



COVERSHEET

Minister	Hon Kris Faafoi	Portfolio	Minister of Immigration
Title of Cabinet paper	Report back on the policy proposals to implement the “Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification” initiative and to drawdown the tagged contingency	Date to be published	21 February 2022

List of documents that have been proactively released

Date	Title	Author
02 December 2021	Report back on the policy proposals to implement the “Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification” initiative and to drawdown the tagged contingency.	Office of the Minister of Immigration
8 December 2021	Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification: Policy Proposals DEV-21-MIN-0262	Cabinet Office

Information redacted

NO

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In Confidence

Office of the Minister of Immigration

Cabinet Economic Development Committee

Report back on the policy proposals to implement the “Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification” initiative and to drawdown the tagged contingency

Proposal

1. This paper reports back to Cabinet on the policy proposals to implement the “Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification” initiative and to drawdown the tagged contingency, which was agreed by Cabinet through Budget 2020 [**CAB-20-MIN-0155.21**].

Executive Summary

2. Through Budget 2020, Cabinet established a tagged contingency of \$22.182 million including outyear funding for the initiative titled “Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification” to:
 - improve the system by increasing the Refugee Family Support Category (RFSC) cap to 600 individuals annually (from 1 July 2021);
 - enhance settlement support provided to sponsored family members; and
 - undertake an evaluation of the settlement outcomes for sponsored family members [**CAB-MIN-0155.21**].
3. Cabinet noted that the drawdown of the tagged contingency was subject to the Minister of Immigration reporting back to Cabinet on the package of specific policy proposals required to implement the initiative. Cabinet also agreed that the tagged contingency would expire on 1 February 2022 unless extended. This paper fulfils the report back requirement and seeks to drawdown the tagged contingency.
4. The closure of New Zealand’s border to manage the COVID-19 pandemic means that, unless granted an exception, non-New Zealand citizens and residents are unable to enter New Zealand. Those family members of former refugees granted a visa under the RFSC have also been unable to enter New Zealand if they were granted their visa while outside of New Zealand. Immigration New Zealand has not been granting new resident visas to people outside of New Zealand, and will begin doing so as a result of a recent High Court case concerning Afghan nationals seeking to travel to New Zealand.
5. An Immigration Instructions change was made on 1 December 2021 to allow all offshore resident visa holders to enter New Zealand if they applied prior to COVID-19 border restrictions or if they are granted a resident visa under the 2021 Resident Visa category. This means that offshore RFSC holders who applied for their visa before 19 March 2020 are now able to enter New Zealand (approximately 50 visa holders).
6. However, it is proposed that \$13.472 million is drawn down for 2021/22 to 2023/24, with \$7.557 million going into baselines from 2024/25, to implement the policy proposals to ensure readiness to provide support to former refugees and their family members in preparation for

any change in the border setting. It is assumed that the increase in the annual RFSC places (to 600 places annually) will be implemented from 2022/23.

7. In addition to funding additional staffing resources to deliver the initiative, the focus of the proposals are to decrease the financial impact on former refugees who are seeking to be reunited with their family members, and increase the support services that are provided to former refugees and their sponsored family members. The package of policy proposals move some of the immigration-related costs from former refugees' responsibility to government. This includes government funding the immigration medical assessments and international and domestic flights and by waiving visa fees. These changes reduce the financial sponsorship burden on former refugees and their sponsored family members.
8. Funding from the tagged contingency will also support the sponsored family members' access to education supports and English language services. Accessing these services supports settlement outcomes related to education, employment and participation. In addition, through a co-design process a community-based model is proposed to support former refugees and their sponsored family members to navigate the immigration process and to access the support services they need in their community. The co-design process will also provide the opportunity to explore immigration processing improvements and enhancements for RFSC.
9. The proposal also includes a two year evaluation that will be undertaken to assess the outcomes for former refugees and their sponsored family members resulting from the settlement support provided. Findings from the evaluation will inform decisions on any future changes to enhance successful refugee family reunification settlement outcomes.

Context

10. The RFSC (300 places annually) enables former refugees and Afghan interpreters in New Zealand to sponsor their family members to join them in New Zealand. There is a two tier priority registration mechanism and queue to manage the RFSC applications received. Tier 1 enables former refugees with no family in New Zealand or who are the sole carer of dependent relatives in New Zealand to sponsor extended family members. Tier 2 enables former refugees to only sponsor their parent, adult sibling or adult child (or grandparent where they are the sponsor's legal guardian). Tier 1 sponsors have first access to available RFSC places and can apply from the date they are granted New Zealand residence. Tier 2 sponsors have access to RFSC places not filled in a year by Tier 1 and have a three year stand-down to being able to apply.
11. Although the family members who are sponsored may not be refugees themselves, they are likely to have similar backgrounds to refugees. The objectives of the RFSC are to enable former refugees to be reunited with a range of family members and that sponsored family members provide support to the former refugees in New Zealand, particularly if the former refugee has no other adult family members in the country.
12. For many former refugees, reunification with family is their first priority, and family reunification strongly supports successful settlement and wellbeing outcomes. However, demand for RFSC places exceeds the 300 annual places and the cost of sponsoring family members is high given former refugees often have limited financial capital.
13. While those sponsored under the RFSC can access the same government-funded services as other residents and New Zealand citizens, they do not receive the same government funded support as quota refugees. However, they generally have similar needs in navigating the support services they require.

14. In May 2020, Cabinet agreed to the Budget initiative “Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification” and established a tagged contingency of \$22.182 million over the forecast period from 2021/22 with up to \$7.557 million for out years [CAB-MIN-0155.21]. The contingency was based on:
- an increase in the numbers of people admitted under the RFSC to 600 individuals annually (from 300 annually);
 - access to services to support sponsored families’ settlement outcomes; and
 - conducting an evaluation of settlement outcomes for former refugees’ sponsored family members.

The package of policy proposals

15. The package of policy proposals to implement the initiative focuses on increasing the number of places available for former refugees to sponsor family members under the RFSC, supporting successful settlement for sponsored family members, and to help them become self-sufficient and participate in the community to build a strong sense of belonging. Supporting some of the costs for the application process and travel will also reduce the financial impacts on both the sponsor and the sponsored family.
16. The settlement services and support are being co-designed with a range of stakeholders including previous sponsors and family members who were sponsored. While the process is still in progress there is clear support for strengthening the support provided to both the families sponsored and the sponsor including supporting them to navigate government services and the support services in the community.
17. **Table One** provides an overview of the package of proposals, including the specific services to be provided to former refugees and their sponsored family members, the objectives aimed to achieve from the service delivery, and the responsible agency.

Table One: Package of policy proposals

Policy Proposals	Objectives	Responsible Agency
Immigration processing		
<p>Increase the cap on the RFSC to 600 people per year</p> <p>Change the share of immigration processing financial responsibilities from former refugees to government, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • waived visa application fees • government-funded immigration medical assessment • government-funded international and domestic flights for sponsored family members 	<p>Increasing the RFSC cap addresses the high demand from former refugees seeking to be reunited with family members and the likely flow-on impact of the increase in the Refugee Quota Programme.</p> <p>Moving the immigration processing financial responsibilities from former refugees decreases the potential of harm from the financial burden of seeking family reunification and aims to support improved settlement outcomes.</p>	<p>Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (Immigration New Zealand)</p>

Policy Proposals	Objectives	Responsible Agency
Settlement support services		
Co-designed community-based model support	Plan, lead and facilitate a co-design process with former refugee communities, key stakeholders and government partners to develop an agreed model of support for families coming through the RFSC.	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (Immigration New Zealand)
Refugee Pathways and Careers; Computers in Homes; Special Education; ESOL funding in Schools; Refugee Flexible Funding Programmes; Bilingual Tutor Funding	Provides specialist education services in schools and homes to former refugees in school. Support includes computers, internet, and computer training as well as additional in school support.	Ministry of Education
English for Speakers of Other Languages	Provides ESOL tuition to sponsored family members as New Zealand residents to boost their English language proficiency and support settlement into the local community and transition to further education and training.	Ministry of Education and the Tertiary Education Commission

18. The package of policy proposals has been developed with government agencies and key stakeholders are being actively consulted through a co-design process to develop a community-based model of support for former refugees and their sponsored family members.
19. Currently RFSC resident visa holders are unable to enter the border due to the current COVID-19 border settings. However, the drawdown of the contingency is required to:
- support the development of the proposed changes to the immigration process related to government-funded immigration medical assessments and international travel and recruitment of immigration officers to meet the increased annual cap when the border opens to this category;
 - develop and establish the community-based support model; and
 - plan, lead and facilitate a co-design process with former refugee communities, key stakeholders and government partners to develop an agreed model of support for families coming through the RFSC.

Evaluation approach

20. An evaluation of the settlement outcomes for sponsored families of former refugees will be undertaken. The two year evaluation will support better understanding of the former refugees and their sponsored family members' strengths and capabilities and their ongoing family reunification and settlement support needs. The evaluation is likely to examine to what extent the aims of increasing support for sponsored family members has been successful and resulted in positive settlement outcomes for both former refugees and sponsored families. The evaluation may utilise the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy framework for assessing successful settlement outcomes. The first stage will primarily be focused on data collation and analysis and will complement the work and findings of the co-design process to inform any future changes.

Consultation

21. The following government agencies were consulted in the development of this paper: The Treasury; and the Ministries of Education and Social Development.

Financial Implications

22. Through Budget 2020, Cabinet agreed to the “Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification” initiative and established a tagged contingency of \$22.182 million including up to \$7.557 million of ongoing funding for outyears.
23. I seek to drawdown \$13.472 million from the tagged contingency for 2021/22 to 2023/24, with \$7.557 million going into baselines from 2024/25. Increases are proposed to Votes Labour Market, Tertiary Education and Education. The remaining tagged contingency of \$8.71 million will not be drawn down and will expire on 1 February 2022.

Human Rights

24. The proposals are consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993.

Legislative and Regulatory Implications

25. There are no legislative or regulatory implications related to the proposals.

Publicity

26. No publicity is planned.

Proactive Release

27. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment will publish this paper, subject to redactions, on its website within 30 business days of decisions being confirmed by Cabinet.

Recommended actions

28. I recommend that the Cabinet Economic Development Committee:
 1. **note** that as part of Budget 2020, Cabinet [CAB-20-MIN-0155.21 refers]:
 - 1.1 **agree** to the “Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification” initiative to:
 - support increasing the cap on the Refugee Family Support Category from 300 people per year to 600 people per year;
 - increase the settlement support provided to sponsored family members; and
 - conduct an evaluation of settlement outcome for the sponsored family members of former refugees;

- 1.2 agreed** to establish a tagged operating contingency of up to the amounts as follows to provide for the “Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification” initiative:

	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 & Outyears
Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification – Tagged Operating Contingency	-	-	7.157	7.468	7.557

- 1.3 noted** that the draw down from the “Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification” is subject to the Minister of Immigration reporting back to Cabinet on the package of specific policy proposals required to implement the initiative;
2. **agree** that, as the further work described in recommendation 1.3 above has been satisfactorily completed, the “Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification” Contingency can now be drawn down;
3. **approve** the following changes to appropriations to provide for the decision in recommendation 2 above with a corresponding impact on the operating balance and net core Crown debt:

Vote	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 & outyears
Vote Labour Market Minister of Immigration Departmental Output Expense: Immigration Services MCA: Settlement and Integration of Refugees and Other Migrants (funded by revenue Crown)	0.780	4.410	4.090	3.970	3.970
Vote Education Minister of Education Outcomes for Target Student Groups MCA Departmental Output Expense: Interventions for Target Student Groups Non-Departmental Output Expense: Learning Support and Alternative Education (funded by revenue Crown)	0.186	0.461	0.545	0.549	0.549
Vote Tertiary Education Minister of Education Tertiary Tuition and Training MCA Non-Departmental Output Expense: Community Education (funded by revenue Crown)	0.000	0.757	1.137	2.272	2.272
Total Operating	0.966	6.110	6.396	7.557	7.557

4. **agree** that the proposed changes to appropriations for 2021/22 above be included in the 2021/22 Supplementary Estimates and that, in the interim, the increases be met from Imprest Supply;
5. **agree** that the expenses incurred under recommendation 3 above be charged against the Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification – Tagged Operating Contingency described in recommendation 1 above;
6. **note** that, following the adjustment(s) detailed in recommendation 5 above, the remaining balances and indicative phasing of the operating contingency described in recommendation 1.2 above will be:

	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 & Outyears
Improving the System for Refugee Family Reunification – Tagged Operating Contingency	6.191	1.358	1.161	-	-

7. **note** that the tagged operating contingency described in recommendation 6 above will not be drawn down and will expire on 1 February 2022.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Kris Faafoi
Minister of Immigration

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