



## BRIEFING

### Managing Emergency Allocations for Afghan evacuees

<b>Date:</b>	7 October 2021	<b>Priority:</b>	High
<b>Security classification:</b>		<b>Tracking number:</b>	2122-1273

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins <b>Minister for COVID-19 Response</b>	<p><b>Agree</b> to proposed changes to the EA process for Afghan evacuees</p> <p><b>Agree</b> not to increase the size of the Emergency Allocation</p> <p><b>Refer</b> this briefing to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Immigration</p>	11 October 2021

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)				
Name	Position	Telephone		1st contact
Privacy of natural persons	Manager, Allocation and Supply	Privacy of natural persons		✓
	Senior Advisor, Allocation and Supply			

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
MFAT, MBIE Immigration

**Minister's office to complete:**

Approved

Declined

Noted

Needs change

Seen

Overtaken by Events

See Minister's Notes

Withdrawn

**Comments**

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### Purpose

To seek your agreement to modifications to the EA process for Afghan evacuees.

### Recommended action

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

- a **Note** Afghan evacuees will be accommodated in Emergency Allocation (EA) rooms, as per your instruction on briefing 2122-1129. *Noted*
- b **Note** in order to use the EA for this group, we advise some exceptions to the standard EA process are required, to make it easier for the applicants, ensure appropriate planning can take place and minimise unnecessary processing. *Noted*
- c **Agree** that EA applications for evacuees from Afghanistan:
  - a. may be made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), rather by the individual applicants  Agree /  Disagree
  - b. may be made to cover a group of applicants  Agree /  Disagree
  - c. evidence of eligibility is assessed by MFAT and Immigration New Zealand (INZ), who will provide assurance that all applicants are eligible  Agree /  Disagree
  - d. can be made further in advance than the standard 14 days prior to travel requirement.  Agree /  Disagree
- d **Note** due to persistent underutilisation of the EA, increasing the size of the allocation is not necessary at this stage. *Noted*
- e **Agree** to keep the EA at 700 rooms per month, but allow the MIQ operational reserve to be used for up to 50 additional spaces per month if the EA exceeds its allocation.  Agree /  Disagree
- f **Agree** to exempt the Afghan evacuees from cohorting so they can all be accommodated (as far as possible) in the same facility which is set up to provide wraparound support to the evacuees.  Agree /  Disagree

g

International relations

*Noted*

h **Agree** to refer this briefing to the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Agree /  Disagree

i **Agree** this briefing should not be proactively released due to the security and national interest issues discussed.

Agree /  Disagree

Privacy of natural persons



Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister for COVID-19 Response**

**Manager, Allocation and Supply**  
MIQ Policy, MBIE

7/10/2021

12 / 10 / 2021

## Context

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1. Last week, we provided you initial advice on how to manage the flow of Afghan evacuees into MIQ [2122-1129 refers]. You indicated your preference was to continue to use the Emergency Allocation (EA) process for these evacuees.
2. This briefing seeks your approval for changes to the EA process for these evacuees in order to manage their arrivals effectively and mitigate the administrative burden on the EA team, which is already under considerable pressure. The proposed changes will also help MIQ to provide appropriate wrap-around support to evacuees in our managed isolation facilities.

## Modifying EA for the evacuees

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3. EAs are designed for individuals who urgently need to return to New Zealand and are unable to do so by using the managed isolation allocation system (MIAS). As such, the applications are designed to cover individuals and small family groups and be made shortly before travel.
4. Afghanistan evacuees require urgent travel to New Zealand, and it is likely that there will be short notice of their travel for the majority of these individuals. However, while the names of individuals will not likely be known until closer to the time of departure, MFAT estimates that there could be 50-150 evacuees seeking to enter New Zealand every month for the foreseeable future. Their previous estimate of 50 rooms per month was included in our advice on the size of a group allocation [2122-1129 refers] but has since been revised upwards due to the changing security and political system in Afghanistan.
5. This revised estimate has been borne out by data: since the initial arrival of 400 evacuees in late August, MIQ has received an additional 28 evacuees, and MFAT has informed us that approximately 76 more will arrive in upcoming weeks.

## Changes needed to EA process for evacuees

6. The proposed changes below would apply to all applications on behalf of evacuees identified by Cabinet as eligible for support from the New Zealand government. This includes New Zealanders and their immediate family members, travellers granted critical purpose visas, and travellers granted visas by special direction of the Associate Minister of Immigration.
7. Other travellers from Afghanistan that require emergency MIQ places (eg student visa holders who are not eligible for MFAT support) would apply for an EA in the standard way.
8. Changing the EA requirements for this cohort makes it easier for them to access EAs than for other New Zealanders offshore, who must apply individually and may not have the support of government agencies in making their applications. However, we believe this is justifiable given the exceptional conditions affecting the evacuees and the large number of them in similar situations.

### *Enable the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to make applications on behalf of evacuees*

9. We recommend that MFAT make applications for evacuees directly to the relevant team in MIQ, which would include critical information to allow planning to meet their complex needs. Applications will go directly to the relevant team, rather than enter the general pool of EA requests. It will also assist MIQ in correctly identifying all relevant travellers as evacuees, which helps ensure they receive the appropriate wraparound support.

### *Allow group applications and simplify the application process*

10. Rather than expect all evacuees to make individual applications (and therefore require MFAT to issue individual letters of support to the applicants and MIQ officials to assess each application), we propose that the evacuees are handled as a 'group EA'. Rooms needed

would be drawn from the EA, but the application process would be simplified, based on your previous agreement that everyone identified by MFAT and Immigration New Zealand (INZ) as evacuees can be prioritised for MIQ spaces [2122-1129 refers].

11. As was done for previous evacuees, MFAT will assess the eligibility of travellers to ensure they have visas, and are eligible for Government support before including them in the EA application. The EA 'application' will then just involve confirming the applicant has met these criteria and is supported by MFAT for an EA. This streamlined process relieves MIQ of an administrative burden and cuts down on unnecessary double handling, while still providing Ministers of assurance that only eligible travellers are receiving Government support and MIQ spaces.
12. Ministers have made a decision to support all relevant Afghan evacuees and provide them with visas and resettlement support in New Zealand. Ministers have also agreed to provide consular support to all Afghan evacuees as New Zealand citizens regardless of citizenship and visa status. You have agreed that this group should be prioritised for MIQ rooms. Given these decisions have already been made, and the very similar nature of the applications, we do not consider there to be a strong case for undertaking assessments of each individual case.
13. An MIQ decision-maker will still formally approve each group application under category 2d (national interest) when it is made, as is required by the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Managed Isolation and Quarantine) Order 2020.

#### *Waive the '14 day' rule*

14. Applicants for standard EAs must intend to travel within 14 days of their application. This is to ensure that their need is genuinely urgent, discourage speculative applications, and make it simple for MIQ planners determining when rooms are needed.
15. However, this requirement would be counterproductive for Afghan evacuees. While it is likely that due to information constraints MFAT may not be able to provide much notice of arrivals, the earlier MIQ is informed of, and has confirmed, likely arrivals, the better for planning purposes. Advance notice gives us more time to ensure rooms are available in dedicated facilities who have experience in supporting returnees with high needs, and to contract wraparound support providers such as interpreters and culturally appropriate welfare providers.

#### **Size of the Emergency Allocation**

16. In your feedback on briefing 2122-1129, you instructed officials to increase the size of the EA in order to accommodate the evacuees through this allocation pathway. Following further analysis of EA room usage, we do not believe this is necessary.
17. The EA is currently set at 700 rooms per month. However, it has never yet come close to full utilisation due to the strict criteria needed for people to access it. The highest utilisation it has experienced since the start of 2021 was in January when 532 vouchers were granted. August and September saw 453 and 317<sup>1</sup> vouchers granted. Given EA rooms are held until the last minute (as they are for emergencies) it is often challenging for MBIE to release these rooms via the MIAS lobby and have them 'picked up'. As such, if EA is set at a level well above demand there is a risk of vouchers not being used.
18. With the projected rate of entry of evacuees, they should be able to be managed within the current EA without displacing other emergency travellers. Rather than set more rooms aside for EA and risk having them go unused, we suggest that you approve using operationing contingency to create more space for Afghan evacuees in the event that the EA appears

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<sup>1</sup> Excluding the three Australian EA flights in September

likely to be exhausted. We consider this approach strikes the right balance between ensuring sufficient rooms are available for evacuees and minimising room wastage.

19. In our previous advice, we suggested imposing a monthly cap on the number of evacuees entering MIQ. However, following further engagement with MFAT, we believe that a strict cap does not adequately reflect the unpredictability of the flow of travellers. Drawing rooms from the EA has a larger 'cap' of 700 places per month, with flexibility to draw up to 50 rooms from operational reserve if necessary.
20. If you agree with this approach, MBIE will keep you informed of the arrivals numbers, and whether operational reserve has been used, via the weekly report. If operational reserve is used on a consistent basis, which we consider unlikely, we would seek your agreement to increase the EA allocation.

### Exemption from cohorting

21. MIQ will seek to place all evacuees in the same facility used by refugees, as the wraparound support needed by both groups is similar and staff at this facility have existing expertise in supporting high-needs groups. You agreed that refugees should be exempt from cohorting [2021-4417 refers] and we recommend the same approach is taken with the evacuees.

### Controlling the flow of evacuees

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22. MFAT has advised that their ability to control the flow of people arriving into New Zealand is limited due to the risk to people's safety that holding them in Afghanistan would create, and the short visas third countries such as International relations are granting the evacuees. International relations  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
23. MIQ acknowledges the constraints that MFAT has to deal with offshore and the importance of maintaining positive relationships with these 'staging post' countries. However, even allowing for these constraints, holding evacuees at staging points for short periods of time (eg 7-14 days) would significantly improve MIQ's ability to manage their allocation of rooms and the provision of services to the evacuees when they arrive.
24. For instance, by arranging for groups to arrive on a regular schedule, MIQ can ensure they go into appropriate MIFs where the staff have experience with high-needs groups and mitigates the need to break cohorting for arrivals. It makes the ability to provide wraparound services easier due to the economies of scale achieved, and ensures a smoother transition from MIQ into community resettlement services.
25. For MIQ staff on the ground, the ability to plan is essential to maintain the high level of service that evacuees have received so far in a sustainable manner. Continuing to respond to the arrival of evacuees as if it were an emergency is highly draining on staff, inhibits their ability to plan staffing rosters appropriately, and could lead to low morale and increased likelihood of IPC breaches.
26. International relations  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

27. MIQ recognises that it will not always be possible for evacuees to arrive in groups that coincide with the cohorting model. However, we believe a successful all-of-government response must seek to mitigate negative impacts on MIQ (such as sudden demands for MIQ space) as much as possible, due to the crucial role MIQ plays in New Zealand's COVID-19 response. MIQ, MFAT and Immigration officials are working together closely to manage and support the Afghan evacuees to this end.

### **Different options needed for a mass arrival event**

28. As we previously advised, the approach of managing people through existing MIQ pathways will not be sufficient in the event of another mass arrival event like the initial evacuation. MIQ does not have the resources and may not have the rooms available to process a large group (more than 100 arrivals within a seven-day period).
29. If the political or security situation in Afghanistan changes (the most likely indicator of a large number of evacuees attempting to travel at once), MFAT will alert us as soon as possible and we will provide you with advice on how to manage such a situation. This may involve using the operational reserve or staging larger numbers of people offshore, depending on MIQ occupancy at the time.

### **Next steps**

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30. We recommend you refer this briefing to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Immigration.
31. MIQ officials are contributing to a Cabinet paper on the all-of-government response to the Afghan evacuees, due to go to Cabinet committee on 21 October 2021.
32. Subject to your agreement, we will continue to work with MFAT and Immigration officials to have the new EA process for Afghan refugees stood up following Cabinet's agreement to the all-of-government approach.