



# For a permanent Community Refugee Sponsorship programme now!

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## BACKGROUND

Aotearoa New Zealand's **Community Refugee Sponsorship (CORS)** programme is a relatively recent initiative, modelled on successful programmes in countries like Canada, the UK and Ireland. It was introduced to complement the government's existing refugee resettlement efforts by offering communities the opportunity to actively participate in the resettlement of refugees.

### 1. Pilot Programme (2018–2020)

In 2017, the New Zealand Government approved a pilot for a Community Refugee Sponsorship programme. Launched in July 2018, the pilot aimed to test the feasibility of a community-led sponsorship model. Four sponsor groups were selected, and 24 refugees were resettled in New Zealand under this pilot. The pilot demonstrated that community groups could provide effective support and supplement government-led refugee resettlement.

### 2. Calls for a Permanent Programme (2018)

In 2018, Amnesty International New Zealand presented a petition with 10,276 signatures to Parliament to the Minister of Immigration at the time, urging the Government to make the community sponsorship pilot programme permanent.

### 3. Extended Pilot (2021–2024)

Following the success of the pilot, the government launched a three-year extended pilot programme in 2021. This phase aimed to resettle up to 150 refugees through community sponsorship. The government partnered with HOST International Aotearoa New Zealand as an umbrella organisation for the programme responsible for supporting and guiding community groups in the sponsorship process. A total of 28 sponsor groups were successfully approved for the programme, and over 250 volunteers across these 28 groups helped resettle 150 sponsored refugees in 12 locations across the country.

### 4. Extension of Extended Pilot (2024-2025)

In June 2024, Cabinet agreed to extend the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship category until 30 June 2025 to grant visas to an additional 51 individuals who were in the category's application pipeline as at 30 June 2024. This brings the total number of sponsored refugees under the extended pilot to 201.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE COMMUNITY REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME

The Community Refugee Sponsorship programme enables community groups to provide financial, emotional, and practical support to refugees, assisting them to integrate into life in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Community-led:** The programme is designed to be led by and involve welcoming and connected communities in New Zealand.

**Direct Support:** Community groups, after being approved as sponsor groups, commit to supporting a refugee individual/whānau for two years, helping them find housing, access services, secure employment or enrol in further study, understand life in Aotearoa New Zealand and participate in the wider community.

**Community Involvement:** The programme emphasises the importance of community involvement in the resettlement process, creating a sense of shared responsibility and building stronger communities.

**Focus on Integration:** The goal is to help refugees quickly regain independence, have self-agency in their decision-making and find a sense of belonging in their new home.

**A Complementary Pathway:** The CORS programme provides an alternative pathway for refugees to complement New Zealand's Quota and, in doing so, demonstrate New Zealand's response to the scale of refugee movement and commitment to international responsibility sharing.

## IMPACT AND SUCCESSES

- **Stronger Community Involvement:** Encouraged grassroots participation in refugee resettlement.
- **Positive Refugee Outcomes:** Refugees supported by communities integrated faster, with better access to housing, education, employment, and social networks.
- **Empowering Refugees:** Helps refugees become self-sufficient and integrate into their new community.
- **More Opportunities for Refugees:** Approved sponsor groups help sponsored refugees access jobs, education, and healthcare more effectively.
- **Policy Innovation:** Demonstrated a **public-private partnership** model that could expand New Zealand's refugee resettlement capacity.
- **Faster and More Personalised Resettlement:** Refugees receive direct, tailored support rather than relying solely on government programmes.
- **Strengthens Communities:** Encourages local communities to be actively involved in humanitarian efforts, fostering social cohesion and intercultural exchange. It breaks down barriers and builds mutual acceptance and understanding.
- **Expanding Resettlement Capacity:** Increases the number of refugees who can find safety, beyond what government-funded programmes alone can accommodate.
- **Providing a Lifeline:** Offers a pathway to resettlement for refugees who cannot return home or settle in the country where they have sought initial safety.


## YOUR VOICE MATTERS

### **Call to Action – Let's Make It Permanent!**

The extended pilot phase of the Community Refugee Sponsorship programme comes to an end in June 2025.

We need the government to commit to a **permanent** Community Refugee Sponsorship Programme. Let's build on what we've started and ensure more refugees can find a safe home in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We urge the Government to make Community Refugee Sponsorship a permanent, **complementary** refugee settlement pathway to Aotearoa New Zealand.

 **Join the movement** – Contact your MP, coalition government partners, opposition parties, express your support on social media, mainstream media, and spread the word!

Enlist and collaborate with community partners, ethnic communities, NGOs and others to have your voices heard.

**Together, we can make New Zealand a strong leader in community-led refugee resettlement.**

## MESSAGING FOR A PERMANENT COMMUNITY REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME

### **Aotearoa Can Lead with Compassion – Make Community Refugee Sponsorship Permanent!**

New Zealand has a proud tradition of welcoming refugees, and Community Refugee Sponsorship has proven that when Kiwis open their hearts and homes, refugees thrive. It is our humanitarian obligation as a country to welcome former refugees. This is another pathway that allows communities to be actively involved in welcoming and helping settle former refugees into our communities.

Now is the time to make this programme permanent!

### **Proven Success – Why Stop Now?**

Since 2018, Community Refugee Sponsorship has shown:

- ✓ **Strong refugee integration** – Community-led support ensures refugees find housing, employment, and social networks more quickly. By having wrap-around community support that focuses on empowerment, sponsored refugees are included in the community, have self-agency and develop self-sufficiency quickly.
- ✓ **Empowered local communities** – Everyday Kiwis, faith-based groups, businesses, ethnic background communities, refugee-led groups and schools have stepped up to support newcomers. More groups are keen to be involved in a future programme.
- ✓ **An expanded resettlement capacity** – This programme allows more refugees to find safety in New Zealand, alongside the Refugee Quota Programme.
- ✓ **Advantage of location** – CORS eases the burden on public resources by resettling in both traditional quota refugee regions but are opening up new locations for refugee resettlement as well.
- ✓ **Social cohesion** – Sponsor group members ensure community connectedness, provide friendship and networks, will regularly check in, hence strengthening personal relationship-building and reducing the risk of isolation.
- ✓ **Communities stepping into the programme can source extra resources quickly** – The programme draws on local communities, their knowledge, networks and resources to help refugees settle rather than government resources.
- ✓ **More communities want to be involved** – Existing and new sponsor groups are ready to commit to supporting former refugees resettle in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- ✓ **An opportunity for refugees who often fall through the gaps of other humanitarian pathways** - The programme provides a pathway for former refugees who would otherwise not be able to be resettled, many of whom have been waiting for a chance for settlement and an opportunity to work again for years.
- ✓ **Giving back** – Sponsored refugees who have arrived through the extended pilot programme are actively giving back to the community. They are engaged through various means, including volunteering, serving on advisory boards, pursuing tertiary education, receiving scholarships, and holding jobs. Some also want to be involved as sponsors in a future CORS programme.

Let's keep the momentum going!

### 💙 A Programme That Works for Everyone

🌟 **For Refugees:** A warm welcome and tailored support to rebuild their lives.

🌟 **For Communities:** A chance to directly participate in life-changing humanitarian work.

🌟 **For New Zealand:** A cost-effective, sustainable model that strengthens our international leadership on refugee protection.

**Timeline:** Time is of the essence, and we hope that you can come on board with your voices over the coming months.

🔗 Learn more: [refugeesponsorship.org.nz](https://refugeesponsorship.org.nz)

## REFERENCES:

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[We can make a difference for refugees, one family at a time | Stuff](#)

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[Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Category Evaluation | Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment](#)

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*Aroha mai aroha atu koha mai koha atu.  
Love received, love given.*