



28 February 2025

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DOIA-REQ-0008787

Tēnā koe Adam

Thank you for your email of 30 January 2025 to the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following:

- [1] - The number of recorded illegal migrants in New Zealand for each of the past 10 years.*
- [2] - A breakdown of these figures by visa subtype, indicating the categories with recorded non-compliance.*
- [3] - The estimated cost per refugee to New Zealand taxpayers, including:  
Initial relocation costs  
Ongoing costs over time Average annual cost per refugee.*
- [4] The average unemployment rate among refugees.*
- [5] - Whether refugees are eligible for social welfare upon arrival and, if so: The types of support available. The average annual cost of this support per refugee.*

*Additionally, I would like to request copies of all briefing papers on the Digital Nomad Visa, including any analysis regarding:*

- 6. The overstaying rate associated with this visa type.*
- 7. The impact of this visa on housing costs for domestic residents. The consideration of this with respect to total migration numbers, total population growth and the number of new build consents and the added pressures on housing and infrastructure.*
- 8. Whether holders of this visa have access to social services such as healthcare.*
- 9. Whether this visa provides access to or a fast track to permanent residence.*
- 10. The maximum length of stay permitted under this visa type.*
- 11. The direct and indirect costs to New Zealand taxpayers from this type of visa. Including the crowding out of marginal domestic renters, and the substitution of housing from long-term rentals to air BMBs.*

On 12 February 2025, MBIE has transferred Question 5 of your request to the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) in accordance with section 14 of the Act as the information requested is believed to be held by MSD.

## **Our Response**

### *Questions*

- [1] - The number of recorded illegal migrants in New Zealand for each of the past 10 years.*
- [2] - A breakdown of these figures by visa subtype, indicating the categories with recorded non-compliance.*

We have interpreted your request to mean statistics of people who are unlawfully in New Zealand. MBIE is refusing this request under section 18(f) of the Act, as the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research. In accordance with section 18A of the Act we have considered whether fixing a charge or extending the timeframe to respond to your request would assist with answering your request however it is our opinion that it would not.

We can advise that the most recent estimate of people who have overstayed their visa was from December 2017. That report estimated that there were around 14,000 individuals, who were unlawfully in New Zealand at that time. To ensure the integrity of this data, Immigration New Zealand (INZ) took a sample of approximately 2,000 people from the data set and manually investigated each client record to establish which clients were in New Zealand unlawfully. This proportion was then applied to the complete data set to get an estimate of the total number of individuals unlawfully in New Zealand. Please find a copy of this report attached to this response, attached as **Appendix A**.

There is no updated list available. MBIE has, however, developed a new methodology to calculate the number of people who are in New Zealand unlawfully. Work is currently underway to update the current estimate based on the new methodology. We expect a new estimate to be available within the next 12 months.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the MBIE website:

<https://www.mbie.govt.nz/about/open-government-and-official-information/published-official-information-act-requests>.

#### *Question*

*[3] - The estimated cost per refugee to New Zealand taxpayers, including:*

*Initial relocation costs*

*Ongoing costs over time Average annual cost per refugee.*

Within MBIE, refugee resettlement is funded by the Settlement and Integration of Refugees and Other Migrants category of the Immigration Services Multi-Category appropriation.

In 2023/24, the appropriation for this category was \$80.8m, which funded the Refugee Quota Programme, the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship category, and support for Convention Refugees. This category funds broader costs related to the settlement of refugees and migrants, including for example, costs relating to the processing of Refugee Family Support Category applications (this is a family reunification policy for refugees), refugee and protection claims, and internal support functions. The figure is MBIE's appropriation and excludes other government entities' costs relating to refugee resettlement services, including for example, costs in health, education, welfare and other social service sectors.

MBIE does not hold information on the overall cost per refugee to New Zealand taxpayers, including overtime. We are, therefore, refusing this part of your request under section 18(g) of the Act as the information requested is not held by MBIE and we have no grounds for believing that it is held by another department or Minister.

We can, however, provide initial relocation costs to New Zealand of \$9.8m for 2023/24, which includes offshore health screening and international travel for the Refugee Quota Programme, and related service delivery costs for both the Refugee Quota Programme and the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship category. The costs vary from year to year depending on the point of departure.

#### *Question 4*

*[4]- The average unemployment rate among refugees.*

MBIE does not hold any statistics on the unemployment rate of refugees which matches the definition of unemployed used by Stats NZ (defined as someone who has no paid job, is working-age, is available for work and has looked for work in the past four weeks or has a new job to start within the next four weeks). Some data on quota refugee employment, and receipt of unemployment-related benefits by

quota refugees, is published in the annual NZ Refugee Resettlement Strategy dashboards which can be accessed on the [Immigration New Zealand website](#).

Please note that we report on quota refugees only, not all refugee groups.

#### Question 6

*Additionally, I would like to request copies of all briefing papers on the Digital Nomad Visa, including any analysis regarding: The overstaying rate associated with this visa type*

There is no Digital Nomad Visa in the immigration system. The changes announced by the Government on 27 January were to visitor visa settings, to allow people on a visitor visa to work for overseas employers while visiting New Zealand. More information on the recent announcements can be found here: [Working remotely from New Zealand | Immigration New Zealand](#)

As such, we have interpreted your request as a request for 'briefing papers related to the changes to the visitor visa conditions'. Please refer to **Appendix B** for the papers in scope of your request:

#	Date	Description/Title
1	31 July 2024	Briefing 2425-0458: Initial advice on immigration settings for Boosting the Tech Sector
2	11 October 2024	Briefing REQ-004360: Remote work for visitor visa holders
3	11 December 2024	Briefing REQ-0004637: Immigration New Zealand Operational Manual: Working remotely on a visitor visa

Please note some information has been withheld under the following sections of the Act:

- 6(c), to prevent prejudice to the maintenance of the law, including the prevention, investigation, and detection of offences and the right to a fair trial;
- 9(2)(f)(iv), to maintain the constitutional conventions that for the time being, protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials;
- 9(2)(g)(i), to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any public service agency or organisation in the course of their duty; and
- 9(2)(i), to enable a Minister of the Crown or any public service agency holding the information to carry out, without prejudice or disadvantage, commercial activities.
- Section 18(d), as the information is, or soon will be, publicly available.

I do not consider that the withholding of this information is outweighed by public interest considerations in making the information available.

#### Questions 7 and 11

*The impact of this visa on housing costs for domestic residents. The consideration of this with respect to total migration numbers, total population growth and the number of new build consents and the added pressures on housing and infrastructure.*

*The direct and indirect costs to New Zealand taxpayers from this type of visa. Including the crowding out of marginal domestic renters, and the substitution of housing from long-term rentals to air BMBs.*

These parts of your request are refused under section 18(e) of the Act as the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

The changes to visitor visa conditions are expected to have a very modest impact on overall visitor numbers.

*Question 8*

*Whether holders of this visa have access to social services such as healthcare.*

People on visitor visas do not have access to New Zealand's social services, such as healthcare.

*Question 9*

*Whether this visa provides access to or a fast track to permanent residence.*

Visitor visas do not provide access or a fast track to permanent residence.

*Question 10*

*The maximum length of stay permitted under this visa type.*

The standard visitor visa conditions apply to maximum duration. More information on visitor visa settings can be found at the following links:

- [Visitor Visa | Immigration New Zealand](#)
- [Operational Manual - Immigration New Zealand. Issue Date: 3 February 2025](#)  
[Operational Manual - Immigration New Zealand. Issue Date: 22 August 2016](#)

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request or this response, please contact [inzoias@mbie.govt.nz](mailto:inzoias@mbie.govt.nz).

Nāku noa, nā



Polly Vowles

**Manager, Immigration (Skills and Residence)**

Labour Science and Enterprise, MBIE