



Asia Pacific Network of Refugees

RAISING REFUGEE VOICES IN NEW ZEALAND



**APNOR CONSULTATION, MARCH 2021
SUMMARY REPORT**

About the APNOR New Zealand Consultation

On 10 March 2021, the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees convened *Raising Refugee Voices in New Zealand*, a consultation for refugees in New Zealand to share their experience and outlook.

We had 16 participants join from across New Zealand, men and women originally from Myanmar, Afghanistan and Iran, many of them representatives of refugee-led organisations.

The consultation was an important chance for refugees provide comments and find a way to be involved and engaged at the national level. For some, this APNOR consultation was their first opportunity to be heard as experts on refugee issues in New Zealand.

The consultation was held on zoom. For privacy reasons, most participants were asked to leave their cameras off.

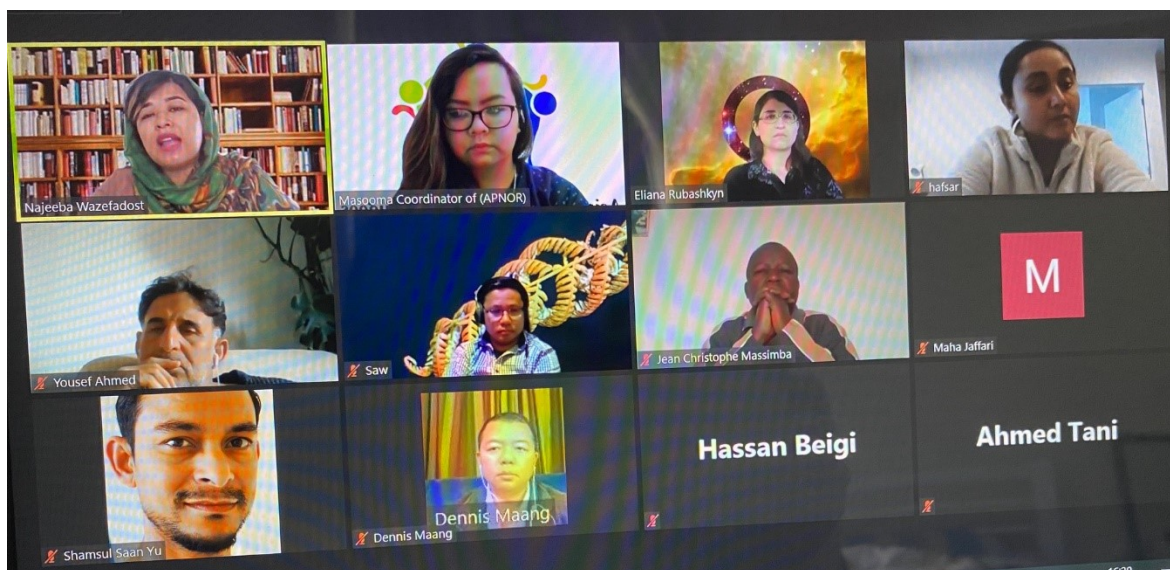
Raising Refugee Voices in New Zealand was possible thanks to the generous support of Open Society Foundations.

Purpose of the consultation

APNOR aims to create strong bonds among refugees, and between refugees and our network, to help ensure refugee voices are heard in decisions that affect us.

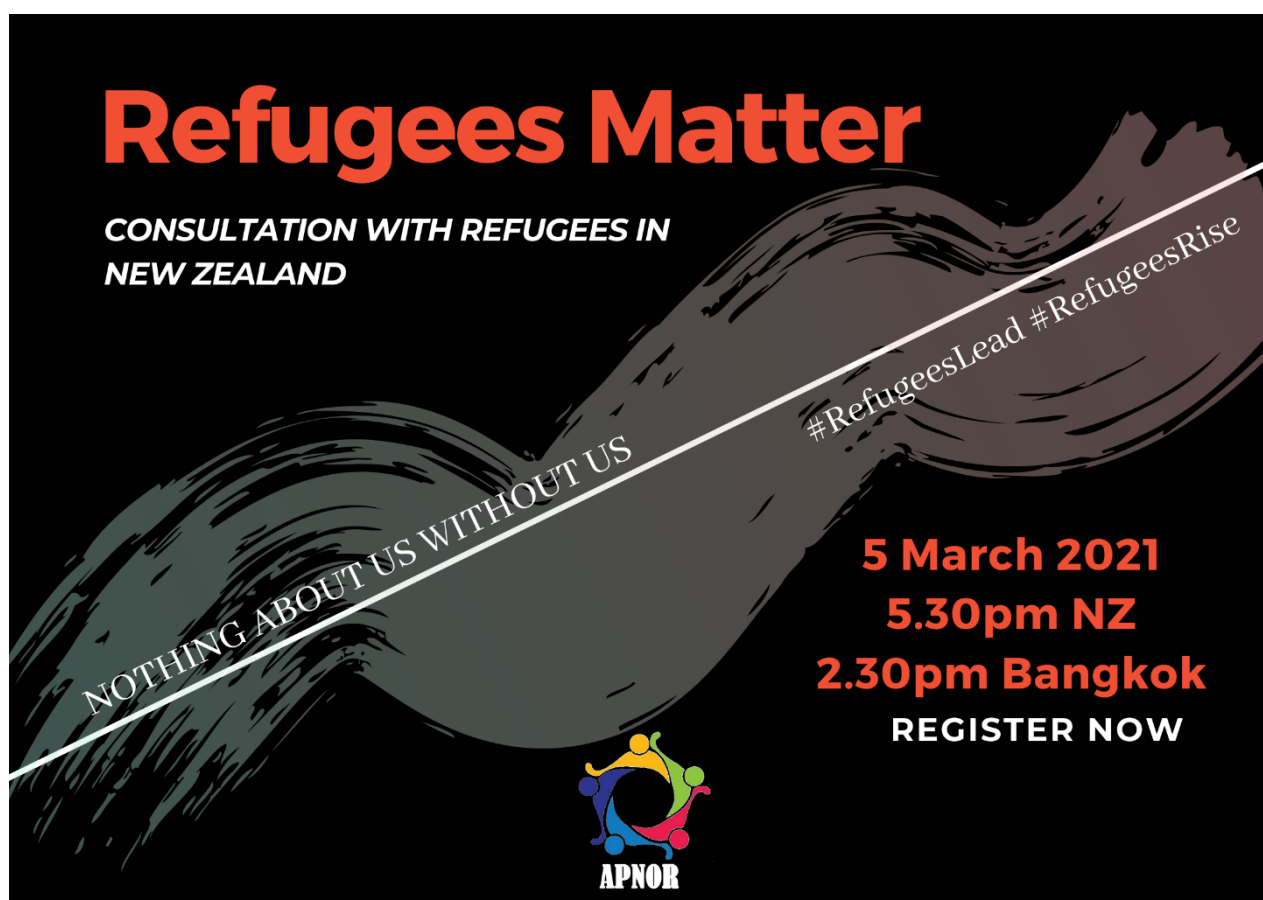
New Zealand, like Australia, has a major opportunity to be a ‘champion’ state in the Asia Pacific, as one of the wealthier countries in the region. Every country has its own challenges. Refugees based in New Zealand and Australia can work together to make sure governments provide much more support for refugees in more underresourced environments, like those in Bangladesh, on the Thai-Burma border, or in Indonesia and Malaysia.

APNOR’s consultations provide an opportunity for expressing refugee voices and for developing a path towards true, meaningful refugee involvement in decision-making.



Above: Participants in the APNOR New Zealand Consultation on Zoom. Image by Masooma Ramazan.

Below: Promotional material for the consultation.



Executive Summary

Refugees at the consultation discussed their key issues and challenges, using a SWOT analytical framework.

Questions for discussion included:

- What problems are you facing in New Zealand?
- What do you want to achieve in New Zealand?
- What are the main barriers as a refugee in New Zealand?
- Is there enough refugee participation in policy discussions?
- Who are refugee leaders who can be involved in the future?
- Who are refugees' allies? Who are relevant refugee experts in New Zealand?
- To what extent can you get involved with the New Zealand government?
- To what extent can you get involved with your home government?
- What relationships do you have with NGOs and INGOs?
- How can APNOR help and support refugee leadership in New Zealand?

The highly interactive consultation opened up space to hear from refugees and talk about how to build sustainable engagement and find opportunities to be involved in a national and international movement for refugees' rights.

Consultation Agenda

- Welcome (Masooma Ramazan, Coordinator of APNOR)
- Introduction to APNOR & Purpose of the consultation (Najeeba Wazefadost, Founder & Executive Director)
- Addressing refugee community engagement across New Zealand (Maha Jaffari, New Zealand Refugee Association)
- Gaps in Refugee representation and participation by wider stakeholders in New Zealand (Hafsar Tameesuddin, APNOR Steering Committee)
- Group workshop / SWOT ANALYSIS by group to discuss the cause, impact and solution.

Consultation Highlights

Addressing refugee community engagement



*“There are many problems and issues raised by Refugees in the community that they are facing in all regions. Refugees are pushed to suffer problems with the family reunification **partner visa** to have their complete family, because of **lack of information** and **language barriers**. We face **employment issues** because of **lack of communication** between government and refugees in terms of providing documentary need. Refugees have always been misunderstood.”*

– Maha Jaffari, New Zealand Refugee Association

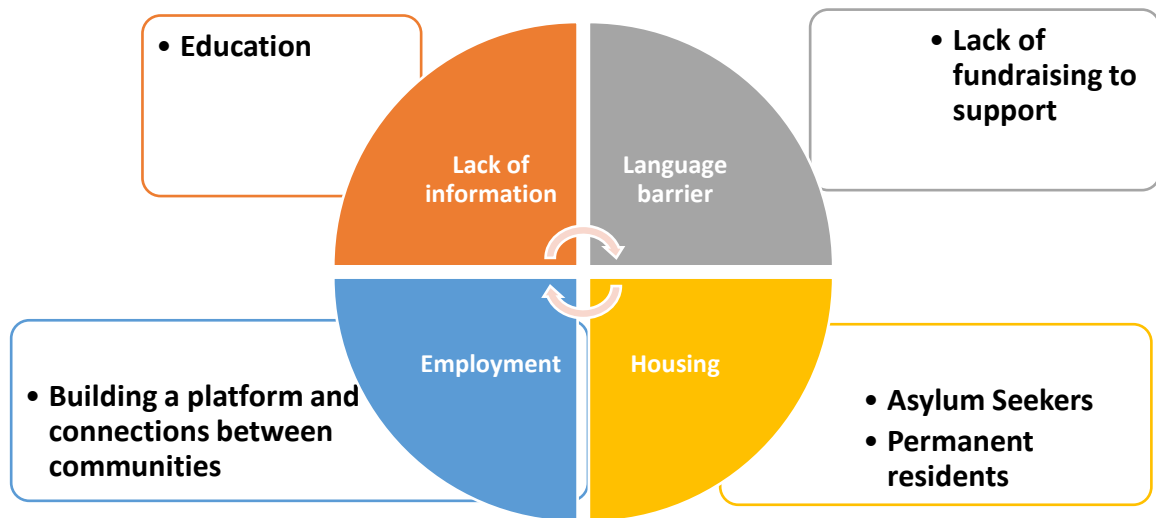
Gaps in refugee representation and participation

“We need a strong platform and connection between communities in New Zealand, that’s the way of engagement. We need refugee resettlement support within communities, and it is very clear that as one community there is a lack of support. By connecting with each other we can build strong relationships to support each other. To bring the refugees’ participation and representation by wider NGOs together, we need all initiative organizations to support in all needs not only based on one issue.”

**–Hafsar Tameesuddin,
APNOR Steering Committee
Member for New Zealand**



Challenges



❖ *Lack of Language & Information:*

Language barriers are a big challenge when refugees are dealing with the government. For example, for refugees to bring their families to New Zealand, they need to make documentary applications for family visas, and the language barrier can cause confusion and misunderstanding in this process.

Refugees who are studying also face issues with language. Continuing studies or starting further education can be hard when refugees do not already have the knowledge of English.

Older refugees find it very difficult to learn English through academic classroom methods. This makes it difficult for them to be accepted into New Zealand society. There should be another way to help them overcome this barrier.

❖ *Discrimination:*

Refugees in New Zealand come from many different backgrounds. There are many different cultures in the refugee community and in New Zealand generally, and misunderstanding between these cultures – worsened by language barriers – can cause problems for refugees.

❖ *Housing:*

The houses refugees live in are often not in good conditions, because of the high costs of finding private accommodation for refugees. Refugees also have difficulty communicating with housing and property agencies to get support or deal with issues in their homes. The result is that during winter refugees often face severe cold and live in difficult circumstances. There is a lack of support for shelter for refugees.

❖ ***Employment:***

Refugees with qualifications from other parts of the world find that these are not recognised in New Zealand. Generally refugees need to attend university and study their subject or profession again to receive a recognised qualification. This makes it very hard for refugees to get the jobs they are trained and experienced in, which is a challenge for their settlement into society.

❖ ***Education:***

Outside school hours, there are no tutors or extra classes to help refugee students with their study and homework.

The methods of teaching English are not adapted to allow older refugees to learn the language.

❖ ***Lack of fundraising:***

Refugees are unable to be supported as always because of lack of fundraising. We need more funding to support the community and refugees around country.

❖ ***Lack of support for volunteers:***

Volunteering is an important option for refugees who are having difficulties finding a job. However, a lack of funding for organisations means there are not as many volunteer opportunities and not as many ways volunteers can support their community.

❖ ***Asylum Seekers:***

Asylum seekers who arrive in New Zealand and then make their asylum claim are detained before the details of their case are considered. Detention for asylum seekers should be used much less frequently, never for more than 28 days, and could be in a refugee resettlement centre rather than in prison.

❖ ***Permanent residency:***

It takes two years or longer for refugees to obtain permanent residency in New Zealand. Access to many other rights and services can be denied during this waiting period while refugees do not have permanent residency.

❖ ***Healthcare:***

Many refugees have faced extreme mental pressures, and experienced physical or sexual abuse with limited chance to properly recover. Refugees also face social isolation and lack contact with their family members, which can make trauma worse and cause serious mental health problems.

Organisations working with refugees

The **New Zealand National Refugee Association** always supports the community, particularly in the past year during Covid-19. They have used their budget to meet refugees' needs by:

- Providing food and groceries.
- Giving translation support for language differences.
- Helping fill out job applications

The **Red Cross** is a diverse, colourful collective and helps lift the voices of refugees who have been silenced. They do excellent work, but still need to strengthen their collaboration with the refugee community.

Consultation Conclusions

All of the participants shared their experience of challenges that they are facing and suffering. Key issues named included lack of information on government services, language barriers, education, employment, housing, lack of fundraising, problems with pending asylum claims, delays for permanent residency, and the lack of a strong bond between refugees and between different communities.

Experiences shared by the participants included:

- Being in unsecure living conditions, while desperate for safety after years of experiencing traumatic situations
- Being detained in a shipping container for more than six months
- Being sexually abused in refugee camps
- Being cut off from their families with no way to establish a connection
- Not being able to have an official identity
- Having no bank account
- Feeling no safety to share their problems with support organisations
- Suffering from the effects of Covid-19 on society
- Depression & other mental health issues
- Not being mentioned or considered as a person in policy discussions
- Feeling voiceless since 2017, because of a lack of organisations wanting to work with refugees
- Lacking communication with other refugees
- Lack of knowledge of governance, management and leadership
- No access to training and workshops on strategic advocacy, making it difficult to achieve goals

- Lacking in the knowledge necessary to help lead the community
- Inadequate management of fundraising, creating accountability issues and trust problems with government
- Ethnic and racial discrimination and tensions

Key actions & support wanted from APNOR

1. Sharing culture and establishing connections will help build a strong relationship between society and government and refugees.
2. English language classes should be available at different levels and tailored for refugees of all different ages.
Refugees should learn English to be able to communicate and advocate with government about refugees' problems and issues.
3. Refugee-led organisations should act as a role model by working together and helping refugees in difficult times.
4. Work needs to move forward at global/international level, as well as all the levels below that – regional, national and local – to achieve change.
5. The refugee community needs to build contacts for more meaningful participation in decision-making, with support from the global level.
6. Refugees' voices should be raised and given the space to be meaningfully involved.
7. As refugees in a developed country, we need to find better ways of using our voices to collectively advocate on refugee issues across Asia, not only in New Zealand.
8. Refugee-led initiatives need to benefit from more funding and resources.
9. Gender-based discrimination needs to be tackled, by refugee organisations and by government.
10. LGBTQI people need to be listened to, so that refugee organisations and government understand their unique challenges.
11. Refugees and others should embrace diversity and strengthen inclusion, particularly by improving awareness and education on LGBTQI issues.
12. The problems of trans and other LGBTQI refugees, who can lack ID and struggle to access public services, must be recognised and addressed.
13. More opportunities must be found and created to work with other communities.
14. Building strong relationships at the national level will help support transnational relations among refugees and with other groups.
15. Refugee communities and organisations should create more relationships and build trust with external organisations.

16. More trainings on strategic advocacy and leadership, and conferences and seminars for networking, are needed to enable refugee-led to work effectively.
17. Convention refugees and asylum seekers, who are not part of resettlement quotas, need significantly improved access to services and opportunities to connect with New Zealand society and other refugees.

For further information, contact APNOR

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