

24 December 2021

Submission
To the
Productivity Commission
On the
“Immigration – Fit for the future preliminary findings report”

We are called to dream together, fearlessly, as a single human family, as companions on the same journey, as sons and daughters of the same earth that is our common home, sisters and brothers all.

- POPE FRANCIS, 107th WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES 2021, 26 Sept 2021

Summary of main points

- People everywhere have a right to migrate to seek a better life for themselves and their children.
- At the same time governments have a right to regulate migration to ensure the wellbeing of both migrants and citizens of the host country.
- Justice mixed with compassion should guide immigration policy including the regulations to control migrant entry.
- New Zealand benefits from the skills, cultures and international networks that migrants bring to our shores.
- We should welcome migrants as people with a range of skills and attributes that can help build the common good in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- At the same time New Zealand needs to overcome crises in infrastructure and reduce its carbon emissions. These too must inform immigration reforms to maximise the opportunities for successful long-term integration into Aotearoa New Zealand.

Introduction

1. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand is the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' agency for justice, peace and development. We work on behalf of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference (NZCBC) for a world free of poverty and injustice through community development, advocacy, education, and emergency relief.
2. Our work is shaped by Catholic Social Teaching, which reinforces the dignity of each and every person, along with their responsibilities, regardless of culture, ethnicity, gender or religion. We promote, in particular, the principles of:
 - Human dignity – Te tapu o te tangata;
 - Solidarity – Kotahitanga;
 - Subsidiarity – Mana whakahaere;
 - Preferential option for the poor and vulnerable – He whakaaro nui mō te hunga rawakore;
 - Participation – Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou;
 - Stewardship – Kaitiakitanga; and
 - The Common Good – Hei painga mā te katoa.
3. New Zealand Catholic Bishops have spoken extensively on the riches and diversity that new arrivals offer our land, the need to offer hospitality and support to migrants as they integrate into Aotearoa New Zealand as well as the ability for migrants to express their culture appropriately. Caritas undertakes a range of practical and educational work to encourage the Church and wider community to always be ready to 'welcome the stranger', including resources for the annual Day of Prayer for Refugees and Migrants in June.

Principles to guide immigration policy

4. The primary principles guiding our approach to immigration are human dignity, equality and the common good. All Catholic social teaching must be understood in light of the absolute equality and human dignity of all people and commitment to the common good. All people are equal in dignity, and migrants need to have their human rights respected before the law.
5. Catholic social teaching supports the view that immigration can be a resource for development rather than an obstacle to it. Though the arrival of large numbers of migrants may be seen as threatening high levels of well-being in a country, immigrants often fill a labour need that may otherwise remain unfilled in some sectors and regions. "Our migrant brothers and sisters are people whose dignity is to be protected and who have the capacity to contribute to the wellbeing of our common home."¹
6. However, care must be taken to protect migrants from exploitation, abuse and discrimination. Caritas' own research on migrant workers has shown issues of below minimum wage payments, unfair treatment and poor contracting practice. "Regulating immigration according to criteria of equity and balance is one of the indispensable

¹ NZCBC: "On Migration for the Day of Prayer for Refugees & Migrants", 18 May 2016.

conditions for ensuring that immigrants are integrated into society with the guarantees required by recognition of their human dignity. Immigrants are to be received as persons and helped, together with their families, to become a part of societal life. In this context, the right of reuniting families should be respected and promoted.”² The Bishops of New Zealand have also reinforced that temporary and permanent migrant workers must enjoy the same rights and be treated with the same dignity as other New Zealand workers.

7. The balancing act between allowing for immigration, supporting the wellbeing of New Zealanders and contributing to a global common good can be expressed in three inter-related principles to guide immigration policy:³

People have a right to migrate to seek a better life for themselves and their children.

8. The goods of the earth belong to all. Every person has an equal right to the basics of life— food, clothing, shelter, as well as a right to education, medical care, religion, and the expression of culture. When someone cannot achieve a meaningful life in his or her own land, they have the right to move.

Governments have a right to regulate migration to ensure the wellbeing of both migrants and citizens of the host country.

9. While people have a right to move, no country is bound to receive so many immigrants that its social and economic life are put at risk. No country is bound to accept all who wish to resettle there. In many if not most cases, migration happens for both push and pull reasons. Many migrate out of desperation and see their only hope of safety and security as being in another land. While welcoming the contributions that new immigrants and their cultures bring, measures can be taken to address the negative causes of migration, such as wars, hunger, climate change and economic deprivation.
10. New Zealand should play its part in the international community to overcome the causes of mass migration. As Pope Francis has said: “The remote causes (of mass migration) should be attacked, not the poor people who pay the consequences and are even used for political propaganda.”⁴ One way of addressing these issues is through increased investment in overseas aid and development to lift living standards in less developed countries, and provide for increased work opportunities in places of origin.

Justice mixed with compassion should guide immigration policy including regulations to control migrant entry.

11. Immigration controls should be guided by concern for all people. A nation may not simply decide that it wants to provide for its own people and no others. A commitment to the needs of all must prevail. A nation's right to limit immigration must be based on justice,

² Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, April 2005.

³ Drawn and adapted from “Catholic Teaching on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples” at:

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/catholic-teaching-on-immigration-and-the-movement-of-peoples>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59538413>

mercy, and the common good, not just on self-interest. Immigration policy also needs to take into account matters such as the right of families to live together.

Immigration policy in New Zealand

12. Based on these principles, we wish to see New Zealand immigration policies that are clear, compassionate and support the dignity of incoming migrants as well as upholding the dignity of all New Zealanders, especially those who are unemployed or working on low pay.
13. We condemn racism in all its forms. We uphold the dignity of all people – regardless of race or nationality. A humane immigration policy should be based on relevant factors such as skills, education, age, etc not on ethnicity.
14. Pope Francis has spoken out against neglecting the plight of migrants out of selfishness or a narrow form of nationalism. “History teaches us that narrow self-interest and nationalism lead to disastrous consequences.”⁵
15. We have reservations about immigration criteria which place undue weight on personal wealth rather than on the totality of gifts that new arrivals can bring to New Zealand and enhance the common good. “Diversity enriches our communities and should be seen as a source of blessing and peace. Understanding our differences can enrich our common humanity. This is the ideal we wish to be working towards, recognising the unique contribution cultural differences can make to the common good.”⁶

Immigration and the Treaty of Waitangi

16. We support an explicit acknowledgement of Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi in immigration policy as we believe such an approach would be in keeping with the spirit of partnership inherent in the Treaty. As the Treaty provided the basis for the first wave of large-scale immigration after the First Peoples of the land and is the foundational document for the relationship between Māori and the Crown, it would be fitting to acknowledge the Treaty in the context of immigration policy.

How well does the current system raise levels of human capabilities?

17. New Zealand has one of the fastest population growth rates in the developed world.⁷ Until the coronavirus pandemic the bulk of that increase comprised overseas migrants coming to New Zealand.
18. The current New Zealand education, training and employment system does not adequately address skills shortages through appropriate training of New Zealanders. Current shortages of nurses, doctors, teachers and builders are cases in point. Instead, employers often find it easier and cheaper to buy in skills through the immigration system. The feedback mechanism between education and employers is very weak.⁸ For example, the number of

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59538413>

⁶ NZCBC, “Creating inclusive and connected communities”, 10 Sep 2010.

⁷ Productivity Commission, “Immigration – fit for the future” 2021, p.4

⁸ Ibid. P.5

new permanent and long-term migrant arrivals (aged 15-64 years), exceeded the number of New Zealand residents turning 15 (and who could potentially enter the workforce).⁹

19. We note with concern the argument by some (identified in the Productivity Commission's preliminary findings) that ease of access to temporary migrant workers has allowed New Zealand firms to grow without increasing wages or capital investment or addressing other issues that have discouraged New Zealanders from taking up the roles.¹⁰

A pathway to citizenship

20. An immigration policy that allows people to live here, pay taxes and contribute to society for years, but refuses to offer them the opportunity to achieve legal status, does not serve the common good. The long-term presence of people living without easy access to basic human rights and necessities is a great injustice. At the same time migrants should be encouraged to use appropriate legal channels for entering the country and remaining here.
21. Since 2006 the number of migrants coming to New Zealand on "temporary" visas has overtaken those coming here on permanent "residence" visas. However, many of those who come on temporary visas (temporary work, student or visitor) end up staying in some cases for many years. Eventually many acquire permanent residency or citizenship, but even "permanent" migrants are defined as people who intend to stay in New Zealand for only 12 months or more. There is no initial requirement for them to make a longer-term commitment to the country.

Environmental impact of higher immigration

22. Governments have the right to determine immigration policies which are appropriate to their unique situation. New Zealand has arguably operated a much looser immigration policy since the 1990s whereby a larger number of migrants have been admitted than was usual on a historical basis. This upsurge in migrant numbers has placed greater strain on the nation's infrastructure and natural environment.

"More people mean more impact on the environment including higher greenhouse gas emissions...If our net immigration is 55,000 a year our population would be nearly 1.3million larger by 2050 than would be the case if the rate of net migration was 10,000 a year. All other things being equal (including that emissions scale with population numbers) that's a 25% increase in New Zealand's total emissions." (Mike Lear, sub.32, p.11)

23. Having acknowledged the potential impact on the environment from increased numbers of people in particular locations we also note the potential for innovative thinking and technological development which can arise from immigration; and may actually help address some of our environmental challenges.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.11

Migrant expectations

24. Migrants need to be adequately informed about the employment situation in New Zealand and of the way their educational qualifications may be recognised in New Zealand before they leave their home country. At the same time, systems for recognising overseas qualifications and experience may need to be reviewed. However, there is nothing compassionate about raising unrealistic expectations of job opportunities or acceptance of overseas educational qualifications. If migrants are misled into thinking that jobs are plentiful regardless of age, or that their qualifications will be recognised, it fosters misleading expectations and sets new migrants on a path towards disappointment and frustration.

Conclusion

25. In summary, when considering immigration policy we believe that:

- People have a right to migrate to seek a better life for themselves and their children.
- Governments have a right to regulate migration to ensure the wellbeing of both migrants and citizens of the host country.
- Justice mixed with compassion should guide immigration policy including regulations to control migrant entry.

26. New Zealand should welcome migrants – particularly those who have skills that are important for the common good of Aotearoa New Zealand – such as in healthcare, education and construction for example. This should be separate to our refugee resettlement programme as part of our international obligations as a developed country.

27. New Zealand benefits from the skills, cultures and international networks that migrants bring to our shores. At the same time, in order to promote the wellbeing of existing residents and new arrivals, New Zealand needs to overcome crises in infrastructure and reduce its carbon emissions. These too must inform immigration reforms to maximise the opportunities for successful long-term integration into Aotearoa New Zealand. Such an approach would be fair and just for both migrants and the host country, and contribute to the global common good.