



29 March 2021

Satish

By email: fyi-request-14767-be81d59f@requests.fyi.org.nz

File No: DOIA 2021-1632

Dear Satish

Thank you for your email of 25 February 2021, requesting the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA):

- 1. Weekly allocation of SMC Non-Priority & Priority allocation since this year (Jan 2021 up to whenever you reply to this request).*
- 2. Number of people who have switched (since this year up to whenever you reply to this request) their application from Non Priority to Priority queue based on the Income threshold or their registration.*
- 3. How many case officers are working in the Immigration Manukau branch currently and their average caseload at any given time (Aug 2020 to Dec 2020 vs 2021).*
- 4. How many Case officers were working on SMC applications when Auckland went to lockdown 3.*
- 5. What IT/Infrastructure and special arrangements immigration have worked out/working on if Covid Level changes.*
- 6. How many exceptions were granted by Immigration to consider an Application as a priority other than the current criteria of priority (High Salary and Registrations) since this year.*

Thank you for clarifying your request on 1 March 2021 as follows:

- 1. Provide the number of skilled residence (priority and non-priority) applications allocated to an Immigration Officer per week from the beginning of this year to present.*
- 2. Number of skilled residence applicants who have switched (since this year up to whenever you reply to this request) their application from Non Priority to Priority queue based on the Income threshold or their registration.*
- 3. How many Immigration Officers currently work in the Manukau office and process Skilled Migrant Category applications, and what was the average caseload for an Immigration Officer processing Skilled Migrant Category applications from August – December 2020, and from January 2021 – present?*
- 4. How many Immigration Officers were working on skilled residence applications during the recent Alert Level 3 lockdown in Auckland from 15 February 2021 – 17 February 2021?*
- 5. What IT/Infrastructure and special arrangements Immigration New Zealand have worked out/working on if Covid Level changes.*
- 6. How many exceptions were granted by Immigration New Zealand to consider a skilled*

residence application as a priority other than under the current criteria of priority (High Salary and Registrations) since the beginning of this year.

Our response

1. Provide the number of skilled residence (priority and non-priority) applications allocated to an Immigration Officer per week from the beginning of this year to present.

Please refer to Table One attached. Auckland moving to Alert Level 3 twice in February 2021 had an impact on the processing of skilled residence applications and therefore the capacity of the Immigration Officers processing these categories to be allocated new applications.

2. Number of skilled residence applicants who have switched (since this year up to whenever you reply to this request) their application from Non Priority to Priority queue based on the Income threshold or their registration.

In January 2021, 65 skilled residence applications changed from non-priority to priority due to a change in circumstance meaning the applications now meet priority criteria. In February 2021, 64 skilled residence applications changed from non-priority to priority due to a change in circumstance meaning the applications now meet priority criteria.

3. How many Immigration Officers currently work in the Manukau office and process Skilled Migrant Category applications, and what was the average caseload for an Immigration Officer processing Skilled Migrant Category applications from August – December 2020, and from January 2021 – present?

As at 3 March 2021 there were 78 Immigration Officers processing a mix of Skilled Migrant Category (SMC) and Residence from Work (RFW) applications (skilled residence applications). From August to December 2020 inclusive, the average caseload size was 26.5 skilled residence applications. From January 2021 to 3 March 2021, the average caseload size was 24.5 skilled residence applications.

4. How many Immigration Officers were working on skilled residence applications during the recent Alert Level 3 lockdown in Auckland from 15 February 2021 – 17 February 2021?

All 78 staff were working on skilled residence applications during the recent Alert Level 3 periods in the Auckland region in February 2021. However, the INZ Manukau office had limited numbers of staff processing skilled residence applications from the office and those working at home were at differing levels of capacity dependent on infrastructure and personal constraints.

5. What IT/Infrastructure and special arrangements Immigration New Zealand have worked out/working on if Covid Level changes.

INZ has plans and procedures in place to ensure business continuity in the event of an escalation in Alert Levels. All Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) people are being upgraded to a Windows 10 laptop by 19 May 2021, which enable them to connect easily when working remotely. In addition, visa processing staff can now be designated as essential workers and are able to access the office in the event of COVID Alert Level escalation.

There are recommended protocols in place to ensure there is a smooth and safe operation in processing offices under Alert Level 2. Processing staff are able to access offices and office set-ups allow for appropriate social distancing.

Under Alert Level 3, working from home is encouraged where possible. An escalation to Alert Level 3 impacts INZ's ability to allocate and process paper-based applications as these cannot be taken out of the office due to information security and privacy concerns.

In the most recent escalation to Alert Level 3 in February 2021, the Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) building was identified as a location of interest. As the INZ processing office is located in the same building, a cautious approach was taken to any staff returning to the office until site clearance was received on 3 March 2021. This was in line with Ministry of Health and MBIE guidelines. Following site clearance, Auckland staff were allowed to access offices under Alert Level 3 with appropriate Health and Safety measures in place, in order to work on paper-based applications only.

6. How many exceptions were granted by Immigration New Zealand to consider a skilled residence application as a priority other than under the current criteria of priority (High Salary and Registrations) since the beginning of this year.

As you will be aware, from Monday 24 February 2020, skilled residence applications are prioritised in the following order:

1. Principal applicants with current occupational registration (where registration is required by immigration instructions) or principal applicants who are paid an hourly rate at or above twice the median wage (from 24 February 2020 this will be NZD \$51 per hour or NZD \$106,080 a year), then;
2. All other skilled residence applications in the order we receive them.

This prioritisation criteria for SMC and RFW does not prevent immigration officers according urgency to the processing of any particular residence class visa application when the individual circumstances justify it. The employment visa escalations (EVE) process provides a mechanism to request priority processing where there are exceptional circumstances.

The number of skilled residence applications prioritised under the EVE process, (i.e. not under the skilled residence prioritisation criteria), was nine applications in January 2021 and seven applications in February 2021.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request or this response, please contact Anna McLachlan, Business Advisor, Operations Support, Immigration New Zealand at Anna.McLachlan@mbie.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely



Nicola Hogg
General Manager
Border and Visa Operations
Immigration New Zealand
Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

Table One:

Allocation information relating to skilled residence (SMC and RFW) applications

Week commencing	Priority skilled residence applications allocated	Non-priority skilled residence applications allocated
4 January 2021	47	104
11 January 2021	16	97
18 January 2021	49	114
25 January 2021	58	92
1 February 2021	41	129
9 February 2021	17	177
16 February 2021	60	17
22 February 2021	21	49
1 March 2021	35	30
8 March 2021	52	0
15 March 2021	73	49
22 March 2021	16	118

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