

Syrian-Conflict Refugee Settlement in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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We had never heard of New Zealand. When I saw on the map where it was I asked them “Is there anywhere else that is not so far away?” (Syrian refugee to New Zealand).

Features of the Syrian conflict intake

New Zealand was an early and enthusiastic signatory to the 1951 Convention of the Status of Refugees and moved to an explicit refugee quota in 1987. First set at 800 quota refugees per year, the figure was reduced to 750 in 1997 and has remained at this level until recently when the Syrian refugee crisis and local campaigns to increase the quota prompted the government to review its approach.

Over the past ten years (2007-08 to 2016-17), a total of 7,515 quota refugees were settled in New Zealand. During this period, the biggest source by far was Myanmar followed by Bhutan, Colombia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Even though the first Syrian quota refugees only arrived in 2014-15, they now constitute the sixth largest group of these in New Zealand (see Table 1). By the 2016-17 year, Syrian refugees made up 28.7 percent of all refugee arrivals, reflecting the government’s shift to prioritise Syrians in 2015. Quota refugees account for the majority of refugees in New Zealand. These are people who are mandated by the UNHCR as refugees and who, once they have gone through the selection process, arrive in New Zealand as permanent residents under the Refugee Quota Programme. In addition, New Zealand accepts convention refugees. These are successful former asylum seekers who, having lodged a claim to be recognised as a refugee or protected person upon arrival in New Zealand are granted refugee status by New Zealand authorities. In the same ten-year period, a total of 899 such claims were approved.¹ Between 2011-12 and 2016-17, a total of 55 Syrians were accepted as convention refugees. Lastly, the Refugee Family Support Category provides an opportunity for former refugees to sponsor family members to be considered for permanent residence in New Zealand. There are typically about 300 spaces available per year and, so far, 11 residence visas have been granted to Syrians under this scheme.

The Syrian refugee crisis prompted an extensive public debate about New Zealand’s refugee policies. These debates have been instrumental in changing both the public discourse about refugees in general but also some of the provisions of refugee policy, although not the process of selecting and settling refugees. Primarily as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis, public pressure from advocacy groups to increase the refugee quota and to take in more Syrian refugees grew noticeably. In 2015, both the Labour and Green parties were seeking to bring bills before the House (the Emergency Humanitarian Response Bill from Labour and a private members bill from the Greens) which sought to increase the number of Syrian refugees coming to New Zealand. As an immediate response to the Syrian refugee crisis, the National-led government agreed to an intake of 750 Syrian refugees over the course of three years. The first 150 of these arrived as part of the refugee quota programme in 2015-16 while a further

¹ During this period, a total of 3,225 claims were made. This means that, on average, approximately 30 percent of all claims were approved.

600 are part of an emergency intake over and above the existing total refugee quota of 750. One hundred of these arrived in 2015-16 with the remaining 500 arriving in 2016-17 and 2017-18. The first of these ‘special intake’ Syrian refugee arrivals landed in January 2016; there were 82 and they had come from Lebanon. Even though there was public pressure from advocacy groups for more Syrian refugees to be brought to New Zealand sooner, the then Prime Minister, John Key, rejected these calls, saying “it was important to bring in the refugees at a pace New Zealand could handle to ensure settlement was successful” (*New Zealand Herald*, 7 September 2015). In addition, in 2016, the then government, led by the National Party, announced a permanent increase of the annual refugee quota intake from 750 to 1,000 to take effect in 2018. Since then, the recently elected Labour-led government has announced that it will double the current refugee quota to 1,500.

The Syrian refugees that have arrived in New Zealand so far had typically been living in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon and were initially screened by the UNHCR according to specific criteria: credibility; settlement; security; immigration risk; and health. These vetting measures indicate a strong emphasis on whether the potential refugee is going to provide any security risks along with their potential of achieving positive settlement outcomes as defined by the New Zealand Government. Post-arrival, this emphasis is reflected in the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy. Adopted in 2013, this strategy outlines five goals for refugee settlement: self-sufficiency; participation; health and well-being; education; and housing (see Marlowe, Bartley and Hibtit, 2014, and below for more details).

Table 1: Largest numbers of Quota Refugee Arrivals by Nationality, 2007-08 to 2016-17

	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	Total
Myanmar	251	152	126	230	351	271	222	159	217	187	2166
Bhutan	75	195	176	117	89	122	91	96	31	60	1052
Colombia	29	48	71	96	42	96	124	76	99	139	820
Afghanistan	66	29	55	5	6	26	40	157	143	123	650
Iraq	90	113	36	7	113	128	71	44	19	23	644
Syria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	83	252	302	637
Total	750	700	709	527	679	751	750	756	876	1017	7515

Source: Refugee and Protection Unit, NZI, November 2017

Responses by the authorities upon arrival

On arrival in New Zealand, all quota refugees (including those from Syria) are processed at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre (MRRRC).² The MRRC provides a six-week long residential assessment and support programme that includes a wide variety of activities and information

² This programme is not open to convention refugees and those arriving under the family support scheme (Mahony et al. 2017).

designed to prepare the refugees for life in New Zealand. The activities at the Centre aim to build basic social and coping skills required for settlement, and to convey the expectations of key agencies and groups such as employers, teachers, the police and health professionals. As part of this orientation, refugees will hear presentations from Immigration New Zealand, the Red Cross, refugee charities, the New Zealand Police, as well as health and social agencies. They will learn everything from how to get a tax account/number through to how to access health services and education. They will also learn about New Zealand customs, from how to hongi – touch noses as part of a Māori greeting – to what they might expect in terms of food or behaviour in a New Zealand home. The period at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre ends with a “graduation” event before the refugees are transferred to the cities and towns that have been selected for them as settlement locations.

Response by NGOs, and religious and community organisations

Once arrived at their settlement location, the former refugees are now aided by the Red Cross with the help of other community and religious agencies, as well as any members of the former refugee community who are already there. The primary provider for refugees is the Red Cross which has 120 staff and a large group of 800 volunteers. Each family or individual will be allocated a Red Cross volunteer who will help liaise between the refugees and key agencies as they settle in. Housing will be arranged, either public housing from Housing New Zealand or a private rental. In addition to the key role played by the Red Cross, a range of other social, governmental and community agencies will also play a role in helping the Syrian refugees to settle, from English Language Partners (who provide English language acquisition) through to religious communities providing friendship and seeking to expand the local networks for the refugees, through to organisations like the Citizens Advice Bureau. While government agencies play a key role in providing benefits and housing, there is typically a range of voluntary and community agencies that contribute significantly to refugee settlement.

While research evidence for recent years is limited, there has been work on settlement outcomes for earlier (and non-Syrian) refugee arrivals (see Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2015, as an example). This available research indicates relatively positive outcomes: while six months after arrival, three-quarters of refugees are reliant on government-provided benefits, this drops to 27 percent after five years in New Zealand. Refugee children in the compulsory New Zealand education system achieve better NCEA (the national exam) results than their peers while labour market engagement (those receiving a salary or wage) rises from 13 percent in the first year to 30 percent at the end of year 2 (see MBIE, 2015: 28). Not all research on settlement outcomes is so positive. Changemakers Refugee Forum (2012) and O’Donovan and Sheikh (2014), for instance, note that former refugees are significantly overrepresented in unemployment statistics and that former refugees face a number of barriers to securing “meaningful” employment, that is “employment that is adequately remunerated and commensurate with a person’s skills and qualifications” (O’Donovan and Sheikh, 2014: 82).

As Mortensen (2008: 4) notes:

Compared to other new migrants, refugee groups demonstrate a unique set of health and psychological needs as a result of both pre- and post-migration experiences. New Zealand studies indicate that the refugees experience a relatively high rate of both physical and mental health problems on arrival... The psychological impacts of pre-migration experiences and post-migration experiences of unemployment, discrimination and a lack of family and social support act as significant long-term barriers to social and economic integration.

In this context, it is the partnership between the provision of services and income by the government combined with the more personalised and social help provided by community organisations and NGOs which is critical to successful settlement outcomes.

Public and political discourses

Public debates about refugees and asylum seekers in the first decade of the twenty-first century were dominated by local and international concerns of security and terrorism. Local debates were influenced by two high profile issues: Ahmed Zaoui and the Tampa refugees. Zaoui was an asylum seeker from Algeria who arrived at Auckland Airport in 2002 and for the next five to six years, his case – specifically, whether he presented a security risk – was discussed widely. The relevant agencies and the government deemed him to be a risk but there was strong public and lobby group support for him, and eventually the latter prevailed. In the second case, the same government offered to take in a group of 37 Afghani asylum seekers who had been rescued by the Norwegian boat MV Tampa in the Indian Ocean. Denied the right to land these asylum seekers in Australia, the “Tampa boys” (they were all male and relatively young) were taken in by New Zealand and came to be a success story in terms of settlement and acceptance. Both cases highlighted the at times ambiguous approach of the New Zealand Government and mixed views of New Zealand communities.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it was quota refugees, specifically Syrians, who were to dominate public debate and media interest. ChangeMakers Refugee Forum, a Wellington-based NGO that represents communities of people with refugee background significantly contributed to an understanding of refugee issues more broadly. The public debate about refugees in general but with a particular focus on Syrian refugees began to gain momentum from June 2013 with a lobby group, “Doing Our Bit”, campaigning for a doubling of the refugee quota (see Stephens, 2017). “Doing Our Bit” campaigned for an increase in the refugee quota during the General Election in 2014. The Labour Party, along with the Green Party and United Future, announced they would increase the quota from 750 to 1000 (Stephens, 2017: 13). In 2015, the Equal Justice Project, involving law students from the University of Auckland, was established. They provided commentaries on New Zealand’s approach and obligations towards refugees and argued for a more lenient and humanitarian approach. In addition to providing a series of commentaries about refugees and asylum seekers in general, they were particularly critical of the government’s approach towards Syrian refugees and asylum seekers. A 2015 opinion piece (“New Zealand’s Questionable Commitment to Refugee Resettlement”, Equal Justice Project) urged the New Zealand government to do more to host refugees, especially given the pressures that were the result of conflict in Syria.

Right now what is needed is an urgent action to provide refugees and asylum seekers a place that will welcome them and guarantee their safety. The impact on our resettlement programme can be worked out as we go, but it is not a good enough excuse to deny more refugees entry to our country...Increasing our quota would be a good start to showing the world that we are willing to pull our weight (Equal Justice Project, 2015).

In February 2015, Amnesty International and Action Station argued for the quota to be doubled, and along with activist groups Doing Our Bit and #WagePeace, advocated for “one-off emergency intake of Syrians above the quota” (Stephens, 2017: 13). The following year, they were joined by “Kiwis On Board” who appealed for a doubling of the numbers. In early 2016, the Anglican Church also called on the government to increase the refugee quota. In May 2016, the then leader of the Labour Party, Andrew Little, added to this debate by agreeing that the refugee numbers should be doubled after he

visited the Zantori Refugee Camp. And in 2016, a petition to double the quota with 20,000 signatures was collected by Action Station, Doing Our Bit and Avaaz.

As the Syrian crisis became a public concern, a number of agencies sought to attract public donations, primarily to help Syrians both in Syria and Syrian refugees in camps in surrounding countries. These included Oxfam, World Vision, Amnesty International and Caritas. These appeals helped sensitise and publicise the plight faced by Syrians. It was underlined by the many groups that operate in New Zealand who have an interest in refugee settlement and support, including the Auckland Refugee Community Coalition, Christchurch Resettlement Services, Refugee Council of New Zealand, Hamilton Refugee Forum, ChangeMakers Refugee Forum (Wellington), and the Canterbury Refugee Council (amongst others).

The issue of Syrian refugees became increasingly politicised as these public interest groups began to influence public and political discourse. This reached a peak during the 2017 General Election campaign when some of the campaigning political parties made an increase in the number of refugees generally, and Syrian refugees in particular, a key talking and policy point. By June 2017 (the voters went to the polls in September), the Green Party had announced their policy to double the new refugee quota target of 1,000 to 2,000 immediately on being elected to government, and then to double that again to 4,000 within six years. The co-leader of the party, James Shaw, commented:

As a percentage it's a big increase, but as an actual number it's not. We knew that when the Syrian crisis really hit the headlines last year, there was a huge outpouring across New Zealand to help (*Dominion Post*, 20 June 2017).

The cost was estimated to be an additional \$NZ66 million and it would then cost \$NZ350 million annually once the suggested 4,000 refugees arrived. The Greens were highly critical of the then National-led government, arguing that it was “falling short of its responsibilities in the Middle East refugee crisis” (*Dominion Post*, 20 June 2017).

Three months from the General Election date, the political parties had all developed policy positions on refugees. The National Party stood by the decision that they had made in government, and were going to keep the number at 1,000 although they did indicate that they might raise this number if a community sponsorship programme was successful. The Prime Minister, Bill English, added that the government was “not committing to ‘a big shift’ in the number of refugees arriving” (*New Zealand Herald*, 20 June 2017). The Labour Party argued for an increase in the annual number to 1,500 while the Māori Party and ACT were both prepared to increase the annual quota, the first adding that there should be an emergency intake of 500 while ACT wanted the numbers to increase in line with GDP growth. NZ First, which continues to adopt a nativist and critical approach to immigration generally, supported the quota of 1,000 but only if immigration arrivals were cut and if there was appropriate security scrutiny. What was interesting was the intervention in July 2017 of four former Prime Ministers – Jim Bolger (National), Geoffrey Palmer (Labour), Helen Clark (Labour) and Mike Moore (Labour) – who urged the government to boost the number of refugees and to increase the quota. It was an unusual move and a very public statement about the need for leadership as a response to the Syrian refugee crisis.

Public discourse, particularly mainstream media coverage, has been relatively positive. A 2017 *New Zealand Herald* article (C. Miller, “A Long Voyage: Refugees Arrive Home in Aotearoa”) is a fairly typical example of portraying the post-arrival lives of former refugees (see also *Newshub*, “What Happens When You Arrive as a Refugee in New Zealand”). These articles focused on the largely positive outcomes experienced by refugees. An Iraqi family and a Syrian refugee were profiled. The Syrian,

Ludy Chakto, fled with her family to Iraq before returning briefly to Syria in 2013 and then they were relocated to New Zealand in 2015. Chakto works at the refugee resettlement centre. The tenor and commentary is positive, and focuses on how refugees successfully relocate and settle in New Zealand. For instance, an Official Information Act request showed that refugees moved quickly to achieve independence so that only 27 percent required benefits five years after arrival. The *Stuff* website and several papers ran a series of articles on Syrian refugees in 2015 and 2016. In June 2016, under the headline “Resettled Syrian Refugees Talk of Life Half a World Away from their Homeland”, *Stuff* provided a lengthy commentary which discussed the experiences of Syrian refugees, both prior to the arrival in New Zealand and what had happened post-arrival. Comments such as the following were included:

They told us that there are laws in New Zealand to protect its citizens. They said refugees are accepted and supported here. They said there was respect for different cultures. So we said “we will come”.

Life here is just what was promised – peaceful, safe quiet. Almost too quiet...

Notably, there is no critical commentary, of either the refugees themselves or their experiences in New Zealand, nor of local refugee policies. The article ends with a small fact section on the war in Syria, the plight of Syrian refugees globally and resettlement in New Zealand. When the same Syrian refugees were re-interviewed later (Manson, “What a Difference a Year Makes for Syrians Families Resettled in Wellington”, January 2017), the focus was again on what they had left – and what had happened to them post-arrival in New Zealand. As before, the tone was positive and highlighted achievements, such as the son in one family winning a major school prize.

When we hear news of Syria it is never good news. Now we focus on our lives here. We have to look to the future and forget about the past (Manson, 2017).

If the public media commentary was largely positive, the same could not be said for some of the online commentary which tended to veer from comments critical of the government (both in relation to not doing enough for Syrian refugees – see McClure, 2017 – to those who were critical of any move to increase numbers), through to racist and Islamophobic commentaries. While it is not always clear whether online comments come from New Zealand communities or are inserts from overseas groups or retweeted comments from internationally active anti-refugee/Muslim/Middle Eastern groups or individuals, the New Zealand National Front, for example, argued in late 2015 that New Zealand was not safe with the arrival of Syrian refugees.

Settlement location

At one point, the government’s post-arrival strategy was to disperse refugees around New Zealand, and to invite local community and religious groups to help them settle. Currently there are six constant settlement locations: Auckland; Hamilton in the Waikato region; Palmerston North and Feilding in the Manawatu region; Wellington; Nelson; and Dunedin in the Otago region of New Zealand. In order to establish where refugees will live, a settlement location plan is made. This plan considers “the availability of trained volunteer support workers, potential work opportunities, housing, mental and other health services, ESOL tuition and links to existing refugee communities, as well as any special needs” (Department of Labour, 2008: 97).

There is an apparent grouping of refugees in these six places which reflects the government’s stance that the co-location of refugees from the same community helps with settlement. For instance, 95

percent of the 637 Syrian quota refugees who have arrived since 2015-16 have been settled in just two cities: Wellington and Dunedin. These have taken in 334 and 274 Syrian refugees respectively. In both cities, the numbers are now sizable and have been added to as new waves of Syrians arrive. Wellington is a long-established settlement location which has received close to 2,000 refugees over the ten-year period from 2007-08 to 2016-17, including large numbers of refugees from Myanmar, Colombia and Iraq and smaller numbers of refugees of other nationalities. Already, Syrians constitute the third biggest intake in Wellington. By contrast, Dunedin is a new refugee settlement location which began to receive quota refugees in 2015/16.³ Its population of former refugees consists almost entirely of Syrians (96%). Dunedin was added as a sixth location as a direct response to the increase in quota refugees from the Syrian-conflict intake.

Post-arrival programs and policies

In 2013, the New Zealand government adopted the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy to guide post-arrival service provision for refugees with a view to achieving positive settlement outcomes. As briefly outlined before, “successful” settlement is measured in terms of the following aspects:

- Self-sufficiency – all working-age refugees are in paid work or are supported by a family member in paid work.
- Housing – refugees live in safe, secure, healthy and affordable homes without needing government housing help.
- Education – refugees have English language skills that help them participate in education and daily life.
- Health – refugees and their families enjoy healthy, safe and independent lives.
- Participation – refugees actively participate in New Zealand life and have a strong sense of belonging here.

Progress is measured against “success indicators” for each outcome, such as increasing levels of labour market participation and decreasing levels of receiving Work and Income benefits over time; decreasing levels of reliance on housing subsidies over time; increasing levels of children achieving NCEA Level 2; increasing levels of immunisations for children, use of GPs, and access to mental health services; and improved English language proficiency of adult refugees (Immigration New Zealand 2013).

The New Zealand government recognises that achieving positive settlement outcomes relies on cross-agency partnerships and the involvement of a range of communities and their organisations in settlement locations. As permanent residents, all quota refugee arrivals are eligible for government benefits and services open to all permanent residents, including access to affordable housing, Work and Income benefits, public health services and free primary and secondary education. But quota refugees also have access to additional services.

These additional services for quota refugees are available for 12 months. The Red Cross Pathways to Settlement Programme consists of 12 months’ support with settling in. Volunteers, as well as social and case workers provide essential support, from setting up homes, assisting newly arrived refugees with finding their way around town and institutions, providing driver training to enable refugees to obtain a drivers licence, as well as addressing other needs, such as trauma. The Red Cross Pathways

³ Dunedin previously resettled Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees in the 1980s and early 1990s.

to Employment Programme is available for former refugees who receive a Work and Income benefit. It is designed to assist former refugees to prepare for the job market and to connect them to potential employers. NGOs such as ChangeMakers Refugee Forum (2018) in Wellington also offer programmes to empower former refugees. One example of this is their programme Turning the Curve which assists women of refugee background to obtain a drivers licence.

Research on refugee settlement indicates that one major challenge is English language acquisition. This is begun at Mangere but other agencies such as English Language Partners continue this in settlement destinations around New Zealand. This effort was undermined by major budget cuts by an incoming National Government almost a decade ago which took \$NZ 69 million out of the adult and community education budget. This had a significant impact on the provision of English language services throughout New Zealand. For example, many of the English classes offered by secondary high school extension education programmes evaporated as extension, adult and community education retrenched.

These refugee policies and programmes are now accompanied by an initiative that Immigration New Zealand developed in 2017, and in which it partners with the Office of Ethnic Communities, the Human Rights Commission and local councils. Called “Welcoming Communities”, the intent is to encourage local communities to play an active role in welcoming both immigrants and refugees. It stresses the importance of: inclusive leadership; welcoming communications; equitable access (especially to council facilities); safe, connected and inclusive communities; economic development (education and employment); civic leadership (participation and engagement; welcoming public spaces; and culture and identity.

As part of approaching integration as a two-way process that involves the host community, New Zealand Immigration produced a short report on Syrian refugees in 2017 which provided a background on the Syrian conflict, what generated so many refugees, and New Zealand’s response. It also provided advice to New Zealanders about interacting with Syrians in day-to-day life (e.g., “Women with a head cover (hijab) are seen regularly. Some shake hands with men, others will not.”).

New Zealand’s approach to receiving and settling refugees – Theoretical reflections

Debate about refugee policy in New Zealand covers three key areas: the extent of the refugee intake, the current refugee resettlement strategy and its stated goals, and the inequitable treatment of quota refugees and convention refugees.

New Zealand’s approach to refugees is underpinned by a human rights framework that stipulates responsibilities for protection of vulnerable populations and the government has the responsibility to meet its obligations as signatories to international treaties. In this context, many commentators have criticised that the refugee quota of 750 has remained stagnant since its inception whilst the population has increased by over 40 percent and the country’s GDP has doubled (Stephens, 2017: 43). According to data provided by Amnesty International (no date), New Zealand ranks 90th per capita, and 116th when considering GDP, in an international comparison of refugee settlement.

In addition, commentators have drawn attention to the New Zealand government’s approach to selecting refugees. Stephens (2017: 44) argues that “without the recent public interest in refugees, policymakers have picked refugees who they think will settle best rather than focusing on the most vulnerable.” It can be argued that the Syrian refugee crisis has in many ways catalysed debate about vulnerability and the responsibility of New Zealand to offer protection, suggesting a geo-political

sensitivity to the plight faced by Syrians within Syria and the size of the forced migration flows. This parallels debates elsewhere. For instance, in the context of Australian political and policy debates about Syrian refugees Hewson (2015) asks: What do we stand for as a nation? How do we see ourselves? How do we want others to see us globally?

Drawing on the work of Chantal Mouffe, Stephens (2017) advocates for a democratic framework that seeks to underpin a rights framework. The intent is to argue that a rights-based approach that relies on the “judiciary, law and moral suasion” needs to be supplemented by “advocacy organisations, media and public representatives [who] participate in the messy and antagonistic public sphere” (Stephens, 2017: 15). The author was instrumental in turning the advocacy group, Doing Our Bit, into a charitable trust in 2015.

Secondly, conceptual and theoretical debate is concerned with the processes of settling refugees. The goal of “successful integration” is central to the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy (see outcomes and success indicators above). Whilst there is consensus that such a strategy is necessary, its stated goals have been subject to critique. Some argue that the strategy is largely “aspirational” (Mahony, Marlowe, Humpage and Baird, 2017; Marlowe, Bartley and Hibbit, 2014). Being firmly focused on outcomes that are primarily measured as a decreased dependency on the state, the strategy displays too little regard for opportunity structures and resourcing to achieve these outcomes. Indeed, some refugee communities have argued that support exceeding the first 12 months is necessary to enable successful settlement (Radio New Zealand, 2017). In this context, a second shortcoming has been identified in the strategy’s preference for “quick” outcomes at the expense of considering the dynamic complexities in which a host of factors, such as family structure, age, gender, and parental human capital shape acculturation trajectories (see Pepworth and Nash, 2009 for a discussion of complex factors pertaining to refugee settlement). Drawing on Portes’ work on segmented assimilation, Marlowe et al. (2014) argue that selective acculturation is rarely achieved quickly but may be more productive. Overall, there is also a greater need to consider “modes of incorporation,” including public discourses, access to social services, and other related social policies affecting the post-arrival experiences of former refugees.

The concern with barriers to settlement was echoed by a special edition of *Kōtuitui* (New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online) in 2014. Contributions highlighted employment outcomes (Donovan and Sheikh, 2014), mental health issues (Choumanivong, Poole and Cooper, 2014), and the lack of access to information or services as barriers to settlement (Bloom and Udahemuka, 2014). One crucial concept is social capital, both bonding and bridging. The co-location of refugees is generally regarded as a useful strategy that enables strong co-ethnic ties. Moreover, “community organisation formation reinforces refugee identity and makes community members feel safe, which are essential considerations for social bonding to occur” (Elliot and Yusuf, 2014: 108).

Lastly, a number of researchers have drawn attention to the differential approaches for quota refugees and convention refugees. In contrast to many other countries where often heated debates about asylum seekers have taken centre stage in discussions of the Syrian refugee crisis, in New Zealand, these debates are largely absent in public and media discourse. Not least this is due to the small numbers of asylum seeker claims made each year. Bogen and Marlowe (2017: 109) note that “the lack of a critical debate on asylum does suggest a culture of indifference to asylum seekers.” Stephens (2017: 44) argues that using the Quota Refugee Programme as the main gateway to New Zealand, “normalises a system that requires refugees to wait for places that are far fewer than the number required.”

The discrepancies do not end with the intake. Post-arrival, the provisions that are designed to enable successful integration are currently only available to quota refugees (see Bloom and O'Donovan 2013; Mahony et al 2017; and Marlow et al 2014). Most importantly, convention refugees are not automatically granted permanent residency which, in turn, means that they are not immediately eligible to access social housing, education, and health services. Convention refugees also do not have the same access to pathways to family reunification that quota refugees have. Whilst this does not greatly affect Syrian refugees – who by and large arrive under the Quota Refugee Programme – this discrepancy needs to be noted in terms of its wider implications. As Mahony et al. (2017) contend, due to these inequities the Refugee Resettlement Strategy effectively discriminates against convention refugees.

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