



SUMMARY REPORT

Quota Refugees Ten Years On: Findings from the Focus Groups

*“We’d like to live the life of New Zealanders
and fully participate.”*

INTRODUCTION

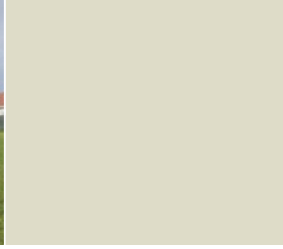
Over the last three years, the Department of Labour has been leading Quota Refugees Ten Years On – a nationally and internationally groundbreaking research programme exploring the long-term integration of refugees.

To build on and complement the programme’s central research tool – a survey of 512 former refugees – the Department of Labour commissioned ChangeMakers Refugee Forum and Emily L’Ami to undertake focus groups with people

who arrived in New Zealand as refugees through the Refugee Quota Programme 10–17 years ago. In particular, the focus groups sought to give greater depth of understanding to the following areas:

1. English language acquisition – barriers and facilitators to learning English.
2. Service delivery – support received, levels of satisfaction and areas for improvement.
3. Movements to and from Australia – experiences and motivations.





FINDINGS

Although participants' long-term resettlement experiences are unique, they share a number of key issues and concerns. These issues are complex and interrelated, and while some may be seen as common to all New Zealanders (such as finding employment), former refugees often face additional compounding barriers and challenges (such as English language acquisition and trauma).

While employment was not a focus for this research, concerns related to achieving economic independence and meaningful employment were identified in every focus group, highlighting their cross-cutting nature and significance.

The following section describes findings in each of the three research areas – English language acquisition, service delivery and movements to and from Australia. Changes over time, key issues and suggestions for improvements are outlined, with differences by age, gender and ethnicity highlighted where relevant.

English language acquisition

Focus groups highlighted that learning English is a significant part of the resettlement experience. For the majority who arrive with little or no English, learning the language is fundamental, underpinning all aspects of life in their new home.

English is very important ... if the people they don't understand the language, there is no success.

Although most participants accessed basic English language services in their initial years, many feel they have not significantly progressed over time.

We are trapped in language problems.

Key barriers to learning English include arriving as an elder, being a mother and inability to find work. Elders spoke of feeling isolated and lacking confidence, while mothers expressed concern about their reliance on their children for help with translation and communication.

The young ones, they're quick [to learn English], but the old ones, they're home, stressed, depressed ... they're lost.

On the other hand, facilitators to learning English include arriving at a young age, easily accessible services (in particular, home tutors) and finding employment.

Home tutor the best because I have five children and I don't drive car ... home tutor come my house.

Across all focus groups, employment was perceived as a key facilitator as it offers an opportunity to mix with other English speakers on a regular basis, which participants note is key to improving English levels.

When you're socialising with people, you'll make communication ... if we find a volunteer job or some job where we can go practising ... they will learn.

As well as practical issues, cultural issues were seen as a factor in willingness and ability to learn, in particular, the sensitivity and understanding of the refugee context shown by English language providers.

Some participants offered suggestions to help improve English levels such as additional home tutor services, free childcare for mothers, more free advanced English services and greater help gaining employment.

If refugees are employed, then everything will be solved ... if not working, then everyone suffers.

After 10 or more years in New Zealand, many participants in the focus groups continue to face English language difficulties. All participants would like to improve their English levels, and they perceive English language to be essential to leading a happy and successful life in New Zealand.

The key of life in this country is English language.

Service delivery

Housing, employment and family reunification were of high importance to participants, and as such, the key agencies discussed during focus groups were Housing New Zealand, Work and Income, and Immigration New Zealand.

Vietnamese participants were a noticeable exception, reporting very little use of government or community-based services.

Although participants expressed gratitude for the services and assistance they have received, they also described significant issues with service delivery by the key government agencies.

Lack of response and/or long response times resulted in feelings of anxiety, stress and frustration, and a lack of English language skills inhibited many participants from following up with frontline staff.

Many participants also described inconsistent treatment and/or application of policy within agencies, with some noting a general lack of internal policy knowledge by agency staff.



I went to WINZ with two clients [applying for the same thing] ... two different case managers – one approved, one not approved – the interpretation of the system is different.

Caseworkers' sensitivity to and understanding of refugee-specific issues was perceived by some participants as low, especially within Housing New Zealand.

People don't do things out of pure hatred or intent ... I think it's just that they don't know ... just being culturally aware and having an understanding.

Many participants look to their communities for support, especially in initial resettlement years. However, there is a feeling that communities are increasingly being relied upon to provide services.

Some participants spoke positively of particular services and even noted an improvement in service delivery from schools, Plunket and public health nurses, and the Citizens Advice Bureau. Participants felt staff from these organisations were more knowledgeable about refugee-specific issues and are more culturally responsive towards their clients.

There's a difference between government service providers and non-government service providers. CAB, Plunket, public health nurses – there's been a lot of improvement.

Some participants also commented on the establishment of Refugees as Survivors – a refugee-centred mental health service. These participants noted how important it was to have a service that focuses specifically on refugee mental health issues.

Suggestions for ways to improve service delivery centred on better communication between agencies and upskilling agency staff in cultural/refugee-specific issues.

Having workshops or trainings for people that work for Housing New Zealand and telling them about this stuff [refugee experience, religion, culture and so on].

Movements to and from Australia

The majority of participants have considered moving to Australia over the last 10 years and describe a growing prevalence of migration to Australia within their communities.

I think people in Australia have better lives than people down here.

The reasons for movements to Australia are resoundingly economic, with Australia perceived as having better job opportunities, better taxes and benefits and lower living costs. At times, Australia took on the patina of the 'promised land' with an abundance of jobs and significantly higher wages. As one participant said:

You can get paid twice as much for the same job [in Australia].

For most participants the perceived chance to save, own a home and provide for both immediate and extended family is a significant motivator. Participants described finding it increasingly difficult to 'get ahead' in New Zealand and regard life in general to be easier in Australia.

If you live in New Zealand, your life never change. People go [to Australia], and within 3, 4, 5 years, they have more money, a house.

Youth appear most likely to move to Australia, especially once they have completed their studies in New Zealand. Mothers and elders, however, seem to be more reluctant due to family considerations and an unwillingness to resettle again.

People are just waiting to get their qualifications before going.

Some participants are concerned about the impact on their communities of what they see as a mass migration to Australia, especially of the younger generations.

All these young generations. they are leaving the country, and New Zealand will be a 'retirement city'.

The majority of participants were, however, unanimous in considering New Zealand to be their home and noted that, while they felt Australia had more to offer economically, they felt that New Zealand was safer, freer and a better place to raise a family.

This is my home, this is where I feel safe.

Many emphasised that their ideal situation would be for New Zealand to offer the same economic advantages as Australia. They called for more focused efforts to better support people to find and maintain work in New Zealand.



RESEARCH APPROACH

The focus groups were conducted using a consultative rights-based approach. Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique leveraging established refugee networks and community leaders. The target population was people 18 years and older who arrived in New Zealand through the Refugee Quota Category as refugees around 10 years ago. To ensure the focus groups reflected a spread of the target population, consideration was given to nationality, gender, age and location.

Six focus groups were conducted in the four main resettlement areas of Auckland, Wellington, Hamilton and Christchurch. Two groups were age-specific (one with those who arrived under the age of 13 and one with those who are currently aged 45 and over), and one group was comprised of women only. A total of 65 people participated in the focus groups, with an additional two people taking part in an interview to mitigate under-representation within the Vietnamese population.

CONCLUSION

The key research areas of English language acquisition, service delivery and movements to and from Australia continue to be important long-term resettlement issues for people who arrived as refugees 10 or more years ago. For all participants, these issues are closely intertwined with concerns around finding employment and achieving economic independence.

Participants suggested a number of ways to address issues in the key research areas such as more English services (especially services tailored to mothers and elders), better communication and understanding from key government agencies and more government support in finding employment to help people stay in New Zealand.

Despite the on-going challenges participants face, they consider New Zealand home and are grateful for the assistance they have received. They have a strong desire to participate and contribute to New Zealand and to be a 'Kiwi'.

We'd like to live the life of New Zealanders and fully participate.

The government help us ... I appreciate that ... but what I'm trying to say is I want to be part of Kiwi.

→ Find out more: <http://www.dol.govt.nz/research/migration/refugees/quotarefugees.asp>
Visit the Labour and Immigration Research Centre at www.dol.govt.nz/research or email research@dol.govt.nz

The Department of Labour was integrated into the new Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment on 1 July 2012. All references to "Department of Labour" now refer to the Labour Group, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.