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Keeping pace with changing contexts: Progress on evaluation of a New Zealand settlement project

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The New Zealand Department of Labour is responsible for leading the national Settlement Strategy. The department's key focus within the strategy is to improve access to appropriate information and responsive services in local areas for migrants, refugees and their families. The department is doing this by involving government and non-government agencies, with migrant and refugee communities, in a national network, called Settlement Support New Zealand (SSNZ). The programme aims to provide local 'systems' through which stakeholders can collaborate for effective local settlement outcomes. As the programme has unfolded in practice, some of the assumptions underlying the initiative have been challenged and the original evaluation approach and framework has needed modification to respond to the emerging questions and issues. At first, the evaluation aimed to measure the impact of the programme on the target population, ie the migrants, refugees and their families. It has become a study of how the network is contributing towards the achievement of the SSNZ programme outcomes, using the developing network as the unit of analysis. The authors use their experiences so far in this evolving evaluation to show how flexibility, adaptability and innovative thinking are necessary for undertaking evaluations in a changing environment.