

Key points

- New Zealand's immigration system is highly adaptive, and able to respond promptly to emerging needs and opportunities. Currently, immigration policy does not undergo the same level of transparency, public scrutiny or robust policy assessment requirements as other public policies.
- High resident numbers, largely uncapped temporary migration programmes and reductions in departures by New Zealanders, have contributed to New Zealand's comparatively rapid population growth over the past decade.
- Immigration policy's disconnection from other policy areas has meant that migration and population numbers have grown ahead of the stock and flow of public infrastructure, contributing to burdens for the wider community. It also means the education and training system is less responsive to generating the skills New Zealand businesses need.
- Overall, impacts of migration on the average earnings and employment of local workers are very minor and mostly positive, though overall outcomes can mask impacts in some regions and on some workers. The immigration system endeavours to manage the risk of New Zealanders being displaced by migrant workers, however, there are known deficiencies with the current Labour Market Test and skills shortage lists.
- The years immediately preceding the pandemic saw large and unprecedented increases in net migration, driven in part by large growth in migrants on temporary visas. In addition to putting pressure on the country's 'absorptive capacity', this growth also saw a notable shift towards temporary migrants filling vacancies in lower-skilled occupations.

Key actions

- Governments should be required to issue regular policy statements on immigration, outlining short-term and long-term priorities for immigration and how performance will be measured. The Government should be required to give explicit consideration to how well New Zealand can successfully accommodate and settle new arrivals.
- The Treaty interest should be reflected in immigration policy and institutions. The Treaty was developed and signed in response to immigration, and directly refers to immigration. The Crown also has a duty to actively protect Māori interests.
- The number of temporary migrant visas with potential residence pathways should be linked to the number of residence visas on offer. Large increases in the number of temporary migrant visas have contributed to uncertainty and mismatched expectations of an actual path to residence.
- Governments should better utilise tools for prioritising migrants when there is high demand. This includes being more selective and transparent with the points system and developing more data-informed and dynamic skills shortage lists.
- Visa conditions that tie migrant workers to a specific employer should be removed. Allowing migrants to move reduces the risk of exploitation and permits them to find jobs that better match their skills and experience.
- The Commission is exploring options for managing volume pressures. These include making greater use of data, evidence and evaluation in designing visa categories and identifying skills shortages, and possibly managing overall numbers of inward migration.
- The Commission is considering options for how to promote migrants' commitment to New Zealand. Options include recognising efforts to learn te reo in decisions about residence or permanent residence, and limiting rights of return for permanent residents who re-migrate.

