AUT

NEW ZEALAND POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
TE KĀHUI RANGAHAU MANA TAURITE

We are not others, we are us with them”

Strengthening pandemic preparedness for communities with migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking backgrounds in Aotearoa New Zealand

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CAHRE Conference 2026 (8-9 September 2026)

Overview

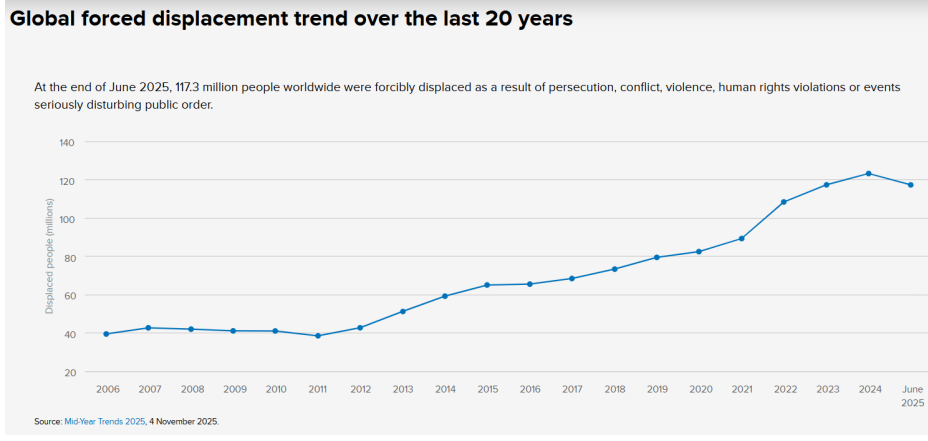
- Migrant and refugee background populations experience challenges during their migration and settlement journey
- Migrants and refugees experienced challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic

Table 1. Key facts and figures from *World Migration Report 2000* and *World Migration Report 2026*

	2000 report	2026 report
Estimated number of international migrants	150 million	304 million
Estimated proportion of world population who are migrants	2.8%	3.7%
Estimated proportion of female international migrants	47.5%	48.0%
Region with the highest proportion of international migrants	Oceania	Oceania
Country with the highest proportion of international migrants	United Arab Emirates	Qatar
Number of migrant workers	–	167.7 million
Global international remittances (USD)	128 billion	905 billion
Number of refugees	14 million	36.9 million
Number of internally displaced persons	21 million	83.4 million

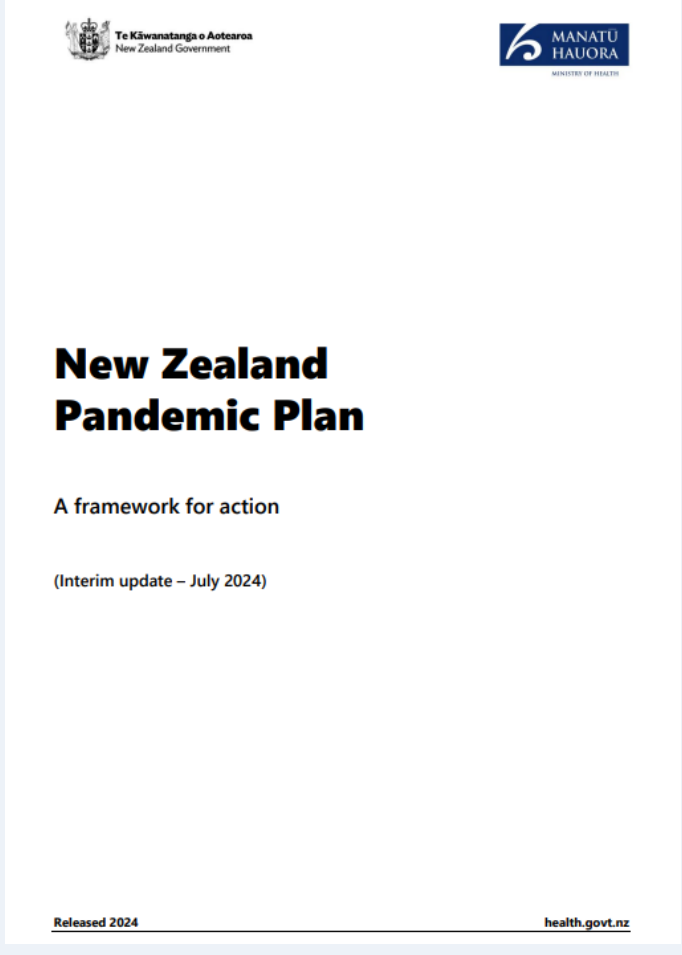
Sources: See IOM, 2000 and the present edition of the report for sources.

Notes: The dates of the data estimates in the table may be different to the report publishing date (refer to the reports for more detail on dates of estimates); refer to Chapter 3 of this report for regional breakdowns.



International Organization for Migration. 2026. World Migration Report 2026. Accessed 6 May 2026. Available from: https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2026
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2025. Figures at a Glance. Accessed 6 May 2026. Available from: https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/figures-glance

Overview



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

MANATŪ HAUORA
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

New Zealand Pandemic Plan

A framework for action

(Interim update – July 2024)

Released 2024 health.govt.nz

Ethical issues in pandemic planning

The National Ethics Advisory Committee is an independent advisor to the Minister of Health on ethical issues of national significance concerning health and disability matters. Its guidance *Finding Balance: Ethical guidance for epidemics and pandemics 2023*[4] sets out a number of principles to guide decision-making. It highlights ethical considerations in a pandemic relating to priority populations, those in higher-risk settings (eg, hospitals, residential services and correctional facilities) and occupations and other vulnerable groups (including people over 65, people experiencing homelessness, rainbow community members, former refugees and recent migrants, and children in poverty). These considerations must underpin planning to ensure inequities are not increased as a result of a pandemic intervention. The committee recommends co-designing epidemic and pandemic plans with relevant population groups to better ensure equal outcomes and connecting with local communities before a pandemic to enable the rapid stand-up of community-led responses, which can significantly reduce or eliminate the risks.

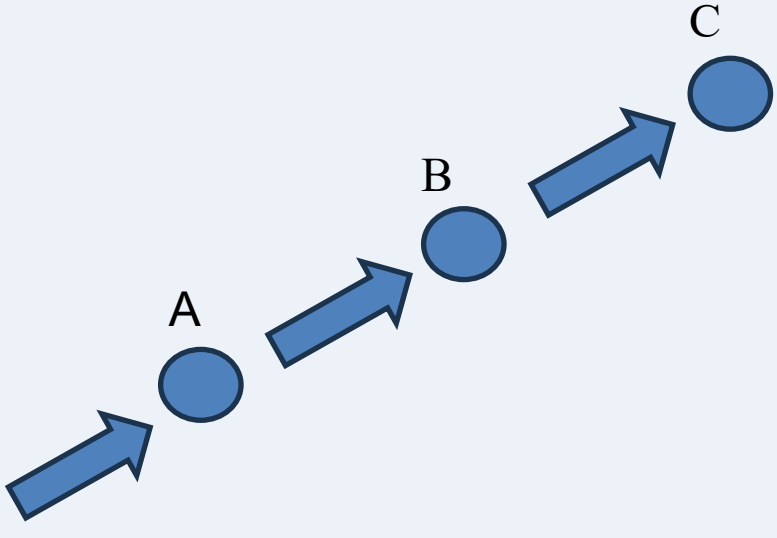
Ethnic communities

Key information on the pandemic needs to be published online in a variety of languages other than English, Māori and Pacific languages. Other resources and channels will need to be considered as the pandemic develops to ensure many ethnic communities have access to timely and relevant information; for example:

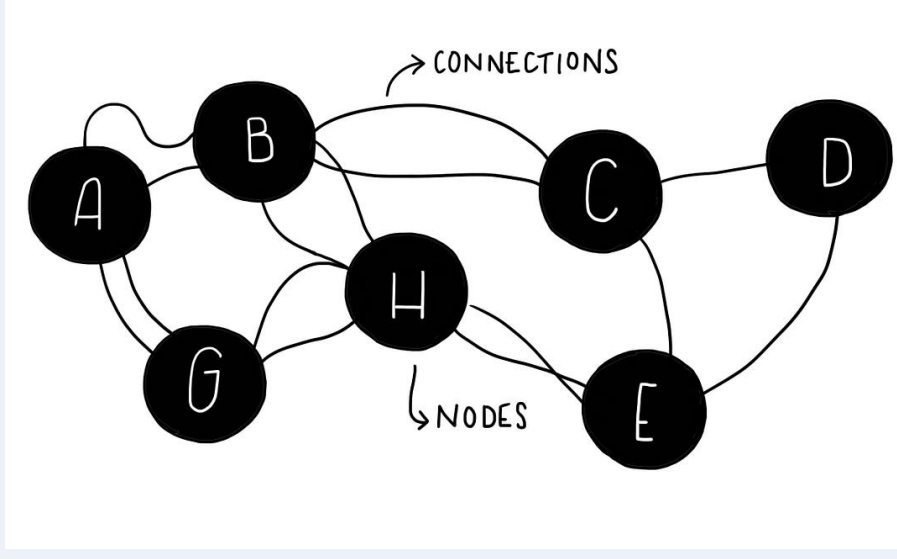
- locally based refugee services and networks

Overview

Traditional approaches



Complexity-informed approaches



Research Design

- Research Aim
  - To leverage complexity science to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for migrant and refugee background communities during future public health emergencies.
- Methodology & Methods
  - Interpretive research paradigm
  - Qualitative interpretive description methodology
  - Interviews and focus groups (N=29)
  - Complexity-informed conventional and directed content analysis

Property of a CAS	Description
Agents	An element (individual, collective, or process) able to respond to other agent actions and information.
Boundaries	Artificial reference points that connects a system with its environment.
Co-evolution	A process by which agents adapt to changes generated by agent interactions.
Emergence	New patterns, structures, or behaviours arriving from diverse interactions.
Far-from-equilibrium	A dynamic state in which CAS maintain a stable appearance by balancing multiple interactions.
Feedback loops	Recursive mechanisms arising from agent interactions that are either positive (reinforcing) or negative (undermining).
Interconnections	Ways in which agents are linked (e.g., via resources, information, etc.).
Interdependencies	Ways in which agents act autonomously, but depend on each other for the overall functioning of the system.
Non-linearity	Agent interactions can generate unpredictable responses.
Path dependency	The influence of historical decisions and experiences on current/future system behaviour.
Self-organisation	Spontaneous emergence of new relationships, forms, or patterns of behaviour.
Uncertainty	Complex, dynamic environments can produce unpredictable outcomes.
Unintended consequences	Agent actions and responses can lead to unexpected outcomes.

Findings

Everything was worse

- Challenges prior to the pandemic
- COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing inequities
- Impacts were not adequately anticipated

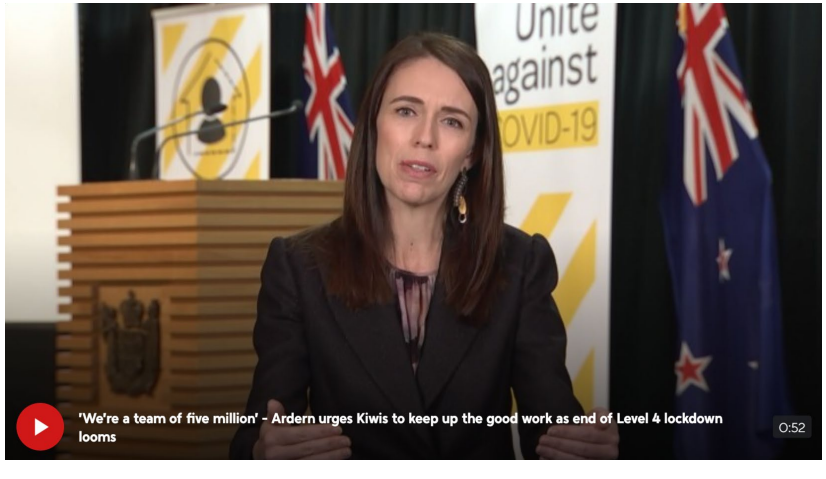
"… it [the pandemic] comes for everyone and everyone experiences it, but the experience is different. The pandemic has been dividing the world … some people take advantage of it, and some people who have really become disadvantaged."

(Participant #9, community leader)

Findings

We are one community

- Overlooked
- Mechanisms for engagement were not established
- Wanted to be included and valued



"… instead of wasting money and the resources and the time, just contact the people who are in the system who can understand the needs of the ethnic communities …"

(Participant #5, community member)

"But it wasn't until you got some colour in that room that the questions started to link closer to us."

(Participant #2, community leader)

"It's hard to have like a big shopping list when you've got nothing to begin with … basic inclusion is much more than we got last time. So, I just want the basics."

(Participant #7, community leader)

Findings

Competing visions

- What does a pandemic and pandemic preparedness mean?
- Extraction isn't engagement
- Community empowerment vs command-and-control
  - Fast vs slow
  - Mobilising vs directed
  - Public expectations vs government capacity

"Because the government view the community sometimes as like object or like property, or like something just they can use whatever they want to use. But they need to come to the sense that if we have the model of bottom-up approach, I think that might help to overcome all this stuff."

(Participant #9, community leader)

"there still has to be an alignment between the official response and the community-led response, because you're going to have a lot of issues if you don't get some sort of alignment."

(Participant #3, government official)

"Are we delivering a service that matches the public expectation? I think this event and this response produced a level of [public] expectation of service from government that doesn't match where we are currently … we stepped significantly beyond what we're sort of set up to do and made it work through emergency policy changes, emergency planning, emergency procurement, massive effort by a lot of people. But if you want to make that a sustainable model, there needs to be some bigger questions asked. So, the expectation is there that everyone in our sector would love to be able to do that more. It's just how we implement it?"

(Participant #6, government official)

Recommendations

- Humanitarian and human rights approach
- Support community-led initiatives and community-based organisations
- Harness the strengths and knowledge of migrant and refugee background communities
- Prioritise and invest in (re)settlement support
- Address the social determinants of health

"And hopefully, we'll be in a country where they think of everyone, all the population who are living in New Zealand, and be better prepared as all of us working together... ***to include us, as we are not others, we are us with them****.*

(Participant #4, community leader)

Acknowledgements







Te Niwha
Infectious Diseases Research Platform

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Thank you!

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