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Human Rights Commission
Te Kāhui Tika Tangata

New Zealand Refugee Resettlement

**Fulfilling its obligations as a good
international citizen**

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New Zealand Refugee Resettlement

The world currently faces one of the greatest humanitarian crises it has ever seen and there is no sign that this is going to improve any time soon. In 2014, 42,500 thousand people were forced to flee their homes every day— around four times more than in 2010.

The Syrian conflict is into its fifth year and there is no solution in sight. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) notes that an estimated 9 million Syrians have fled their homes since the outbreak of the civil war in 2011. Most of them have no prospect of returning home in the near future.

The Numbers

Resettlement is an important durable solution for many refugees around the world. Since New Zealand signed the 1951 Refugee Convention we have provided a world leading refugee resettlement programme to approximately 750 refugees per year. The Commission commends the government on its ongoing commitment to this programme and its decision to resettle an additional 600 Syrian refugees as a one off temporary increase.

However, compared to the rest of the world New Zealand still lags behind. **The Commission believes that the annual Quota should be permanently increased.**

New Zealanders want us to do more

There has been a significant increase in public support and willingness to participate and support resettlement in the community. During the media coverage of the Mediterranean Crisis the Commission understands that the New Zealand Red Cross received one years' worth of volunteer enquiries in the period of a week.

There has also been a coordinated response from the Catholic and Anglican churches who have a long history of supporting refugees and have committed to providing more support for refugees resettling in this country.

This demonstrates a significant level of public support for providing protection for refugees. It also shows that any increase in refugee arrivals will be met with appropriate levels of community support through practical settlement support and welcoming neighbourhoods.

Quota Composition

Refugee resettlement is a *voluntary* scheme coordinated by the UNHCR, which facilitates burden and responsibility sharing amongst countries that are party to the 1951 Refugee Convention. The purpose of UNHCR resettlement is to provide a durable solution for those most vulnerable and in need of protection.

The 7 categories used by the UNHCR to prioritise refugees for resettlement are:

- Legal and/or Physical Protection Needs;
- Survivors of Torture and/or Violence;
- Medical Needs;
- Women and Girls at Risk;
- Family Reunification;
- Children and Adolescents at Risk;
- Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions

To maintain the integrity of the Quota these principals must be maintained and must be embedded in New Zealand's policy to UNHCR refugee resettlement.

The presence of family is a very important factor affecting refugees' ability to settle and integrate in the country of durable asylum. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) "the family unit has a better chance of successfully integrating in a new country rather than individual refugees. In this respect, protection of the family is not only in the best interests of the refugees themselves but is also in the best interests of the States."

Family reunification continues to be a major concern for refugees in New Zealand.

The family reunification subcategory of the Quota for 2013 -2016 remained limited to declared spouses and dependent children of refugees who arrived under previous Quotas and UNHCR family linked cases.

This narrow definition of 'family' effectively precludes a number of refugees from accessing, for their family, the family component of the Quota. The reality of wider family interdependence needs to be acknowledged. **The Commission recommends that a generous, culturally sensitive and flexible definition of family should be applied.**

What more can be done?

The Commission encourages the government to consider implementing additional admissions programmes which would offer legal avenues for those displaced to access **safety and protection**. These could include: community-based private sponsorship, humanitarian visas, academic scholarships and labour mobility schemes. These programmes would be in addition to and would complement the existing UNHCR annual resettlement Quota.

Many comparable jurisdictions have already implemented such programmes including Australia, Canada, Germany and France.

For more information on these programmes see this briefing paper prepared by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission and New Zealand Red Cross: [**New Zealand's part in addressing the current global humanitarian crises: considering alternative methods of entry.**](#)