

IMMIGRATION

Our vision

Labour is committed to a world-class immigration system designed to contribute to our economic growth, recognise New Zealand's international commitments to resettle refugees, acknowledge our special role in the Pacific, and commit to positive settlement and resettlement outcomes for the benefit of all.

Labour in government introduced the New Zealand Immigration Programme, with its emphasis on increasing New Zealand's talent and skill base through a separate stream for skilled and business migrants making up 60% of the programme. Family reunion and the International/humanitarian streams make up the balance. Ten years on, this approach has stood the test of time. However as in any area of policy, it would be worth reviewing the Programme to ensure that it is still meeting the needs of New Zealand and the migrants and refugees, who make New Zealand home.

New Zealand has a strong and proud history of a special relationship with the other Pacific nations and our immigration policy recognises that relationship. Migrants bring social as well as economic benefits. They broaden and enrich our cultural diversity and understanding. Family migration strengthens families and assists with positive settlement and resettlement outcomes.

Temporary entry visas provide the opportunity to support the tourism industry, to meet shortages in the labour market and to support reciprocal working holidays for young people. Labour in government spearheaded the concept of work-to-residence through Talent Visas and the Skilled Migrant category.

Immigration New Zealand has an extensive international network of offices and faces significant demands as it seeks to facilitate entry to New Zealand of those qualified to do so, while managing risks of irregular migration and non-compliance.

Strengthening our economy through immigration

Migrants enhance our economy. Not only does our migrant population contribute billions of dollars to our economy each year, but it also reminds us to think and act globally, drives innovation, gives our businesses international connections and provides a range of skills to transform our economic landscape.

It is vital that New Zealand continues to attract the migrants it needs. We will conduct a review of the Skilled and Business Migrant stream of the New Zealand Immigration Programme.

Labour will review the Skilled Migrant Category to ensure that it is still meeting our needs and that it is not posing unnecessary barriers to skilled migrants that are needed to grow our economy.

Labour will review the business migrant categories, with an emphasis on the investor category providing an option for active investment and allowing flexibility in the requirements for different levels of investor migrant.

Labour will also investigate changes to the Entrepreneur categories to increase opportunities for young entrepreneurs to migrate to New Zealand or remain here at the completion of their studies. We plan to enable joint ventures or taking equity in an existing high growth potential company to support the application.

It is vital that immigration policies reflect current local labour market conditions. Labour believes recent policy changes making it easier for overseas actors and others in the entertainment industry to work in New Zealand temporarily are out of touch and signal job losses in our local industry.

Labour will reverse the policy changes to entry visas for temporary entertainment industry workers that are due to come into operational effect in March 2012.

Addressing labour shortages and attracting skilled migrants

Given the dramatically changed labour market over the last three years, where New Zealand has gone from record low unemployment rates to comparatively high unemployment rates, we must have policies which have the flexibility to allow us to respond quickly to changes in the labour market situation. We need to be aware of the needs of people caught in the work-to-residence timeframe and we will investigate temporary solutions to enable people to remain and complete their residence in due course in such cases.

Labour will build on existing policies to ensure that we are continuing to attract the skills and talent we need and helping to fill labour gaps, while maintaining a firm focus on New Zealand's labour market, mindful of the needs of skilled migrants who have entered the work-to-residence path.

We know that there is fierce competition amongst countries to attract and retain skilled migrants. We need to ensure that our message is reflected in people's experience.

Labour will ensure that the Immigration Service, in conjunction with other relevant agencies, continues to market New Zealand overseas as a great place to live, work and raise a family, targeting people with the skills needed to grow our economy.

Our special relationship with the Pacific

New Zealand has long-standing ties and a unique set of relationships with our Pacific neighbours. We have large Pasifika populations in New Zealand and important historical connections. Labour will ensure our immigration policies continue to recognise the special relationship between New Zealand and the Pacific.

Too many of our Pacific new arrivals are forced to wait an unacceptably long time before a final decision is made on a permanent residency. This waiting time must be reduced. Labour is also concerned that there are young Pacific people who are, through no fault of their own, missing out on education, medical and hospital care as a result of their parents' irregular status.

Labour will investigate the reasons why there are a continuing number of Pacific people with irregular immigration status in order to curtail the increase in immigration scams, and to encourage Pacific people living illegally in New Zealand to regularise their status.

Labour will undertake a review of the Pacific Access and Samoan Quota systems and criteria to better align job offer requirements with the current market.

The Recognised Seasonal Employment Scheme enables the horticulture and viticulture industries to recruit workers, primarily from Pacific countries, to fill labour gaps. This scheme is designed to fill labour gaps, not to displace New Zealand workers.

Labour will enhance the Recognised Seasonal Employment scheme through:

- improved pre-departure information being provided to workers so that they are better prepared upon arrival in New Zealand
- further improvements to pastoral care so that workers are looked after while they are here
- more flexible working arrangements
- ensuring workers are able to change between employers during the scheme, recognising the need for flexibility for both employers and workers
- requiring the wages for workers on this scheme to be paid at the rate of at least the minimum wage and with accommodation provided in addition to the wages.

Labour will maintain close relationships with the Pacific region in terms of immigration policies.

Recognising migrants' needs

If we expect migrants to New Zealand to fully contribute to our society, we must ensure that we are meeting their essential needs. That means having robust family migration policies, because that can strengthen families and assist with good settlement outcomes. It also means ensuring that our policies protect the most vulnerable of our new migrants post-arrival.

Labour will continue to extend the New Zealand settlement strategy into regions throughout the country in partnership with local authorities

Labour will review the domestic violence policy to ensure it is meeting the needs of those it is designed to protect.

The ethnic community relies on responsive immigration policies to facilitate their aspirations for family reunification and family visitation. There is a balance to be achieved between these and New Zealand's need for an appropriately qualified and competent work force.

Labour will, in consultation with ethnic communities and their representatives, ensure that immigration policies are responsive to the family and communal aspects of settlement (for example the need for priests, language teachers).

Labour will ensure that policies and practices do not place undue restrictions and impose demands that effectively bar families from being together periodically for the celebration of particular religious and cultural events.

Refugees – meeting our international obligations

New Zealanders pride themselves on being a nation that is willing to make a stand on the international stage on matters of humanitarian concern. Labour believes our attitude towards refugees is an important aspect of that.

Labour's vision for New Zealand is a country that is committed to ensuring that refugees and their families resettle well; a country which welcomes newcomers and provides a safe and peaceful place to live, especially for those who have experienced difficult times in their own countries; a country that is strong and inclusive.

Labour supports a National Refugee Resettlement Strategy to ensure consistency across New Zealand and across all government departments and agencies, with the Strategy being developed in partnership with the refugee community in New Zealand.

Labour will develop an integrated national plan for refugee resettlement in collaboration with leaders in the refugee community and from refugee led agencies.

Labour will ensure that refugees continue to receive the support they need through government agencies and by working closely with relevant community groups, including through the expansion of our resettlement support programme.

Labour will strengthen mental health services for refugees. It will review refugee entitlements for consistency. Labour will also review refugee family reunification policies to ensure families are reunited wherever possible and desirable.

Labour will investigate the options for better support for tertiary education for refugees, to ensure that both New Zealand and the refugee themselves is able to take the best opportunity for future contribution to our nation.

Advocacy, checks and balances

Labour believes in a 'firm but fair' approach to immigration, and this means having adequate protections for migrants as well as for New Zealanders.

Labour will introduce a specialist Immigration Ombudsman within the office of the Ombudsman, with extensive powers of inquiry enabling him/her to investigate systemic issues, individual complaints from onshore and family sponsored applicants without other appeal rights, immigration detention issues and protected disclosures from immigration staff.

Labour will establish a Residence Review Panel as an advisory board to make recommendations on exceptions to policy to the Minister.

Managing Immigration Risks

New Zealanders need to have confidence that, while we are encouraging the people that we need in New Zealand to come here, we are also minimising and managing risks.

The best way of protecting our borders is by stopping those who pose a risk to New Zealand before they even reach our border. The Advanced Passenger Processing system, introduced by Labour in 2003, was designed for this purpose and has shown success.

Labour will continue to improve information technology and processing capability at Immigration New Zealand to help protect our borders and the integrity of the service.