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Major NZ border rules relaxed: Essential workers allowed in, so who qualifies?

(source NZ Herald)

The Government has announced major changes to New Zealand's immigration rules that ministers say will help New Zealand families reunite without increasing the risk of Covid-19.

The requirement for partners and dependents of New Zealand citizens and residents to travel together to return home has been removed.

And the Government will introduce short-term - less than six months - and long-term - more than six months - criteria for Other Essential Workers requests.

Short-term workers

Must have "unique and technical or specialist skills that are not obtainable in New Zealand" and must also be working on a major time-critical project, such as infrastructure.

Long-term workers

Must be earning twice the medium salary, have a role that is essential for the completion or continuation of science programmes, or have a role that is essential for the delivery or execution of a government-approved event, such as the America's Cup.

The threshold for other essential worker visas, Minister for Economic Development Phil Twyford said, remains "very high".

Essential worker criteria

An "Other Essential Worker" is someone an employer can demonstrate meets the following criteria:

For a short-term role (less than six months):

- The worker must have unique experience and technical or specialist skills that are not obtainable in New Zealand, or
- The work must be significant in terms of a major infrastructure project, or event of national or regional importance, or government-approved programme, or in support of a government-to-government agreement, or have significant benefit to the national or regional economy, and
- The role must be time critical (eg if the person does not come to New Zealand, the project, work or event will cease or be severely compromised, or significant costs will be incurred).

For a longer-term role (more than six months), the worker must:

- meet one of the short-term criteria and
- earn twice the median salary (as an indicator of high skills), or
- have a role that is essential for the completion or continuation of science programmes under a government-funded or partially government-funded contract, including research and development exchanges and partnerships.
- have a role that is essential for the delivery or execution of a government approved event, or programme that is of major significance to New Zealand.

An "essential worker" may also request approval for a partner and dependent children.

Anyone approved under the "essential worker" category must secure a place in managed isolation or quarantine for 14 days, to be paid for by the employer or sponsoring agency, or the individual.

When arriving

Immigration Minister Iain Lees-Galloway added that everyone coming in would still need to do 14 days of managed isolation or quarantine.

As of June 10, there had been 15,331 requests for a border exception; 2914 were invited to apply for a visa, and 2456 visa applications were approved.

EOI status

Up until **May 28**, 10,224 people had lodged an expression of interest to come to New Zealand and were declined: 4918 people for family reasons, 2457 for humanitarian reasons, 486 saying they were essential health workers, 1802

saying they were essential non-health workers, 496 Australians and 65 Tongan or Samoans.

In that same period, 2760 people were invited to apply for a visa; 1630 for family reasons, 276 for humanitarian reasons, 513 health workers, 151 essential non-health workers, 180 Australians and 10 Tongan or Samoans.

Outside New Zealand

Immigration NZ estimates that, as of May 27, 10,062 people with a current work visa who may be "ordinarily resident in New Zealand" were stuck outside of New Zealand.

They included: 2950 people with an "essential skills" visa, 2772 people with a post-study work visa, 298 people with partnership visas, 124 people who were partners of temporary visa holders, 2436 people with a variety of other work visas, 1401 people who were partners of a worker, 33 people with an investment visa, and 48 people with visas for humanitarian work.

Contact details

Please contact us should you have any questions and queries, initially by email.

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