



19 October 2021

Hon Mins Faafoi, Twyford and Hipkins (Ministers of Immigration and the Covid 19 Response)

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**\*\*\*URGENT\*\*\***

Dear Ministers,

We write on behalf the Reunite Families NZ movement that represents those separated partners, children and siblings in New Zealand (**NZ**). These include Scientists, Nurses, Doctors, Engineers, Teachers, Construction Workers, Trades Workers, Primary Industry Scarce workers, and our PhD and Masters students inter alia. We still have workers in New Zealand who have not seen their newborn babies.

Whilst specific border categories have been created for select groups, the fine print has made their reunification slow or unattainable in many cases. The “Highly Skilled” Category, for example, has seen a decline rate of 90% and has reached notoriety as simply ridiculous and unworkable.

The newly created 2021 Residence Visa has generated only more uncertainty for split families as the Principal Applicant must be in New Zealand to lodge and the majority will only be able to apply in March 2022. Even for those able to apply in December 2021, we do not expect those families to be able to reunite for some months more unless you, as Ministers, create the means for them to do so.

This entire issue has intensified as we approach what for many will be a third Christmas apart from their families. Those of us working with these families can attest to the mental health of so many hanging by a thread. We receive anguished messages on a daily basis. Those in a position to leave NZ have already done so. The majority remain here as this is where they came to make a home. They have watched the plight of those stuck offshore since the pandemic began who have not been allowed back into NZ and have been excluded from the 2021 Residence Visa. This makes them extremely nervous to leave NZ in case they lose all that they came to achieve. These are workers who have all contributed to Aotearoa New Zealand during Covid-19, yet they continue to be marginalised. Even in the talk of revising NZ border and MIQ settings, there has been no mention of the Split Families.

These families include partners of New Zealand Citizens/Residents and of our skilled migrant workforce who, for one reason or another, cannot meet the “living together” requirements of our current partnership and border policies. Many, due to Immigration New Zealand’s own systematic and wrongful declines of 2019 that kept too many couples apart before the pandemic, only to be offered a remedy that then became frustrated by NZ immigration border policies. The entire approach is having a particularly marked impact on our healthcare workforce who generally hail from countries where arranged marriage is prevalent. While we have a Culturally Arranged Marriage (“CAM”) policy that only applies to partners of New Zealanders and not to our migrant workers. It is also a policy that is too narrow to assist in reunifying the majority of cases that fall outside its archaic confines (63% decline rate in the 2020/2021 year). All who work in this field are calling for the urgent review of our partnership policies as we are losing skilled New Zealand healthcare and other workers to risky and prolonged “fetch and fly” missions or to other countries at a time when that makes least sense. All that is required is for couples that are found to be genuine and credible to have visas issued that facilitate their entry into New Zealand. Instead, we have arbitrary border and general immigration policies that perpetuate a Catch-22 for so many; unless they live together no visa or border entry is allowed, yet no visa will be issued to facilitate living together in this country.

We then come to those that are lucky enough to secure critical purpose visas in these times. They now have to run the gauntlet of the MIQ lobby system where most, as we know, miss out.

New Zealand has sought to be a world leader in terms of its Covid-19 response, yet that has come consistently at the expense of family reunification. As increasing numbers of New Zealanders seek to reunite with extended family, these migrant partners and children must be factored into the equation as an immediate priority.

We are asking for the following measures to be given your urgent and utmost consideration:

- To allow double vaccinated split family members to self-isolate at home. These families are so highly motivated to comply (with deportation liability as an added Damocles sword hanging over their heads) that they present the lowest possible risk. They will literally do anything just to be with their immediate loved ones;
- Where self-isolation is not possible, the urgent creation of a specific MIQ quota for split families with immediate priority this side of Christmas for the most extreme cases;
- To resume the processing of visas for all split family members now so that there is at least some movement in the right direction. It is currently taking Immigration NZ around 3 months to process most border requests and subsequent visas and any visas issued are given 9-month first entry dates. The time is therefore now to resume all visa processing to ensure Immigration NZ has a head start;
- To allow all split families eligible for the new 2021 visa to be placed in the 1 December cohort and for their residence visas to be prioritised;
- To allow all eligible residence visa applicants to leave NZ to reunite offshore with families without prejudicing their residence visa processing in order to provide an additional option that gives swift relief to their situations;
- To remove the living together requirement as mandatory for issuance of partnership visas –

at least for those partners who have maintained relationships all through the pandemic, as a first step towards a more comprehensive review of our partnership policies;

- To generally change the messaging to remove the stigmatisation of migrant partners and families and give them the dignity of being treated as human beings deserving of our care as a society.

Yours sincerely,



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