



**NEW SETTLERS
FAMILY AND
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TRUST**



**MIGRANT AND REFUGEE
HEALTH RESEARCH CENTRE**

MIXED METHOD

EVALUATION OF THE AFGHAN EVACUEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

REPORT WRITTEN BY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

In response to the Taliban taking control of Afghanistan after international forces departed, Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) welcomed Afghan nationals on critical purpose visas beginning in August 2021. These individuals received specific assistance as they met the criteria for being at risk of harm if they remained in Afghanistan due to their work with NZ agencies.

The New Settlers Family and Community Trust (NFACT) is a community-based organisation that delivers culturally-appropriate, wrap-around support and services to individuals with refugee and refugee-like backgrounds. NFACT entered a two-year contract with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) to provide tailored support to approximately 1,500 Afghan individuals (evacuees) who were evacuated from Afghanistan by the NZ Government. The aim of this study was to evaluate NFACT's Afghan evacuee resettlement programme and inform improvements for future resettlement programmes.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This mixed-methods 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 designed based on the domains of refugee integration as conceptualised by Ager and Strang (2008), which includes markers and means, social connection, facilitators, and foundation. Professional translators, interpreters, and an Advisory Group supported this research. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, the Cochran-Armitage Trend Test, and generalised logistic regression. Qualitative data were analysed using a content analytic approach. Ethical approval to undertake this study was granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (23/160).

RESULTS

Survey findings with Afghan evacuees

Of the 101 sampled evacuees who completed the survey, most were female (65.3%), young adults (72.3% were younger than 39 years old), and of Hazara ethnicity (56.4%). A substantial proportion of respondents held a bachelor's or postgraduate degree (Master's or Doctorate) (37.6%). Nearly half (44.6%) were completing or had completed studies or job training since arriving in NZ. Almost a quarter of participants (20.6%) reported being comfortable speaking English. Only a minority had a paid job at the time of data collection (7.0%) or had ever done paid work since arriving in NZ (14.8%). Almost all survey participants indicated having difficulties finding a job, both now and in the past (89.0%).

Most respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the resettlement support they received from NFACT (93.1%). Regarding the helpfulness of support and services, the analysis found high average ratings across all integration domains (mean ratings ranging from 4.5 to 4.9) on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not helpful, 5 = extremely helpful). 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 well or very well found it easier to make friends with individuals from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds and to understand local culture. Younger participants found it easier to make friends with individuals of different ethnicities compared to older participants (40 years and over).

NFACT was contracted to support enrolment with general practitioners, schools, and English language classes, all of which were well attended and received. Evacuees also noted the benefits of NFACT's additional services, particularly related to employment (e.g., digital literacy, business starter course), ongoing training, and obtaining a driver's license. Overall, 97.0% of respondents would recommend NFACT's programme to newcomers arriving in NZ.

Interview findings with Afghan evacuees

Twelve Afghan evacuees were invited to participate in interviews following the survey. Three categories were developed that described Afghan evacuees' experiences with accessing NFACT's resettlement programme. A challenging standstill reflected the time and effort associated with establishing their lives in a new country due to language barriers, cultural differences, and adjusting to systems that they were unfamiliar with. Evacuees spoke to the deep sense of loss that they felt since arriving in NZ as they missed their loved ones and the vibrant socio-cultural and economic aspects of their lives back in Afghanistan.

Evacuees spoke highly of the resettlement services offered by NFACT and were grateful for the support to **guide the way**. NFACT supported their immediate resettlement needs in addition to offering programmes that fostered belonging and social connections and built their capabilities and confidence. It was evident that NFACT staff built trusting relationships with evacuees. Cultural and linguistic barriers were minimised, as many NFACT staff were proficient in the same languages, had lived (forced) migration experiences, and were of or familiar with Afghan culture. Staff acted as much-needed intermediaries who could effectively communicate with government agencies to access support.

Evacuees spoke to the need for continued and tailored support to **cultivate dreams and sense of purpose**. Achieving certain milestones, such as learning English and gaining meaningful employment, would require ongoing support, but would lead to better outcomes in the long-term. Evacuees' narratives reflected a strong drive to learn, and to develop their skills to become more independent and in turn support other community members and wider society. Evacuees overwhelmingly recommended NFACT's resettlement programme for newcomers and suggested some improvements based on the strengths of NFACT's existing programme.

Focus group and interview findings with NFACT staff

Eleven NFACT staff members shared their experiences of developing and delivering the Afghan evacuee resettlement programme.

Supporting evacuees to overcome challenges

Staff went beyond their contractual responsibilities to support evacuees with housing, employment, skills training, and social connections, to name a few. NFACT's proactive approach supported awareness among evacuees about their rights and entitlements as permanent residents in NZ and how to navigate health and social services.

Grappling with resourcing

Evacuees had high expectations (that were sometimes unrealistic) regarding the extent of the support they should receive from NFACT. However, as the primary (and only NZ dedicated) organisation to support the evacuees, staff expressed concerns about sufficiently addressing the diverse resettlement needs due to limited resourcing. The need for increased and sustained resources was highlighted given the holistic and comprehensive nature of NFACT's programme and evacuees' need for ongoing support.

Successes and future directions

The success of NFACT's resettlement programme was largely due to the staff members' lived experience as former refugees or migrants and the shared values that guided their work. Their compassionate and empathetic approach were their foundation as they delivered additional programmes to support evacuees, with a particular focus on youth and women. Staff spoke of plans to further improve their programmes and advocate for broader policy changes to better support resettlement in NZ long-term.

CONCLUSION

Evacuees' key resettlement priorities included health and wellbeing, housing, English language proficiency, social connectedness, gaining educational qualifications, learning how to drive, and securing meaningful employment. Notably, many evacuees expressed a desire to build their capabilities and capacities to become independent and give back to society. Given the challenges they faced when resettling in NZ, evacuees were very appreciative of the comprehensive support provided by NFACT. The success of NFACT was primarily attributed to the holistic and tailored programs designed to address the resettlement needs of evacuees. This success also stemmed from the altruistic nature of the staff, who went above and beyond their contractual responsibilities and effectively advocated for the needs of evacuees. Additionally, the trusting relationships that staff developed with evacuees were founded on shared lived experiences, language, culture, and values.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To support integration and improve resettlement outcomes for those with refugee-like backgrounds who are resettling for humanitarian reasons, we have the following recommendations:

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 sustainable resource provisions are needed to support the resettlement and integration in NZ of those impacted by humanitarian crises.

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.

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INTRODUCTION

Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) welcomed more than 1,700 Afghan nationals on critical purpose visas in response to the humanitarian crisis that unfolded in Afghanistan when the Taliban took control of the country after international forces departed in 2021. These individuals (evacuees) were provided specific assistance as they met the criteria for being at risk of harm if they stayed in Afghanistan due to their work with NZ agencies (Immigration New Zealand, 2023). For instance, some of these individuals were human rights advocates, female judges, journalists, NGO workers, and politicians. The first of these individuals arrived in NZ on 23 August 2021 as part of the emergency evacuations and could apply for residency under a new category known as the 'Afghan Emergency Resettlement Category' (Hon Andrew Little, 2023; Immigration New Zealand, 2023; Red Cross New Zealand, 2022).

Resettlement in another country is one of the three durable solutions outlined by the United Nations, the others being voluntary repatriation in the country of origin and local integration in the country of asylum (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024).

Resettlement refers to resettling refugees who have fled their country of origin in a third country (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024). Refugees require comprehensive and tailored resettlement programmes to support effective integration, which can include mental health and health services, employment opportunities, and English-language classes, to name a few. The models of refugee resettlement vary across high-income countries, and often stem from political traditions, ideologies, and formalised service delivery practices of each country. Thus, to date, it is unclear which refugee resettlement model and frameworks to guide service provision is most effective within specific migration contexts and settings to support positive settlement outcomes long-term.

Afghan evacuees were forced to leave their home country under extremely hostile and traumatic circumstances and needed resettlement support upon arrival in NZ. However, it is important to note that Afghan evacuees were unique in that they were not formally assigned refugee status and did not spend a protracted amount of time in a country of asylum nor being detained before being resettled in a third country. As such, herein we position evacuees as having refugee-like backgrounds given their experience of displacement that contributes to vulnerabilities that require support from the receiving country.

NFACT was contracted for two-years by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) to deliver a resettlement programme to Afghan nationals who were evacuated by the NZ Government. The aim of this mixed-methods study was to evaluate NFACT's Afghan evacuee resettlement programme and inform improvements to resettlement programmes in the context of humanitarian crises. Our presented study builds on previous findings that focused on Afghan evacuees' resettlement experiences to advocate for improved support for those resettling for humanitarian reason in NZ (Papoutsaki & Bhana, 2023).

The role of New Settlers Family and Community Trust in resettling Afghan evacuees

NFACT, established in 2019, is a charitable trust that provides community-led, culturally-appropriate, wrap-around support and services to newcomers, focusing on those with refugee and refugee-like backgrounds (e.g., asylum seekers, family reunification, and those on certain emergency visas) across the Auckland region. NFACT's vision is *"to help new settlers and their families thrive within their communities in New Zealand"* (New Settlers Family and Community Trust, 2023a).

As such, NFACT emphasises social and emotional wellbeing through the early engagement of individuals in various programmes. NFACT fosters a sense of belonging and connectedness among individuals with refugee and refugee-like backgrounds, facilitating integration and settlement within the broader community. NFACT adopts a collectivist approach and are driven by values of integrity, respect, empowerment, connectedness, and innovation (New Settlers Family and Community Trust, 2023a). A hallmark feature is that their services are provided *'for refugees, by refugees'*; NFACT's staff primarily includes individuals with lived migration and displacement experiences and represents diverse cultural and ethnic groups (New Settlers Family and Community Trust, 2023b).

From 2021 to 2024, NFACT was the sole organisation to support arriving Afghan evacuees and delivering services to 1,478 evacuees (New Settlers Family and Community Trust, 2023a). Once evacuees arrived in NZ, they completed a quarantine period, as their arrival coincided with NZ's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. NFACT engaged with and supported evacuees as soon as they moved into their temporary accommodations in the community. The uniqueness and urgency of the emergency response to evacuating Afghan nationals required NFACT to rapidly recruit and train staff to deliver a tailored set of services, with additional considerations due to the pandemic. There was considerable diversity within this evacuee cohort in terms of ethnic backgrounds and social characteristics that needed to be addressed. For example, a substantial portion of evacuees lacked formal education, with some individuals being illiterate in their native languages and having limited to little prior work experience. In contrast, others possessed higher education degrees and trade skills, including backgrounds in law, education, politics, activism, and service with the New Zealand Defence Force.

To facilitate responsive service delivery, NFACT drew on Māori models of wellness, including Te Whare Tapa Whā and Te Pae Mahutonga. The contracted services NFACT delivered included assistance in connecting with local government services, accessing health and mental health services, and receiving language and education support, as well as fostering local cultural connections and advocating for the needs of evacuees. To promote belonging and connectedness, NFACT identified additional needs and correspondingly provided tailored services, including parenting and resilience programs, targeted mental health support, employability courses, assistance in developing small businesses, digital literacy training, driver's license training, and access to cultural events and leadership opportunities.



METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The aim of this study was to evaluate NFACT's Afghan evacuee resettlement programme and inform improvements for future programmes for those resettling for humanitarian reasons. Specific objectives were to:

1. Understand the experiences of Afghan evacuees with accessing NFACT's resettlement programme, and how their needs were addressed by the programme,
2. Explore the experiences of staff delivering the resettlement programme, and
3. Make recommendations for improvements to future resettlement programmes for refugees and those with refugee-like backgrounds.

This study represents a community-academic partnership between NFACT and researchers from the Migrant and Refugee Health Research Centre (MRHRC) based at the Auckland University of Technology. This research was guided by the transformative research paradigm which emphasises social justice and human rights as the goal of knowledge production. A key feature of the transformative paradigm is the inclusion of diverse stakeholders throughout the research process in a way that is respectful, reciprocal, and transparent (Mertens, 2024; Mertens et al., 2010). For this presented study, researchers worked alongside NFACT stakeholders and members of the Advisory Group, so their own local knowledge, experiences, and expertise informed the research process.

To address the study aim and objectives, a mixed-methods methodology was employed, specifically a parallel convergent design in which the quantitative and qualitative phases ran concurrently with equal value (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This design allowed for the combination of quantitative approaches that assess magnitude and frequency with qualitative approaches that explore meanings and understandings, enhancing our understanding of the resettlement experiences of Afghan evacuees and how NFACT staff could best support their journeys.

ETHICAL AND CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval to undertake this study was granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (23/160). To guide this cross-cultural research, we formed an Advisory Group of four members, including one iwi representative and three from refugee backgrounds. Three members came from refugee backgrounds having lived experience of the resettlement journey, two of which are from Afghanistan and are long-standing and well-respected community leaders. They advised the development of the survey instrument and qualitative question guides, and reviewed findings and draft outputs. Members of the Advisory Group were given a koha (voucher) in appreciation of their time and valuable input.

Relevant documents, including the study invitation flyer, participant information sheet, consent form, and study instruments, were translated into Dari. Professional interpreters proficient in Dari and Pashto supported participant recruitment and data collection among Afghan evacuees for both the survey and interviews. All participants provided consent prior to data collection and were offered a koha (voucher) in appreciation of their time.

QUANTITATIVE PHASE

Study location, population, and recruitment

The cross-sectional survey assessed the resettlement needs and experiences of a cohort of 1,741 Afghan evacuees, 78% of whom were resettled in the Auckland region (Papoutsaki & Bhana, 2023). We recruited a total of 101 adult participants over 4 weeks in November and December 2023, with the majority being self-referrals after seeing the study advertisement. Participants were eligible if they were over 18 years of age, entered NZ via the Afghan evacuee pathway, had lived in Auckland for at least 3-6 months, and were proficient in English, Dari, or Pashto. Participants were excluded if they were family members of any NFACT staff member. The survey was administered over the phone or in-person in English, Dari, or Pashto by a professional interpreter. Survey responses were entered into RedCap directly by the interpreters.

Instrument development

The survey was designed based on the ten domains of integration included in the Refugee Integration Survey and Evaluation (RISE) survey (Puma et al., 2018), which operationalised the conceptual framework of Ager and Strang (2008) for understanding refugee integration (Figure 1). This framework has guided the evaluation and research of refugee services in other countries, including Australia (Williams et al., 2024). Within each integration domain, we proposed a few research questions within some domains, i.e. social connectiveness, with evaluation questions in particular relating to NFACT. Additional questions for evaluating overall programme adequacy and effectiveness were included based on literature about evaluating services from patients' perspectives and health service evaluation framework for remote communities, which incorporates questions related to structure, process, and outcomes (Nguyen et al., 1983; Reeve et al., 2015). In addition, participants were asked to complete a brief form to collect information about key sociodemographic variables. The survey was developed in English and translated into Dari. The translated Dari version underwent back-translation to verify its accuracy. Both the English and Dari versions were sent to the Advisory Group to address content validity. Additionally, an interpreter piloted the survey with an individual from an Afghan cultural background.

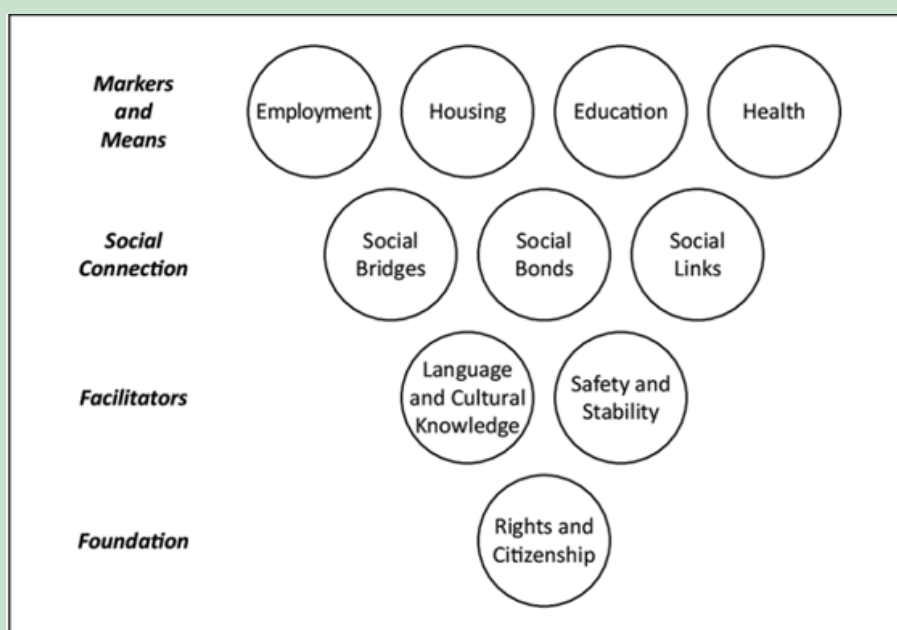


Figure 1 - Conceptual model of core domains of refugee integration based on Ager and Strang (2008) (Williams et al., 2024)

Data analysis

The demographics were primarily analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency and proportion) for categorical variables, including age group, gender, ethnicity, qualifications, and household composition. Research questions regarding the perceptions and experiences of Afghan evacuees' resettlement and integration into NZ society were summarised using descriptive statistics. Social connectedness and its associations with demographic factors (age, gender, and English language proficiency) were assessed using the Cochran-Armitage Trend Test and generalised logistic regression. Evaluation questions about NFACT's services provided to Afghan evacuees to assist their resettlement and integration into NZ society were also summarised. The hypothesised differences in evaluation results were also tested for demographic factors (age, gender, and English language proficiency) using the Cochran-Armitage Trend Test and generalised logistic regression. Post-stratifications were employed to calibrate sampling and non-response bias based on the gender distribution of the total Afghan evacuee population. Analysis was conducted using SAS, R, and SPSS. Answers to the two open-ended questions were manually analysed using a qualitative summative content analytic approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

QUALITATIVE PHASE

The two qualitative phases were guided by a qualitative descriptive methodology (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010) and involved semi-structured interviews with Afghan evacuees and focus groups with NFACT staff involved in delivering the resettlement programme. Given the importance of reflexivity and researcher positionality in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013), the two qualitative researchers (NC and PK) engaged in informal discussions with each other and the wider research team to reflect on their positionality as the study progressed (Folkes, 2022).

Study location, population, and recruitment

In-person semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 Afghan evacuees in November 2023. The same inclusion and exclusion criteria as the survey guided the purposeful sampling of evacuees, and recruitment was facilitated by NFACT's networks. All interviews were conducted in English, with a professional interpreter providing consecutive language interpretation in Dari and Pashto as needed. The interviews took place in a room at NFACT's main office, a familiar and convenient location for participants. Refreshments and halal food were offered during the interviews, which lasted between half an hour to slightly over an hour, with most lasting around an hour.

In the second qualitative phase, NFACT staff aged over 18 years, proficient in English, employed at NFACT for at least the past six months, and involved in the development and delivery of the Afghan evacuee programme were invited to participate. Line managers of NFACT staff were excluded to create a safe space for staff to share their experiences without the potential power imbalance of having their line manager or director present. Staff were recruited through NFACT's networks, whereby an invitation was sent and those interested could contact the researchers. In August 2023, a total of 11 NFACT staff members participated in either focus groups or interviews. All in-person focus groups were held in English at the NFACT office, which was a comfortable and convenient location for participants, with refreshments and food provided. The focus groups lasted over an hour and a half, while the two interviews lasted an hour.

Based on literature and our previous work, the research team deemed the final sample sizes sufficient to address the study's aim and feasible given logistical constraints of time, resources, and funding (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Sandelowski, 1995).

Guide development

Similar to the survey instrument, the interview guide for evacuees was based on the conceptual framework proposed by Ager and Strang (2008) for understanding refugee integration. Open-ended questions were used to gain insights into the type of resettlement support evacuees needed and how NFACT's programme met or did not meet those needs. We also probed for suggested programme improvements and how NZ can better support the resettlement needs of refugee-like background communities. As with the survey, participants completed a brief demographic form. The guides were vetted by the Advisory Group to ensure they addressed the study's aim and were framed in a culturally-appropriate manner that respected the journey that evacuees have experienced.

The interview guide for NFACT staff focused on their experiences with developing and delivering the Afghan evacuee resettlement programme. Questions specifically probed for whether the provided support services were adequate, acceptable, effective, accessible, and perceived as beneficial. Participants were also asked to suggest improvements to enhance outcomes for Afghan evacuees and others from refugee-like backgrounds.

Data analysis

The interviews and focus groups were audio recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim by a transcribing company. The researchers checked the transcripts to ensure accuracy. Data were analysed following the five-step conventional content analytic approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A combination of manual coding and using software (e.g., NVivo) was used to support data management and analysis.

Rigour

Assessing the rigour of this mixed-methods research was guided by the rigorous mixed methods framework. We reported the methodological procedures for both the quantitative and qualitative strands and presented findings that build upon each other (Harrison et al., 2020). For each strand, we also addressed methodologically specific elements of rigour. In the quantitative phase, the developed survey underwent a process for face and content validity (i.e., clarity, cultural appropriateness, and internal consistency) (Mastaglia et al., 2003). In the qualitative phase, we were guided by the four criteria of trustworthiness (i.e., credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers have outlined the research decisions made and engaged in reflexivity activities, particularly during the analysis phase. Preliminary findings were regularly discussed with members of the wider research team, and shared with the advisory group as forms of peer debriefing.



FINDINGS

The following results sequentially present the findings from the cross-sectional survey, followed by the interviews with Afghan evacuees, and ending with the focus groups with NFACT staff members.

FINDINGS FROM THE QUANTITATIVE SURVEY WITH AFGHAN EVACUEES (N=101)

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

Demographic characteristics

Of the 101 sampled evacuees, most were female (65.3%), younger adults (72.3% were younger than thirty-nine years old), and of Hazara ethnicity (56.4%) (Table 1). Female participants are over-represented compared to the total female population of evacuees that arrived in NZ (49%). Female respondents were slightly younger than their male counterparts. More than half of the surveyed evacuees have three or more children (57.4%), while 28.7% have no children. Evacuees predominantly settled in Auckland CBD (59.4%), followed by Auckland's other districts (41.6%).

Employment, education, and training

A substantial proportion of respondents hold a bachelor's or postgraduate (Master's, Doctorate) degree (37.6%) (Table 1). Almost half (44.6%) are currently attending or have completed studies or job training since arriving in NZ. In contrast, only a minority had a paid job at the time of data collection (7.0%) or had ever done paid work in a job or business since arriving in NZ (14.8%). Most study participants reported having difficulties finding a job, both now and in the past (89.0%).

Health

Evacuees reported being in good health (mean = 3.97, SD 1.11, median (IQR) = 4 (3 – 5)) on a 5-point scale (1 = very poor, 5 = very good) (Table 1). Younger respondents aged 18 to 29 reported better general health than those aged 30 years and older.

Housing

Over half of the surveyed evacuees were satisfied with their current homes in relation to aspects, such as the number of rooms and proximity to shops, schools, childcare, and public transport (67.3%) (Table 1). However, when asked what additional support evacuees would have liked NFACT to have offered during their settlement, support in finding appropriate housing and information on tenancy rights and responsibilities were among the most common needs mentioned by study participants.

Language, cultural knowledge, and social connections

Overall, the findings suggest that evacuees considered themselves to have good English language proficiency and reported a strong sense of belonging to the community in NZ (mean = 4.4, SD = 0.96, median (IQR) = 5 (4 – 5)) on a 5-point scale (1 = never, 5 = always) (Table 2). Evacuees with school or higher qualifications demonstrated a higher level of English language proficiency than those with less education (mean = 3.0, 2.9 versus 1.4, median (IQR) = 3 (3 – 3), 3 (2.75 – 3) versus 1 (1 – 2)). The majority were most comfortable speaking Dari, followed by English (Dari was also the most commonly used survey language). However, understanding the local ways and culture of their new homeland continued to be challenging for 66.4% of study participants. Responses also indicated that it was easier to establish social connections with people of the same culture and/or ethnic group than to build friendships across cultures (57.4% versus 24.7% rating it easy or very easy). It is worth noting that many evacuees found it difficult to make friends in general, whether within the same or across different cultural and/or ethnic groups.

Rights and citizenship

All evacuees who participated in the study intended to apply for citizenship in NZ.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

The survey included four questions that assessed social connectedness. English-speaking proficiency was self-reported and grouped into two categories (not at all/not well and well/very well). Age was grouped into three categories (18 - 29 years, 30 - 39 years, and 40 and above). Both English-speaking proficiency and age were significantly associated with participants' likelihood of making friends with individuals from different ethnic groups, as well as their ease of understanding the local culture. No differences based on gender were found. Participants who reported speaking English well and very well had less difficulty making friends with individuals from different cultural or ethnic groups (18 (30.5%) vs 7 (16.6%)) and found it easier to understand local culture (20 (33.9%) vs 8 (19.0%)) (Table 3). Moreover, participants in the younger group found it easier to make friends from different ethnicities than those in the older groups. More than half of the participants found it easy to make friends within their ethnic group and felt a sense of community either always or most of the time; these experiences did not significantly vary across different age groups or gender and were not associated with spoken English proficiency (Table 3).

Demographics	N	Percent	Education, employment, and housing	N	Percent	Subjective health by age	Mean	N	SD
Age			Highest level of education			18 - 29 years	4.7	31	0.7
18 - 29 years	31	30.7%	School qualification	15	14.9%	30 - 39 years	3.7	41	1.1
30 - 39 years	42	41.6%	Bachelor's or postgraduate degree	38	37.6%	> 39 years	3.6	28	1.2
> 39 years	28	27.7%	No qualification	21	20.8%	<i>Total</i>	4.0	100 [†]	1.1
Gender			Other	27	26.7%	(1 = very poor, 5 = very good)			
Female	66	65.3%	Current education in Aotearoa New Zealand						
Male	35	34.7%	Currently studying or completed	45	44.6%				
Ethnicity			Not studying	56	55.4%				
Hazara	57	56.4%	Done paid work in a job or business in Aotearoa New Zealand						
Tajiks	19	18.8%	Yes	15	14.8%				
Other *	25	24.8%	No	85	84.2%				
Number of children			Current employment status						
No children	29	28.7%	Full-time or part-time	7	7.0%				
1 - 2	14	13.9%	Not in paid employment	93	93.0%				
3	28	27.7%	Satisfaction with current home						
> 3	30	29.7%	Satisfied or very satisfied	68	67.3%				
Settlement location			Neutral/unsure	13	12.9%				
Auckland CBD	60	59.4%	Somewhat or very dissatisfied	20	19.8%				
Other Auckland Districts	41	41.6%							

* Sadat, Uzbek and Pashtun † Prefer not to answer or missing value n = 1. SD = Standard deviation.

Table 1. Demographics, education, employment, training, housing status, and general health of participating Afghan evacuees (N=101)

	N	Percent/ Mean	SD	Min	Max	Median (IQR)
Language						
English language proficiency (1 = not at all, 4 = very well)	101	2.5	0.91	1	4	3 (2 – 3)
School qualification	15	3.0	0.38	2	4	3 (3 – 3)
Bachelor's or postgraduate	38	2.9	0.69	1	4	3 (2.75 – 3)
No qualification	21	1.4	0.67	1	3	1 (1 – 2)
Other	27	2.4	0.84	1	4	3 (2 – 3)
Language comfortable speaking (select all that apply)						
Dari	96	60.0%				
English	33	20.6%				
Pashto	26	16.3%				
Other	5	3.1%				
Social Connection						
Feel part of the community in NZ (1 = never, 5 = always)	101	4.4	0.96	1	5	5 (4 – 5)
Understanding of local ways/culture						
Easy or very easy	28	27.7%				
Neutral/unsure	6	5.9%				
Hard or very hard	67	66.4%				
Making friends with people from the <i>same</i> culture/ethnic group (social bonding)						
Easy or very easy	58	57.4%				
Neutral/unsure	3	3.0%				
Hard or very hard	40	39.6%				
Making friends with people from <i>different</i> culture/ethnic group (social bridging)						
Easy or very easy	25	24.7%				
Neutral/unsure	5	5.0%				
Hard or very hard	71	70.3%				

SD = Standard deviation. Min = Minimum. Max = Maximum. IQR = Interquartile Range.

Table 2. Language, cultural knowledge, and social connection among participating Afghan evacuees (N=101)

	English language proficiency			
	Not at all or not well		Well or very well	
	n	%	n	%
Since you came to Aotearoa New Zealand, how easy have you found it to make friends with people from <i>different</i> cultures/ethnic groups?				
Very hard/hard	34	81.0%	37	62.7%
Neutral/Unsure	1	2.4%	4	6.8%
Easy/very easy	7	16.6%	18	30.5%
* Cochran-Armitage Trend Test p = 0.009				
Since you came to Aotearoa New Zealand, how easy have you found it to make friends with people from the <i>same</i> culture/ethnic groups?				
Very hard/hard	19	35.3%	21	35.6%
Neutral/Unsure	1	2.4%	2	3.4%
Easy/very easy	22	52.3%	36	61.0%
* Cochran-Armitage Trend Test p = 0.15				
Since you came to Aotearoa New Zealand, how easy have you found it to understand the local ways and culture?				
Very hard/hard	34	81.0%	33	55.9%
Neutral/Unsure	0	0.0%	6	10.2%
Easy/very easy	8	19.0%	20	33.9%
* Cochran-Armitage Trend Test p = 0.007				
Do you feel part of the community in Aotearoa New Zealand?				
Never/hardly ever	0	0.0%	2	3.4%
Some of the time	10	23.8%	12	20.3%
Most of the time/always	32	76.2%	45	76.3%
* Cochran-Armitage Trend Test p = 0.66				

Table 3. English language proficiency and social connectedness among participating Afghan evacuees (N=101)

Post-stratification by gender

Post-stratification was conducted by deriving a gender calibrated weight. Results from weighted employment, housing, and social connectedness questions were compared to those from the unweighted questions. The difference between post-stratified results and unweighted results were less than 2% except for “understand local ways/culture”; the weighted results have less selection in “very hard” (weighted 40.2% vs. unweighted 44.6%) but more in “hard” (weighted 25.7% vs. unweighted 21.8%).

PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Regarding the helpfulness of the support and services provided by NFACT, the analysis found high average ratings across all domains, with median = 5 across all domains on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not helpful, 5 = extremely helpful) (Table 4). This positive feedback was further illustrated by open-ended survey responses:

‘Really appreciate your [NFACT] help support.’

(Participant #N008)

‘Everything is good for us, helping us a lot.’

(Participant #N006)

Health support

In terms of NFACT services, most evacuees received support to enrol with a general practitioner (95.0%), and 81.5% received assistance through health and wellbeing programmes (e.g., migrant family resilience programme, counselling).

Employment, education, and training

Regarding support for employment, education, and training, less than half of the respondents reported receiving assistance related to their employment (42.6%) or to enhance their driving skills (46.5%). In contrast, when asked what additional support evacuees would have liked NFACT to have offered during their settlement, training and support to find employment were among the most frequently mentioned needs. A large proportion of participants were enrolled in English classes (79.2%), and 83.2% received support to enrol their children in school.

Facilitators

The majority of participants (89.1%) took part in NFACT’s orientation programme. Among those who attended, the health module was considered the most helpful (94.4%). Modules on police and housing, tenancy obligations, and rights were also perceived as beneficial by many respondents (75.6% and 77.8%, respectively).

Language and cultural knowledge, social connections, rights and citizenship

Most participants (82.2%) attended NFACT’s programmes and events to make friends and become more familiar with the community (e.g., cultural festivals). Over half (68.3%) reported receiving support to understand their citizenship rights and responsibilities.

Support service or programme	Number		Rating			Median (IQR)
	N	Percent	Mean	Min	Max	
Employment, education, and training						
Enrol child(ren) in school	84*	83.2%	4.9	4	5	5 (5 – 5)
Enrol in English classes	80*	79.2%	4.8	3	5	5 (5 – 5)
Ongoing learning (e.g. sewing, parenting or family resilience programmes, etc.)	75	74.3%	4.7	3	5	5 (4 – 5)
Programmes to support employment (e.g. digital literacy, business starter course, etc.)	43*	42.6%	4.5	3	5	5 (4 – 5)
Health						
Enrol with general practitioner	96	95.0%	4.8	3	5	5 (5 – 5)
Health and wellbeing programmes (e.g. migrant family resilience programme, counselling, etc.)	86	85.1%	4.6	2	5	5 (4 – 5)
Social connections, language and cultural knowledge						
Programmes and events to make friends and be more familiar with the community (e.g. cultural festivals)	82	81.2%	4.7	2	5	5 (5 – 5)
Facilitators						
Orientation programme	90	89.1%				
Health	85	94.4%				
Education	82	91.1%				
Work and Income	78	86.7%				
Housing/Tenancy obligations and rights	70	77.8%				
Police	68	75.6%				
Road Code (driving programme)	47	46.5%	4.9	3	5	5 (5 – 5)
Rights and citizenship						
Understand rights and responsibilities	69	68.3%	4.8	2	5	5 (5 – 5)

*missing n=1 (1.0%) as not applicable/support not needed/unsure. SD = Standard deviation. Min = Minimum. Max = Maximum. IQR = Interquartile Range. Likert scale 1 = not helpful, 2 = slightly helpful, 3 = moderately helpful, 4 = very helpful, 5 = extremely helpful

Table 4. Evaluation of NFACT's resettlement programme

Programme evaluation results by demographic factors

A lack of spoken English was significantly associated with positive evaluation of support to access health services. Participants who self-reported not speaking or speaking English poorly were more likely to rate the helpfulness of support in accessing GP services highly, with 85% rating it as extremely helpful, compared to 76% of those who self-reported speaking English well. Age was also significantly associated with evaluation of English education support; participants aged 40 and over were more likely to rate this support highly compared to younger participants. The other evaluation questions were not significantly associated with any of the collected demographic variables.

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH NFACT'S RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME

Overall, 97% of respondents would recommend NFACT's settlement support services to newly arrived refugees and those with refugee-like backgrounds in NZ. The majority of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the settlement support they received from NFACT (93.1%). Overall satisfaction by demographic characteristics, including gender, education, and language proficiency (Figures 2 a,b,c). The most needed support was related to employment and ongoing training. Additionally, participants expressed that NFACT could have offered more support related to driving programmes and employment support programmes (e.g., digital literacy and business starter courses).

Figure 2a. Overall programme satisfaction rating by gender

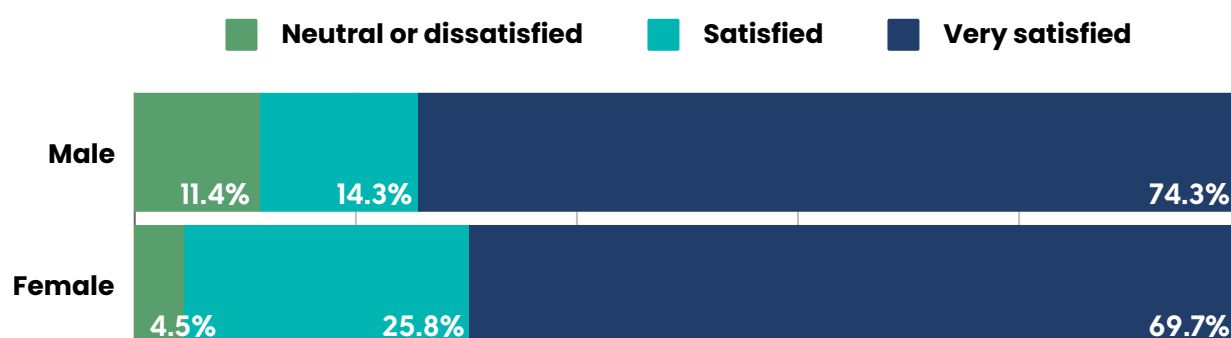


Figure 2b. Overall programme satisfaction rating by educational qualification

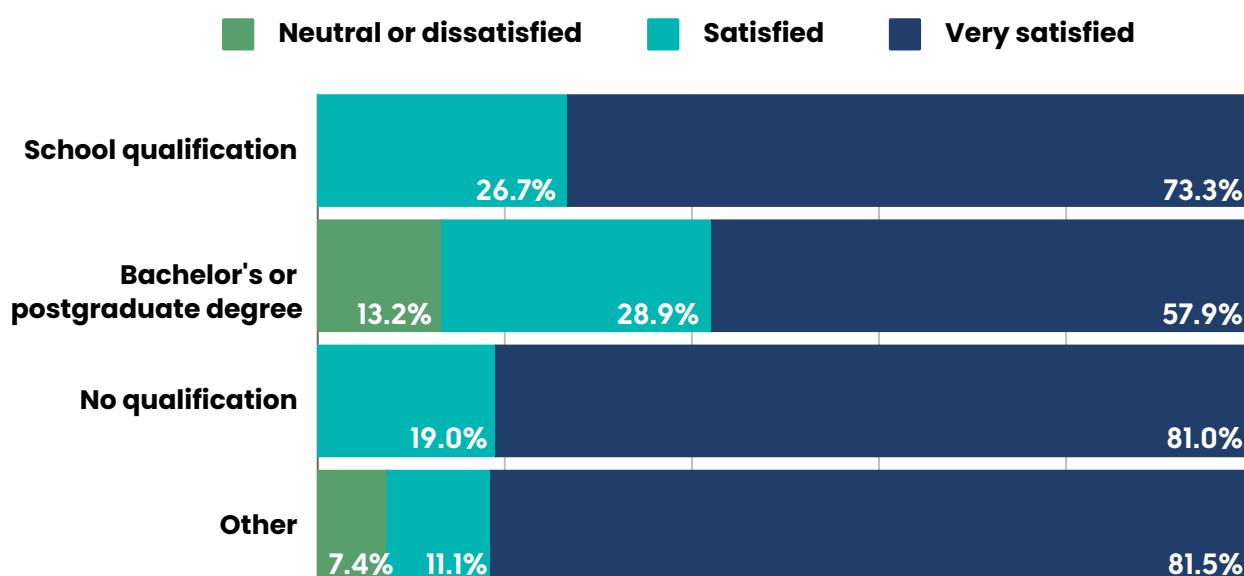
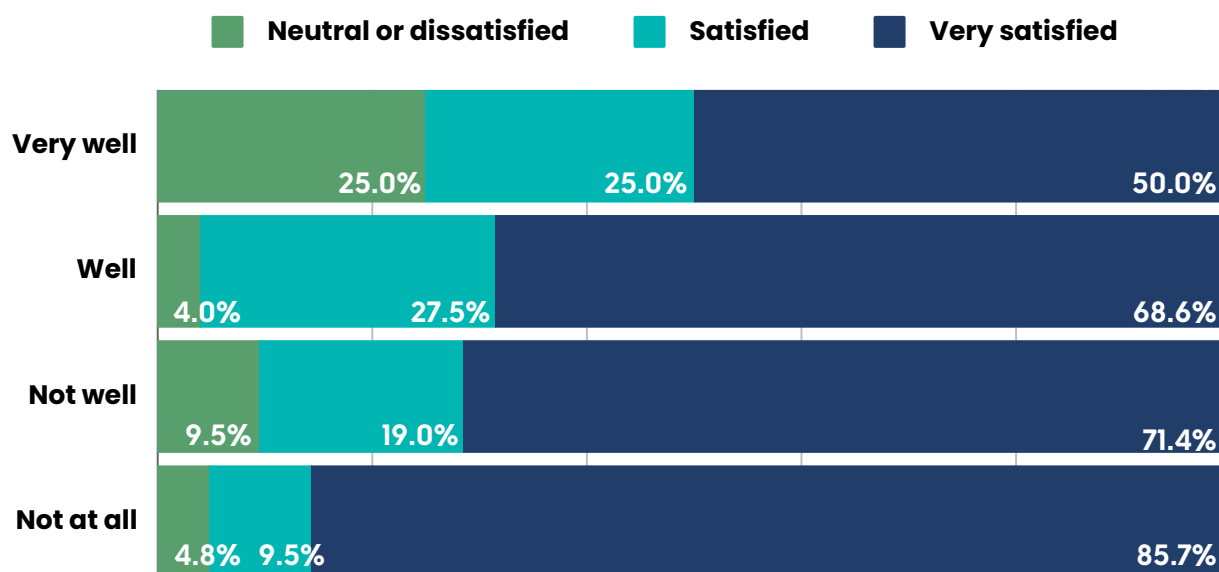


Figure 2c. Overall programme satisfaction rating by English language proficiency



ANALYSIS OF OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTIONS

We analysed open-ended responses regarding (1) the additional support evacuees would have liked NFACT to have offered and (2) any additional comments.

1. *What other support (programmes/services) would you have liked NFACT to have offered during your settlement?*

When asked what additional support evacuees would have liked NFACT to have offered during their settlement, 23 out of the 101 respondents mentioned assistance in finding suitable housing and information on tenancy rights and responsibilities as the most pressing needs (Table 5). Responses indicated that improvements were necessary in programmes delivering employment and skills training (e.g., driving courses, assistance with job searching). However, the feedback did not specify the exact nature or scope of the recommended improvements. Additionally, 20 out of the 101 surveyed evacuees emphasised the importance of continuous and long-term settlement support.

Response category	N	Percent	Verbatim Examples
Housing			
Housing and tenancy	23	22.8%	Finding Housing NZ, Applying for Housing NZ
Employment, education, and training			
Employment and training	13	12.9%	Finding a job, Driving course, Support us to learn sewing
Education	10	9.9%	Support my kids in school, Give us information about enrolments at the university
Rights and Citizenship			
Immigration	9	8.9%	Information about family reunification, Immigration support
Language and cultural knowledge, social connections; safety and stability			
English language support and cultural connections	10	9.9%	Support us learning English, Support us to mix with New Zealand culture
Health	3	3.0%	Health, Solve our medical problems
Other			
Continuous and long-term support	20	19.8%	Keep supporting us
Support for families and children	6	5.9%	Provides training about family violence, help to enrol my kids in the kindergarten
More resources for NFACT, more information	5	5.0%	NFACT need more staff to help people, More information
Other	22	21.8%	Support people regarding their need, Support all of us, we want help from NFACT in west

Table 5. Frequency of themes reported by survey participants (n=121 replies in total provided by 101 survey participants)

2. Do you have any additional comments about NFACT's settlement programme?

Responses were similar to those of the previous question, with finding appropriate housing, information on tenancy rights and responsibilities, and employment and skills training being among the most common needs mentioned by 22 out of 101 study participants (Table 6). Some respondents also emphasised the need for support in financial matters, political education (e.g., learning about human rights and democracy), and digital literacy.

Response category	N	Percent	Verbatim Examples
Housing			
Housing and tenancy	22	21.8%	Support regarding our house, Finding social housing
Employment, education, and training			
Employment and training	17	16.8%	How to apply for a job, Information about study and employment, Driving
Education	5	5.0%	Support kids to study, Enrolment at the university
Digital Literacy	2	2.0%	Computer learning
Rights and Citizenship			
Immigration	15	14.9%	Help me to bring my family
Legal/Rights	4	4.0%	Learn the human right and democracy
Language and cultural knowledge, social connections; safety and stability			
English language support and cultural connections	14	13.9%	Support kids to learn English, improve knowledge about NZ culture, Explain everything in Dari
Financial support	4	4.0%	Scholarship, Financial support
Health			
	7	6.9%	Help us for health and interpreter
Other			
Continuous and long-term support	15	14.9%	Continue support all of us
Support for families and children	2	2.0%	Child support, Support my child need
More resources for NFACT, more information	6	5.9%	Inform us about the workshops and information classes, increase staff member to help all refugees
Other	13	12.9%	NFACT did everything, very supportive programmes for new settlers

Table 6. Frequency of themes reported by survey participants (n=126 replies in total provided by 101 survey participants)

FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS WITH AFGHAN EVACUEES (N=12)

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The evacuees had diverse characteristics representing a range of ages, gender, and ethnicity (Table 7). They spoke many languages, predominately Dari, and two spoke English. Almost half (n=5, 41.7%) held a Bachelor's or postgraduate (Master's, Doctorate) degree, while others either had school or trade qualifications or were currently studying. Despite these strong educational backgrounds, the majority (n=11, 91.7%) were not in paid employment at the time of the interviews.

Characteristics	N	Percent	Characteristics	N	Percent
Age (years)			Language(s) spoken *		
18 - 29	4	33.3%	Dari	10	55.6%
30 - 39	3	25.0%	Pashto	5	27.8%
40 - 49	3	25.0%	English	2	11.1%
50 - 59	2	16.7%	Other	1	5.6%
60 +	-				
Gender			Educational qualification		
Female	7	58.3%	School qualification	3	25.0%
Male	5	41.7%	Bachelor's or postgraduate degree	5	41.7%
			Trade qualification	1	8.3%
Ethnic Group			No qualification	1	8.3%
Pashtun	4	33.3%	Other	2	16.7%
Tajiks	3	25.0%			
Hazara	4	33.3%	Employment status		
Uzbek	-		Full-time (30 hours or more)	-	
Other	1	8.3%	Part-time (less than 30 hours)	1	8.3%
			Not in paid employment	11	91.7%
Annual household income (NZD)			Number of children		
Less than \$25,000	6	50.0%	None	3	25.0%
\$26,000-\$50,000	-		One	-	
\$51,000-\$75,000	-		Two	1	8.3%
\$76,000-\$100,000	-		Three	4	33.3%
More than \$100,000	-		Four and above	4	33.3%
Prefer not to answer	6	50.0%			

* Participants could select multiple options

Table 7. Demographic characteristics of interviewed Afghan evacuees (N=12)

CHALLENGING STANDSTILL

Evacuees expressed a deep sense of loss since arriving in NZ. While some evacuees stated that they were happy, this sentiment seemed to stem from their gratitude for being safe and for their families having the opportunity to build new lives in a beautiful country like NZ. Their narratives, on the other hand, reflected feelings of being lost and helpless, as they desperately missed the vibrant socio-cultural and economic aspects of their lives back home. Particularly concerning was that some evacuees had been separated from their loved ones, including their children and immediate family members, causing immense stress due to ongoing concerns for their safety.

All participants spoke about how challenging it was when they first moved into the NZ community and the pressures they felt. They were unfamiliar with life in NZ and its systems, which hindered their ability to meet their basic immediate needs. Many participants discussed how the stress and pressures of resettling affected their mental health, especially during the initial period. One participant used the metaphor of a tree being replanted to symbolise his experience and the time it takes to adjust to life in a new country:

“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)

A few participants mentioned that their current housing arrangements met their needs, but the majority rented houses that were described as old, cold, too small to accommodate their families, and far from schools and amenities. Participants also expressed financial concerns related to high housing rental costs. Additionally, language barriers and cultural differences posed challenges for evacuees of all ages when trying to establish social connections to support their resettlement.

“Nobody talk with us because everywhere everybody's busy. When they are talking with us, just talk two words. That's all. But because of this, we are not learning English...”

(Interviewee #1)

Education was a top resettlement priority among evacuees. All the participants spoke of wanting to improve their English language skills and pursue meaningful careers in NZ. For younger participants, it was evident that the language barrier impacted their adjustment to the secondary school system and their ability to build friendships across cultural groups. Young adults and parents of young children discussed the impact of being placed in mainstream versus ESOL classes for learning English.

GUIDING THE WAY

Evacuees spoke highly of the resettlement services offered by NFACT and expressed gratitude for the support that helped them adjust to life in NZ. A common sentiment was that their lives were very challenging when they first moved into the community, but they improved substantially once NFACT connected with them. Evacuees noted that NFACT provided support for immediate essential needs. Additionally, evacuees participated in various programmes offered by NFACT that facilitated their resettlement, such as cultural celebrations (e.g., Eid and Afghan Independence Day), courses (e.g., business and financial literacy, positive parenting, driving theory), and information sessions (e.g., tenant rights, dental services, emergency response). Tailored programmes addressed age- and gender-specific needs were also well received, including weekly football practices for youth and sewing and quilting programmes for women. Participants' narratives reflected how these programmes fostered belonging and social connections, while building their capabilities and confidence.

“They [NFACT] really help us because we went for camping. We met a lot of people, Afghan people and also Kiwi and European people. We learn a lot from them and also, we show to them our culture, but mixing everything, it was great.”

(Interviewee #8)

It was evident that NFACT staff focused on building trusting relationships and went above and beyond to support the evacuees. Many NFACT staff members spoke Dari and Pashto and were either of Afghan descent or familiar with Afghan culture, thereby minimising cultural and linguistic barriers. Evacuees described the staff as kind and helpful, praising the warm, welcoming environment they created. Importantly, it was beneficial for evacuees to have people they could contact for support as they settled into the community. They shared examples of attempting to contact government agencies for assistance but not receiving a response or struggling to communicate their needs due to language barriers. As a well-known and credible organisation, NFACT staff acted as much-needed and culturally safe intermediary who could effectively communicate with agencies to access available support and advocate for the evacuees. Participants shared that,

“... when we know about the NFACT, we know there's [a] human being helping us. Someone there's helping us. Otherwise, nobody help us.”

(Interviewee #2)

SUPPORT TO CULTIVATE DREAMS AND SENSE OF PURPOSE

Evacuees expressed the need for continued support that would evolve over the course of their settlement journey, tailored to their individual and family needs and goals. They noted that certain aspects of resettlement, such as English language proficiency, meaningful employment, safe and appropriate housing, and the establishment of social connections, take time and require ongoing support. Many evacuees' narratives reflected a strong desire to learn and build their capabilities and capacities, enabling them to address their resettlement needs independently and become more self-reliant.

“But I really want to learn the language, because I want to solve my problem by myself.”

(Interviewee #9)

Many evacuees spoke of a loss of identity and meaning tied to their previous well-respected and influential occupations back home. Participants expressed a strong desire to find permanent employment to achieve financial stability and independence. Some suggested additional support to find employment opportunities that matched their qualifications and areas of expertise, although they were also eager to re-train in new and different fields as needed. Over time, evacuees believed this would enable them to better assist others and contribute to NZ society, reinforcing values of autonomy, reciprocity, and collectivism. As one participant stated,

“All of us learning English. That's good. We improve our language. But in future, if we find that we have to work, because all the time, New Zealand government cannot support us. And also it's not good. We have to do something. We have to be on our own, do something by our own. We enjoy to do something, we enjoy to find the work, we really want that.”

(Interviewee #6)

Given the positive reception of NFACT's programmes, several evacuees suggested offering more support to further their social learning and development. Driven by a strong desire to improve, participants expressed interest in learning more about parenting skills, NZ history, local Māori culture and other cultures, language, and women's rights. Youth expressed a desire for more opportunities to engage in team sports and explore new places to learn about different cultures. Evacuees also suggested offering specific programmes for young children. Since it was culturally acceptable for women to attend programmes at NFACT, participants suggested additional programmes for women, particularly those who were illiterate or did not have access to formal education, to socialise and acquire professional skills of interest, such as sewing and beauty courses.

As some evacuees missed out on attending certain programmes due to lack of awareness or insufficient available spaces, they suggested that these programmes should be more widely advertised, and that additional funding should be provided to increase the number of attendees who can be accommodated. Immigration support was also mentioned, as some evacuees needed assistance applying for visas for their immediate family members still in Afghanistan. One participant suggested support to help them apply for citizenship, enabling them to obtain a passport, as they did not have their passports from Afghanistan.

Overall, evacuees overwhelmingly recommended NFACT's settlement programme for individuals with refugee and refugee-like backgrounds, in addition to offering the programme to other cultural groups settling in NZ. One participant said that,

“Because when we were there, we don't know anything. We cannot speak English. The life was too hard for us. If someone like NFACT did not help us, we don't know which is the right and which is the wrong way. They help us, they support us. We are here and now we are better. But they [newly arrived individuals] also need the support like that because they don't know about the rules of New Zealand, anything. Everything, it'll be new for them, like us, it'll be too hard for them. But when they have them to show this is the way you can go, then they settle.”

(Interviewee #12)

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS WITH NFACT STAFF (N=11)

SUPPORTING EVACUEES TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES

NFACT played a vital role in ensuring that evacuees had access to essential services and received support that made evacuees feel safe and supported. The support needed by families meant that NFACT had to extend beyond their contracted responsibilities. Over time, the needs of families evolved, leading NFACT to offer skill-building workshops aimed at informing evacuees of their rights and how to access services. These workshops became a vital and unique aspect of the support NFACT offered.

By hosting orientation sessions, NFACT effectively bridged an initial crucial gap in the support system. NFACT's proactive approach facilitated integration by equipping families with knowledge of essential services, enabling them to navigate their interactions with the health, education, and social systems in NZ. This knowledge provided families with the opportunity to make informed decisions about their lives and actively participate in their new community.

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

(Session 1)

This level of support was crucial for building trust and confidence among evacuees, helping them feel more at home and reducing the anxiety and uncertainty often associated with resettlement. By being well-informed, families could better advocate for themselves, seek appropriate help when needed, and utilise the resources available to them to their fullest. However, as NFACT was the first point of contact for families requiring support, challenges arose for the organisation.

GRAPPLING WITH RESOURCING

As NFACT was the primary point of contact for these families, they would reach out to NFACT whenever they required support, some of which NFACT was unable to deliver on. Setting boundaries became a challenge, as families did not know where else to seek help, expressed their frustration with NFACT, and felt neglected if their needs were not immediately addressed. However, some of the requested support fell outside the organisation's contracted requirements and working hours. NFACT staff grappled with providing support in a “one size fits all” manner as per their tasked responsibilities. Being under-resourced and acting as the frontline service for the myriad of support that evacuee families needed posed challenges of its own for NFACT staff.

“The team started becoming heavily involved with work and income issues. Heavily involved with housing issues, heavily involved with communicating with... There was lots of need for communication with the other agencies like the agency to connect our family. It didn't stop with only three [contracted] tasks.”

(Session 1)

Furthermore, although the challenges that evacuee families faced were familiar to NFACT, supporting additional tasks outside of their contract required even more from their already overburdened staff. To work more efficiently within resource constraints, NFACT pivoted to provide interventions that targeted multiple families at once, such as hosting workshops and information seminars. This approach enabled NFACT not only to work effectively within their limited means but also created a space for knowledge and information sharing that drew on their dedication, determination, and resourcefulness.

The duration of funding was also a significant challenge for NFACT. As families continued their resettlement journey in NZ, their needs changed over time. However, NFACT was only contracted to support evacuee families for a year from their entry into the country. Once this first year had passed, some families were left unsupported with their ongoing and newly emergent needs. NFACT staff expressed their frustration with having supports in place for only a year as they felt it was their responsibility to support these families with the ongoing nature of their resettlement needs.

“You know, 12 months’ worth of funding isn't nearly sufficient to help these people actually become self-reliant.”

(Session 4)

Consequently, staff emphasised the importance of increased, sustainable funding to not only support families for longer but also to employ additional staff to better address the evolving needs of the evacuees. It should be noted that while NFACT faced its own set of challenges in providing support to evacuees, there were also triumphs and future plans developed.

SUCSESSES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The critical role of NFACT’s culturally and linguistically relatable staff, along with their empathetic approach, has played an enormous part in the success of the resettlement services provided. A primary marker of success was that staff shared similar backgrounds with the evacuees, allowing them to understand the evacuees’ struggles themselves and related to their current experiences. For the evacuees, this created a sense of relatability that was instrumental in fostering a caring and supportive environment for the resettled families.

NFACT's emphasis on providing holistic support, covering various aspects of resettlement, such as housing, employment, and language support, as well as extending to other areas like providing information sessions, workshops, skill-building classes has been identified as a key factor in the overall success of the programme. Additionally, the organisation tailored its support to address the socio-economic, health, educational, and cultural needs of evacuee families. NFACT's determination to provide comprehensive support for families exemplifies their genuine care and compassion as they refrained from adopting a 'tick-box' approach to their contracted responsibilities, even while facing their own resourcing challenges.

“NFACT is an organisation that basically understands, feels and delivers ... understand them and then deliver what they really need as opposed to somebody who would take it as a simply project delivery. Tick, tick, tick, done, done, done, complete project, that's it.”

(Session 2)

Looking ahead, NFACT aims to secure additional funding to extend their support and offer a broader range of services. For instance, NFACT plans to expand their youth leadership programmes to foster community leadership among resettled populations and explore partnerships with private sector employers to create more job opportunities. Additionally, NFACT intends to engage in advocacy for national policy changes and shifts within the resettlement space to better support the holistic integration of migrant and refugee populations. They plan to advocate for clear guidelines to support those resettled for humanitarian reasons and to promote greater multi-agency cooperation to facilitate integration.

NFACT's overarching goal is to continue enhancing the holistic support provided to resettling populations by leveraging the unique strengths of their staff, who have lived experience, through an empathetic, wrap-around approach.

“So at least to be available for families when there are challenges, but definitely you'll need ongoing support to be available to provide service, for the timeframe there needs to be kind of well established, well-structured research that for a refugee or any settlement process, a five year is very okay... the five-year is more crucial period.”

(Session 1)

The findings demonstrate the importance of leveraging the unique perspectives and lived experiences of migrants and refugees in the design and implementation of resettlement programmes, as this can significantly enhance the effectiveness and impact of such initiatives.



DISCUSSION

Data collected from the quantitative and qualitative phases demonstrated similarities regarding the key resettlement challenges faced by evacuees and their experiences accessing support from NFACT. Key resettlement priorities included health and wellbeing, housing, English language proficiency, social connectedness, gaining educational qualifications, learning how to drive, and securing meaningful employment. Notably, many evacuees expressed a strong desire to build their capabilities and capacities to become independent and give back to society.

Given the challenges evacuees faced when resettling in NZ, they appreciated the support provided by NFACT. The success of NFACT's programme was primarily attributed to the holistic and tailored services that addressed evacuees' resettlement needs, the altruistic nature of staff who went above and beyond their contractual responsibilities, and the trusting relationships established between staff and evacuees, built upon shared lived experiences, language, culture, and values. NFACT's comprehensive approach resonates with the broader view of integration and resettlement success employed at national and international levels (Ager & Strang, 2008; Immigration New Zealand, 2024).

The evacuation of Afghan nationals was unprecedented in many ways, and as a result there was no clear guidance on how to support the resettlement of evacuees. Other high-income countries, such as Japan and the US, also noted insufficient policies to address the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Afghanistan (Ogawa et al., 2024; Salley, 2024). One of the main challenges NFACT faced was the speed of delivery and the scale of services they needed to offer within an uncertain and resource constrained environment. Despite the resource constraints, NFACT staff noted that evacuees found their resettlement programme very helpful for supporting integration. Evacuees would overwhelmingly recommend the programme for others with migrant, refugee, and refugee-like backgrounds arriving in NZ. Across the datasets, participants' suggestions for improvement reflected the need for increased and longer-term support that aligned with the dynamic, intersecting, and evolving resettlement needs of evacuees.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, this study provides novel insights into the resettlement experiences of Afghan evacuees in accessing resettlement support. Below, we outline three main recommendations to enhance integration and improve resettlement outcomes for individuals with refugee-like backgrounds who are resettling for humanitarian reasons.

1) Improve readiness to respond to humanitarian crises

The immigration circumstances of newcomers to NZ and their respective resettlement priorities must be considered when designing support services. While the support provided by the NZ Government to resettle Afghan evacuees was greatly appreciated, it was insufficient to address all their needs, particularly in the long-term. We recommend that the NZ Government take a more proactive approach in preparing to receive and integrate individuals and families with refugee-like backgrounds in the future. Given the current global geopolitical climate, high-income countries like NZ must do our part as members of the international community to better respond to ongoing and future humanitarian crises. NZ's approach to refugee resettlement is guided by humanitarianism principles, and therefore, there needs to be clearer policies and resources to support those impacted by humanitarian crises who require resettlement.

The inclusion of Afghan evacuees in the 2023 refresh of the NZ Refugee Resettlement Strategy marks a positive step toward addressing long-standing inequities in support provided to those entering NZ through different refugee pathways (Immigration New Zealand, 2024). However, it remains unclear how this intention will be actualised and what it means for future groups requiring humanitarian assistance. Moreover, specific policies and resources for those resettling for humanitarian reasons must be developed and implemented. This must include pathways for permanent residency and citizenship, along with immigration support for family reunification. As those with lived experience best understand the context and needs of their communities, we recommend that these plans be developed in genuine collaboration with communities that have lived experience and intersecting social identities. In addition, plans must leverage multi-sectoral agency collaboration to enhance the quality and efficiency of the support provided.

2) Extend and expand resettlement programmes

Government funding to provide resettlement support for Afghan evacuees was initially allocated for one year and was later extended for an additional year. However, resettlement takes a substantial amount of time and investment, necessitating longer-term funding to effectively support resettlement efforts. For example, evacuees highlighted the time it takes to learn English and secure meaningful employment, which are essential for positive long-term outcomes. Additionally, the traumatic context surrounding the evacuation of Afghan nationals must be considered when developing comprehensive resettlement programmes. Previous research also calls for extended support, recommending a minimum of five years, as assistance during this period can lead to significant long-term improvements (Marlowe et al., 2023). We recommend that resettlement support be provided for at least five years, with flexibility to address evolving needs over time.

Resettlement support should be holistic and tailored to the changing needs throughout one's resettlement journey to achieve better future outcomes. NFACT's programme was successful because it was based on holistic health models that addressed the multiple dimensions of health and wellbeing, including mental, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects. NFACT supported evacuees' health and wellbeing by addressing broader social determinants of health, such as education, employment, housing, social connectedness, and communication, among others. Offering vocational training and job placement services based on evacuees' skills and education levels could help them secure meaningful work. Furthermore, mentorship programmes for children and youth can assist with adjusting to the educational system and overcoming social challenges. We recommend that resettlement support adopts a holistic, lifespan, and comprehensive approach while also allowing flexibility to adapt to the evolving needs of those being resettled.

3) Invest in community-led organisations and professional workforce with lived experience

Culturally-appropriate resettlement programmes are pivotal. NFACT's motto "by refugees, for refugees" highlights the significance of lived experience and how the team acted as cultural and linguistic brokers to facilitate successful resettlement. Staff actively listened and focused on problem-solving to support evacuees in an empathetic and dignified manner. The professional workforce must include social workers, counsellors, community navigators, medical staff, interpreters, and others. It would be beneficial for the professional workforce to reflect the diversity of lived experience and social identities while also being proficient in culturally safe practices.

NFACT is a credible organisation, and its staff leveraged connections with key health and social services to ensure the needs of evacuees were addressed. Importantly, NFACT has extensive community connections that support social connectedness within and between cultural groups. Moreover, NFACT established relationships with iwi to enhance connection between Tangata whenua and Tangata Tiriti, and to support evacuees in improving their knowledge of NZ's history and our obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We recommend that the NZ Government invest in community-led organisations to deliver resettlement programmes and in developing a professional workforce with lived experience to enable the delivery of culturally-appropriate resettlement programmes.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

This study leveraged the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to inform improvements for those resettling for humanitarian reasons. Another strength is that the findings reflect triangulated insights from the perspectives of staff who delivered the programme, as well as Afghan evacuees who accessed it. To share these findings and support efforts to drive change, we plan to publish this report and a summary document, present the findings to community members and key government stakeholders, publish journal articles, and present at academic conferences.

Although we recruited a large sample of Afghan evacuees representing diversity in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, language proficiency, and educational background, the findings from our participants may not fully reflect the views of all resettled Afghan evacuees. It should be noted that more participants identified as female and Hazara in the survey responses. We used post-stratification to adjust for potential sampling bias in gender. The post-stratified results revealed only trivial differences between the adjusted and unadjusted results in most employment, housing, and social connectedness questions, except for those related to understanding local ways and culture.



CONCLUSION

The findings of this mixed-methods evaluation demonstrate the success of NFACT's resettlement programme in supporting the integration of Afghan evacuees. NFACT's comprehensive programme was well-aligned with the resettlement needs of the Afghan evacuees. To achieve better outcomes for those being resettled for humanitarian reasons, we recommend that the NZ Government proactively develops and resources guidelines, extends and expands resettlement programmes, and invests in community-led organisations and a professional workforce with lived experience. The success of NFACT's programme highlights the importance of working closely with individuals who have lived experience and fostering multi-sector collaboration.

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