



Future of the Skilled Migrant Category – Fact Sheet

MBIE is consulting on proposed changes to the Skilled Migrant Category.

The Skilled Migrant Category has traditionally been New Zealand's main residence visa category based on skills and employment. New priority skilled residence pathways have been introduced under the [Immigration Rebalance](#), meaning there are now three main pathways to skilled residence:

- the Skilled Migrant Category, which recognises individuals' skills;
- the new [Green List residence pathways](#) for eligible migrants in specified highly skilled, hard-to-fill occupations; and
- the new [Highly Paid Residence Visa](#) for migrants earning at least twice median wage.

Residence allows people to live and work in New Zealand indefinitely. Migrants are also able to work in New Zealand temporarily on an [Accredited Employer Work Visa](#), or other temporary work visas.

Why are changes proposed?

Before the borders closed, the number of people eligible for the Skilled Migrant Category significantly outnumbered approvals, leading to long queues and uncertainty for migrants. There was also a trend of applicants coming through the Skilled Migrants Category in jobs that need only low levels of training or experience.

The proposed future settings are designed to:

- **align with the Immigration Rebalance**, which aims to support a higher-productivity, higher-wage economy, while making it easier for employers to attract and hire skilled migrants;
- **give more certainty to migrant workers and their families**, through clearer, fairer and more transparent settings, so migrants can make informed decisions about their immigration options from the beginning;
- **improve processing times** through simplifying processes where possible – the goal is shorter wait times for migrants and no long queues; and
- **reduce immigration and labour market risks** and drivers of exploitation, by putting in place special conditions where appropriate to address identified risks.

How will the proposed future settings work?

The key proposal is to introduce a new, simplified points system. It focuses on granting residence to people who can fill medium- to long-term skill needs that would be hard, or take time, to fill from the domestic labour market, even under the right conditions. The points system sets a clear skill threshold for residence, but offers several ways for people to demonstrate their skill level.

Applicants must have at least 6 points to be eligible. This can be made up from:

- 3 to 6 points based on either professional registration, qualifications or income. People can choose the skill category that offers the most points based on their circumstances; and
- 1 point per year of working in New Zealand in a skilled job, up to a maximum of 3 points.

All applicants must have a job or a job offer in New Zealand and be paid at least median wage.

Figure 1: Proposed future points system

Points: **6 points**

NZ Professional Registration		OR	Qualification		OR	High Income		+	Skilled work in NZ*	
NZ Professional Registration (≥6 years training/work experience)	6		Level 10 (PhD)	6		3 x Median Wage	6		3 years	3
NZ Professional Registration (≥5 years training/work experience)	5		Level 9 (Master's)	5		<i>Migrants earning 2 x Median Wage already have a two year pathway to residence under the Highly Paid Residence Visa</i>			2 years	2
NZ Professional Registration (≥4 years training/work experience)	4		Level 8 (Honours, Post-grad Diploma)	4					1 year	1
NZ Professional Registration (≥3 years training/work experience)	3		Level 7 Degree (Bachelor's degree)	3		1.5 x Median Wage	3			

*Skilled work means ANZSCO 1-3 occupations at 1 x median wage or ANZSCO 4-5 occupations at 1.5 x median wage

For example:

- A scientist with a PhD could claim 6 points for their qualification, so would be eligible for residence straight away if they had a job or job offer in New Zealand.
- A licensed building practitioner could claim 3 points (points level to be confirmed) for their professional registration, so would be eligible for residence after three years of skilled work in New Zealand.
- A chef earning 1.5 times the median wage could claim 3 points for their income, so would be eligible for residence after three years of skilled work in New Zealand.
- A registered teacher could claim 3 points (points level to be confirmed) for their professional registration, so would be eligible for residence after three years of skilled in New Zealand. A teacher with a Master's degree could claim 5 points for their qualification, meaning that they would be eligible after one year of skilled work in New Zealand.

A small number of occupations identified as presenting immigration and labour market risks will need to meet the higher income threshold (1.5 times median wage) to be eligible. These include occupations where employers should be able to draw on the domestic labour market and/or temporary migrant workers, including some roles in retail and hospitality. This approach aims to manage the risks, while granting residence to genuinely highly skilled people in these occupations.

How many people will get residence under the new settings?

Under the new settings, there will be no cap on the number of eligible applications that can be processed. This relies on setting an appropriate skill level to help manage demand. If migrant flows return to pre-COVID levels, a higher number of people are expected to gain residence every year, even with a tighter skill threshold than the current points system. The settings will be monitored and adjustments may be made if e.g. the number of approvals is higher (or lower) than expected, or the types of skills are not well-aligned with New Zealand's long-term needs.

In the first few years, the number of people coming through the Skilled Migrant Category is expected to be relatively low, because most onshore migrant workers gained residence through the one-off 2021 Resident Visa, and under the proposed future settings new migrants will need to spend some time working in New Zealand before becoming eligible.



What about people not eligible for residence?

Every year, significantly more temporary work visas are approved than skilled residence visas. The new median wage income threshold for most temporary workers will reduce the proportion of people without a realistic pathway to residence. However, there will still be a gap between eligibility for temporary work and residence visas. This is appropriate, as closing the gap completely and giving residence to everyone eligible for a temporary work visa could lead to either:

- unmanageably high immigration flows; or
- a need to increase the threshold for temporary work visas, which is not appropriate in the context of immediate labour shortages.

The proposal is to make changes to the existing stand-down policy. This would mean after a certain period, e.g. three years, migrants on a temporary work visa who are not eligible for residence must spend at least 12 months outside New Zealand. This is to avoid the risks to migrants of becoming well-settled in New Zealand without the rights and protections that come with residency, which can increase vulnerability to exploitation. These risks include limited access to social security benefits and having to leave New Zealand if they are injured or ill and no longer able to work, as their visa is based on employment.

How can I have my say on the future settings?

The consultation period will run until 18 November. More details and information on how to have your say can be found [here](#).

When will the new settings be in place?

The Government is expected to consider feedback and make further announcements on the new settings in early 2023.

The new settings are expected to be in place in mid-2023.

What about people wanting to apply for skilled residence now?

The Skilled Migrant Category will reopen using the current points system on 9 November. This is to provide a general residence pathway for skilled migrants while future settings are developed.

People who have already submitted an Expression of Interest will be given an opportunity to update their information or withdraw their Expression of Interest and receive a refund.

Existing and new Expressions of Interest submitted before 9 November will need to meet the current points threshold of 160 points. The points threshold will increase to 180 points for Expressions of Interest submitted after 9 November, to better align with the proposed future settings and the objectives of the wider Immigration Rebalance.

Information on eligibility and how to submit an Expression of Interest can be found [here](#).

Eligible migrants also have the option of working in New Zealand on an [Accredited Employer Work Visa](#) and applying for residence when the new Skilled Migrant Category settings are in place.