

MIXED METHOD

EVALUATION OF THE AFGHAN EVACUEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

In response to the crisis in Afghanistan, Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) welcomed more than 1,700 Afghan nationals on critical purpose visas in 2021. The New Settlers Family and Community Trust (NFACT) provided a two-year community-led, wrap-around resettlement programme, offering various support services related to health and mental health, education, language, capacity building, and social and cultural connections.



STUDY DESIGN

This study evaluated NFACT's Afghan evacuee resettlement programme using a cross-sectional survey, interviews, and focus groups with Afghan evacuees and NFACT staff. Study instruments were based on the domains of refugee integration as conceptualised by Ager and Strang (2008). Professional translators, interpreters, and an Advisory Group supported this research. Quantitative data focused on the domains of integration, and were analysed using descriptive statistics, the Cochran-Armitage Trend Test, and generalised logistic regression. Qualitative data were analysed using a content analytic approach.

<< **AGER AND STRANG (2008)**

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Most respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the resettlement support they received from NFACT (93%). Almost all of respondents (97%) would recommend NFACT's programme to support newcomers.

NFACT provided support in enrolling with general practitioners, schools, and English language classes, all of which were well attended and received. Most evacuees also attended the orientation programme (89%) and participated in additional programmes and events to make friends and become more familiar with the community (82%). English-speaking proficiency and age were significantly associated with participants' likelihood of making friends with individuals from different ethnic groups and their ease of understanding local culture. Participants who reported speaking English very well or well found it easier to make friends with individuals from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds and to understand the local culture. Younger participants found it easier to make friends with individuals of different backgrounds compared to older participants (40 years and over). Evacuees found benefits in attending support related to employment and driving skills, and expressed a need for additional assistance with professional development and employment opportunities.

SAMPLED EVACUEES (N=101)



- 65% female
- 72% younger than 39 years old
- 56% of Hazara ethnicity

- 38% Bachelor's or postgraduate
- 44% were in studies or job training since arriving in NZ
- 21% comfortable speaking English



- 7% had paid job
- 15% had paid work since arriving in NZ
- 89% difficulties finding a job

Ethical approval was granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (23/160)

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Written by: Dr Nadia A. Charania, Dr Irene Zeng, Priyanka Kumar, Claudia Gaylor & Professor Eleanor Holroyd, AUT's Migrant and Refugee Health Research Centre, Auckland University of Technology

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**NEW SETTLERS
FAMILY AND
COMMUNITY
TRUST**



**MIGRANT AND REFUGEE
HEALTH RESEARCH CENTRE**

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Themes from interviews with Afghan evacuees (n=12)

While evacuees were grateful to be safe and build a 'new life' in NZ, they expressed a deep sense of loss as they missed their loved ones and the vibrant socio-cultural and economic aspects of their lives back in Afghanistan. They spoke fondly of their former jobs, homes, and relationships, which starkly contrasted with their current situation. Evacuees spoke of the numerous challenges and pressures they faced when resettling due to language barriers, cultural differences, and adjusting to new systems that they were unfamiliar with.



CHALLENGING STANDSILL

"I felt that I'm like a tree, to take out from the root and plant somewhere else. Up to that time it become again rooted and become green, it takes a lot of time. So, when I came here, I felt that I lost everything ... how can I manage all these problems?"

(Interviewee #7)

GUIDING THE WAY

"Because when we are coming to NFACT, we are thinking this is our second home. We feel very happy."

(Interviewee #5)



Evacuees spoke highly of the support NFACT provided to address their resettlement needs. NFACT staff built trusting relationships with evacuees, facilitated by the fact that staff shared similar cultural, linguistic, migration backgrounds, and values. As a credible organisation, staff could act as much-needed intermediaries to access and advocate for appropriate health and social services.

Evacuees spoke of their need for ongoing resettlement support, which evolved over time depending on their backgrounds and goals. Evacuees' narratives reflected a strong drive to learn and develop their skills to become more independent, and in turn support others and the wider society.



CULTIVATING DREAMS AND SENSE OF PURPOSE

"... we expect from our government to support NFACT, for NFACT to support us. In the future, we will support other people and support government."

(Interviewee #2)

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Themes from focus groups and interviews with NFACT staff (n=11)

SUPPORTING EVACUEES TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES

"NFACT did something that nobody did in New Zealand and no agency did it. We are providing orientation, information sessions on rights and access to policing, education, Work and Income, Study Link, health sector just to inform them [evacuees] and know their rights as a permanent residents and how to receive the services." (Session 1)

Staff spoke to the extensive support they offered, including linking evacuees with essential services, language training, educational opportunities, and employment and skills training. NFACT's proactive approach promoted greater awareness among evacuees about their rights and entitlements as permanent residents in NZ and how to navigate health and social services.



As the primary organisation to support the evacuees, NFACT staff went above and beyond to support empowerment and independence in a culturally sensitive manner that built social connectedness. However, staff spoke to challenges related to limited resourcing to address evacuees' diverse resettlement needs. They emphasised the need for increased and sustained resources to ensure support could be extended beyond the initial resettlement stages.

GRAPPLING WITH RESOURCES

"It was such a massive project, and we were fresh and the volume of support and the high needs of people ... for our small staff group then, it was a big challenge." (Session 2)

SUCCESSES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

"NFACT is an organisation that basically understands, feels and delivers... understand them and then deliver what they really need ..." (Session 2)

The success of NFACT's resettlement programme was primarily attributed to the holistic and tailored services provided, altruistic nature of staff, trusting relationships developed with evacuees, and links with government agencies. Their compassionate and empathetic approach served as a foundation for the additional programmes provided by NFACT to empower evacuees, with a particular focus on youth and women. Staff spoke of further plans to improve their programmes and advocate for broader policy changes to better support resettlement in NZ.



1. IMPROVE READINESS TO RESPOND TO HUMANITARIAN CRISES

Given the global geopolitical climate, NZ must be proactive in our preparedness efforts so we can do our part to support those impacted by humanitarian crises. Clear guidelines and operational resource provisions are needed to support the resettlement and integration in NZ of those impacted by humanitarian crises.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. EXTEND AND EXPAND RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMMES

The success of NFACT's programme suggests that expanding these resettlement services through sustainable funding models to offer more comprehensive long-term support would better address the dynamic and evolving needs of those being resettled. This, in turn, can support improved outcomes in the long-term for those resettling and for wider society.

3. INVEST IN COMMUNITY-LED ORGANISATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Culturally-appropriate, wrap-around resettlement programmes are pivotal and thus should be developed and delivered by community-led organisations and a professional workforce with lived experiences and shared values.