

Rebalancing New Zealand's Immigration System

The Government is rebalancing the immigration system to support its plan for a higher-productivity, higher-wage economy, as it moves to fully reconnect with the world by 31 July 2022.

The Rebalance has been designed to make it easier to attract and hire high-skilled migrants, while supporting some sectors to transition to more productive and resilient ways of operating, instead of relying on lower-skilled migrant workers.

It will make it easier to fill genuine skills gaps, where New Zealanders can't be found. For highly skilled workers in global shortage, it will ensure New Zealand is an attractive destination, with fast-tracked pathways to residence and simplified application processes.

Together these changes aim to:

- Encourage employers to offer competitive wages, hire less experienced New Zealanders and train them, and work together as a sector to showcase employment opportunities and career pathways. This will help build businesses' resilience and productivity.
- Encourage businesses to invest more. Technology provides huge opportunities to increase productivity and create more value, and these upfront investments will pay dividends in the long run.
- Reduce the recent pressure on infrastructure and housing and support economic growth. Our GDP growth in the past has been led by high levels of migration, but the GDP growth per capita has been much lower. By shifting to a higher skill mix of migrant labour and reducing the previous reliance on low wage low skill migrant labour, this can help New Zealand grow a more productive economy.

What's changing: At a glance

Temporary work visas

From 4 July 2022, the new Accredited Employer Work Visa system will be fully up-and-running.

Under this streamlined system, employers won't need to provide as much information, and most of them will be able to use their existing recruitment processes to meet the job check criteria to prove no New Zealanders are available to fill their vacancy.

The application process will be entirely online, and Immigration New Zealand will use publicly available information, or information it holds, to save businesses' time and speed up the process.

Immigration New Zealand's Accredited Employer Work Visa processing targets across the three stages are: 10 working days for accreditation check, 10 working days for the job check, and 20 working days for the migrant check.

This means the first Accredited Employer Work Visas could be granted before the end of July 2022.

To make it easier to attract high-skilled migrants:

- A Green List will help employers hire migrants for specified high-skilled, hard-to-fill occupations, including in the construction, engineering, trades, health, and ICT sectors. Employers won't need to provide proof of advertising and migrants will have a pathway to residence.

To support sectors to develop more productive and resilient workforces:

- A median wage threshold is being introduced for most Accredited Employer Work Visas and for Foreign Fishing Crew Visas. From 4 July the median wage will be \$27.76 and adjusted annually.
- Employment as a chef will now require a qualification for migrants on an Accredited Employer Work Visa.

There will be exemptions to the median wage threshold to help some sectors that currently rely on lower-skilled migrant workers:

- Many tourism and hospitality roles will be provided an exemption to the median wage, with a lower wage threshold of \$25 per hour until April 2023.
- New sector agreements – for the care; construction and infrastructure; meat processing; seafood; and seasonal snow and adventure tourism sectors – will provide for a short-term or ongoing need for access to lower-paid migrants. Lower wage thresholds will apply in the interim.



Partnership work visas

From December 2022, most partners of temporary migrant workers will be granted visitors visas. If they wish to work, they will need to qualify for an Accredited Employer Work Visa in their own right. Unlike other work visa holders, all partners can work less than 30 hours a week, reflecting they may have other responsibilities, such as childcare, and are not the primary household earner.

To ensure New Zealand can attract high-skilled migrant workers, partners of migrants working in occupations on the Green List or paid twice the median wage will continue to receive automatic open work rights. There are no changes to automatic open work rights for partners of New Zealanders.

Residence pathways

To make it easier to attract high-skilled migrants, the Immigration Rebalance will streamline pathways to residence for migrants working in occupations on the Green List.

Some will be able to apply for residence directly after September 2022, though they can come to New Zealand from 4 July on a work visa. Others will be eligible for residence after two years working in New Zealand.

Migrants earning twice the median wage can also qualify for residence after two years on an Accredited Employer Work Visa. Other migrants may have pathways to residence through the Skilled Migrant Category.

In the coming months the Government will make further decisions about immigration settings for the Skilled Migrant Category residence pathway.

Student and post-study work visas

Migrant students studying bachelor's or post-graduate courses or higher will continue to receive Post-Study Work Visas.

Students undertaking a qualification at sub-degree level (Level 7 and below, excluding bachelor's degrees) will only be eligible for post-study work rights if the qualification is relevant to an occupation on the Green List.

For most international students eligible for a Post-Study Work Visa, the duration of that work visa will now mirror the time they study in New Zealand, up to a maximum of three years. This change will not apply to Master's and PHD students, who will continue to receive three years' post-study work rights, as long as they have spent 30 weeks in New Zealand undertaking full-time study.

These changes take effect for students who apply for a visa from 11 May 2022.

From 31 July 2022, the cost-of-living funds required for international students, which have not increased for more than a decade, are being updated. Tertiary and English language students will need \$20,000 per year of study, and primary and secondary school students fund requirements will be set at \$17,000 per year. These funds are prorated for study less than a year.



Employer accreditation requirements

During 2023, a new requirement will come into effect, with all employers needed to be accredited to employ any migrant, including those with open work rights (such as working holidaymakers or students). Accreditation is straightforward but prevents employers that do not meet minimum employment and immigration standards, such as those convicted of migrant exploitation offences, from hiring migrants. More details on this requirement will be provided closer to the time.

These changes don't affect current or other visa holders

These changes are focussed on the future and migrant workers coming to New Zealand to work in permanent jobs. Aside from accreditation requirements in 2023, they don't affect people with open work rights, like working holidaymakers. They don't change the visa conditions of current work and student visa holders, or partners who apply for a partner visa before the changes take effect in December 2022.

For employers, this means the median wage threshold does not apply when hiring working holiday makers or students, or require any changes to current employment agreements with any migrant employees.

Aside from employer accreditation requirements in 2023, there are no changes for partners of New Zealanders, or to specific purpose, short-term business or visitor visas, Working Holiday Schemes, the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme, or other family and humanitarian categories.

These decisions align with other measures to support migrants and their employers

A fast-tracked residence pathway for migrants in New Zealand

The one-off 2021 Resident Visa provides a streamlined pathway to residence for most temporary migrant workers already in New Zealand, and their offshore partners and dependents. Around 200,000 people have been included in applications to date.

This was the first decision in the Immigration Rebalance, to ensure employers could retain their migrant workers and to give migrants here certainty.

Visa extensions to support the transition to new settings

To support employers to transition to these new work visa settings, the Government has announced new temporary visas and extensions will be granted for many migrants who are in New Zealand and have visas expiring on or before 31 December 2022. The extended visa will take effect on the date of the migrant's current visa expiry. The new temporary visa granted on 9 May takes effect on 9 May and expires two years after the date of expiry of their previous visa.

- All Work to Residence visas will be extended for six months.
- All Essential Skills, Post-Study Work and Partner of a New Zealander Work visas will be granted open work rights through a new visa and their visa duration will be extended by two years.

Partners and dependents will also receive new or extended visas.



The Detail: Making it easier to attract and hire high-skilled migrants

A Green List will make it easier for employers to hire and attract migrants for specified high-skilled, hard-to-fill occupations, with guaranteed residence pathways for eligible people.

These roles will have registration, qualification or experience requirements, and more detail on these is available on the Immigration New Zealand website.

Employers won't need to provide proof of advertising for these occupations when progressing an accredited employer work visa job check application.

Eligible migrants working in these occupations will have clear pathways to residence, either through a direct to residence application or after working in New Zealand for two years, depending on the role. Their partners will have open work rights. Both residence pathways will be limited to migrants 55 years or younger which is aligned with the Skilled Migrant Category requirements.

The Green List is about making it easier to attract globally in-demand workers, but it is not the only pathway to residence available. Other employers will still be able to access skilled migrants, and many of them will also have a pathway to residence through the Skilled Migrant Category.

The Fast Tracked 'Straight to Residence' pathway

Eligible migrants employed in these occupations can come to New Zealand on a work visa from 4 July and apply for residence from September 2022. Minimum salary requirements apply where specified, and these will be indexed to the median wage and change over time.

Construction Project Manager
Project Builder
Quantity Surveyor
Surveyor
Chemical Engineer
Civil Engineering Technician
Civil Engineer
Electrical Engineer
Electronics Engineer
Electrical Engineering Technician
Electronic Engineering Technician
Environmental Engineer
Geotechnical Engineer
Industrial Engineer
Materials Engineer

Mechanical Engineer
Production or Plant Engineer
Structural Engineer
Engineering Professionals (Not Elsewhere Classified)
Telecommunications Engineers
Telecommunications Network Engineers
General Practitioner
Anaesthetist
Psychiatrist
Specialist Physicians Not Elsewhere Classified
Surgeons (Including General Surgeons
Cardiothoracic Surgeon Neurosurgeon



NEW ZEALAND
IMMIGRATION

Orthopaedic Surgeon Otorhinolaryngologist
Urologist and Vascular Surgeon)
Other Medical Practitioners (Including
Dermatologist Obstetrician and Gynaecologist
Ophthalmologist Diagnostic and
Interventional Radiologist and Radiation
Oncologist)
Resident Medical Officer
Medical Laboratory Scientist
Clinical Psychologists & Psychologists
Physicist (Medical)

Orthoptist
Veterinarian
Other Spatial Scientist
Environmental Research Scientist
Food Technologist
ICT Managers (\$120,000)
Software Engineer (\$120,000)
ICT Security Specialist (\$120,000)
Multimedia Specialists (\$95,000)

The Work to Residence pathway

Eligible migrants in these occupations can apply for residence after two years:

Anaesthetic Technician	Midwife
Medical Laboratory Technician	Teachers - Secondary with specialisations and registered ECE
Medical Imaging Technologist	Automotive Electrician
Medical Radiation Therapist	Diesel Motor Mechanic (including Heavy Vehicle Inspector)
Occupational Therapist	Electrician (General) –registered
Sonographer	Plumber – registered
Podiatrist	Dairy Farm Managers
Audiologist	
All Registered Nurses (including but not limited to Aged Care)	

Migrants paid at least twice the median wage in other roles can also apply for residence after two years.

The Detail: Supporting sectors to develop productive and resilient workforces

Interim transition measures in place from 4 July 2022

A temporary median wage exemption for tourism and hospitality

Tourism and hospitality employ large numbers of migrants with open work rights, like students and working holiday visa holders. The Immigration Rebalance does not change these visa conditions. This means employers can continue to hire these migrants at any wage, at or above the minimum wage.

The Government recognises that it will take time for the number of working holidaymakers and students in New Zealand to increase.

The Government has agreed to temporarily exempt tourism and hospitality businesses from paying the median wage to recruit migrants on an Accredited Employer Work Visa into most roles. Instead, a lower wage threshold of \$25 per hour will be required until April 2023, for employing migrants in these occupations:

Hotel Service Manager	Commercial Housekeeper
Hotel or Motel Manager	Kitchenhand
Accommodation and Hospitality Managers, not elsewhere classified	Barista
Licensed Club Manager	Hotel or Motel Receptionist
Conference and Event Organiser	Bar Attendant
Travel Consultant	Fast Food Cook
Travel Agency Manager	Food Trades Assistants, not elsewhere classified
Tour Guide	Hospitality Workers, not elsewhere classified
Caravan Park and Camping Ground Manager	Cafe Worker
Diving Instructor (Open Water)	Pastrycook's Assistant
Hunting Guide	Doorman or Luggage Porter
Gallery or Museum Technician	Gaming Worker
Trekking Guide	Travel Attendants, not elsewhere classified
Waiter	

The median wage will apply for Accredited Employer Work Visas for any other tourism and hospitality roles.

Longer-term transition measures through sector agreements

New sector agreements will be put in place for the care, construction and infrastructure, meat processing, seafood, seasonal snow and adventure tourism sectors to provide for a short-term or ongoing need for access to lower-paid migrants.

Each of these sectors will be provided limited exceptions to the median wage requirement in exchange for ongoing improvements. This will allow these sectors, which have traditionally relied on lower-paid migrants, time to improve working conditions and put significant effort into retaining, training and upskilling New Zealanders, or changing labour needs.

The length of these exceptions will be different for each sector.

Interim arrangements for these sectors

Border exceptions are already in place for the seafood, meat processing, and seasonal snow and adventure tourism sectors, and this will allow them to support their immediate workforce needs while sector agreements are finalised.

The Government is also putting interim wage thresholds in place for the following sectors from 4 July, until sector agreements with these sectors are finalised:

Construction and Infrastructure Workforce: interim \$25 wage threshold from 4 July

Metal fabricators	Painting trades worker
Welders	Fibrous plasterer
Fitters (general)	Solid plasterer
Fitter-welder	Wall and floor tiler

(Most other skilled trades roles are primarily paid above the median wage.)

Care Workforce: Interim \$25.39 wage threshold, based on the Level 3 or 8+ years' experience rate in the existing pay equity agreement.

Kaiāwhina (Hauora) (Māori Health Assistant)	Nursing Support Worker
Disabilities Services Officer	Personal Care Assistant
Residential Care Officer	Therapy Aide
Aged and Disabled Carers	Child or Youth Residential Care Assistant

Migrants in these occupations will receive a two-year Accredited Employer Work Visa. When it expires, they can only remain in New Zealand if they receive an Accredited Employer Work Visa for a job paying at least the median wage. Otherwise, they will need to leave New Zealand for 12 months before returning on a new visa.