

Immigration Settings Feedback to Productivity Commission, December 2021



New Zealand Council Of
Christian Social Services

Tirohanga Whānui | Overview

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report for the immigration enquiry.

NZCCSS has six foundation members; the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support and the Methodist and Salvation Army Churches.

Through this membership, NZCCSS represents over 250 organisations providing a range of social support services across Aotearoa. We believe in working to achieve a just and compassionate society for all, through our commitment to our faith and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Further details on NZCCSS can be found on our website www.nzccss.org.nz.

As a faith-based peak body of social services, we believe the overall objectives of the New Zealand immigration system should be to ensure the best possible outcomes for all people in New Zealand whether they live here permanently or are here temporarily. It should treat all potential migrants equally and once here, these migrants should be treated as Pakeha New Zealanders, the same as those Pakeha who already live here, in accordance with Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

In the spirit of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, we wish for the system to be supportive to both the productivity and wellbeing of New Zealanders, refugees and migrants that choose to live and work here. The system should be agile and responsive, flexible enough that settings can be changed to match the changing needs of New Zealand's economy. For example, where unemployment is low, but a shortage of workers remains high (as is the case today in our Aged Care sector), New Zealand needs migrants to maintain the wellbeing of its New Zealanders.

Migrants play an important role in delivering care to residents in our members' rest homes and other aged care provision, particularly Registered Nurses (RNs) and caregivers. While we hope to see an increase in New Zealand-trained nurses and caregivers, it is unlikely that there will ever be enough New Zealanders to provide the entire workforce in ARC, particularly as the ageing population will see an increase in demand. So New Zealand should value highly the nurses and caregivers we recruit from overseas.

Almost 40% of RNs and some 20% of caregivers in the ARC workforce are migrant labour. The most common types of visas are either a Long Term Skill Shortage List (LTSSL), Work-To-Residence or a Resident visa. However, around 10% of all RNs – or perhaps a quarter of our migrant RNs in aged residential care - are on a temporary visa.

New Zealand's population is ageing rapidly. By 2030 one in four people will be aged 65 or over. This unprecedented change, together with multiple factors reducing the number of potential family carers, means that there will be a corresponding year-on-year increase in demand for long term care¹. Over 35,000 residents currently live in care homes in New Zealand and approximately 25,000 caregivers and 5,000 nurses are needed in the workforce to provide care for these residents².

¹ Spoonley, P. (2020). *The New Zealand*. Auckland, New Zealand: Massey University Press.

² McDougall, J. (2020). *Aged Residential Care, Industry profile 2019-20*. Wellington: New Zealand Aged Care Association.

Over the next 10 years ARC resident numbers are projected to grow in the range of 12,000-16,000 across New Zealand. Applying the industry standard of 95 per cent occupancy, the number of new ARC beds required will be in the same range. This is the equivalent of an average of 10-14 new large (120 bed) ARC facilities being added to the supply per year over the next decade³.

While border closures have been very successful in keeping COVID-19 out of New Zealand (when compared to most other countries), a knock-on effect has been a chronic shortage of Registered Nurses across the whole health sector, nationwide. Since the border restrictions were put in place in March 2020, the Critical Purpose Visa is the only visa with which workers can enter New Zealand.

Temporary migration is not the preferred option for many migrants and border closures dashed many hopes to resettle more family members over time. A path to permanent residency needs to be considered for the families of the migrants hired to work in New Zealand.

The 30 September announcement from the Minister of Immigration on the new 2021 Resident Visa is therefore welcomed. We believe the pathway to residency should be offered to more migrants whose work in New Zealand is currently classed as “lower skilled” but whose role in our workforce is – given our members’ staff shortages – nevertheless essential.

Horopaki | Context

To what extent does access to migrant labour reduce training and upskilling activity by employers?

Our members inform us the opposite is true: access to migrant labour increases and structures the training and upskilling activity for all staff, organised by us as employers.

Internationally Qualified Nurses (IQN) qualify for this as “Critical Health Workers”, provided they are invited to come to New Zealand by the Nursing Council of New Zealand, and are enrolled in a Competence Assessment Programme (CAPS). Once they have achieved NZ registration through the Nursing Council of New Zealand, they can work under this visa. We fully support the Critical Health Workers pathway, but our members have experienced a bottleneck effect from the pressure this puts on the Nursing Council of New Zealand.

We support all CAP providers in ARC to be given the capability to invite IQNs directly within their own streamlined recruitment process for internationally qualified nurses. CAPS providers can ease the bottleneck occurring that prolongs the time between initiation of recruitment to enrolment and work start date, often over six months. All CAPS providers partner with the Nursing Council of New Zealand already and so we see this capability as more means for our members with CAPS training to strengthen partnerships in the interests of Aged Care nursing.

Do effects on training and development differ by industry?

The costs of providing training and development are largely not included in ARC funding contracts. Funding for ARC is attributed to the daily occupancy of carebeds within ARC facilities. Members of ours that hold government contracts to provide CAPS training inform us they incur the costs to enrol their own staff.

³ We acknowledge and support the submission of our peak body, New Zealand Aged Care Association

We urge government to place higher value on training and development, by investing in them properly within its funding models for service contracting and procurement of all its service providers.

The pathway to residence for Critical Health Worker Visa holders, once working as a nurse in Aged Residential Care, is to apply for the Long-Term Skill Shortage Work Visa. Where RNs have done this, the Long Term Skills Shortage Visa has historically specified where, for whom they work, and for how long.

We recently learnt that Immigration New Zealand has allowed for a Long Term Skills Shortage visa specification to be changed however, so that RNs can move into DHB-based roles (DHBs offer a much larger salary).

We do not support Immigration New Zealand's allowance to change visa specification, as it hurts the Aged Care sector, and possibly other specialist health sectors in the same way. We recommend that the allowance be removed.

Are there areas of the economy in which New Zealand should be training people that are currently disproportionately supplied by migrant workers? How could policy best respond?

As part of a larger ARC sector we support all efforts to train and prepare New Zealanders for recruitment into the ARC workforce. However, it is highly likely that migrant labour will always make up a sizeable portion of the workforce in order to provide enough and the best possible care to older New Zealanders as the population grows. So we support the recommendations of the NZACA's Nursing Leadership Group in its paper submitted to Govt June 2020⁴. This paper considers how a sustainable ARC nursing workforce can be built, to reduce turnover and fill an increased number of RN positions with NZ trained nurses.

What objectives should be included in an immigration Government Policy Statement and Why?

As we noted in our introduction, the overall objectives of the New Zealand immigration system should be to ensure the best possible outcomes for all people in New Zealand whether they live here permanently or are here temporarily. Immigration policy should treat all potential migrants equally and once here, these migrants should be treated as Pakeha New Zealanders, the same as those Pakeha who already live here, in accordance with Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

In this spirit we wish for the system to be supportive to both the productivity and wellbeing of New Zealanders, refugees and migrants that choose to live and work here. The system should be agile and responsive, flexible enough that settings can be changed to match the changing needs of New Zealanders. For example, where unemployment is low, but a shortage of workers remains high (as is the case today in our Aged Care sector), New Zealand needs migrants to maintain the wellbeing of New Zealanders.

How could the Treaty of Waitangi interest in immigration policy be best reflected in new policies and institutions?

⁴ NZACA/Nursing Leadership Group (2020) *Building a sustainable nursing workforce for aged residential care services*. Wellington, New Zealand

We support ongoing and meaningful involvement of tangata whenua in the development of immigration policy. It is widely acknowledged that immigration has had a destructive impact on iwi, whānau and hapu, but we believe this does not need to be the case if there were appropriate levels of consultation and partnership. As the tangata tiriti, we believe any revision to the Immigration Act should include a clause requiring consultation with iwi leadership on all migration strategies and policies. In addition, we support the inclusion of Te Ao Māori perspectives into any future redesign of immigration policy, with a particular emphasis on manaakitanga and rangatiratanga.

Should efforts by migrants to learn Te Reo be recognised in the residence or permanent residence approval process? If so, how would this best be done?

We support not simply Te Reo requirements but also levels of Tiriti understanding to be recognised in the processes of migration, at each level effecting positively the approval process. We urge government to consult and partner with mana whenua - Reo educators and Tiriti experts - in developing the best process for establishing and recognising these efforts made by migrants, and how to incorporate them in the residence approval process.

Should the annual number of residence visas on offer be reduced?

We don't believe that the number of residence visas on offer should be reduced.

We welcome the recent government initiatives that will simplify the pathway to residence for around 165,000 migrants already working in Aotearoa. This measure will go some way to retain skilled workers who were otherwise at risk of leaving New Zealand. While this is a positive move, overseas workers with jobs in New Zealand continue to wait to enter Aotearoa.

We recommend a corresponding accelerated and simplified pathway to attract migrant workers for targeted sectors with human resource shortages in New Zealand. We would also urge Government to step in and support whole sectors to work together to fill skills shortages in areas crucial to the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

Do particular groups of migrants need additional or targeted support to settle? If they do, what types of support would work best?

There are significant qualitative differences between the challenges faced by migrants from majority English speaking countries (such as the United Kingdom, USA, and Canada) and other recent migrants. The differences in lived experience between these groups varies greatly, and these distinctions should be clearly articulated in policy.

We see great potential for providing more cultural and English Language support and mentoring to migrants and refugees. This would enable them to better apply their skills to their work and day-to-day life (for example, customer service, English for Employees, Professional Speaking, kiwi culture, English for work, broadening cultural awareness, etc.) We feel that English language proficiency is vital to the empowerment of migrant communities and their ability to engage with New Zealand society.

If a migrant worker cannot communicate effectively in English they are much less likely to know about and understand their rights, have the language skills or confidence to report

exploitation, and raise concerns with their employers (or others) about their employment conditions.

There is also an uneasy overlap between language challenges, worker exploitation and exploitation by a family member. Many migrants work as part of family businesses (or with distant relatives). This is a particularly vulnerable demographic and deserves specific attention under this plan. This can also connect with a fear of losing a visa were they to leave employment or the family group. It should also be noted that under a spouse/partnership visa, women can be dependent on an abusive partner/family. A focus on the challenges and opportunities of self-employment for migrants could be helpful, as this is often a route many take; however, access to face-to-face information, training and support is limited.

Migrants with non-resident status would benefit greatly from English Language Support, both in terms of training for workplace culture and preparation courses for recognised English-language proficiency tests.

We note an urgent and considered review of the ability for migrants to have their internationally achieved qualifications accepted in Aotearoa. Many migrants have qualifications from their own countries that are unable to be recognised here in New Zealand. The system built to assess these qualifications are blunt, discriminatory and racist.

An urgent review of these processes is required to ensure equity and pay parity among migrants. Where there are pathways these are generally broad, blunt, and costly. We are doing a disservice to our migrants in this space and need collective work between NZQA, TEC and related regulatory bodies to enable migrants to have their level of qualification valued in New Zealand.

Tūtohutanga | Recommendations

In the interests of ensuring immigration policy reflects the principles of te Tiriti o Waitangi, we support inclusion and full collaboration with tangata whenua on development of all immigration policy going forward. But we appreciate this opportunity provided by the Productivity Commission to also ensure inclusion and collaboration with the many stakeholders like us who actually deliver services to former refugees and migrants, as well as hire them.

Contacts

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