

When analysing what immigration policies are going to best support New Zealand's economic growth, I believe one of the most significant areas which need to be looked at/improved, is policies concerning the rights and wellbeing of migrant workers within New Zealand. The reason for this is, if the government wishes for our economy to benefit from the skills and working abilities of migrants, they need to provide safe and supportive work conditions, which not only uplift migrants currently working in New Zealand but also encourage more migrants to seek temporary work in New Zealand. However, the current treatment of migrant workers in New Zealand is serious, and relevant enough to be recognised as an issue and is likely to affect the number of migrants working in New Zealand. A study done on migrant survey trends from 2015 to 2019, highlighted that around 10% of migrants reported that they had been mistreated within their workplace, and specifically; "Six percent said they have felt threatened by their employers' behaviour and five percent had contacted someone to help them with their working conditions. Three percent said their employer had held back, or threatened to hold back, entitlements like holiday pay or sick leave and two percent have had employers ask them to pay money to get or keep their job." The mistreatment of migrant workers is currently happening within New Zealand, and an alarming number of migrants are being negatively affected along with their rights being tested. The results of these surveys do not represent all migrants, and therefore it is likely that there are more migrant workers being mistreated within New Zealand.

If the number of migrants being mistreated/ having their rights refused in New Zealand does not begin to decrease, we will likely begin to experience drops in the number of migrants requesting to work in New Zealand. Though some may see this as a positive consequence, given the tendency for New Zealanders to blame the housing crisis on migrants, in reality, this decrease is likely to harm our economy. Fewer migrants mean fewer individuals paying taxes and decreasing supply-demand, and also means that gaps will remain within workplaces, and it is also possible more gaps will occur, especially in fields in which migrants are hired at a large rate. Therefore if the government wants New Zealand to continue to benefit from the effort of migrants, there needs to be policy change, which will secure and protect the rights of migrant workers while also improving their overall wellbeing during their time in the country.

One specific policy which should experience change is the 'Rights of Migrant Workers', under the Immigration Act. This policy states that "[All workers in New Zealand have rights as employees. Your employer cannot take away your rights. As an employee you have the right to:](#)"

- -holidays
- -leave
- -work breaks
- -wages
- -a written employment agreement

Therefore this is the policy that is responsible for ensuring that migrants working in New Zealand are having their rights met, along with being treated fairly within their workplace. However, given the results of the 2015-2019 migrant survey, it is clear that this policy is not being properly enforced amongst New Zealand workplaces, and as a result, many migrants are having their rights refused and are being mistreated. This then indicates that changes need to be made to this policy if we wish to improve the rights and treatment of migrant workers in New Zealand. There is currently a punishment associated with this policy, as those who don't follow the policy "[can be imprisoned for up to 7 years and be fined up to NZ \\$100,000. They can also be punished for failing to meet their obligations as an employer.](#)" Despite this being in place, employers in New Zealand are still refusing the rights of migrant workers, therefore indicating that this risk of fine/imprisonment is not enough to deter individuals from mistreating migrant workers. A simple change would be to increase the amount of the fine/prison sentence, however, the current punishment is still relatively significant and is failing to serve its purpose, so it is unlikely that worsening the punishment would have an extreme effect on the number of employers abusing the rights of migrant workers. A better solution may be to incorporate mandatory checks of workplaces that hire migrants into the "Rights of Migrant Workers" policy. For example, the government may hire trained individuals who visit migrant workplaces across New Zealand every 6-12 months. During these checks, migrant workers would be allowed to properly express their experience working in New Zealand and report any mistreatment/refusal of rights. These visits would likely result in migrant workers feeling as though their rights and wellbeing are being respected and monitored, which is then likely to make them feel safer when working in New Zealand. This would also mean that migrants who have had their rights refused would be able to report any misconduct, thus allowing wrongful employers to be disciplined for their mistreatment of migrants. It may also deter employers from discriminating against migrant workers in the first place, as knowing

that these checks are going to take place, would make it harder for individuals to mistreat migrants under the radar.

To maximise the profit and skill New Zealand benefits from migrants, the immigration act also includes The New Zealand Occupation list 2018. This occupation list aims to boost New Zealand's economic growth by bringing in highly skilled migrants, especially in areas where New Zealand is lacking. It is understandable for the government to use this list to fill gaps in New Zealand work fields and contribute to who is accepted into New Zealand. However, this list is becoming the driving factor when deciding what migrants receive a visa, which has proven to have negative consequences. This list does allow migrants with the specific and needed training to be granted a visa, however, it also denies a large number of migrants access to New Zealand, while also deterring migrants from wanting to apply for a visa. This list therefore strongly limits who is let into the country and results in those with less training being denied access into New Zealand.

This then rules out the possibility of migrants undergoing training in New Zealand and using this training in workplaces which New Zealand needs to improve. A study by MBIE showed that ["Just over a third of recent migrants \(36%\) said they had undertaken formal education or training while in New Zealand. A higher proportion \(44%\) said they had undertaken non-formal training, for instance on-the-job training or community training courses."](#) Therefore it is common for migrants to experience relevant training in New Zealand, which will improve their ability to work in skilled workplaces. This then acts as reasoning to not use the occupation list so strictly when deciding who is allocated a working visa, as it denies migrants the possibility to gain experience in New Zealand, which they can then use while working in NZ. Many argue that the government should be focusing on having New Zealanders fill gaps in fields rather than migrants, therefore an alternative to the occupation list, maybe focusing on organising/advertising more training opportunities across New Zealand which target citizens to gain training in fields that lack workers who are fully trained. Even if the government made an effort to encourage New Zealand citizens to partake in training, likely, there would still be gaps in workplaces. The government could then set up direct programs for migrants which would allow them to undergo specific training in New Zealand, and then enter that field of work once the training is completed. The government however should continue to encourage New Zealand residents to engage in fields of work that are currently deprived, and allow for more training opportunities. This, therefore, leaves the opportunity for both New Zealand residents and migrants to gain the necessary experience, while also improving New Zealand workplaces and the economy.

