sample size,⁶ it shows a general trend of significantly better outcomes for CORS, for example:
- 32% of CORS refugees were employed at six months, compared to 19% of Quota refugees employed after one year;
 - 39% of CORS refugees were on the Jobseeker benefit at six months, compared to 67% of Quota refugees on the unemployment benefit after one year; and

⁴ In June you received a briefing on the results of the recently completed CORS outcomes evaluation (REQ-0016409 refers).

⁵ The Quota is a government-managed resettlement programme for UNHCR-referred refugees with permanent residence on arrival, while CORS uses sponsorship channels to provide a safe pathway for resettlement of refugees meeting certain eligibility criteria (age, language, work experience) outside traditional pathways.

⁶ CORS resettlement is in its early stages and the sample size is small.

- 42% of CORS refugees were receiving the accommodation supplement at six months, compared to 82% of Quota refugees at 12 months.
13. The positive settlement outcomes observed under the pilot within a short timeframe are likely attributable to two key factors:
- **Sponsor-led support:** Sponsors provide tailored, hands-on assistance that facilitates rapid integration into housing, employment, and community networks.
 - **Eligibility settings:** Applicants are selected based on criteria that favour successful settlement, including prior work experience or tertiary qualifications, English language proficiency, and an age range that supports workforce participation.

CORS is cost-effective

14. Complementary pathways are intended to be scalable and sustainable. In addition to delivering positive settlement outcomes, CORS is a financially prudent way of increasing New Zealand's refugee intake (for example as compared to increasing the Quota⁷).
15. CORS places are significantly cheaper than Quota refugee places. The estimated cost of a Quota place to MBIE is \$36,400, whereas a CORS place is costed at \$26,000 for a programme of 50 places per year (more than 28% cheaper per place). Further, the cost of delivering CORS places decreases with scale, dropping to \$13,000 per place for a programme of 200 places (more than 64% cheaper than a Quota place) due to economies of scale for umbrella organisation support and processing. In addition, CORS refugees generally arrive with stronger English skills and job readiness, reducing the likelihood of ongoing welfare costs compared to Quota refugees.

Free and frank opinions

16. Complementary pathways are playing an increasingly important role in the global protection system, as traditional refugee resettlement systems face constraints due to high global displacement levels, reductions in funding, and reduced quotas. The Global Compact on Refugees⁸ identifies complementary pathways such as labour mobility, education opportunities, and community sponsorship as being a core part of a comprehensive refugee response.
17. Like-minded countries including Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom have established effective permanent complementary pathway programmes. The UNHCR continues to encourage States to expand these options as part of international solidarity and responsibility-sharing in a time of acute need.
18. While the CORS programme is small in scale, it sends an important message of solidarity to countries hosting large refugee populations. This solidarity is essential to maintaining a strong and credible global protection system.
19. Along with delivering a world-class refugee quota programme, by establishing CORS as a permanent pathway, New Zealand would demonstrate that numerous small-scale complementary pathways can collectively strengthen international responsibility-sharing and support durable solutions. Expanding such pathways also builds a more agile and responsive protection system, better equipped to address diverse and emerging displacement crises.

⁷ The Māngere Refugee Resettlement Centre is at capacity. This means that it would not be possible to increase the Quota at this time without significant capital funding.

⁸ Framework adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2018 to strengthen global responses to refugee situations through predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing among countries.

Key choice two: number of refugees

20. The initial pilot capped the annual caseload at 25 refugees per year. Cabinet agreed for this to be increased to 50 in 2020 (CAB-20-MIN-0155.21 refers). Officials have considered a range of scaling options.

Options analysis

21. The options for scaling are considered in more detail in the table below. Key costs include INZ staffing and immigration officers, an international referral partner (discussed in detail at paragraphs 54-59 below), international travel, language assessments, umbrella organisation and offshore logistics. Further information on estimated costs can be found at Annex One.

Annual cap	Estimated cost per year (\$m)	Pros	Cons
<i>Recommended</i>			
200	2.666	Demonstrates the greatest commitment to complementary pathways. Would encourage the greatest diversity in sponsors.⁹ Outcomes evaluation supported scaling with appropriate resourcing. System is ready and able to support scaling without compromising quality. Good value for money as it costs around \$0.026m per refugee at 50 places per year, but \$0.013m at 200.	Increased financial investment. Likely to aggravate existing costs and other pressures in health and social services (but mitigated by eligibility requirements of sponsored refugees).
<i>Scaling options</i>			
100	1.835	Demonstrates a greater commitment to complementary pathways than 50 places. Would encourage greater diversity in sponsors. Outcomes evaluation supported scaling with appropriate resourcing. System is ready and able to support scaling without compromising quality.	Increased financial investment. May aggravate existing costs and other pressures in health and social services (but mitigated by eligibility requirements of sponsored refugees).
50	1.3 ¹⁰	Cheapest and easiest to implement as it is consistent with existing settings.	50 is a small caseload relative to the financial investment.

⁹ Having a diverse range of sponsor groups strengthens the programme as it enables INZ to match the varied needs of refugees with sponsors' different skills and strengths. It also enables settlement capacity to grow in non-traditional settlement locations across New Zealand, which widens the pool of resources and support systems that can be tapped in to.

¹⁰ This is an increase in funding previously sought for 50 places (\$0.970m), primarily due to additional staffing, an international referral partner and an increase in umbrella organisation costs. Further information on this can be found at Annex One.

			Falls short of community interest and capacity.
--	--	--	---

Stakeholder views

22. Stakeholders consulted were supportive of increasing the number of places, citing the pilot's success, sponsor interest, humanitarian need and continuity. They emphasised the need for gradual scale-up with adequate resourcing and processing capacity.

Recommendation

23. Based on the outcomes evaluation¹¹ and cost estimates, MBIE considers that scaling to 200 refugees per year at \$2.666 million represents good value for money. 200 places would demonstrate a stronger commitment to international responsibility sharing and keeps us more aligned with international partners who have larger refugee intakes on a per capita basis. It would also enable INZ to recruit new sponsor organisations each year, which is crucial for programme sustainability.
24. In addition, MBIE considers that the programme can be scaled without compromising quality, provided there is adequate resourcing. The outcomes evaluation noted an overwhelming response from sponsorship organisations interested in participating, with demand outstripping availability of places. It also found no difference in settlement outcomes experienced by refugees supported by organisations supporting higher numbers of refugees compared to those with fewer sponsorships. Confidentiality
- funding.
25. Any increase to 200 places should be incremental to ensure a smooth transition and successful adjustment to any changes in policy settings from the pilot, with the number of places being 100 for the first year of the programme and 200 in the years following.
26. We recommend that the number of places be set with a tolerance range of plus/minus ten percent, mirroring the setting for the Quota. This would avoid inefficiencies caused by rigid numbers (e.g. if a family group slightly exceeds the cap) and also provides operational flexibility to respond to unexpected delays, urgent humanitarian cases, or changes in sponsor readiness without formal changes.

Key choice three: cost-sharing alternatives between sponsors and government

27. Under the pilot, INZ funded the immigration process (including international flights and health assessments) and umbrella organisation. The government also funds health, education and welfare costs. Approved community sponsors funded the majority of settlement costs (including domestic travel, sourcing housing and initial bond and rent, living costs until benefit starts, interpretation costs and initial orientation).
28. For the purposes of the Budget process we are required to consider whether there are options that could reduce government expenditure, for example alternative cost-sharing arrangements between sponsors and government. Any potential savings must be carefully balanced against refugee settlement needs and the capacity of community sponsors.

Options analysis

29. The alternative options are considered in more detail in the table below.

¹¹ Pages 36-37.

#	Option	Pros	Cons	Cost for 200 places per year (\$m)
1	Requiring sponsors to pay for international flights (average of \$3,200 per person). Either directly or INZ paying upfront and requiring sponsors to repay that cost.	Would reduce the costs to the Government per refugee. For example, saving of around \$160,000 per year for a programme of 50 and \$640,000 per year for a programme of 200. Would reduce the amount of government investment required, or alternatively could enable more people to be resettled within the same funding envelope.	Cost of flights is subsidised for INZ and likely to be higher if paid directly by sponsors. Flights are often booked last-minute which could create further funding and logistical difficulties for sponsors (if sponsors are paying upfront). Prohibitive for some organisations and therefore could impact on number and diversity of sponsors. Could impact quality of settlement support. May change the make-up of refugees, for example, if sponsors are less able to support larger families due to the cost of flights.	2.426
2	Charging a set fee for sponsors either annually or per sponsored refugee. Under the Immigration Act, a fee could potentially be charged for costs associated with visa processing and the umbrella organisation, currently costed at around \$0.729m per year for a programme of 50. For example, a fee of \$5,000 per refugee could potentially be charged to incur savings of \$250,000 for a programme of 50 or \$1m for 200.	Would require sponsors to cover a higher proportion of costs than Option 1 and reduce Government expenditure further per refugee. As above, could reduce funding required or allow more refugees to be resettled through the allocated funding.	While charging for INZ processing costs may be relatively straightforward, it would deliver minimal savings. Charging for umbrella organisation costs is more complex and no profit can be made. Similar to existing employer fees, careful consideration would be needed regarding the amount and purpose of the fee. Same concerns as Option 1 in terms of being prohibitive for some sponsors, impacting the quality of support and impacting diversity of both sponsors and refugees. These concerns increase the higher the fee. Enforcement options are limited – while refugee status cannot be revoked, sponsors who fail to pay could be barred from future participation.	1.666

30. Another option to reduce cost to government that was considered but discounted was limiting the programme to the Asia-Pacific region. We understand that this would likely save an average of \$1,200 per refugee (due to the cheaper cost of international flights in the region). Under the pilot, half of sponsored refugees came from the Asia-Pacific region and around half of the sponsor organisations nominated from outside the Asia-Pacific region. Because limiting the programme to the Asia-Pacific region would not create significant savings and would likely significantly impact the interest of sponsors, we have not included this as a viable option.

Stakeholder views

31. Most stakeholders consulted stated that a significant increase to sponsor costs, such as requiring sponsors to pay for international flights, could be prohibitive to the ability to sponsor. This was also the case for larger sponsor organisations, such as Confidentiality Confidentiality. One organisation, Confidentiality stated that it would not be limited by an increase in sponsor costs, but noted that this would not be the case for many other organisations. We also understood from stakeholders that increasing costs could impact the diversity of sponsors. Sponsors noted that it would be particularly difficult to sponsor families, as flights for a family of six could cost in excess of \$19,200.
32. Confid noted that a sponsor's financial resources do not necessarily equate to the ability to sponsor successfully. This is because strong settlement support also requires significant volunteer hours and large community networks. It also noted a concern that differences in financial capacity could reduce or result in inconsistencies in the quality of settlement support. Confid also raised a concern that sponsors paying for flights could create undesirable expectations/demands on refugees, or a power imbalance between sponsors and refugees.

Recommendation

33. Sponsors are currently contributing a significant share of both financial and in-kind support toward the settlement of sponsored refugees.¹³ Preliminary analysis of cost-sharing alternatives suggests that there may be significant flow-on effects for increasing costs for sponsors, particularly in terms of being prohibitive for some sponsors, impacting the quality of support and impacting diversity of both sponsors and refugees. These concerns increase the higher the fee. Even some of the most well-resourced sponsors noted that paying for flights would be prohibitive.
34. For these reasons, we recommend against an increased cost-sharing burden on sponsors.

Summary of key choices

35. The below table provides a high-level summary of the key parameters for the budget bid outlined above, measured against the criteria.

Options	Criteria		
	Cost-effectiveness	Settlement outcomes	Free and frank
<i>Permanent or time-bound programme</i>			
Permanent (recommended)	(ongoing cost)		
Time-bound	(set cost)		
<i>Number of refugees</i>			
200 (recommended)	(more expensive but the cost per refugee decreases at scale)		

Confidentiality

1

100			
50	(cheaper but costs more per refugee)		
<i>Cost-sharing alternatives between government and sponsors</i>			
Status quo (recommended)			
Sponsors pay for international flights			
Sponsorship fee			

Funding

36. A permanent CORS visa category could either be funded from within INZ baselines or by new Crown funding from Budget 2026.
37. MBIE does not recommend funding a CORS programme within baselines. This is because any refugee-related expenditure (Crown-funded) would need to be reprioritised. This would mean reducing the Quota and/or RFSC numbers delivered annually or alternatively reducing the amount of settlement support services that INZ funds.
38. INZ has prepared some cost estimates for a permanent programme, based on the key policy settings outlined above and options to scale, attached at Annex One. These estimates will inform the budget bid.

Costs to other agencies

39. As resident visa holders under CORS, sponsored refugees and their families are eligible to access the same Government-funded welfare and housing support, education and health services as other New Zealand residents and citizens.
40. Funding for the CORS pilot was spread across Votes Education, Health, Labour Market, Social Development and Tertiary Education. Funding for the extension of 50 places in 2024 was limited to Vote Labour Market. MBIE considers that funding for a permanent programme should also be limited to Vote Labour Market as population-based funding mechanisms for health, education and other core services should be sufficient to meet the needs of CORS refugees. Agencies views are set out from paragraph 42.
41. The marginal impact on these services is negligible (even at a cap of 200), and they are already funded through per capita allocations that absorb small fluctuations. Including additional funding for these services in the budget bid would create unnecessary complexity. The budget bid should therefore focus on programme-specific costs, such as immigration processing and sponsor support, rather than mainstream public services. This approach is consistent with most other immigration changes, for example Skilled Migrant Category changes which expanded the range of people who can stay and get residence. In addition, most agencies have not advised that the CORS cohort received any tailored or cohort-specific services and the eligibility requirements of refugees (e.g. age and health assessments) are also a mitigant to increased costs to other agencies.

Feedback from agencies

42. Treasury has advised that it agrees with MBIE's preferred approach and that it is unlikely to support other agencies seeking separate funding on top of general population costs.

43. The Ministry of Education and Tertiary Education Commission have confirmed they will not seek additional funding for this initiative as it can be supported through baseline funding.
44. The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) has noted that it supports the intent of this initiative but that it cannot be accommodated within MSD existing baseline appropriation. MSD has noted that further dialogue will be required to identify funding options and clarify responsibilities and expectations of partner agencies.
45. Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, the delivery arm of Health, in consultation with the Ministry of Health (MOH), has advised that although it is supportive of a permanent CORS programme, it will likely put pressure on a system already under challenge. This is particularly the case with scaled options of above 50 places per annum and depending on where people are resettled or whether there are existing refugee-specific primary care and support services in those resettlement locations).
46. They note that there will be an additional cost to the health system but it will not fall within the Treasury threshold for a budget bid. Accordingly, no additional Vote Health funding will be sought, provided there are no expectations around the CORS cohort being able to access refugee-specific health and support services. The cohort will be able to access publicly funded health and disability services as part of business as usual, equivalent to any permanent resident in New Zealand.
47. MBIE officials will continue to work with agencies to get more detail on costs.

Further policy changes to improve the pilot

48. Officials have also considered a number of other consequential policy and operational adjustments should the budget bid be approved.

Matched and nominated pathways

49. Under the pilot, refugee candidates were identified for sponsorship in one of two ways:
 - Matched pathway: refugee is identified by the UNHCR (or other organisation) as a refugee and then referred to CORS for matching with a suitable sponsor organisation.
 - Nominated pathway: the community group names a specific candidate for sponsorship. The UNHCR (or other organisation) would provide some information for nominated referrals relevant to determination of the candidate as a refugee, with the process primarily being carried out by the Refugee Status Unit (RSU).
50. Officials have considered whether both pathways should be retained.

Options analysis

51. The pros and cons of maintaining both pathways are outlined in more detail in the table below.

Pathway	Pros	Cons
Matched	International partners conduct refugee status assessments before referring cases to CORS, resulting in a lower decline and dropout rate. Refugees with the highest protection needs will be identified and referred to CORS, even where they have no pre-existing connection to New Zealand.	The matched pathway is less popular among sponsor groups. An international referral partner selects 2-3 locations to identify and refer refugees from. This means less diversity among sponsored refugees on the matched pathway.

Nominated	More popular among sponsor groups and therefore enabled INZ to recruit a large and diverse group of sponsor organisations. This is important for programme sustainability.	More operationally complex as refugees were located in a wide range of locations. There was also a higher decline and dropout rate.
-----------	--	---

Recommendation

52. On balance, because of keen sponsor interest in retaining the nominated pathway, MBIE recommends retaining both pathways. The outcomes evaluation found no discernible difference in outcomes between the two.
53. Although there is some increased operational complexity associated with the nominated pathway, this can be mitigated through the use of a third party to manage the offshore verification process. This is discussed further below at paragraphs 57-58.

Role of third-party international organisations in referring and verifying refugees

54. Under the pilot, the UNHCR played a key role in both matched and nominated pathways by identifying and referring cases for the matched pathway and verifying the status of principal applicants under the nominated pathway. International relations

55. International relations

56. Negotiations and international relations

Requirement for principal applicants to be mandated as refugees

57. The pilot settings required principal applicants to be mandated as refugees by either the UNHCR or host country governments or have their summary of claim assessed by the RSU. This was administratively and legally complex and added to RSU's already substantial workload.
58. Confidentialit has existing systems that would enable them to interview applicants under both pathways and conduct refugee status decisions. MBIE officials view this as being the preferred process and note that the quality of the information and service Confidentialit can provide will be as robust International to what can be provided by the UNHCR. This approach will also relieve some resourcing pressure on the RSU.
59. Immigration instructions would need to be amended to enable this approach.

Other improvements

60. A range of other issues that will not impact the budget bid are set out in the table below.

#	Issue	Description	Recommendation for change/comments
Requirements for applicants			
1	Applicant be “residing in a country that is an UNHCR priority area” and one of the international regions the Quota resettles from	There is no existing list of UNHCR priority areas that Immigration Officers or sponsors can easily access or use to interpret these criteria. This complicates the process for identifying refugees for both officers and sponsors. In terms of identifying refugees and facilitating travel, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)'s operations are now more fundamental to the operation of CORS than the UNHCR's. There may be some countries that are in regions that the Quota resettles from but the IOM doesn't operate. INZ will not be able to process applications from these countries.	Retain the requirement that refugees are from one of the international regions the Quota resettles from but remove requirement that applicants be “residing in a country that is an UNCHR priority area”. Add a requirement that they be residing in an area where the IOM has operational capability.
2	Principal applicant be aged 18-45 years	Some stakeholders have noted a preference for increasing the upper age limit (both during consultation and the outcomes evaluation). This is primarily due to it being unnecessarily restrictive for a humanitarian pathway and older individuals still being able/motivated to settle successfully. The range of 18-45 years was intended to align with the Pacific Access Category and the Samoan Quota, which similarly focus on younger working age rather than highly skilled migrants.	A maximum age of 45 reflects the CORS focus on workforce participation and successful settlement (higher adaptability and capacity for language acquisition). This age range includes key life stages (completion of study, workforce entry, family formation, career progression) and younger applicants are less likely to have downstream healthcare costs. It is also consistent with other Pacific pathways.
3	Principal applicant has a minimum of three years' work experience or a qualification requiring at least two years' tertiary study	There were difficulties with understanding and evidencing what type of work experience was sufficient to meet this requirement (e.g. voluntary or part-time work).	Issue guidance to immigration officers and applicants/sponsors clarifying that consistent part-time and volunteer work experience that is akin to paid employment can meet the relevant requirement. More stringent requirements may start to shift towards a labour mobility focus.

Requirements for sponsors			
5	Clarify process for returning sponsors, how long sponsor approval is valid for	Regular reviews of sponsor eligibility are required to ensure that sponsors continue to meet sponsorship requirements and can effectively deliver settlement support.	Amended sponsorship agreements that enable an in-principle ability to sponsor (valid for three years to balance changes in circumstances with resource burden), but require approval for each Expression of Interest submitted. This would enable INZ/HOST to do a light-touch check of capacity/capability for each new refugee sponsored, with a full reapplication required after three years. For returning sponsors, a light-touch renewal process and requirement to demonstrate they meet any new requirements. Separately, officials note that an assessment of the sponsorship recruitment process and conflict resolution process (set out in the Deed of Agreement) will also be undertaken.
6	Ensuring sponsors have enough core members (in addition to being a registered entity)	Both the process and outcomes evaluations found that larger sponsor groups perform better. Confidentiality This is due to the significant time commitment involved in fulfilling sponsorship duties and need for frequent communication with relevant parties. Having more sponsors involved also ensures a more diverse range of skills are available. This would be particularly important if sponsors were supporting more refugees (if the cap is increased).	Require sponsors to have a minimum of five core members involved in the sponsorship team. Require a minimum of two signatures on the Deed of Agreement and two contact details.
7	Have capability and capacity to secure suitable accommodation	Suitable accommodation has been interpreted as private, individual housing. However, this was not the most desired type of living situation for some refugees (e.g. some preferred flatting arrangements). Because travel was often organised at late notice it was not always possible for sponsors to have secured and sourced private housing in time for the arrival of refugees.	Provide clarification that flatting and/or boarding situations are acceptable, provided they meet the "suitable" standard. To ensure sponsors better understand obligations up-front, add "at short notice" to the eligibility requirement for sponsors to source housing.

Other			
8	Managing demand from sponsors	Community interest in sponsorship could exceed the number of places each year. This would need to be managed.	Before opening the annual application process for approved sponsors, MBIE will assess the capacity and interest of existing sponsors. This review will inform how many new sponsor positions can be approved for that year. A similar assessment will be carried out before inviting sponsors to submit Expressions of Interest for sponsored refugees.

Stakeholder consultation

61. Officials consulted with a targeted group of stakeholders to inform this advice: **Confid**, the **Confidentiality** and six sponsor organisations from the extended pilot. **Confidentiality** They are a mix of refugee and non-refugee led organisations, used both matched and nominated pathways to identify refugees for sponsorship and are located in both major urban centres and smaller communities that are not part of the established refugee resettlement network.
62. Consultation involved written submissions and online meetings, with responses received from all stakeholders. Their views are reflected in the analysis in this briefing.

Next steps

63. Following your direction on the recommendations in this briefing, officials will finalise a draft budget bid and seek feedback/approval from Minister Stanford on the draft budget bid. Budget submissions are due with Treasury on 19 December 2025.
64. Following submission of the bid in December, we will work to provide any further detailed advice on the policy settings to ensure that MBIE is in a position to implement the category quickly if funding is secured.
65. Budget decisions will likely be announced in May 2026.

Milestone	Date
Discuss any feedback on proposed approach to the budget bid with officials and provide final decisions on this briefing	2 December
Briefing seeking feedback on draft budget bid to Minister Stanford for consideration, sent to Minister Costello for information	11 December
Budget bids due	19 December
Seek any further minor policy decisions	January-March 2026
Cabinet agrees to Budget 2026 package	April 2026
Budget day	May 2026
First refugees start to arrive	Early-mid 2027

Annexes

Annex One: Scaled funding options

Annex One: Scaled funding options

	50 places				100 places				200 places (100 in year 1)			
Labour Market	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Immigration Services MCA: Departmental Output Expense: Settlement and Integration of Refugees												
Senior Advisor	0.175	0.175	0.175	0.175	0.175	0.175	0.175	0.175	0.175	0.175	0.175	0.175
Immigration Officers (2 FTE for 50 and 3 FTE for 100 and 4 FTE for 200)	0.279	0.279	0.279	0.279	0.418	0.418	0.418	0.418	0.418	0.557	0.557	0.557
	Negotiations											
International travel	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.320	0.320	0.320	0.320	0.320	0.640	0.640	0.640
ESOL assessment	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.012	0.012	0.012	0.012	0.012	0.024	0.024	0.024
	Negotiations											
Offshore logistics - health, biometrics, interview	0.080	0.080	0.080	0.080	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.320	0.320	0.320
Total each year	1.300	1.300	1.300	1.300	1.835	1.835	1.835	1.835	1.835	2.666	2.666	2.666
Cost per place	0.026				0.01835					0.01333		
Total over four years	5.200				7.340				9.833			

Notes

1. The estimated cost of \$1.3m for 50 places is an increase to funding previously sought for 50 places (CAB-20-MIN-0155.21 refers). The main differences are:
 - Additional immigration officer requested: \$0.1395m (required as the current resourcing for processing CORS is constrained)
 - Negotiations and international relations
 - Negotiations
 - English assessments not included in prior bid \$0.006m (costs which were omitted in past bids which are now required based on pilot findings)
 - Offshore logistics, health & biometrics not included in prior bid: \$0.080m (costs which were omitted in past bids which are now required based on pilot findings)
2. Note also that in past bids \$0.040m was estimated for international travel for officers however that was not required and is not included in the current costings.



BRIEFING

Draft Cabinet paper for Ministerial consultation – Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category

Date:	23 March 2026	Priority:	High
Security classification:	Sensitive	Tracking number:	REQ-0029363

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Casey Costello Associate Minister of Immigration	Provide any feedback on the draft Cabinet paper Circulate the draft Cabinet paper for Ministerial consultation	30 March 2026
Hon Erica Stanford Minister of Immigration	For information.	N/A

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)				
Name	Position	Telephone		1st contact
Sam Foley	Manager, Immigration (International & Humanitarian) Policy	Privacy of	Privacy of	✓
Vanessa Jones	Principal Policy Advisor, Immigration (International & Humanitarian) Policy	Privacy of		

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
MBIE is consulting with: The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Ministries of Education, Ethnic Communities, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Health, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Social Development, the Tertiary Education Commission, the New Zealand Police, the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service and the Treasury were consulted on this paper.

Minister's office to complete:

☐ Approved

☐ Declined

☐ Noted

☐ Needs change

☐ Seen

☐ Overtaken by Events

☐ See Minister's Notes

☐ Withdrawn

Comments



BRIEFING

Draft Cabinet paper for Ministerial consultation – Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category

Date:	23 March 2026	Priority:	High
Security classification:	Sensitive	Tracking number:	REQ-0029363

Purpose

To provide you with a draft Cabinet paper for Ministerial Consultation seeking agreement to create a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category.

Recommended action

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment recommends that you:

- a **Note** that the Minister of Finance has requested that you submit a paper for consideration by Cabinet on establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category, in advance of Budget 2026 decisions being made

Noted

- b **Agree** to circulate the attached Cabinet paper for Ministerial consultation

Agree / Disagree / Discuss

- c **Note** that agency consultation is currently underway and feedback from agencies will be incorporated in the final version of the paper alongside any Ministerial feedback

Noted

- d **Note** that officials require feedback from Ministerial consultation by 13 April 2026 to enable the paper to be lodged by 10am on 16 April for Cabinet Economic Policy Committee (ECO) consideration on 22 April and Cabinet decisions on 28 April 2026.

Noted

Sam Foley
Manager, Immigration (International & Humanitarian) Policy
Labour, Science and Enterprise Group, MBIE

..... / /

Hon Casey Costello
Associate Minister of Immigration

..... / /

The Minister of Finance has requested you seek Cabinet agreement to a permanent CORS category in advance of B26 decisions

1. As you are aware, the Minister of Immigration submitted a Budget bid for Budget 2026 seeking funding to make the CORS visa category permanent [REQ-0024708].
2. On Monday 16 March 2026, the Treasury advised that the Minister of Finance had directed that the decision to make the CORS programme permanent is significant enough that it requires a Cabinet decision in advance of Budget 2026 decisions. The Treasury advised that the Budget Cabinet paper will be lodged on 24 April 2026 and that Cabinet decisions on CORS need to be taken before this time.
3. This means that you will need to take a paper to the Cabinet Economic Policy Committee no later than its meeting on 22 April 2026. Given consultation obligations and the sitting calendar, it is not feasible to aim for an earlier meeting.

A draft Cabinet paper is attached

4. In order for the CORS initiative to be considered as part of Budget 2026 decisions, Cabinet must agree to establishing a permanent visa category. Officials have prepared a draft Cabinet paper attached at **Annex One** that reflects the preferred option in the Budget bid, and the policy settings you agreed to in November 2025 [REQ-0023577], specifically:
 - a permanent CORS visa category for 200 places annually from year two (increased from 100 in the first year), largely reflecting the settings from the extended CORS pilot.
5. The proposals in the draft Cabinet paper, including the annual cap, are subject to Budget 2026 decisions.
6. Due to the tight timeframes, all interested agencies have not yet been able to provide feedback on the draft Cabinet paper. The Treasury, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Health have provided initial comments. Officials are currently consulting with agencies and will include any further feedback in the final version.

The Ministry of Social Development has advised it is no longer seeking funding

7. The Ministry of Social Development advised last week that it has now decided that the departmental costs it previously sought for CORS through Budget 2026 can be absorbed (\$0.717m for Vote Social Development for a cap of 200 over four years).
8. We will work with the Treasury to update the Budget bid as required.

Next steps

9. Following feedback from Ministerial and agency consultation, we will provide you with a final version of the Cabinet paper no later than 14 April 2026 for lodgement on 16 April 2026. Cabinet Economic Policy Committee (ECO) will consider the proposals on 22 April 2026.

Milestone	Timeframe (2026)
Ministerial and agency consultation	30 March – 13 April (TBC)
Final Cabinet paper	14 April, for decision by 15 April
Lodge paper for ECO by 10am	16 April

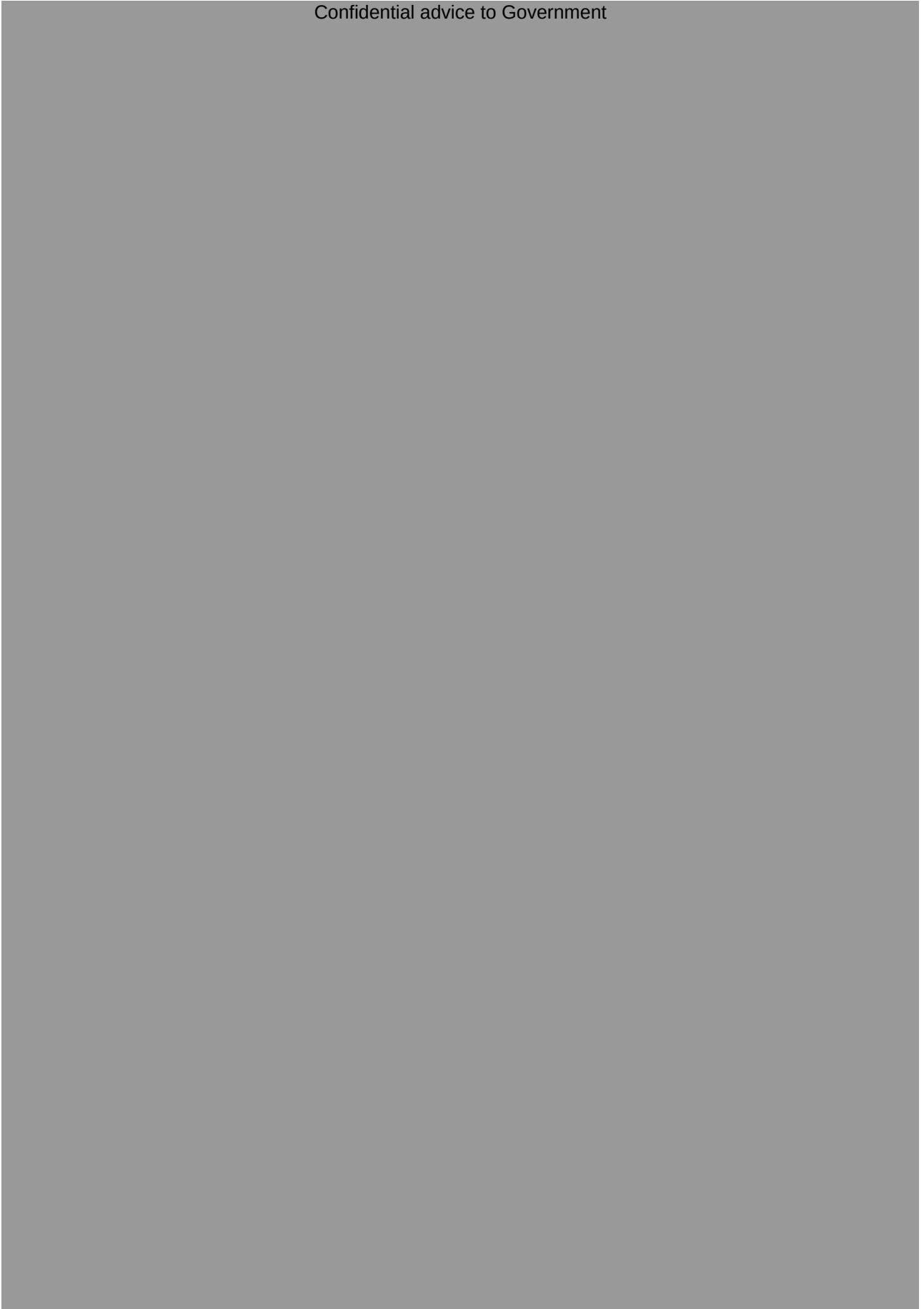
ECO	22 April
-----	----------

Annexes

Annex One: Draft Cabinet paper: Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category

**Annex One: Draft Cabinet paper: Establishing a permanent
Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa
category**

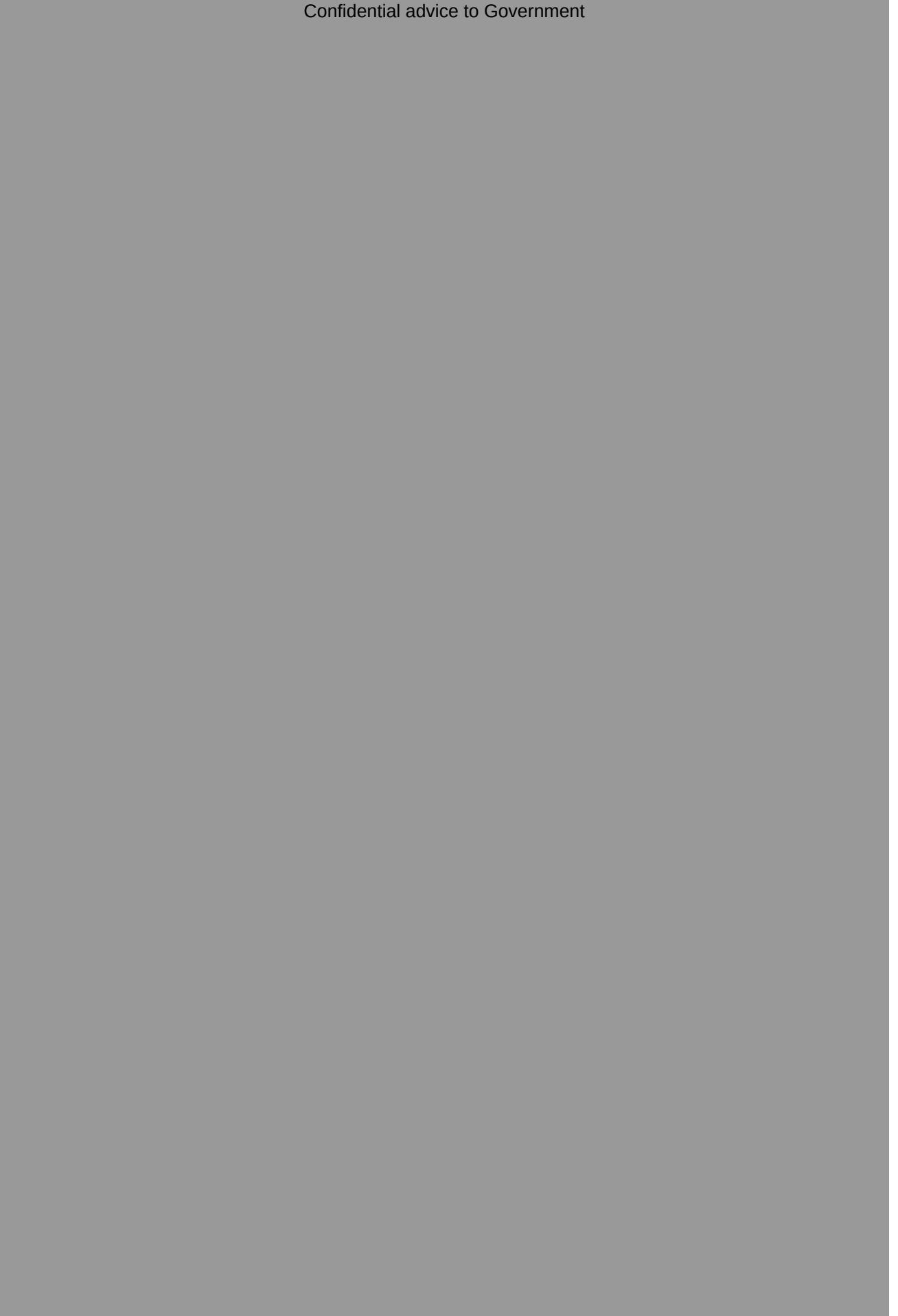
Confidential advice to Government



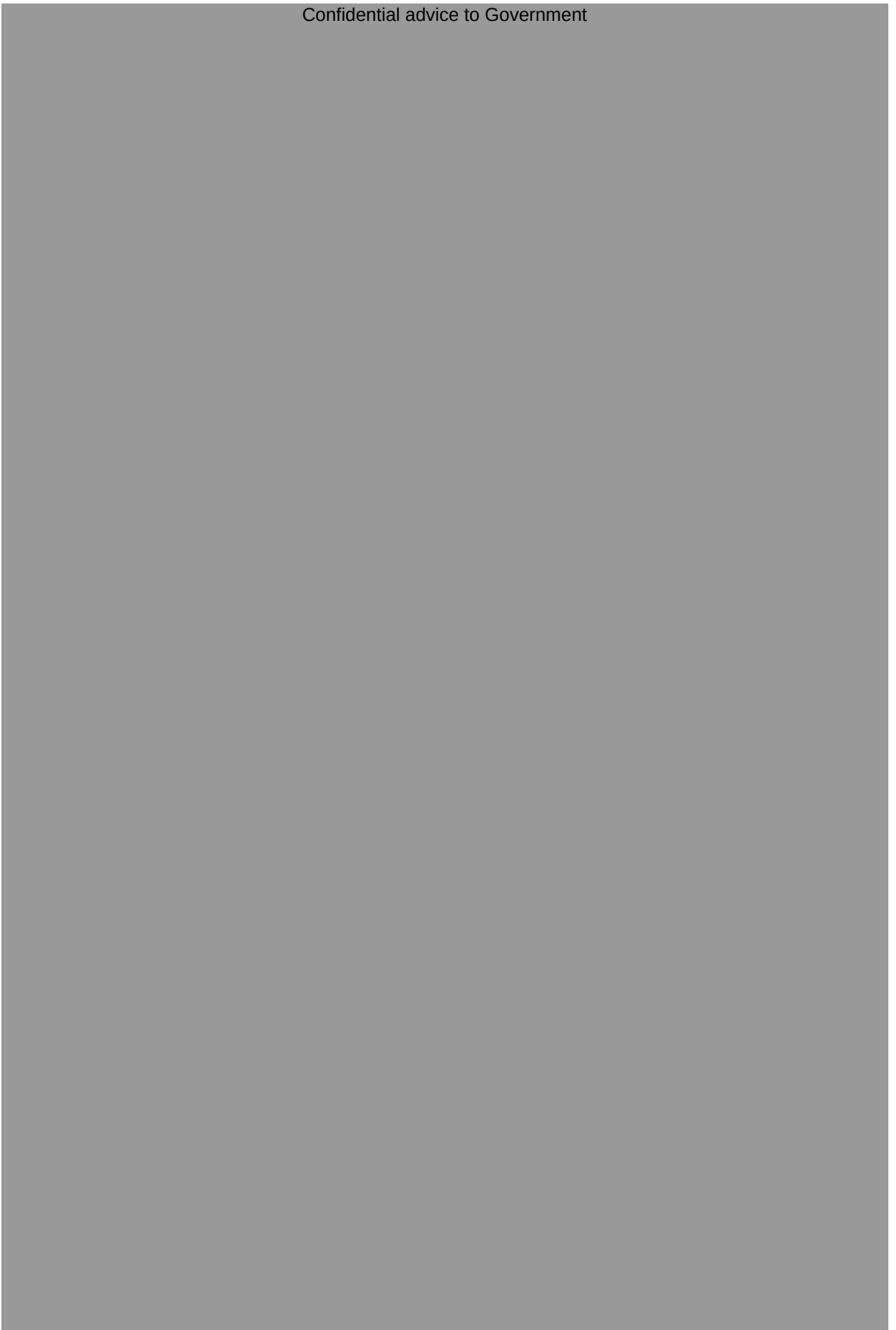
Confidential advice to Government



Confidential advice to Government



Confidential advice to Government



Confidential advice to Government



B U D G E T S E N S I T I V E

Confidential advice to Government



I N C O N F I D E N C E



BRIEFING

Final Cabinet paper for lodgement – Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category

Date:	14 April 2026	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:	Sensitive	Tracking number:	REQ-0030051

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Casey Costello Associate Minister of Immigration	Provide any final feedback on the Cabinet paper to officials Approve the lodgement of the Cabinet paper by 10am on 16 April 2026	15 April 2026
Hon Erica Stanford Minister of Immigration	For information	N/A

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)				
Name	Position	Telephone		1st contact
Sam Foley	Manager, Immigration (International & Humanitarian) Policy	Privacy of	Privacy of	✓
Vanessa Jones	Principal Policy Advisor, Immigration (International & Humanitarian) Policy	Privacy of		

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
N/A

Minister's office to complete:

☐ Approved

☐ Declined

☐ Noted

☐ Needs change

☐ Seen

☐ Overtaken by Events

☐ See Minister's Notes

☐ Withdrawn

Comments



BRIEFING

Final Cabinet paper for lodgement – Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category

Date:	14 April 2026	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:	Sensitive	Tracking number:	REQ-0030051

Purpose

To provide you with a final Cabinet paper seeking agreement to create a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category for:

- lodgement with the Cabinet Office by 10am on 16 April;
- consideration by the Cabinet Economic Policy Committee (ECO) on 22 April 2026; and
- consideration by Cabinet on 28 April 2026.

Recommended action

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment recommends that you:

- a **Note** that your office circulated a draft Cabinet paper to interested Ministers for comment on 30 March 2026;

Noted

- b **Note** that agency consultation has also been completed and some further minor feedback incorporated;

Noted

- c **Note** that the only feedback received during Ministerial consultation was from the Minister of Social Development and Employment's office;

Noted

- d **Approve** the Cabinet paper attached at **Annex One** for submission to Cabinet Office by 10am on Thursday 16 April 2026.

Agreed / Not Agreed / Discuss

Sam Foley
Manager, Immigration (International & Humanitarian) Policy
Labour, Science and Enterprise Group, MBIE

Hon Casey Costello
Associate Minister of Immigration

..... / /

14 / 04 / 2026

Context

1. The Minister of Finance recently directed that the decision to make the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) programme permanent is significant enough that it requires a Cabinet decision in advance of Budget 2026 decisions. The Treasury advised that the Budget Cabinet paper will be lodged on 24 April 2026 and that Cabinet decisions on CORS need to be taken before this time.
2. We understand from the Treasury that the decision to make CORS a permanent programme has now been bilateralised and that the Minister of Finance has indicated that funding is available for a programme of 50 places.
3. The Cabinet paper attached at **Annex One** seeks Cabinet Economic Policy Committee (ECO) agreement to create a permanent CORS visa category

The Cabinet paper has been consulted with agencies and Ministers

4. As noted in previous advice on the draft Cabinet paper [REQ-0029363], early feedback was received from the Treasury, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and the Ministry of Health. This feedback was reflected in the draft circulated for Ministerial consultation.

Further feedback from agencies

5. We have also received some minor feedback from the Treasury, New Zealand Police, and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.
6. The Treasury requested that we remove the recommendation in the draft Cabinet paper referring to agreement to the permanent category having a cap of up to 200 places per year, and replace it with the following:

Note that final numbers for the permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship category will be determined by Budget 2026 funding.

7. New Zealand Police commented that it supports CORS being made a permanent pathway. It noted that it is pleased to see that CORS refugees will undergo **Security and defence** character checks. It requested that it be made clearer that vetting is difficult to undertake in conflict zones and that some risk remains. We confirmed to New Zealand Police that the **Security and defence**. In addition, MBIE officials do not consider there is evidence that refugees pose a risk to national security above that of New Zealand citizens.
8. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development commented that it is supportive of the proposals in the paper and noted that, while it considered whether the proposals could impact the housing system, particularly social housing, this appears to be mitigated by the sponsorship requirements to source private housing.

Feedback from Ministerial consultation

9. **Free and frank opinions**

10. **Free and frank opinions**

11. Finally, officials have also updated the IDI data in the paper to be current as of March 2026.

We seek your agreement to lodge, subject to any final feedback

12. We seek your agreement to lodge the Cabinet paper (attached at **Annex One**) by midday Wednesday 15 April, in order that the paper can be lodged by 10am on Thursday 16 April.
13. **Annex Two** provides a tracked-changes version of the paper, showing the changes made since the paper was sent for consultation.
14. Draft talking points for ECO on 22 April are attached at **Annex Three**.

Annexes

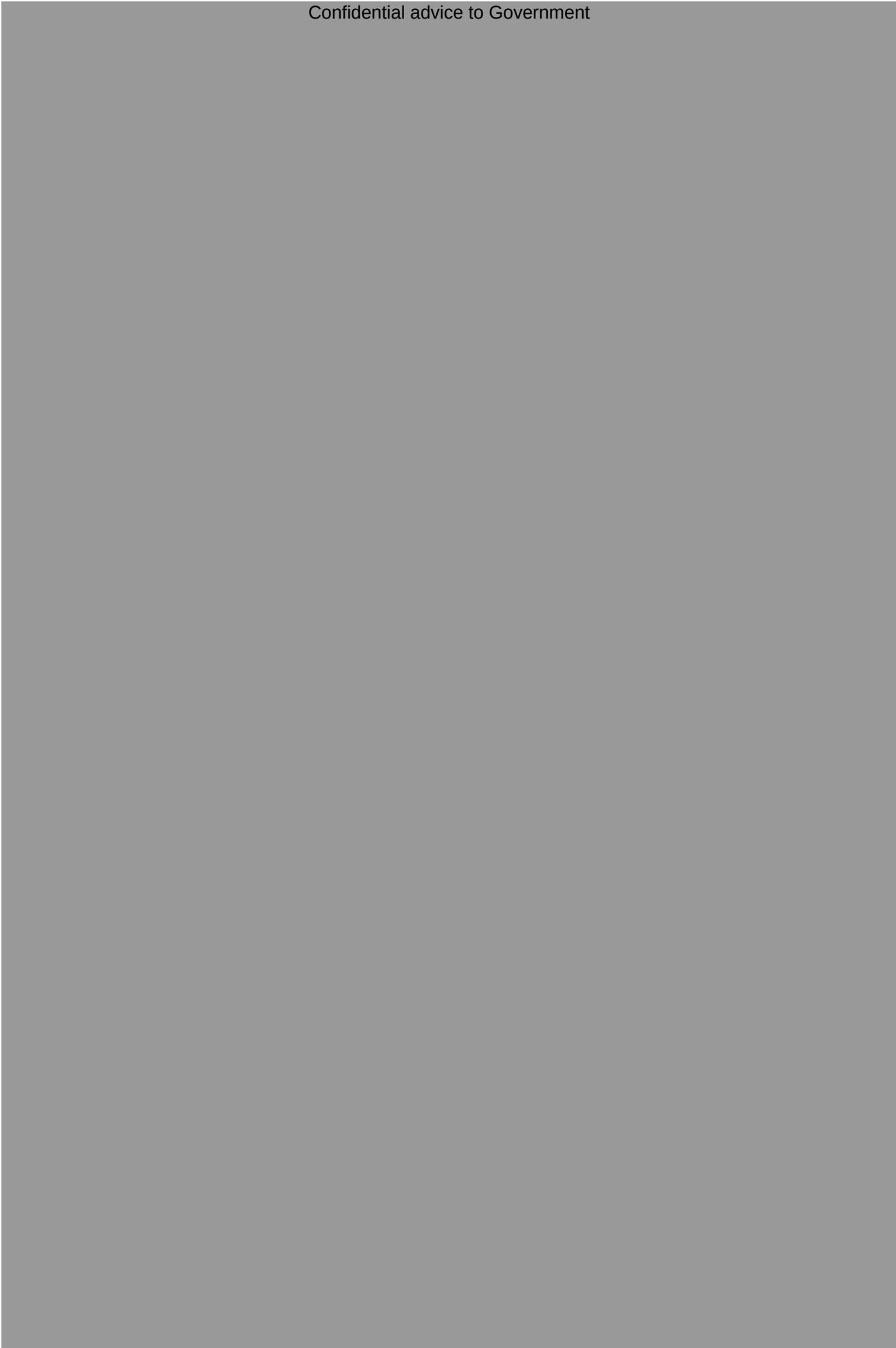
Annex One: Final Cabinet paper: Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category

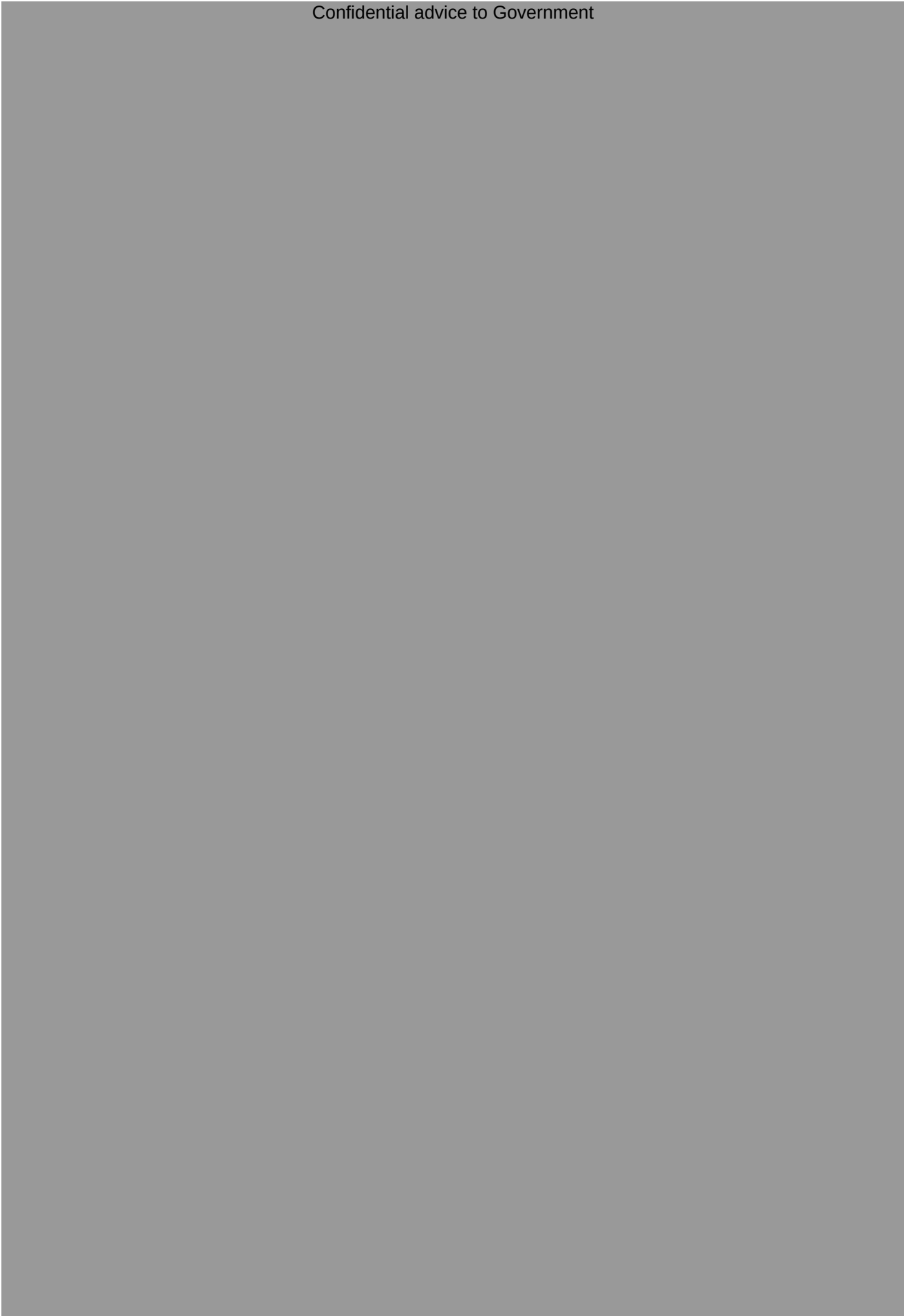
Annex Two: Tracked-changes version of the Cabinet paper

Annex Three: Talking points for ECO meeting on 22 April and Cabinet meeting on 28 April

**Annex One: Final Cabinet paper: Establishing a permanent
Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa
category**





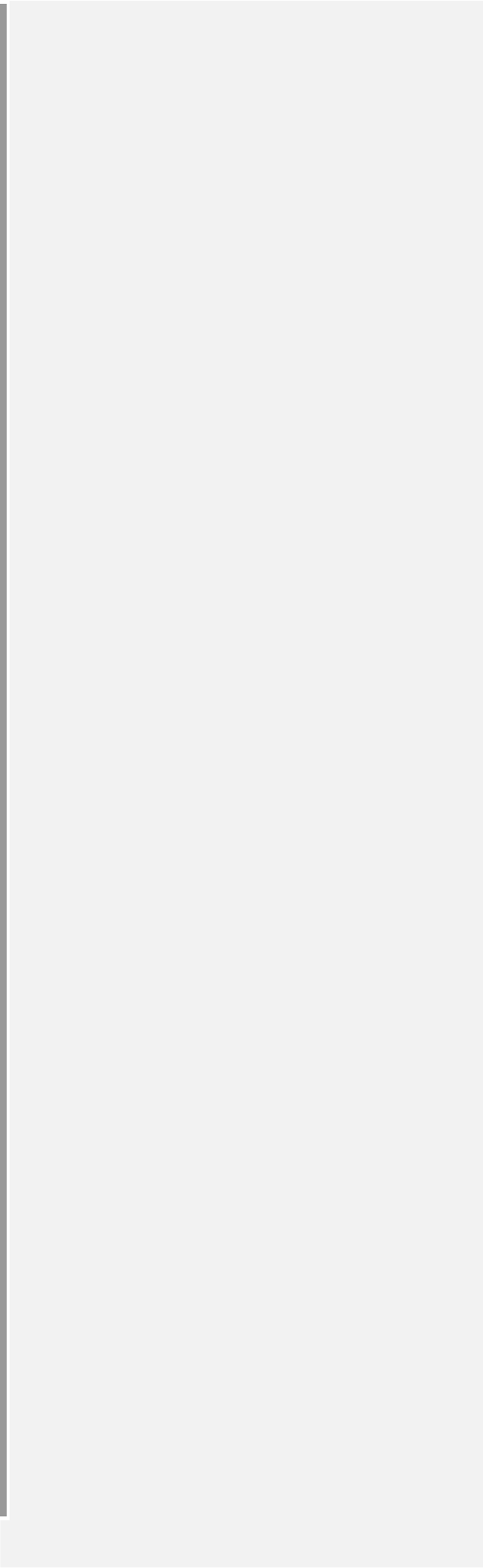




Annex Two: Tracked changes version of the Cabinet paper

Confidential advice to Government

Confidential advice to Government



Confidential advice to Government

Confidential advice to Government

|

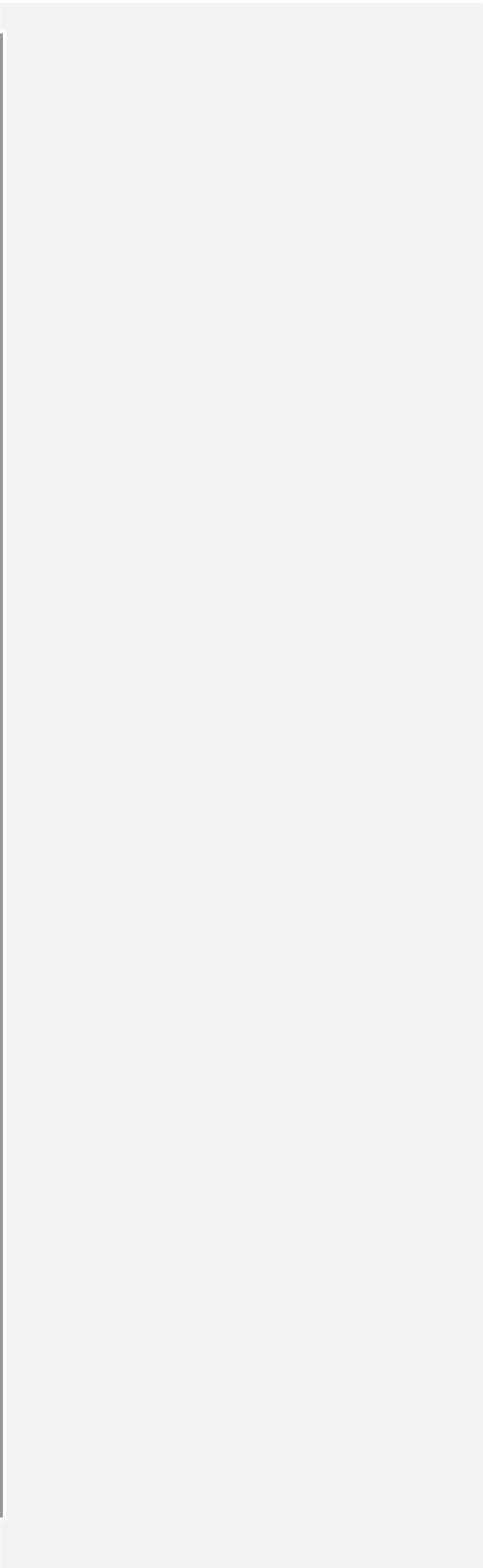
|

|

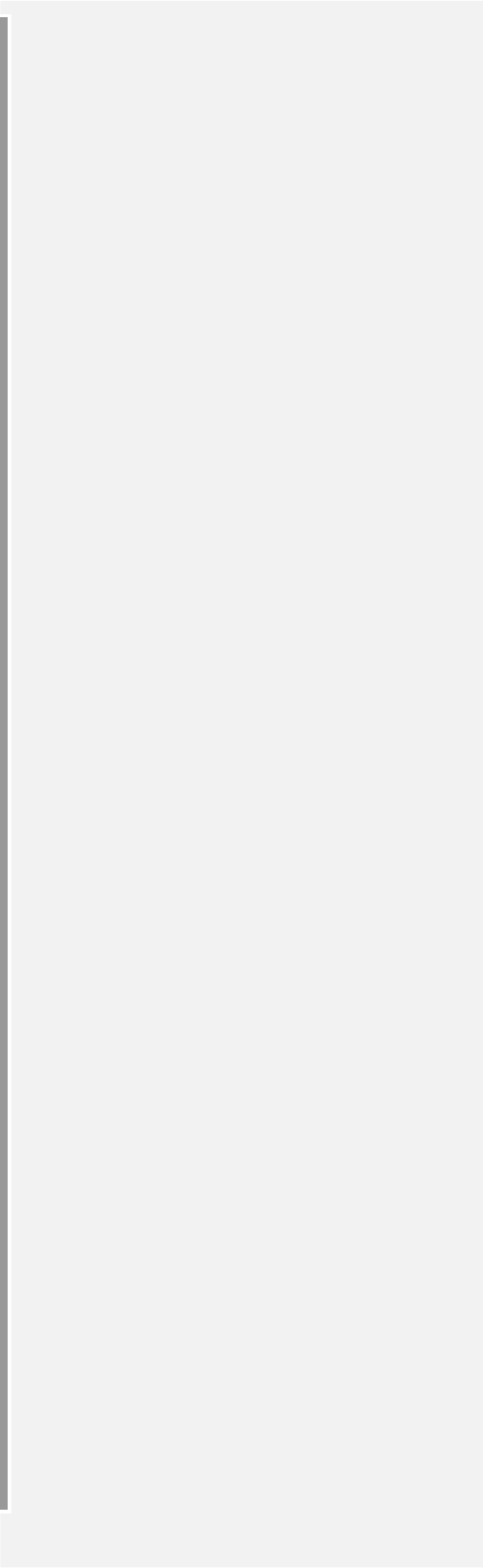
|

|

Confidential advice to Government



Confidential advice to Government



Confidential advice to Government

Confidential advice to Government

Confidential advice to Government

Confidential advice to Government

B U D G E T S E N S I T I V E

Associate Minister of Immigration

Formatted: CabStandard, Line spacing: single

I N C O N F I D E N C E

Free and frank opinions

Free and frank opinions





BRIEFING

Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category – updated draft Cabinet paper

Date:	21 May 2026	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:	Sensitive	Tracking number:	REQ-0032111

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Casey Costello Associate Minister of Immigration	Agree to your preferred approach for the future of CORS. Agree to circulate the attached draft Cabinet paper for Ministerial consultation, subject to any feedback.	25 May 2026

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Stacey O'Dowd	Manager, Immigration (International & Humanitarian) Policy	Privacy of	✓
Vanessa Jones	Principal Advisor, Immigration Policy	Privacy of	

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, The Treasury.

Minister's office to complete:

☐ Approved

☐ Declined

☐ Noted

☐ Needs change

☐ Seen

☐ Overtaken by Events

☐ See Minister's Notes

☐ Withdrawn

Comments



BRIEFING

Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category – updated draft Cabinet paper

Date:	21 May 2026	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:	Sensitive	Tracking number:	REQ-0032111

Purpose

To provide further advice and a draft Cabinet paper on fiscally neutral options for establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category.

Recommended action

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) recommends that you:

- a **Note** that the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee (SOU) discussed the Cabinet paper *Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category* [SOU-26-MIN-0037 refers] on 22 April 2026 and deferred consideration of the paper, directing that it be updated in light of the discussion at the meeting
- Noted*
- b **Note** that following SOU, you directed officials to consider fiscally neutral options for establishing a CORS programme of 200 places by reducing the Refugee Quota Programme (the Quota) and to update the Cabinet paper
- Noted*
- c **Note** that to achieve SOU's policy direction requires:
- i. reducing the Quota by 200 places to fund a 200 place CORS programme, with a total of 1,500 places across both the Quota and CORS category per annum from the 2027/28 financial year; and
 - ii. a transition year, delivering up to 50 CORS places and 1,450 Quota places over the 2026/27 year
- Noted*
- d **Note** that the draft Cabinet paper at **Annex Two** has been prepared based on the approach outlined in **recommendation (c)** above, alongside other options considered but discounted on the basis that they do not achieve SOU's policy direction
- Noted*
- e **Agree** that the reductions in the Quota are applied proportionately across the regional allocations with no impact on the subcategories: women at risk, medical needs, and emergency or urgent resettlement
- Agree / Disagree*
- f **Note** that given the short timeframes in preparing this advice and its sensitivity, MBIE has not consulted with stakeholders with a direct interest in New Zealand's refugee policy settings (including the New Zealand Red Cross, New Zealand's Refugee Advisory Panel and the International relations

Noted

g

International relations

Agree / Disagree

- h **Agree** to circulate the draft Cabinet paper for expedited Ministerial consultation between 26 May and 1 June to lodge a paper on 4 June for consideration by the Cabinet Business Committee on 8 June

Agree / Disagree

- i **Discuss** your preferred approach with officials and provide any feedback on the draft Cabinet paper

Agree / Disagree

- j **Refer** this advice to the Minister of Immigration.

Agree / Disagree



Stacey O'Dowd
**Manager, Immigration Policy
(International and Humanitarian)**
Labour, Science and Enterprise, MBIE
21 / 05 / 2026

Hon Casey Costello
Associate Minister of Immigration

..... / /

Background

1. On 22 April 2026 the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee (SOU) considered the Cabinet paper *Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category* [SOU-26-MIN-0037 refers]. The paper sought Cabinet agreement to a permanent CORS category ahead of Budget 2026 decisions.
2. SOU deferred consideration of the paper and directed that it be updated in light of the discussion at the meeting. You requested a briefing and updated draft Cabinet paper reflecting fiscally neutral options to establish a CORS programme of 200 places, specifically by reducing the Quota to offset CORS. Officials have considered options for achieving this (including those testing the parameters directed by SOU), and discussed these with you in your meeting with officials on 11 May (analysis of options is attached at **Annex Two**).
3. As you are aware, the CORS budget bid has been removed from the Budget 2026 package.

Officials have identified four fiscally neutral options for establishing CORS

4. The following four options for the future of CORS have been considered:
 - **Status quo:** do not establish a permanent CORS programme at this time, with the future of complementary pathways to be considered as part of the scheduled review of the Refugee Family Support Category later this year.
 - **Reduce the Quota from 1,500 to 1,300 to fund a 200-place CORS programme:** maintain 1,500 humanitarian places per annum.
 - This option is most closely aligned with SOU Committee direction.
 - In the officials' meeting on 11 May we advised that this would require a reduction to Quota of more than 200 places. Further work undertaken indicates a 200-place reduction is sufficient through cost adjustments across both programmes. This option would require a 'transition' year in 2026/27 of settling up to 50 CORS places and 1,450 Quota places.
 - Further information on how this option is achieved is set out in **Annex One**.
 - **Reduce the Quota from 1,500 to 1,400 to fund a 50-place CORS programme:** resulting in 1,450 humanitarian places per annum
 - **Enable the 'offset' through a reduction in places in the Refugee Family Support Category (RFSC), rather than reducing the Quota,** by either:
 - a) Reducing RFSC places from 600 to <50 to fund a 200 place CORS programme,
 - or:
 - b) Reducing RFSC places from 600 to 350 to fund a 50 place CORS programme
5. Given the direction that options need to achieve the objective of a fiscally neutral approach, the options were considered against the following criteria:
 - Impact on New Zealand's overall humanitarian commitments
 - Operational feasibility

- Likely international and domestic stakeholder reaction, and
 - Cost effectiveness.
6. An options analysis is set out in the table at **Annex Two**. All options that meet the overall objective require trade-offs across the criteria, with the key choices and associated risks discussed below.

Key choices and associated risks

Impact on New Zealand's humanitarian commitments and international reputation

7. The Quota is designed to resettle those with the highest protection needs as referred by the UNHCR and was recently reaffirmed at 1,500 places through to 2028 [CBC-25-MIN-0018 refers]. UNHCR guidance sets out that complementary pathways should add to, not replace, traditional resettlement pathways.
8. The options have the effect of changing the mix of how New Zealand delivers on its humanitarian commitments by diverting places from refugees identified by the UNHCR as having the highest protection needs (Quota refugees) with those who, although in need of protection, are less vulnerable. This would represent a policy departure from New Zealand's established approach to prioritising the most vulnerable.
9. New Zealand reaffirmed its commitment to resettle 1,500 refugees annually through to 2028 and, while not legally bound to a minimum quota, **Free** and international partners will likely raise concerns about the reduction to the Quota. This is likely to arise as, within the context of increasing global need and limited and reduced resettlement places¹, even small reductions in Quota places can have a material impact on global resettlement outcomes.
10. **International relations**

Domestic stakeholder reaction

11. This advice has prepared at pace and **International** and key domestic stakeholders, including refugee stakeholder groups such as the New Zealand Refugee Advisory Panel, have not been consulted.
12. While some stakeholder groups may support a permanent CORS programme, other stakeholders, **Free and frank opinions** settlement service providers, are highly likely to raise concerns about the reduction of the Quota. MBIE will develop a communications and engagement plan to support any announcements.

The Cabinet paper reflects Option 2, in line with the direction from SOU Committee

13. We have drafted the Cabinet paper (see **Annex Three**) to reflect this. The Cabinet paper identifies other options considered, but discounted, specifically:
- *the status quo*, on the basis that this option loses the momentum and infrastructure of the pilot and does not respond to requests from domestic stakeholders for an ongoing, permanent CORS category; and

¹ Global resettlement places **Confidentiality**, compared with more than 200,000 in 2024, against 2.5 million refugees identified as in need.

- *establishing a 50-place permanent CORS programme and offsetting with a 100-place reduction in the Quota*, on the basis that it results in an overall reduction in humanitarian places, (at 1,450 total places per year). (Note that this configuration is proposed for the transition year, recognising that INZ can absorb the associated costs on a one-off basis while a larger programme is being established.)

Consequential policy settings are required to support your preferred option presented in the Cabinet paper

Maintaining the Quota review cycle, regional distribution for settlement and mix of sub-categories within the Quota

14. Cabinet decisions are required on the regional allocations and subcategories within the Refugee Quota Programme in three-yearly cycles. The draft Cabinet Paper seeks agreement to maintain this pattern (with the next review due by July 2028) and to apply the reduction to the Quota proportionately across the regional allocations agreed in 2025. **Annex Four** sets out the quota subcategories and allocations.
15. The paper also proposes that the priority subcategories of women at risk, medical needs, and emergency or urgent resettlement persist.

Transition and operational considerations

16. A transition period is required to allow time to recruit and onboard a sufficient number of sponsors for a 200-place programme. The Cabinet Paper proposes that this achieved by progressing 50 CORS places in 2026/27 (alongside settlement of 1,450 Quota places). We recommend you seek Cabinet approval for allowing Quota places to fill any shortfall if CORS approvals are delayed.
17. This approach reflects the tight timeframe to put in place Immigration Instructions and contractual arrangements for a referral partner and sponsor support function, and the end-to-end CORS process, from recruiting sponsors to visa approval. Achieving 50 places may require prioritising faster-to-process applications, such as matched pathway cases.

Timeframes

18. The table below sets out milestones for Cabinet decisions and implementation. There are also a number of events relating to your portfolio that you are scheduled to attend shortly after the proposed announcement date. You have choices about whether you would like to announce ahead of your scheduled Estimates hearing and portfolio events, which would provide an opportunity to talk about the change, or whether you would like to make the announcement later. We will provide your office with talking points and Q&As to support the announcement and possible questions.

Milestone	Date
Policy decisions and any feedback on the draft Cabinet paper	25 May
Circulate draft Cabinet paper for expedited Ministerial consultation and agency consultation	26 May – 1 June
Provide final Cabinet paper for your approval to lodge, along with Talking Points and Q&A to support you at CBC	2 June
Lodge Cabinet paper	By 10am 4 June
CBC	8 June
Cabinet	15 June

Milestone	Date
Announcement	16 June
<i>Estimates hearing - Associate Minister of Immigration</i>	<i>17 June</i>
<i>World Refugee Day</i>	<i>20 June</i>
<i>New Zealand Refugee Convention at Parliament</i>	<i>24 June</i>
<i>World Refugee Day celebrations at Māngere Refugee Resettlement Centre</i>	<i>27 June</i>
Minister of Immigration to certify immigration instructions	July 2026
First CORS arrivals	From July 2027

Annexes

Annex One: Information on how cost neutrality is achieved

Annex Two: Options analysis

Annex Three: Draft Cabinet paper for Ministerial consultation

Annex Four: Quota allocations

Annex One: Information on how cost neutrality is achieved

- Flights, medicals, and visa costs are broadly comparable across Quota and CORS.
- Some Quota costs (e.g. catering, furniture, interpreters, rent, domestic travel to settlement locations) decrease with lower volumes, but significant savings occur only after reductions of 200 places. Free and frank opinions and negotiations

- Free and frank opinions and negotiations

- Reducing Quota by 200 places generates sufficient savings to support a 200-place CORS programme, with some scaling back of CORS as it was presented in the Budget bid. Free

- Free and frank opinions and negotiations

Annex Two: Options analysis for Establishing a fiscally neutral permanent CORS category

Context: The RFSC review is scheduled to begin shortly. Confidential advice to Government.

Criteria: we have assessed options against the criteria below. All options are fiscally neutral.

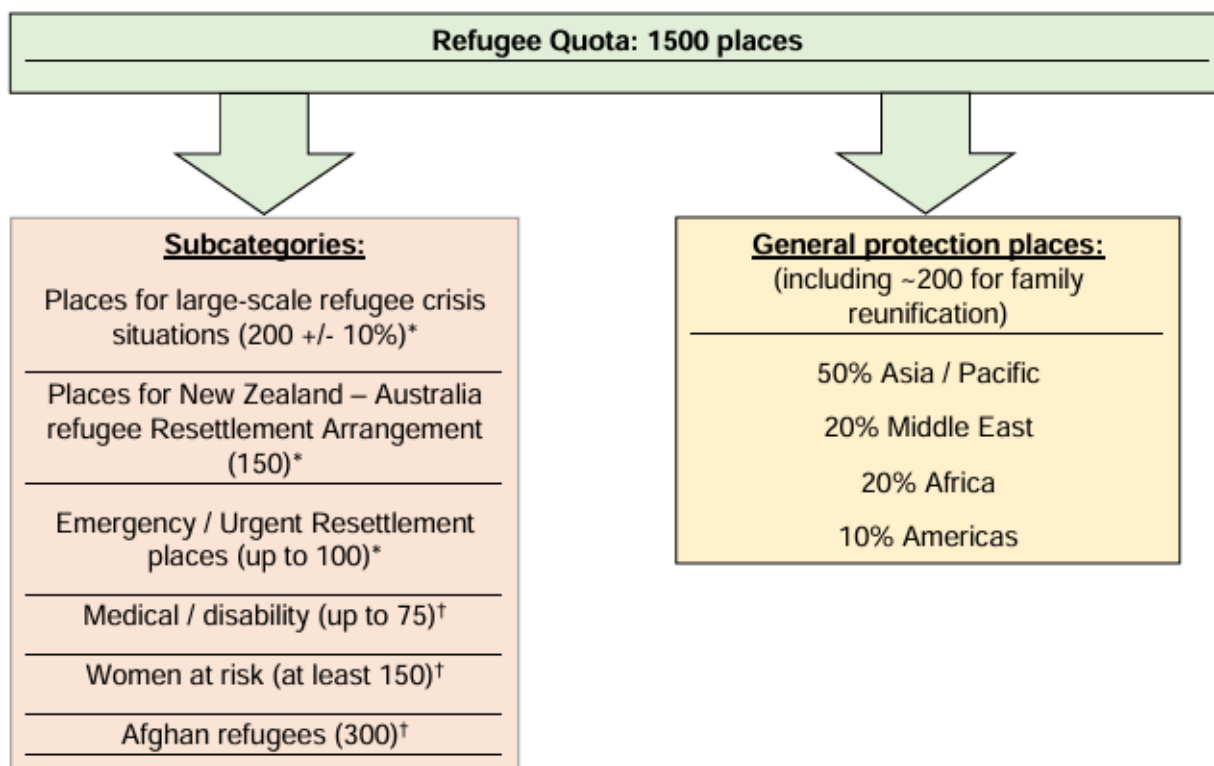
Assessment of options against criteria	
Low	
Low-moderate	
Moderate	
High / no impact	

- Strengthens New Zealand’s overall humanitarian commitments – assessing the extent to which the option supports New Zealand’s humanitarian commitments
- Operational feasibility – assessing the extent to which the option can be implemented practically, considering established systems, processes, and delivery risks
- Stakeholder support – assessing the extent to which the option is likely to be supported by key stakeholders (e.g. former refugees, NGOs, UNHCR and international partners).
- Cost effectiveness – assessing the extent to which the option delivers humanitarian outcomes relative to its fiscal cost and resource use

Option		Strengthens New Zealand’s overall humanitarian commitment	Operational feasibility	Stakeholder support	Cost effectiveness
1	Status quo: maintain existing Refugee Quota Programme (Quota) of 1,500 places with no CORS pathway	No impact Maintains existing Quota commitments, which provides a pathway to resettlement for refugees deemed by the UNHCR to have priority needs. Does not resettle any refugees under a permanent CORS pathway.	Moderate No new implementation requirements or operational changes. However, loses momentum/infrastructure from the CORS pilot.	Moderate Disappoints domestic stakeholders who are supportive of a permanent pathway. Leaves New Zealand out of step with comparable countries who have established complementary pathways.	No impact No fiscal impact or trade-offs required. Finding a sustainable funding solution for a complementary pathway could be considered as part of the RFSC review.
2	Reduce the Refugee Quota from 1,500 to 1,300 to fund a 200-place CORS programme	Low New Zealand’s overall refugee intake remains at 1,500. However, a reduction in Quota places impacts individuals with priority protection needs Substitutes protection need with settlement readiness as the selection driver for CORS refugees. Free and frank opinions	Low-moderate <i>Quota:</i> Proportionate Quota reductions across regional allocations balance impacts and avoids reprioritisation decisions by Cabinet or UNHCR engagement. <i>CORS:</i> Maintains momentum/infrastructure from the CORS pilot.	Low Reduction in Quota risks overshadowing positives of establishing CORS. No consultation with Internati or domestic stakeholders increases risk of significant criticism. Free and frank opinions Intern	High Many Quota and CORS costs are fixed, which means that while CORS is slightly lower-cost to the Crown at scale, a 200-place swap is fiscally neutral Free and frank opinions
3	Reduce the Refugee Quota from 1,500 to 1,400 to fund a 50-place CORS programme	Low New Zealand’s overall refugee intake reduces from 1,500 to 1,450, with a reduction in Quota places for individuals with priority protection needs. Substitutes protection need with settlement readiness as the selection driver for CORS refugees. Free and frank opinions	Moderate <i>Quota:</i> Given smaller reduction in Quota, MBIE would likely not need to consolidate settlement locations Proportionate Quota reductions across regional allocations balance impacts does not require reprioritisation decisions by Cabinet or UNHCR engagement. <i>CORS:</i> Maintains momentum/infrastructure from the CORS pilot.	Low -moderate A smaller CORS pathway may not meet stakeholder expectations, and reduction in Quota risks overshadowing positives of establishing CORS. No consultation with Internati or domestic stakeholders on the Quota reduction increases risk of criticism. Free and frank opinions which International	Low-moderate Many Quota and CORS costs are fixed, which means that while CORS presents a slightly lower cost to the Crown at scale, establishing a smaller CORS programme of 50 places per year requires a greater proportional reduction in the Quota in order to be fiscally neutral. Will result in some underutilisation of capacity at the Māngere Refugee Resettlement Centre, although this will be lower than under Option 2.
4	Enable the ‘offset’ through a reduction in places in the RFSC, rather than reducing the Quota, r a. Reducing RFSC places from 600 to <50 to fund a 200 place CORS programme OR: b. Reducing RFSC places from 600 to 350 to fund a 50 place CORS programme	Low-moderate New Zealand’s overall refugee intake increases and no corresponding reduction in settlement for individuals with priority protection needs. However, reduces family reunification opportunities and impacts welfare of refugees in New Zealand. Having family in New Zealand was the strongest driver of belonging for former refugees in the recent Refugee Survey. Could redirect demand for family reunification to CORS, frustrating intended focus on community sponsorship and settlement readiness.	Moderate Maintains momentum/infrastructure from the CORS pilot. Requires further work to determine operational impact on RFSC, but likely: • Tier 1 (priority queue for those with no immediate family) may not be impacted if current trends continue (demand has fallen). • Tier 2 would not be reopened. • Existing Tier 2 queue (who have been in queue for 9 years) would move more slowly or may need to be discontinued.	Low Free and frank opinions However, anticipate criticism from domestic stakeholders, given existing frustrations with RFSC and absence of stakeholder consultation. Predetermines anticipated RFSC policy review.	Low CORS and RFSC costs per person are not like-for-like. While per-person visa processing costs, flights and medical assessments are equivalent between RFSC and CORS, covering CORS system costs would require a greater proportional reduction in the number of available RFSC places.

Annex Three: Draft Cabinet paper for Ministerial consultation

Annex Four: Quota subcategories and places



*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.



BRIEFING

Final Cabinet paper – Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category

Date:	9 June 2026	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:	Sensitive	Tracking number:	REQ-0033577

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Casey Costello Associate Minister of Immigration	Agree to lodge the attached Cabinet paper by 10 am, 11 June 2026	11 June 2026
Hon Erica Stanford Minister of Immigration	For information	N/A

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Stacey O'Dowd	Manager, Immigration (International & Humanitarian) Policy	Privacy of	✓
Clare Morrell	Principal Advisor, Immigration Policy	Privacy of	
Olivia Gurunathan-Yates	Policy Advisor, Immigration Policy	Privacy of	

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Ministry of Education, Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Development, New Zealand Police; the Treasury

Minister's office to complete:

☐ Noted	☐ Approved	☐ Declined
☐ Overtaken by Events	☐ Needs change	☐ Seen
	☐ See Minister's Notes	☐ Withdrawn

Comments



BRIEFING

Final Cabinet paper – Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category

Date:	9 June 2026	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:	Sensitive	Tracking number:	REQ-0033577

Purpose

To provide you with the final Cabinet paper, *Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category* (**Annex One**), for lodgement ahead of consideration by the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee (SOU) on 17 June 2026, and draft talking points to support your discussion (**Annex Three**).

Recommended action

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (the Ministry) recommends that you:

Updated Cabinet paper for lodgement

- a **Note** that on 22 April 2026, the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee (SOU) considered and deferred decisions on the Cabinet paper *Establishing a permanent Community Organisations Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category* until it had been updated in light of the discussion at the meeting [SOU-26-MIN-0037 refers].

Noted
- b **Note** that following SOU’s consideration, you directed officials to consider fiscally neutral options for establishing a CORS programme of 200 places by reducing the Refugee Quota Programme (the Quota) and to update the Cabinet paper [0032111 refers].

Noted
- c **Note** that your office circulated the updated draft Cabinet paper for ministerial feedback from 27 May to 5 June 2026 and that MBIE undertook agency consultation in parallel.

Noted
- d **Note** that MBIE has updated the Cabinet paper in light of agency feedback and a final version is attached at **Annex One** and a tracked-change version at **Annex Two**.

Noted
- e **Agree** to lodge the final Cabinet paper by 10:00am 11 June 2026.

Agree / Disagree

Managing refugee arrival numbers under CORS and the Quota

- f **Note** that, while this proposal would maintain New Zealand's total humanitarian places at 1,500 per year, arrivals will be lower in the initial years of the permanent CORS pathway due to the timing difference between Quota arrivals and CORS approvals (see paragraphs 6 and 7).

Noted

- g **Agree** to the Cabinet paper seeking an enduring ability to allow unutilised CORS places to be backfilled with Quota places, to maintain 1,500 resettlement places each year (i.e., enabling this beyond just the transition year in 2026/27).

Agree / Disagree



Stacey O'Dowd
Manager, Immigration (International & Humanitarian) Policy
Employment, Skills and Immigration Policy,
MBIE

09 / 06 / 2026

Hon Casey Costello
Associate Minister of Immigration

.... / /

Background

1. On 21 May 2026, we provided you with a draft Cabinet paper *Establishing a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) visa category*, which outlined fiscally neutral options for establishing a permanent CORS visa category by reducing the Refugee Quota Programme (the Quota), as directed by the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee (SOU) [SOU-26-MIN-0037 and 0032111 refers]. Following your feedback on the paper, an updated version of the Cabinet paper was circulated for parallel ministerial and agency consultation.
2. **Annex One** attaches a final draft Cabinet paper reflecting feedback from consultation, with a tracked-change version attached at **Annex Two**. We seek your agreement to lodge the paper by 10:00am on 11 June 2026.
3. We have prepared draft talking points to support your item at SOU on 17 June (attached at **Annex Three**).

The Cabinet paper has been consulted with ministers and agencies

There was no feedback from ministerial consultation

4. Your office consulted with ministers on the revised Cabinet paper from 27 May to 5 June and did not receive any feedback.
5. Officials provided the Minister of Immigration with an update on the CORS paper at her weekly officials meeting on 29 May 2026. The Minister of Immigration raised questions about:
 - a. eligibility requirements under the CORS programme and how Government can be assured that there are appropriate regulatory settings in place for sponsors, and
 - b. the extent to which Cabinet could set regional allocations for the CORS pathway in the same way it does for the Quota.
6. We provided the Minister of Immigration's office with information in response to these questions on 8 June 2026 and have included answers relating to these questions in the Q&A attached at **Annex Three**.

MBIE received feedback from agencies

7. We have summarised substantive feedback and our responses in **Table 1** on the next page. We have actioned minor feedback to address issues of clarity into the Cabinet paper directly.

Table 1: Feedback from agency consultation

Agency	Agency comment	MBIE comment
Ministry of Education (MoE)	MoE noted that a reduction in Quota refugees will affect its current refugee orientation contract, which is set for 1,500 people. MoE also identified that there is a risk of negative reactions from refugee advocacy and support organisations due to CORS funding being offset against, rather than additional to, the Quota.	MBIE has updated the Cabinet paper to note that existing Quota arrangements will continue while the permanent CORS programme is implemented. Any longer-term adjustments will be considered through normal planning and contract processes. See paragraph 49. Concerns stakeholders are likely to raise are set out in paragraphs 9, 35 and 37.
Ministry for Ethnic Communities (MEC)	MEC noted the risk of negative perceptions of the policy among some ethnic communities, particularly those not directly benefiting from CORS, including that it could heighten their concerns about declining social cohesion. MEC recommended some edits to the 'Population implications' section to reflect this. MEC endorsed the emphasis on proactive engagement with stakeholders and offered to work with MBIE on this engagement.	MBIE has updated the 'Population implications' section of the Cabinet paper.
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)	International relations	International relations
Ministry of Health (MoH)	MoH noted that the proposal would have negligible fiscal impacts on the health system.	The impact on wider government services is noted in paragraph 48.
Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	HUD noted that lower uptake of the accommodation supplement by CORS refugees compared to Quota refugees may not necessarily be a favourable outcome on the basis that uptake does not necessarily reflect need.	MBIE has addressed this in footnote 6 and noted that the CORS Pilot evaluation found that all CORS refugees had appropriate housing.
Ministry of Justice (MoJ)	MoJ welcomed that the paper identifies potential negative implications for refugees with the highest protection needs but recommended these be more fully addressed. It suggested incorporating UNHCR needs-based criteria in CORS selection and clarifying whether using an international referral partner would affect refugee status determinations. MoJ recommended reframing the human rights section to better reflect the fact that while this proposal does not reduce New Zealand's overall humanitarian <i>intake</i>, it does impact New Zealand's commitment to resettle 1,500 refugees with priority needs via the Quota. MoJ also cautioned against directly comparing outcomes between CORS and Quota refugees without acknowledging differences in entry criteria and suggested providing clearer information on how quota reductions will impact regional allocation. It recommended including feedback from sponsoring organisations in the paper, if available.	The minimum eligibility criteria for CORS are explicitly different to the UNHCR's needs-based criteria given the pathways target different cohorts and have different policy objectives. It would not be feasible to include UNHCR needs-based criteria into CORS eligibility. We have clarified in the Cabinet paper: • the use of a third-party referral partner does not impact the requirement that principal applicants under CORS must meet the same globally recognised definition of a refugee • the proposal does not change New Zealand's overall humanitarian intake (noting it does impact New Zealand's current Quota commitment) • the current regional allocations under the Quota, and • feedback from stakeholder consultation in support of increasing the CORS cap.

Agency	Agency comment	MBIE comment
Ministry of Social Development (MSD)	MSD noted that increasing the number of CORS refugees from 50 (as in the pilot) to 200 without changing New Zealand’s overall humanitarian intake would reduce financial and administrative costs for MSD. (This was not quantified as part of feedback).	The impact on wider government services is noted in paragraph 48.
New Zealand Police (Police)	Police recommended strengthening the paper to include detail on how sponsoring organisations will be monitored and supported throughout the settlement period. It also requested Immigration New Zealand engage early with Police’s Ethnic Liaison Network to assist with housing placement, develop safety messaging and ensure oversight of sponsor capability surrounding risk of harm and exploitation.	MBIE has updated the Cabinet paper to describe INZ’s role in supporting approved sponsors with monitoring and reporting support. See paragraph 44. MBIE will work with the Police Ethnic Liaison Network as part of CORS implementation.

Managing refugee arrival numbers under CORS and the Quota

CORS and Quota settings operate on different measures, so while under the proposal there is no change to the overall commitment to 1,500 resettlement places per year, this will not mean 1500 arrivals, at least initially

- 8. The timing of CORS refugees’ arrival depends on sponsor readiness and practical logistics. For this reason, the Government’s commitment is to approve a set number of people for residence each year. This means that, while the proposal for a permanent CORS pathway will maintain overall resettlement places at 1,500 people per year across the Quota and CORS, this will be made up of a mix of arrivals (Quota) and approvals (CORS).
- 9. In 2026/27, we anticipate that there will be 1,450 arrivals, as the 50 CORS approvals will not arrive until the following financial year. In 2027/28, there will be a minimum of 1,350 arrivals (1,300 Quota arrivals and 50 CORS arrivals approved in the previous year). There is likely to be 1,500 arrivals per year from 2028/29.

We seek agreement to backfill unutilised CORS places with Quota places on an enduring basis

- 10. For the transition year, a target of 50 CORS approvals has been set. Delivery is time-sensitive, and any delay in announcement reduces INZ’s ability to meet this target. To manage this, the earlier Cabinet paper provided for the Minister of Immigration to backfill any unutilised CORS places with Quota places in 2026/27, maintaining the overall intake of 1,500.
- 11. The attached Cabinet paper extends this flexibility on an ongoing basis, rather than limiting it to the transition year.

Free and frank opinions
- 12. To mitigate this risk, we recommend enabling any unutilised CORS places to be backfilled through the Quota as required so that the overall resettlement intake continues to be maintained at 1,500 places per year.

Next steps

- 13. Following SOU and Cabinet’s consideration of the proposal, we will provide you with advice on detailed policy design to give effect to Cabinet’s decisions, and immigration instructions will be provided to the Minister of Immigration for certification.
- 14. We are working to the following timeframes:

Table 2: Timeframes for key milestones

Milestone	Date (2026)
Lodge Cabinet paper	11 June
SOU	17 June
<i>World Refugee Day</i>	<i>20 June</i>
Cabinet considers paper	22 June
<i>World Refugee Day Convention at Parliament</i> Announcement	<i>24 June</i>
<i>World Refugee Day celebrations at Māngere Refugee Resettlement Centre</i>	<i>27 June</i>
First CORS refugees begin arriving in New Zealand	From July 2027

Annexes

- Annex 1:** Final Cabinet paper – clean version
- Annex Two:** Final Cabinet paper – tracked-change version
- Annex Three:** Talking points for SOU on 17 June 2026

Annex One: Final Cabinet paper – clean version

Attached separately

IN C O N F I D E N C E

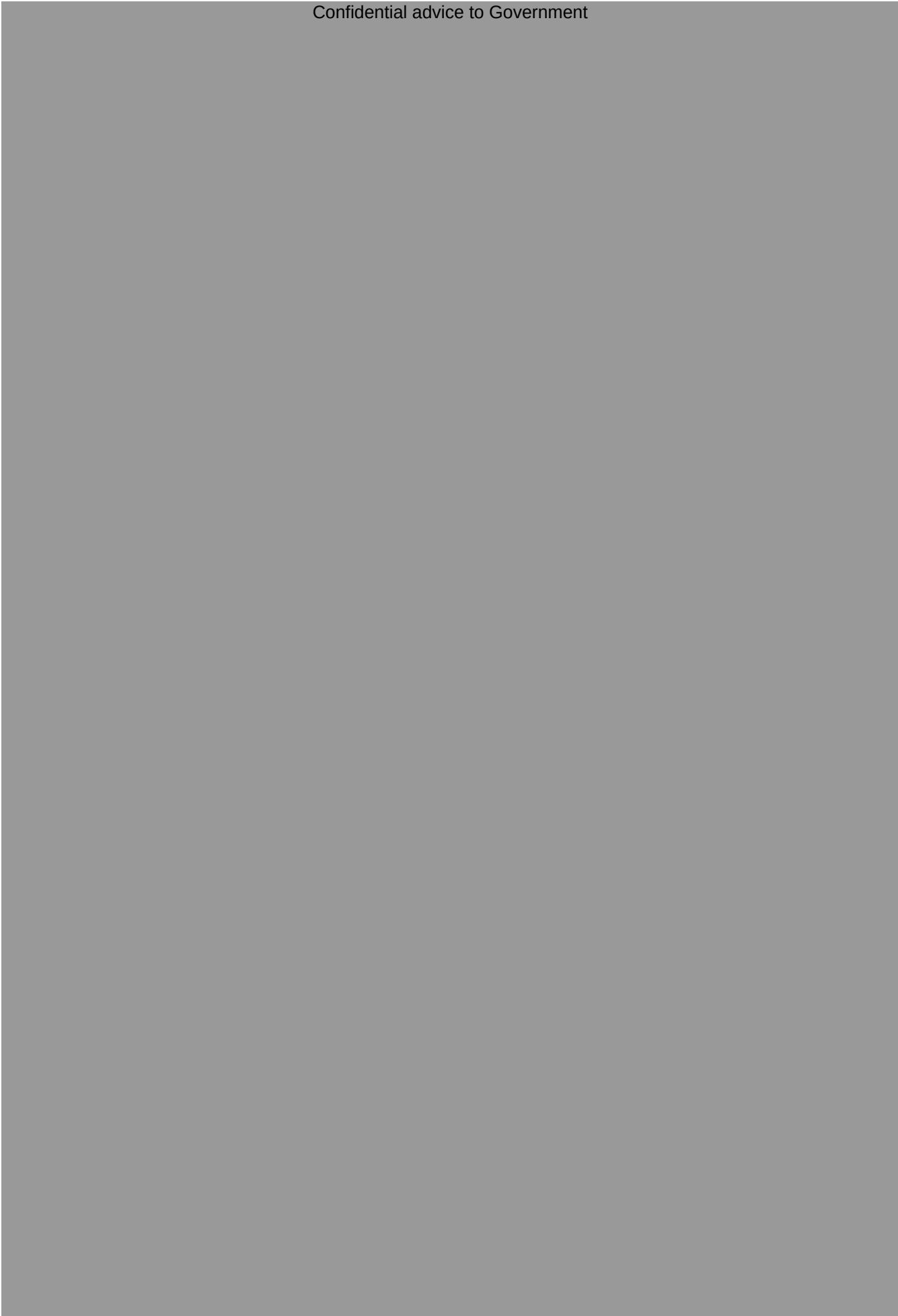
Confidential advice to Government



IN C O N F I D E N C E

I N C O N F I D E N C E

Confidential advice to Government

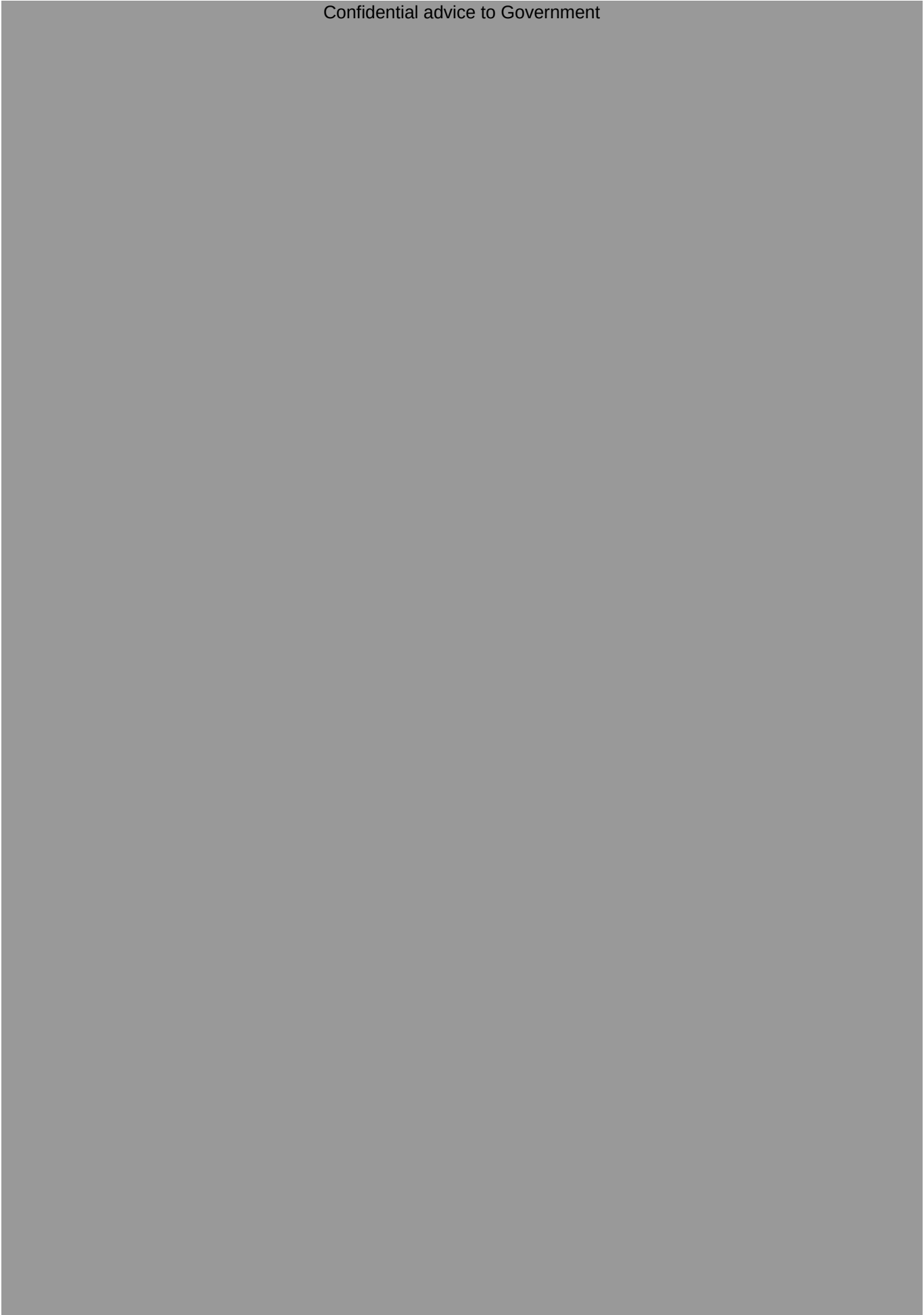


I N C O N F I D E N C E

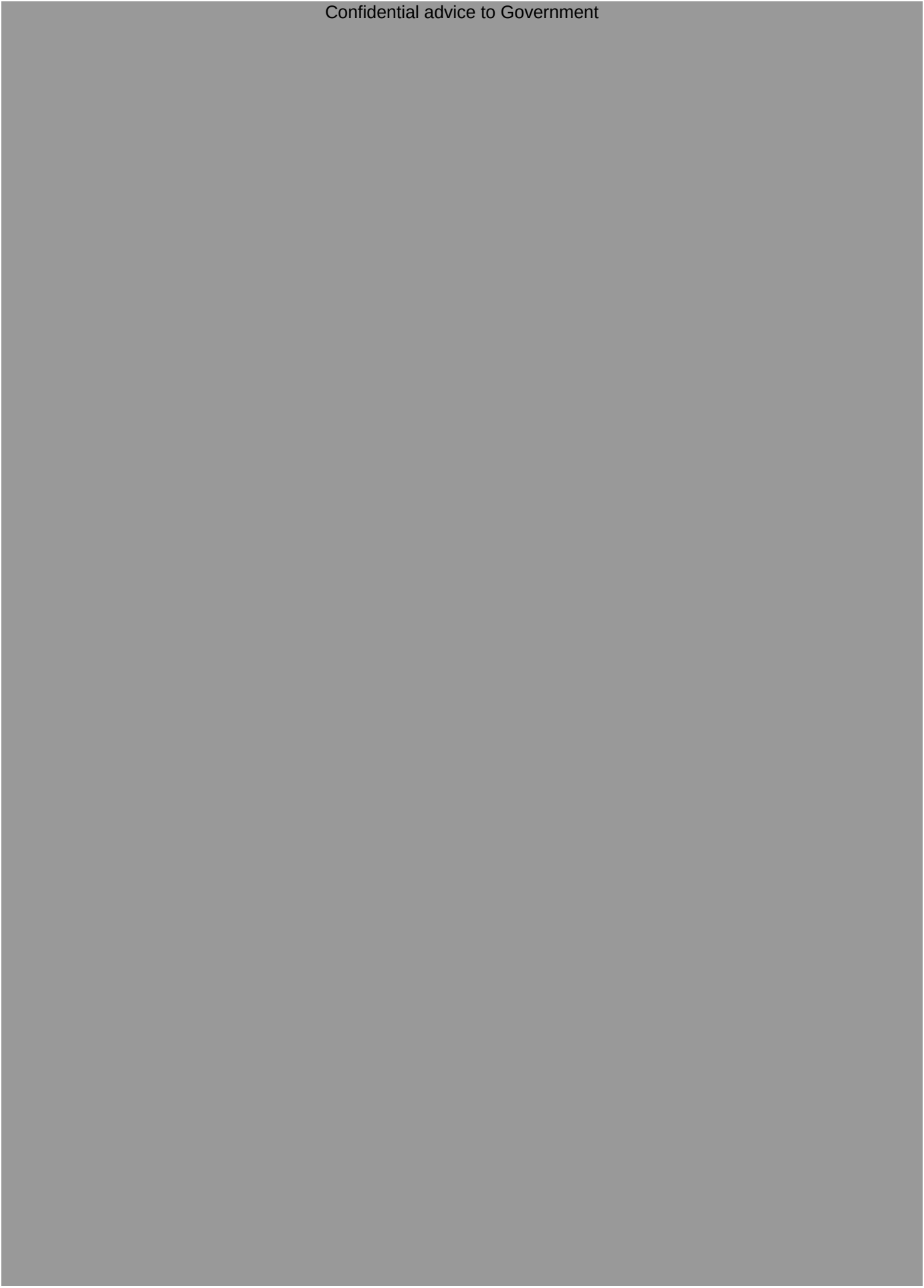
Confidential advice to Government



Confidential advice to Government



Confidential advice to Government





I N C O N F I D E N C E

Confidential advice to Government



I N C O N F I D E N C E

Confidential advice to Government



Annex Two: Final Cabinet paper – tracked-change version

Attached separately

Confidential advice to Government

|

|

|

Confidential advice to Government

|

|

|

|

Confidential advice to Government

|

|

|

|

Confidential advice to Government

|

|

|

Confidential advice to Government

|

|

|

|

|

|

|

|

Confidential advice to Government

Confidential advice to Government



Confidential advice to Government

Confidential advice to Government

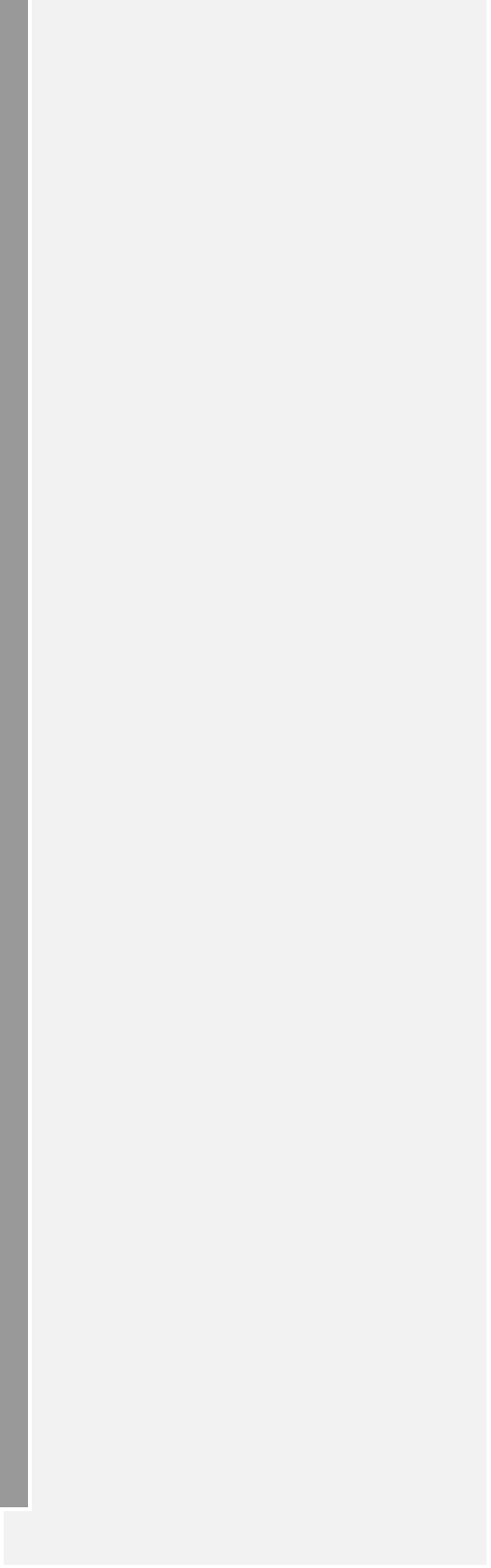
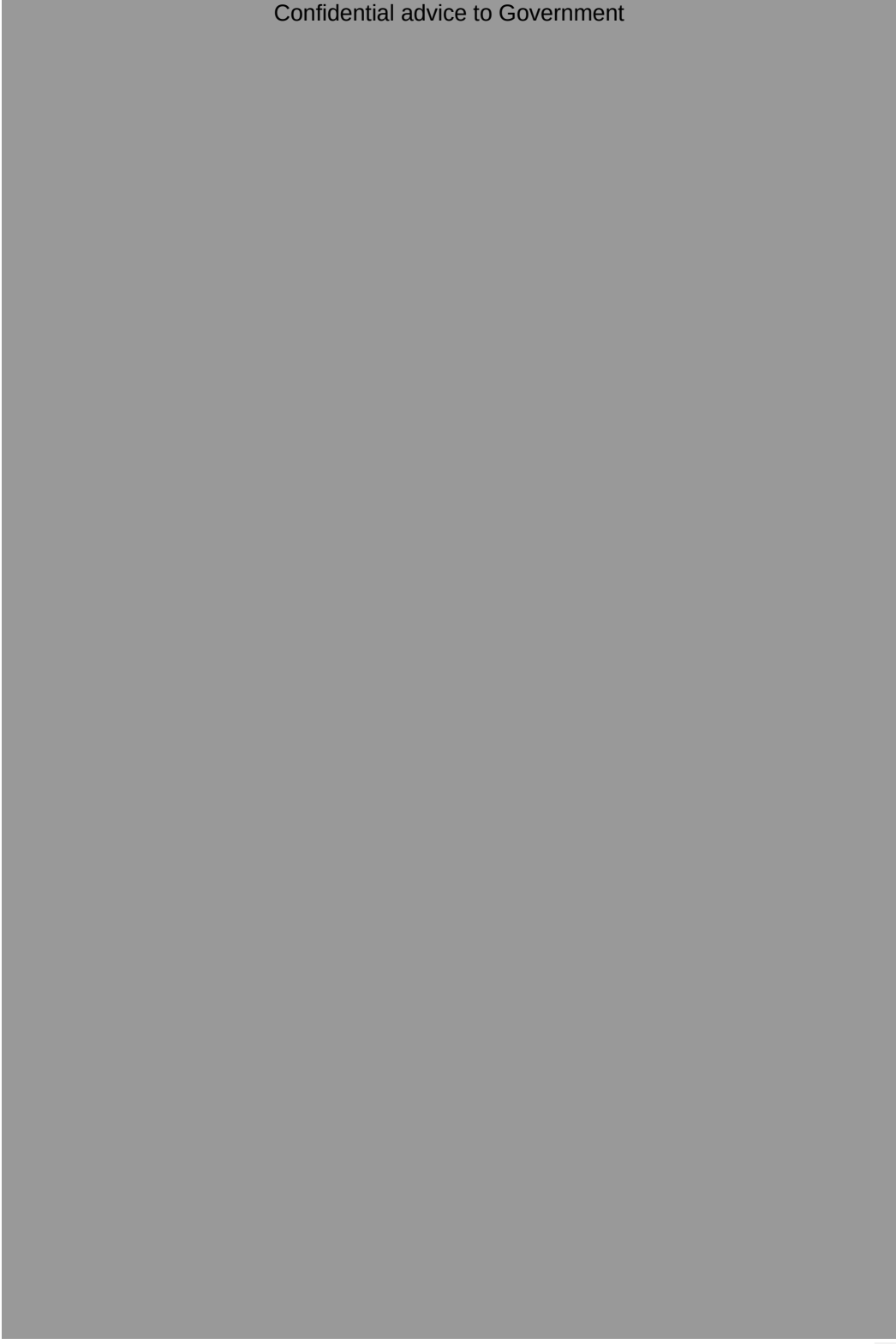
|

|

Confidential advice to Government

Confidential advice to Government

Confidential advice to Government



Annex Three: Talking points for SOU on 17 June 2026

- SOU previously considered a proposal to establish a permanent Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) pathway but sought a fiscally neutral option through a reduction in the Refugee Quota Programme.
- I propose establishing a permanent 200-place CORS visa pathway, funded by reducing the Refugee Quota Programme (the Quota) by 200 places.
- This maintains New Zealand’s overall humanitarian intake at 1,500 places per year across the Quota and CORS programmes combined.
- A transition year in 2026/2027 will establish the CORS programme, with
 - 50 CORS places
 - 1,450 Quota places
 - unfilled CORS places backfilled by the Quota if needed.
- The full 200-place CORS pathway will begin from 1 July 2027, once a pipeline of approved sponsoring organisations is established.
- New Zealand’s overall refugee resettlement commitment will remain 1,500 per year, made up of CORS approvals (as timing for their arrival is agreed with sponsoring organisations) and Quota arrivals.
- I expect stakeholder reactions to be mixed. Some community organisations may support making CORS permanent, while others, International relations and refugee advocacy groups, are likely to express concern about the corresponding reduction in the Quota.
- I note that the risk of not establishing a permanent CORS programme now is that the infrastructure and momentum built during the pilot will be lost.
- Subject to Cabinet’s agreement to this proposal, I intend to announce this change at the World Refugee Day Convention at Parliament on 24 June 2026.

Possible Questions and Answers

Question	Answer
If CORS has better outcomes and is cheaper at scale than the Quota, why not replace the Quota?	The Quota is New Zealand's primary refugee resettlement mechanism for the most vulnerable refugees who are deemed to have the highest protection needs, including children and women at risk. It contributes to New Zealand's fulfilment of our international and humanitarian commitments and supports the UNHCR and the international community in providing protection for refugees who cannot return safely to their home country. CORS, on the other hand, targets a different cohort of refugees who are more employable and less likely to have critical protection needs.
If CORS is cheaper overall, why aren't 200 CORS places cheaper than 200 Quota places?	Many Quota and CORS costs are fixed, such as core staffing, infrastructure, and establishing settlement contracts. As a result, while CORS is slightly lower cost to the Crown at scale, these fixed costs mean the programmes are fiscally neutral at around 200 Quota and 200 CORS places.

How does the CORS pathway work?	CORS operates through two sponsorship pathways, with INZ responsible for final approval in both. Principal applicants under either pathway must meet the definition of a refugee under the 1951 Refugee Convention. <i>Nominated (sponsor-led) pathway</i> • Approved New Zealand-based sponsors can nominate a refugee through CORS. There is growing interest (e.g. universities, potentially employers) in using this pathway to attract skilled refugees aligned with workforce needs. <i>Matched pathway</i> • Candidates are identified through an international referral partner, who meet the eligibility criteria and matched with approved sponsors. Refugees under either pathway must meet eligibility criteria and meet immigration and security checks.
How are community sponsor organisations approved, monitored and supported?	Community sponsor organisations must meet clear criteria before they can be approved for the programme. This includes demonstrating registered organisation status, financial capacity, ability to support settlement outcomes (e.g. employment, accommodation), and good character. There is an ongoing monitoring and accountability framework to ensure sponsors meet their obligations. INZ can monitor performance, intervene where needed and revoke sponsor status where required.
What are the eligibility criteria that CORS refugees must meet?	CORS eligibility is targeted through the following selection criteria for principal applicants: 1. English language requirement, assessed through a programme-specific test, and 2. a skills threshold, requiring either three years' work experience or tertiary study of at least two years' duration. These criteria target those who are better positioned to participate in the New Zealand labour market. Negotiations International relations
How will security risks be managed?	INZ will continue to undertake a robust assessment of all CORS applicants, consistent with operational practice for the Quota. Interviews will be conducted with all refugees to confirm identity, assess the credibility of their refugee claim, and ensure that applicants meet New Zealand's character and security requirements. The New Zealand Security Intelligence Service will also continue to conduct national security checks. The Ethnic Liaison Officers within the New Zealand Police will be introduced to Approved Sponsor organisations to support with settlement processes, including around risk of harm and exploitation.

How similar is your proposed approach to that of comparable countries like Australia, Canada and the UK?	International relations															
Where will the CORS refugees come from? Can Cabinet set regional allocation for the CORS pathway in the same way it does for the Quota?	Eligibility under CORS is limited to refugees located in regions where New Zealand already undertakes offshore refugee processing under the Quota. These are: • Asia-Pacific • Middle East • Africa • Americas This ensures the programme remains aligned with the Quota and focused on populations with recognised resettlement needs, rather than opening access globally. CORS includes a nomination pathway, which means regional intake cannot be set as tightly as the Quota. However, evidence from the extended pilot shows that regional resettlement outcomes under CORS are broadly aligned with the regional allocation settings agreed by Cabinet in 2025 for the Quota. <table><tr><th>Region of asylum</th><th>Quota allocations for 2025/26 to 2027/28 (agreed by Cabinet)</th><th>CORS pilot regional split</th></tr><tr><td>Asia-Pacific</td><td>50%</td><td>47.7%</td></tr><tr><td>Africa</td><td>10%</td><td>40.6%</td></tr><tr><td>Middle East</td><td>20%</td><td>11.7%</td></tr><tr><td>Americas</td><td>20%</td><td>0%</td></tr></table>	Region of asylum	Quota allocations for 2025/26 to 2027/28 (agreed by Cabinet)	CORS pilot regional split	Asia-Pacific	50%	47.7%	Africa	10%	40.6%	Middle East	20%	11.7%	Americas	20%	0%
Region of asylum	Quota allocations for 2025/26 to 2027/28 (agreed by Cabinet)	CORS pilot regional split														
Asia-Pacific	50%	47.7%														
Africa	10%	40.6%														
Middle East	20%	11.7%														
Americas	20%	0%														

What are the international reputational risks of this change?	International relations
What are the domestic reputational risks of this change?	I anticipate some concern from domestic stakeholders about a reduction in the Quota. Some stakeholder groups may support making CORS permanent; however, this could be tempered by the corresponding reduction in the Quota. I intend to work proactively with domestic stakeholders to manage this. I have also directed my officials to develop a communications and engagement plan to support any announcements.

¹ UNHCR, Conclusion No. 117 (LXXV) on durable solutions and complementary pathways (2024).