



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

19 JUN 2017

Dear

On 24 May 2017, you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *The number of refugees receiving a benefit each year since 2008, broken down by benefit type.*

Refugees who come to New Zealand under the refugee quota system are known as mandate refugees. Mandate refugees are eligible for welfare assistance from the time their refugee status is approved. These refugees are normally granted a residence class visa and are automatically entitled to reside indefinitely in New Zealand from the date of that approval. Therefore they can become eligible for a benefit from that date.

Refugees who apply for refugee status under any other criteria are known as convention refugees. They can apply before arriving in New Zealand, upon arrival or after arrival. Once they are granted refugee status, they have to apply for a residence class visa to become entitled to reside indefinitely in New Zealand.

Therefore, they can become eligible for assistance from the date the residence class visa (issued under the Immigration Act 2009) or residence permit (issued under the Immigration Act 1987) was granted.

The Ministry does not track 'refugees' as this information is not pertinent to a person receiving welfare assistance. The Social Security Act 1964 is clear in what criteria any person must meet in order to be able to receive assistance from the New Zealand government. Please see the following link for additional information on main benefit criteria: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/jobseeker-support/qualifications.html

The Ministry does not always know if a client receiving a benefit came into New Zealand as a refugee. When a client first comes onto a benefit, the Ministry requests their residency status to determine the entitlement to receive a benefit. If at that time the client is no longer classified as a refugee as they have since been granted residence/ permanent residence/ NZ citizenship, then the Ministry may not be aware that they are or have been a refugee.

I am unable to provide you with the number of refugees receiving a benefit each year since 2008, broken down by benefit type, as the Ministry would need to identify if a beneficiary is a refugee, which may or may not be held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

For further information on refugees please see Immigration New Zealand's website: www.immigration.govt.nz/new-zealand-visas

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Elisabeth Brunt
General Manager, Ministerial and Executive Services