

# National's Plan to Fix the Immigration Crisis

As the world moves to speed up their economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, the race to attract and retain global talent will continue to accelerate as countries and businesses compete for the best and brightest.

New Zealand's immigration settings will play a key role in driving productivity, sustainable growth and innovation to support our recovery. If New Zealand wants the best international talent, we need to be the best on immigration. National has a plan to put New Zealand in the best position to attract and retain the talent we need to grow.

Our immigration system has become a shambles over the past few years; huge delays in processing visas resulting in a years-long backlog of residency applications, a frozen Skilled Migrant Category (SMC) visa Expression of Interest (EOI) pool leaving migrants stuck in limbo, entirely avoidable labour shortages in some of our most critical industries, and above all a Minister who seems utterly uninterested in fixing any of these issues.

Many migrants – our doctors, teachers, engineers, construction workers and nurses – are fed up with the uncertainty of not knowing when they will get residency. That means longer wait times at hospitals, larger class sizes for your children, and longer delays to get houses built. It also means more pressure on the already soaring cost of living in this country, as labour shortages flow through to further price increases, hitting Kiwis in the back pocket.

Essential Skills visa holders who supported us during the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic are also being forced to leave as they have no pathway to residence. These are our truck drivers, dairy farm workers, aged care workers and hospitality workers who are heading offshore to countries where they have more certainty about their future.

A National Government would fix our broken immigration system and ensure New Zealand communities can benefit from all the world has to offer.

By urgently addressing the residency backlog, offering a Covid Contribution pathway to residency, and decoupling works visas from specific employers, we can clear the decks and start again with a system that works for New Zealand.

## Our plan

National's plan will solve the immigration crisis in three steps:

### 1. Open EOI pool and clear the residency backlog

The EOI pool for SMC visas has been closed since March 2020. This means skilled migrants who are already in New Zealand are effectively blocked from applying for residency. There are currently 3,000 nurses and doctors languishing in this pool, along with 600 school teachers. Many are giving up and are starting to leave.

The blow out in visa processing times since 2018 has also created a backlog of residency applications. Processing times have ballooned to an unprecedented 27 months. These delays are creating huge uncertainties for businesses and migrants.

## National would

- Properly resource Immigration New Zealand (INZ) so they have the ability to process the backlog of residence applications.
- Reopen the EOI pool and process these visas with urgency so we don't lose our critical skilled migrants to other countries.
- Create a fast-tracked process for residence applications by allowing immigration officers processing applications to use information already submitted in previous visa applications until the backlog is cleared.
- Allow those onshore applicants in the EOI pool who have passed the age eligibility requirements to remain eligible for residence.

## 2. Create a pathway to residency for those who stuck with us during COVID

We need to offer the skilled migrants who are already here a pathway to residency. These are our dairy farm workers, aged care workers, truck drivers, construction workers and hospitality staff who have helped keep New Zealand open for business through the pandemic.

These people are in New Zealand because we have a skills shortage. Many will have been in New Zealand for many years contributing to our economy and society. But without a pathway to residence and certainty about their ability to stay in New Zealand these people are starting to leave.

We are losing valuable workers every week to countries like Australia and Canada, who offer pathways to residency. We have the tightest labour market in 40 years, with very low levels of unemployment. We cannot afford to lose these valuable workers who are extremely difficult to replace given our closed border.

## National would

- Create a Covid contribution pathway to residence for all onshore Essential Skills visa holders who have stuck with us through the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Create a 'Covid Contribution Visa', a three-year work visa that would provide these valuable migrants with the time and certainty needed to apply for residency.

## 3. Decouple visas from a specific employer to stop migrant exploitation

While the vast majority of employers in New Zealand treat their staff well, there are sadly some cases where migrants are taken advantage of because their visa conditions mean they are bonded to a specific employer. Even if these cases are rare, they can tarnish entire sectors and may even discourage some workers from wanting to move here.

Rather than bonding migrants to specific employers, a smarter approach is to bond them to specific sectors or even regions. This would reduce the scope for migrant exploitation, ensure the right skills are available in the regions that need them, and make our immigration system work better for the needs of our economy.

- National will decouple visas from a specific employer and instead bond people to sectors and/or regions.

## **Our Vision**

National understands that we need a fair, transparent and effective immigration system that ensures New Zealand benefits from all the world has to offer. As a country with a strong immigrant tradition, we would ensure New Zealand regains its status as an attractive destination globally.

New Zealand should be one of the most attractive destinations in the world for migrants to bring their skills to. Our immigration policies should support New Zealand's long-term sustainability, economic competitiveness and international standing.

## **Appendices**

1. Policy announcement press release.



**Hon Judith Collins**  
Leader of the Opposition



**Erica Stanford**  
National Party Spokesperson for Immigration

## National calls for 'Covid Contribution Visa'

National will clear the current residency backlog and provide a clear pathway for skilled migrants already in the country to gain residency.

Leader of the Opposition Judith Collins says we are losing the skilled migrants we desperately need who moved to New Zealand before the lockdown with the promise there would be a pathway to residency for them and their families.

"In the last four years this Government, through poor planning and poor policy, have completely broken our immigration system so that we now have the longest queues for residence in our history and record wait times for getting residence visas processed

"This has destroyed our international reputation as a destination for skilled migrants to move to and is causing the migrants we do have onshore to look to take their skills elsewhere.

"We can't afford to lose any more doctors, engineers, teachers and IT workers because they have no certainty around when they can become a resident.

"These people have played a pivotal role in getting New Zealand through the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The Government is effectively forcing skilled migrants to leave the country, while trying to find space in MIQ for other foreign workers to replace them. It is madness in a time of skill shortages and MIQ shortages.

"National has come up with a plan to fix the issue.

"The first thing we will do is clear the residency backlog. We will unfreeze the residency pool and streamline and fast-track residency processing to clear the backlog of more than 30,000 applications.

"Then we need to offer our migrant workers here a pathway to residency. These are our dairy farmer workers, aged care workers, truck drivers, construction workers and hospitality staff who are in New Zealand because there was a skills shortage.

"Finally, we will decouple visas from a specific employer to stop migrant exploitation. A smarter approach is bonding people to sectors and regions which would make sure the right skills are in the right regions.

"We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with record low unemployment and the biggest labour shortage in 40 years to offer a pathway to residence for those migrants who stuck with us through Covid and have contributed to our economy and our society.

"This pathway would be through a 'Covid Contribution Visa', which would give our valuable migrants the ability, time and surety to apply for residence.

"We expect this to affect around 35,000 Essential Skills workers and their families that will be processed in the next few years once we have cleared the current residency backlog. In the meantime we will offer all of these workers a three-year work visa so they do not have to keep reapplying while they wait.

"We cannot attract good people to our shores to help boost our economy and our productivity if we have a system that is in complete meltdown.

"By clearing the residency backlog and offering a Covid contribution pathway to residence we can clear the decks and start again.

"If we want the best, we need to be the best. Labour's immigration policies have made New Zealand the worst and National has a plan to fix it."