

Submission on NZ Refugee Resettlement Strategy

19th November 2010

This document is ChangeMakers' submission on the draft NZ Refugee Resettlement Strategy presented to the External Reference Group (ERG) on Friday 12th October 2010.

Introduction

ChangeMakers welcomes the development of a NZ Refugee Resettlement Strategy and the identification of key outcomes and indicators of success. We also welcome the overall outcome statement that is rights based and reflects ChangeMakers' vision of:

New Zealanders from refugee backgrounds participating fully in New Zealand life.

Former refugees go through various stages in their resettlement and therefore ChangeMakers is supportive of the strategy being divided into stages from selection to integration.

We would also like to recognise DoL's inclusion of the ERG as a mechanism to provide input and feedback on the Refugee Resettlement Strategy. Participation in the ERG provides an opportunity for organisations like ChangeMakers and the National Refugee Network to have input into, and give feedback on, the draft strategy and to advocate on behalf of the communities that we are working with.

There are however several areas in the drafting process and the strategy itself that ChangeMakers believes could be improved, and we have made a number of recommendations that we believe would achieve this. These recommendations are outlined under the following sections:

- Section 1.0: Process Recommendations**
- Section 2.0: Strategy Recommendations**
- Section 3.0: Indicators**

1.0 Process Recommendations

The development of a New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy will have a significant impact on refugee background communities already resettled in New Zealand and those who will arrive in the future.

As noted above we welcome the inclusion of the ERG as a mechanism to provide input and feedback on the strategy. However, ChangeMakers would like to see membership of this group widened to include a greater selection of agencies who are working with refugee background communities. Broadening ERG membership would enable agencies who deal with refugee background communities, sometimes in a very specialised area, to contribute their knowledge and expertise to the development of the strategy.

We also have concerns that the timeframe appears to be driving this process and therefore there has been little time allocated for community consultation. While the ERG can provide some feedback on the strategy, this is not the same as gaining direct input from across the many refugee background communities in New Zealand. Without refugee background communities input and feedback there is a danger that the final Resettlement Strategy will not reflect the goals and aspirations of these communities. Further, the corresponding outcomes and indicators are less likely to be owned by communities or seen as reflecting their rights and responsibilities if there has not been adequate consultation.

To address these concerns we recommend that:

- 1.1.1 Membership of the ERG is extended to include a wider range of agencies who work with refugee-background communities.**
- 1.1.2 Refugee background communities are made aware that the Refugee Resettlement Strategy is being developed.**
- 1.1.3 Refugee background communities have time to consider the draft strategy and their response to it.**
- 1.1.4 Refugee background communities' input is reflected in the strategy, the outcomes and the indicators of success**

ChangeMakers is available to assist in achieving recommendations 1.1.2-1.1.4 by:

- Distributing the draft strategy so that communities are made aware of the draft Resettlement Strategy
- Organising a series of forum where communities can discuss the draft strategy and provide input to it, and feedback on it
- Collating the outputs from the community forums and
- Presenting the output to DoL

As you are probably aware, our recent Family Reunification workshops attracted over 200 participants and provided DoL staff with valuable insight, information and first hand knowledge about the challenges that communities are facing in this area. We envisage that we would get a similar number of participants to forums on the draft Resettlement Strategy.

Ideally we would run these next year but could, if need be, organise community forums in December to ensure that the strategy, outcomes and indicators are reflective of the priorities that communities have and the challenges that they face.

While we are unable to speak for other areas, we imagine that such forums could be arranged in the other main centres where refugee background communities have been resettled.

2.0 Strategy Recommendations

2.1 Overall Outcome Statement

As noted above the Overall Outcome Statement is in line with ChangeMakers' vision and we welcome the inclusion of rights based language in the statement. We do however have some questions about who the resettlement strategy applies to and the choice of words used in the statement.

It is our understanding that the Resettlement Strategy will apply to all refugees. This includes all quota and non quota or Convention refugees. Currently, only quota refugees are eligible for resettlement support. The strategy needs to explicitly state that all refugees are covered.

From our reading of the outcome statement it is not clear what is meant by

'so that they are living independently'

and whether this relates specifically to the Outcome 5 (Housing) or has a broader application. ChangeMakers believes that there is a need to clarify this to avoid confusion and ensure that the statement is easily understood and progress towards it can be measured.

We also have concern over the use of words

'exercising the same rights.'

This wording suggests that refugee background communities themselves are the only factor in the realisation of rights. This is clearly not the case. In order for rights such as the right to education, or a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of self and family to be realised, there needs to be systematic well resourced refugee centric service provision. As the DoL is no

doubt aware, former refugees face challenges in integration different to those of other migrants due to:

- they did not choose to leave their home country
- most do not choose their country of resettlement
- they come with few capital assets and little opportunity for advance planning
- their physical and mental health may be compromised, and
- their need for support tends to be high, complex and immediate.

In addition, the diverse backgrounds of former refugees bring challenges in ensuring services respond to their needs.

To address these concerns we recommend that:

2.1.1 The Overall Outcome statement is re-worded to

Former refugees¹ are participating fully in New Zealand society, are realising the same rights and responsibilities as other New Zealanders, and have a strong sense of belonging to their own community and to New Zealand.

2.2 Outcomes 1-5

2.2.1 Outcome 1 Self Sufficiency

ChangeMakers welcomes an outcome that has a focus on self sufficiency. However, self sufficiency is a broad term and is underpinned by the realisation of rights in a number of areas including education, housing and employment. Further, the current wording in this outcome is not aspiration enough and may not result in the issue of underemployment of former refugees being addressed.

To address these concerns we recommend that:

2.2.1.1 Outcome 1 is re-worded to:

Economic Wellbeing: All former refugees who can work have secured durable and meaningful paid employment

2.2.2 Outcome 2: Participation

The framework rightly recognises the importance of the connection of refugee background communities to NZ and their sense of belonging. What is missing is the importance of the connection within and between refugee background communities. Refugee background communities play a vital role in the welcome and on-going support of

¹ This includes all former refugees: Quota and Convention refugees

new arrivals by assisting their integration into New Zealand. There is no recognition of this role in the outcome statement or within the different integration stages.

Further, there is no mention of cultural identity and the need to ensure that refugee background communities can maintain and live their customs, practices, languages, values and world views or the role that this has in contributing to wellbeing.

Both of these factors are recognised in The Social Report and need to be reflected here.

As previously noted, the ChangeMakers/DoL workshops on family re-unification were attended by over 200 people from throughout the Wellington region. For many refugee background communities, family re-unification is the number one issue. Therefore it is disappointing that there is no reflection of this in the draft strategy.

To address these concerns we recommend that:

2.2.2.1 Outcome 2 is re-worded to:

Participation: Refugees are well connected to their own family, their community and the wider NZ community and have a strong sense of cultural identity and belonging.

2.2.2.2 Each stage of integration for Outcome 2 is re-worded to reflect the importance of family re-unification and the role refugee background communities play in supporting fellow refugee background community members.

2.2.3 Outcome 3 Health

ChangeMakers welcomes the achievement of refugee specific needs being addressed but notes that the language of this outcome is somewhat different from Outcome 2 which has more of a rights focus. While getting health needs addressed is important, what is more important is the connection between this and the realisation of positive health outcomes such as enjoying a long and healthy life.

To address this concern we recommend that:

2.2.3.1 Outcome 3 is reworded to:

Health: Refugee-specific health needs have been addressed so that former refugees are able to live a long and healthy life.

2.2.4 Outcome 4: Education

ChangeMakers agrees with a focus on education as a key outcome. As a participant in one of our recent youth workshops stated "Education is key".

However we have concerns that this outcome does not link the refugee specific education requirements to positive outcomes and that there is ambiguity in some of the integration stages. For example, in the reception stage it is not clear whether education assessments are available for all or just for children. If the intention is that every former refugee would have access to an assessment (and we recommend that this is the case), then this stage needs to cover more than preparing children for school. It should also include support and advice for youth who are intending to go to university, polytechnics or other education and training institutions, and for adults who want to re-train or need to complete NZ training/education in order to have their qualifications recognised.

To address these concerns we recommend that:

2.2.4.1 Outcome 4 is reworded to:

Education: Refugee-specific education requirements have been addressed so that former refugees are able to use their knowledge and skills to participate fully in NZ life.

2.2.5 Outcome 5: Housing

The outcome focuses on reducing the reliance on state housing. While many former refugees have aspirations to own their own house or move to private rental accommodation, it is ChangeMakers' view that focus of the outcome should be wider and ensure that refugee background communities are housed appropriately.

To address this concern we recommend that:

2.2.5.1 Outcome 5 is reworded to:

Housing: Refugee background communities have access to affordable, appropriate and healthy housing options

The wording on each integration stage needs to be edited to reflect the focus on affordable, appropriate and healthy housing options

2.3 Indicators

ChangeMakers welcomes the inclusion of indicators that will be used to determine whether progress towards the outcomes is being achieved. However we have concerns about the indicators shown on the 20/10/10 draft.

It is our view that there is not a strong cause and effect link between the indicators and the outcomes. For example, a reduction in numbers on the unemployment benefit or sickness benefit does not necessarily mean that there is a corresponding increase in the percentage of former refugees who have durable and fulfilling paid employment.

While ChangeMakers could make recommendations on the re-wording of these indicators, it is our view that refugee background communities should be involved in this process to ensure that indicators are a true measure of progress towards the Overall Outcome of the Resettlement Strategy.

Summary

The drafting of a NZ Refugee Resettlement Strategy is welcomed by ChangeMakers. It is our view that the final NZ Refugee Resettlement Strategy could be seen both locally and globally as a seminal, rights based strategy that provides a platform from which all refugee background communities are able to participate fully in NZ life. However, the current timeframe and process for finalising the strategy could undermine the achievement of this. This submission contains a number of recommendations to address these concerns.

ChangeMakers is committed to the development of the NZ Refugee Resettlement Strategy and would welcome further collaboration with the DoL on how best to ensure that the strategy reflects the rights and aspirations of all refugee background communities.