

New Zealand Productivity Commission
Te Kōmihana Whai Hua o Aotearoa

International migration to New Zealand

Historical themes & trends

Working paper 2021/04



NEW ZEALAND
PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION
Te Kōmihana Whai Hua o Aotearoa



New Zealand Productivity Commission
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International migration to New Zealand: Historical themes & trends

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Note: This working paper is intended both to promote informed debate about immigration policy and to outline the thinking and analysis that has underpinned the New Zealand Productivity Commission's preliminary findings and recommendations for its immigration inquiry. It is a draft and one of six supplementary reports, that may change and be updated, as the Commission prepares its final advice to the Government for April 2022.

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NZ Productivity Commission

1. The Commission that pursues abundance for New Zealand.

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Key points

- The Treaty of Waitangi enabled significant immigration into New Zealand, but the scale and pace of the subsequent inflows surprised Māori and rapidly undermined their position. The Treaty has been absent from official debate over immigration policy until recently, and there are diverging views between the Crown and Māori leaders and scholars about the role of the Treaty in immigration policy.
- For much of modern New Zealand's history, immigration policy has had a strong labour market focus, aiming to fill current shortages of workers. Reforms from the mid-1980s and in the early 1990s sought to put more weight on immigration's contribution to economic growth, but implementation problems (especially difficulties managing the volumes of migrants and concerns about skills mismatches) saw a shift in policy back towards promoting labour market integration.
- Immigration has only been the main driver of New Zealand's population growth in specific periods – the 1860s and 1870s and, in recent years, before the Covid-19 pandemic. For the remainder of the country's colonial and post-colonial history, population growth was driven primarily by natural increase.
- Integration of migrants has been an enduring theme and goal of migration policy for much of this country's history. Up until the 1980s, policy explicitly sought to promote assimilation into New Zealand society (and the dominant Pākehā norms) by excluding or tightly controlling the entry of people from non-British or non-northern European backgrounds. More recent policies have encouraged integration by selecting permanent migrants based on their likely success in getting a job. One result has been a large increase in the ethnic diversity of permanent migrants, with significant growth in the number of migrants from China, India and other parts of Asia over the 1990s.
- Public debate over immigration often focuses on permanent migration, where migrants broadly enjoy the same rights as citizens. However, measured by volumes, temporary migration has in recent years (pre-Covid) been the dominant feature of New Zealand's system and many temporary migrants have more limited rights than residents or citizens. The numerical shift to temporary migration means that concerns about integration now effectively only apply to a minority of migrants.
- Concern about the ability of New Zealand's society and economy to absorb large numbers of migrants has been a recurring theme in public debate over immigration in this country. Pressures on housing, public services and employment have been particularly prominent areas of public concern, although migrants may have been scapegoats for wider policy failures. Since the 1990s, policy has not obviously taken "absorptive capacity" into account, with high targets set for permanent residents and high volumes of temporary migrants admitted by international standards.
- Net migration has always been sensitive to New Zealand's economic circumstances and relative economic performance, with outflows during downturns. Since the 1960s, this country has experienced both high inward and outward flows of people, with large-scale emigration of New Zealanders, primarily to Australia. New Zealand has had some of the highest per capita rates of both inward and outward migration in the OECD.

1 Introduction

The Productivity Commission has been asked by the Government to examine New Zealand's immigration system, and make recommendations that would best facilitate its contribution to long-term economic growth and the wellbeing of New Zealanders.

Policy does not exist in a vacuum. It is the result of current political, economic and social pressures, but also historical trends and developments. In order to make recommendations about the future, it is important to understand the origins of current policy and the issues that this country has faced in the past. This working paper aims to identify common or recurring themes in New Zealand's immigration policy and key turning points, and answer the following questions of relevance to the inquiry:

- What influence has the Treaty of Waitangi had over immigration policy, and how has its role been understood in the past?
- Who migrated to New Zealand, and why did they come?
- What objectives have New Zealand Governments sought to achieve through immigration policy?
- What have been the notable features of migration into and out of New Zealand since the signing of the Treaty, and how and why have these patterns changed?

2 Immigration, the Treaty and the founding of modern New Zealand

The Terms of Reference for the inquiry ask the Productivity Commission to consider how “the Crown can honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the mana of Māori in its development and application of immigration policy.” This section considers the role that immigration played in the signing of the Treaty, the impact of subsequent immigration on Māori, and recent debate over the place of the Treaty in immigration policy.

Immigration was a factor behind the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi

The arrival of non-Māori people in Aotearoa New Zealand in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and the resulting disruptions, was one reason behind the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. The preambular text of the Treaty makes this clear:

Her Majesty Victoria Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland regarding with Her Royal Favour the Native Chiefs and Tribes of New Zealand and anxious to protect their just Rights and Property and to secure to them the enjoyment of Peace and Good Order has deemed it necessary in consequence of the great number of Her Majesty’s Subjects who have already settled in New Zealand and the rapid extension of Emigration both from Europe and Australia which is still in progress to constitute and appoint a functionary properly authorised to treaty with the Aborigines of New Zealand for the recognition of Her Majesty’s Sovereign authority over the whole or any part of those islands... (English version of the Treaty of Waitangi)

In its Wai 1040 report, the Waitangi Tribunal (2014, p. 528) commented that, to the Chiefs who signed the Treaty, it:

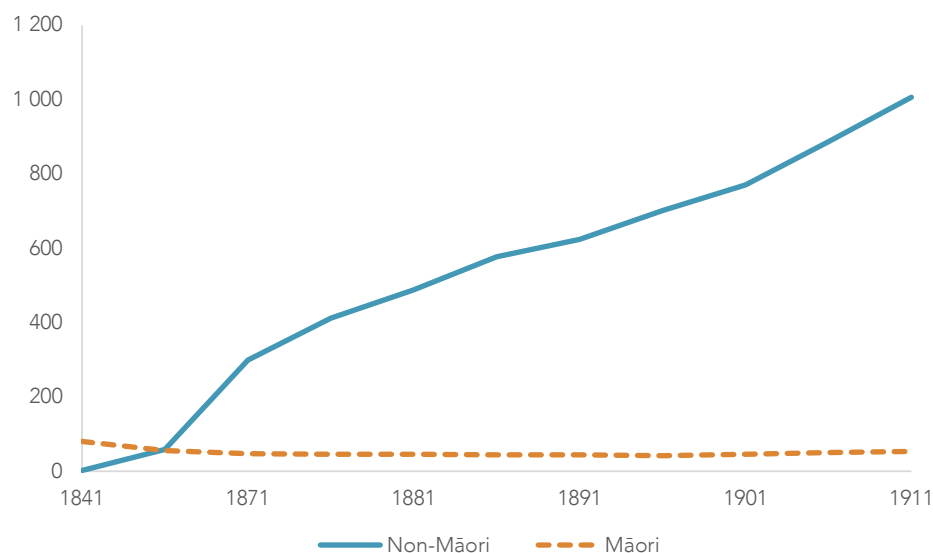
...seemed to offer them peace and prosperity, protection of their lands and other taonga, the return of lands they believed Europeans had wrongly claimed, **security from mass immigration** and settler aggression, protection from the French, and a guarantee of their ongoing independence and rangatiratanga [emphasis added].

The Treaty was not the first time Chiefs had formally raised questions about immigration. In an 1831 petition to William IV, 13 Ngāpuhi rangatira sought (among other things) the King’s assistance in disciplining troublesome British residents:

And if any of thy people should be troublesome or vicious towards us (for some persons are living here who have run away from ships) we pray thee to be angry with them that they may be obedient, lest the anger of the people of this land fall upon them. (English translation, cited in Waitangi Tribunal, 2014, p. 114)

Immigration overwhelmed the Māori population

A number of scholars have argued that, in signing the Treaty, the Chiefs expected orderly and manageable future levels of migration that would protect their “demographic dominance” (Kukutai & Rata, 2017, p. 29). However, large-scale immigration in the wake of the signing of the Treaty rapidly and radically changed the size and composition of New Zealand’s population. At the time of the signing, Māori outnumbered non-Māori by 40 to 1, but within 19 years, non-Māori were the majority (Briggs, 2003, p. 7).

Figure 2.1 New Zealand's population by ethnicity (thousands of people)

Source: Pool & Jackson (2018a).

These large arrivals created shock among the Māori population. Fry and Wilson (2018, p. 178) cite reports of Māori responses to European arrivals to illustrate their astonishment and horror:

When the first emigrant ships arrived at Port Nicholson, and landed their hundreds of colonists, the Natives are said to have wept at the sight. They had been told, but had not believed, that the foreigners were coming to settle in great numbers upon the land which the agent of the Colonising Company had just acquired. They had not realised to themselves that their country was about to be occupied by a civilised race in such force as to be able to hold its ground in spite of Native resistance.

Te Āti Awa leader, Te Kakapi-o-te-rangi Te Wharepōuri, is also reported as expressing surprise and worry to Edward Wakefield in 1840 about the volumes and character of British settlers:

I know that we sold you the land, and that no more White people have come to take it than you told me. But I thought you were telling lies, and that you had not so many followers. I thought you would have nine or ten... I thought that I could get one placed at each pa, as a White man to barter with the people and keep us well supplied with arms and clothing; and that I should be able to keep these White men under my hand and regulate their trade myself. But I see that every shop holds two hundred, and I believe, now, that you have more coming. They are well armed; and they are strong of heart, for they have begun to build their houses without talking. They will be too strong for us; my heart is dark. (Bennion & Boyd, 1994, p. 5)

Immigration contributed to changing demographics, not just by adding people to the non-Māori population, but also through the introduction of infectious diseases, which raised mortality rates and lowered fertility rates among Māori (Pool, 2014). The Māori population did not start growing again until the turn of the 20th century.

Government support for immigration was intended, at least in part, to ensure Pākehā dominance and to break the back of Māori resistance during the New Zealand Wars. A 1946 parliamentary report into population policy noted that the central government had become actively involved in immigration in the 1860s in "recognition that peace in the North Island could be maintained only if a larger European population were available so that strong settlements in certain districts could be founded" (New Zealand House of Representatives, 1946, p. 24).

Growing debate over the role of the Treaty in immigration policy

The Treaty was largely absent from official discussion of immigration policy until the 1990s. The introduction of the “points-based” system for assessing permanent migrant applicants in 1991 brought the issue of the Treaty to the fore. The Auckland District Māori Council made a claim to the Waitangi Tribunal in 1991, arguing that:

- the Crown had failed to adequately consult with Māori over the proposed policy changes; and
- the proposed changes were inconsistent with the principles of the Treaty.¹

The claim did not proceed to a hearing, in part because preparatory research conducted for the Tribunal concluded that there was no clear legal standard of what constituted “adequate” consultation.

More influential was a 1993 article by University of Auckland professor, Ranginui Walker, which argued that the “original charter for immigration into New Zealand is in the preamble of the Treaty of Waitangi” (Walker, 1993, p. 87). According to Walker, this allowed “immigration into New Zealand from the countries nominated in the preamble of the Treaty, namely Europe, Australia and the United Kingdom”, but “any variation of that agreement” would require consultation with the Crown’s Treaty partner (ibid).

Senior Māori leaders have picked up Walker’s characterisation of the Treaty. Dame Tariana Turia memorably referred to the Treaty as “the first immigration policy document for this nation.” Former President of the Māori Women’s Welfare League, Dame Mira Százy, observed that “in signing the Treaty, Māori took their first, and to date last, decision on the immigration policy of this country. No further consideration has been given to Māori as to who else should live upon our land” (The Māori Party, 2007). The Māori Party unsuccessfully sought in 2009 to include a reference to the Treaty in new immigration legislation, to ensure that Māori as Treaty partners are “consulted on every aspect concerning migrants who wish to reside here” (Flavell, 2009).

Walker also expressed concern about the high numbers of migrants being welcomed in during a period of very high Māori unemployment and the heavy emphasis placed on multiculturalism in the 1986 immigration policy review, which he interpreted as “a direct negation of the Māori assertion of the primacy of biculturalism” (ibid, p. 88). Other scholars have since echoed Walker’s criticism that immigration policy and implementation gives no recognition of the Treaty partnership (Kukutai & Rata, 2017).

For its part, the Crown has asserted that: it did not recognise “as a general principle that it has a formal duty to consult with the Māori people in matters where their rights under the Treaty of Waitangi are, or may be, involved” (Stevenson, 1992, p. 6); and the Executive has sovereignty under Article 1, which includes the right to set migration policy (Fry & Wilson, 2018).

Advice provided to the Department of Labour by the Institute of Policy Studies in 2005 on the relevance of the Treaty to immigration policy concluded “the Treaty of Waitangi has only limited relevance for the way in which [immigration policy and process] is carried out on a day to day basis”, with two possible exceptions:

- First, it can be argued that the Government has an overarching protective responsibility that would require it to consider the effect of extreme changes in immigration flows on the cultural strength of Māori. It is possible that in an extraordinary case a responsibility of this kind would be enforced by the courts.
- Second, it could be argued that there is a need to think about Māori concepts of whanau and family connection when setting the policy for determining the level of family connection that is sufficient to enable a person to gain entry to New Zealand. This would not be done to create any kind of differential category for Māori who are not citizens, but to ensure that the general settings in fact

¹ The Auckland District Māori Council had also submitted against changes to immigration policy in 1973, although not on Treaty grounds. Their submission argued that immigration should be suspended until the housing shortage of the period had been resolved (Bennion & Boyd, 1994, p. 30).

met the social need, in the New Zealand context, that they were designed to address” (White, 2005, p. 2).

The Government did seek to consult with Māori over immigration policy, convening a hui in 2001 with participants such as Ranginui Walker, Pauline Tangiora, Atareta Poananga, Amster Reedy, Sir Paul Reeves, Eru Potaka-Dewes, Annette Sykes, the Hon Tuariki Delamere, Moana Jackson, Jason Fox and others. Opinions differed about the value of the exercise. Dame Tariana Turia (2007) later commented that “a very useful report was written – a report that never saw the light of day.” However, Lianne Dalziel (2009), who had been Minister of Immigration during the hui, described it as “a complete and utter disaster” because “there was not a unified view from those around the table.”

In recent years, issues of the relationship between the Treaty and immigration, and the effects of immigration on Māori, have been advanced most prominently by The Māori Party. In their 2017 policy paper, the party stated that:

Our desire is for every new immigrant and refugee to be welcomed to Aotearoa with a pōwhiri and over time, to have a basic understanding of te reo and Māori and culture. We also support immigration policy that respects Māori as tangata whenua of Aotearoa, the rights guaranteed to them under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and acknowledges the mana and mātauranga that people immigrating to Aotearoa bring with them. (The Māori Party, 2017)

The policy paper noted that that “facilitating the movement of people between countries is part and parcel of the reality of our world today”, and concluded that “[w]e should not be reducing people to numbers or exclusion on the basis of populist opinion” (ibid). Specific policy proposals in the paper included:

- amending the Immigration Act “to recognise the status of tangata whenua and our tikanga”;
- amending the Citizenship Act to “incorporate upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the Oath of Citizenship”;
- introducing a “Te Tiriti o Waitangi programme as a prerequisite to gaining citizenship, meeting language and settlement requirements” and a compulsory Treaty education programme for all international students; and
- expanding working holiday schemes “to support greater rangatahi participation in overseas work holiday exchanges and broaden appeal to international youth wanting to experience Māori culture” (ibid).

The Māori Party did not put forward a separate immigration policy in 2020, but its Whanau Build statement proposed that immigration “be curbed until the supply side of housing meets the demand side” (The Māori Party, 2020).

3 Who came to New Zealand?

Large-scale immigration following the signing of the Treaty transformed New Zealand. Government policy affected the types of people who came. For much of post-Treaty history, policy encouraged a relatively narrow range of peoples to come to New Zealand. Changes in the 1980s and 1990s led to dramatic changes in the diversity of New Zealand's migrant intake.

For most of recent history, migrants were overwhelmingly British and European

Up until the 1980s, the vast majority of immigrants to New Zealand were British or Irish. For example,

- 93% of immigrants who arrived between November 1871 to June 1892 were English, Irish or Scottish;
- 92% of net permanent immigrants between 1922 and 1928 were from the UK; and
- over two-thirds of permanent migrants between 1946 and 1960 were from the UK or Ireland (Mitchell, 2003, p. 21; New Zealand House of Representatives, 1946, p. 28).

This heavy reliance on British migrants was the result of government policy (discussed below) and cultural norms. These cultural norms included the view that New Zealand was an extension of Britain ("Britain of the South Seas"), or part of a wider British "family", and a strong weight was placed on assimilation and integration into New Zealand Pākehā society as a condition of entry.

Outward migration to countries like New Zealand sometimes also suited the interests of the British Government, which sought to ease domestic pressures resulting from poor economic circumstances, perceived excess population and the return of servicemen home after World War One (Constantine, 1990).²

This pattern was encouraged by discriminatory laws and policies

Early government policy explicitly encouraged European immigration and discouraged entry from other countries. An Immigration Board was established in England in 1864 with a grant of £200 000 to promote migration, and both the provincial and central governments offered inducements in the forms of money and land grants.

The tempo of immigration and public support accelerated in the 1870s. The Government appointed an Agent General in 1871 in London to promote immigration to New Zealand and offered free passage to European migrants in 1873. Up to £1 000 000 (around \$146 million in 2021) was authorised by the 1870 Immigration and Public Works Act for immigration subsidies (Fry & Wilson, 2018, p. 28).³ From the 1870s to the 1890s, 70–86% of immigrants received some form of government support to move (Hawke, 1985).

Although assisted migration schemes came and went over the next 100 years, they were consistently targeted towards British, Irish and European countries up until the last scheme was closed in the 1970s. Of the over 82 000 people who were assisted or subsidised to move to New Zealand in the post-World War Two scheme, 93% were British and 4% Dutch. The remainder were from Austria, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Greece and other European countries (Bellamy, 2008, p. 7). Assisted migration schemes were typically expanded to non-British European peoples when labour demand in New Zealand was especially high, but these groups were also "the first to be cut... when the demand for labour receded" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 16).

² Under Britain's 1922 Empire Settlement Act, the costs of resettlement were shared between the British and participating Dominion governments (McLintock, 1966).

³ Conversion to 2021 NZD undertaken using the Reserve Bank of New Zealand's inflation calculator, comparing the second quarters of 1870 and 2021.

There were some minor exceptions in the initial years following the Treaty's signing. For example, the Otago Provincial Government, with support from commercial interests, invited Chinese miners from Australia and China during the 1860s to work and improve yields on local goldfields (McKinnon, 1996).

But starting from the 1880s and continuing up until the 1920s, a series of laws and policies were introduced to restrict the entry and naturalisation of people from non-European countries, especially China. The numbers of Chinese people who could enter New Zealand were limited and poll taxes were imposed (**Box 1**). These restrictions were tightened over time, with additional barriers introduced later (eg, English language reading tests, fingerprinting).

Box 1 Restrictions against Chinese immigrants, 1881–96

Year	Tonnage ratio	Tax per head
1881	A vessel could land only 1 Chinese person per 10 tons vessel weight.	£10 (\$1 755 in 2021) was to be paid in respect of every such person landed.
1888	1 per 100 tons vessel weight.	As above.
1896	1 per 200 tons vessel weight.	£100 (\$17 551 in 2021).

Source: McKinnon (1996, p. 26). Monetary conversions undertaken using the Reserve Bank of New Zealand's inflation calculator.

The poll taxes were not applied after 1934 and were formally abolished in 1944. However, government policy had an explicitly racist tone up into the post-war period, as can be seen in a 1953 memorandum from the Department of External Affairs (the predecessor to today's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade):

Our immigration is based firmly on the principle that we are and intend to remain a country of European development. It is inevitably discriminatory against Asians – indeed against all persons who are not wholly of European race and colour. Whereas we have done much to encourage immigration from Europe, we do everything to discourage it from Asia. (Greif, 1995, p. 39)

In contrast, immigration legislation effectively allowed British and Irish citizens to enter New Zealand without a permit up until 1974.⁴

Large increases in diversity came mainly with the move to a skills- and points-based policy

New Zealand's post-war migrants remained predominantly British or Irish until the 1970s, with some notable exceptions. One was the Dutch, over 28 000 of whom arrived between 1951 and 1968 (van der Pas & Poot, 2011, p. 5). This migration was actively promoted by both the Dutch and New Zealand Governments during the 1950s. Candidates were selected for their skills and potential economic contribution, were bonded, and encouraged to become naturalised. Dutch migrants integrated so rapidly that they were later described as "invisible" immigrants (ibid, p. 1) There were also arrivals in the post-World War Two period from countries outside the traditionally favoured sources (eg, Poles in the 1940s, Hungarians in the 1950s, Vietnamese in the 1970s), but their numbers were small and the intakes were largely humanitarian in nature.

Perhaps the most visible exception prior to the 1980s was people from Pacific Islands nations, whose entry was encouraged by the Government and the manufacturing sector, albeit on the assumption that much of this migration would be purely temporary.⁵ Large-scale migration began in the 1960s, and by

⁴ The 1920 Immigration Restriction Amendment Act created a right of free entry for people of British or Irish birth or descent. All other nationalities were only allowed in by Ministerial discretion. 1964 legislation required that all non-New Zealand citizens required a permit to enter, but British and Irish citizens were exempted and Australians had free rights of entry by longstanding conventions (later formalised in the 1973 Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement).

⁵ Belich notes that the assistance schemes offered for Samoan, Tongan and Fijians "focused on young men and women, and it was initially assumed that their stay would be temporary – a "guest worker" system similar to that of the Turks in West Germany" (2001, p. 534).

the mid-1970s there were around 60 000 Pacific Islanders living in New Zealand. Many came from countries with which New Zealand has special constitutional arrangements and whose people had the right to freely enter and remain here (eg, the Cook Islands, Tokelau and Niue). Entry to New Zealand by other Pacific peoples was more tightly controlled.

However, the big change in New Zealand's immigrant intakes came in the 1980s and 1990s, where immigration policy reforms removed the earlier preferences for "traditional source countries" and placed more emphasis on skills. Reforms in 1986 explicitly sought to "enrich the multicultural fabric of New Zealand society" (Burke, 1986, p. 10). Intakes from Asian countries grew dramatically (Figure 3.1), and the share of all permanent and long-term migrants from China and India grew from around 1% in 1990 to just under one-fifth in 2001 (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.1 Permanent and long-term arrivals by areas of residence

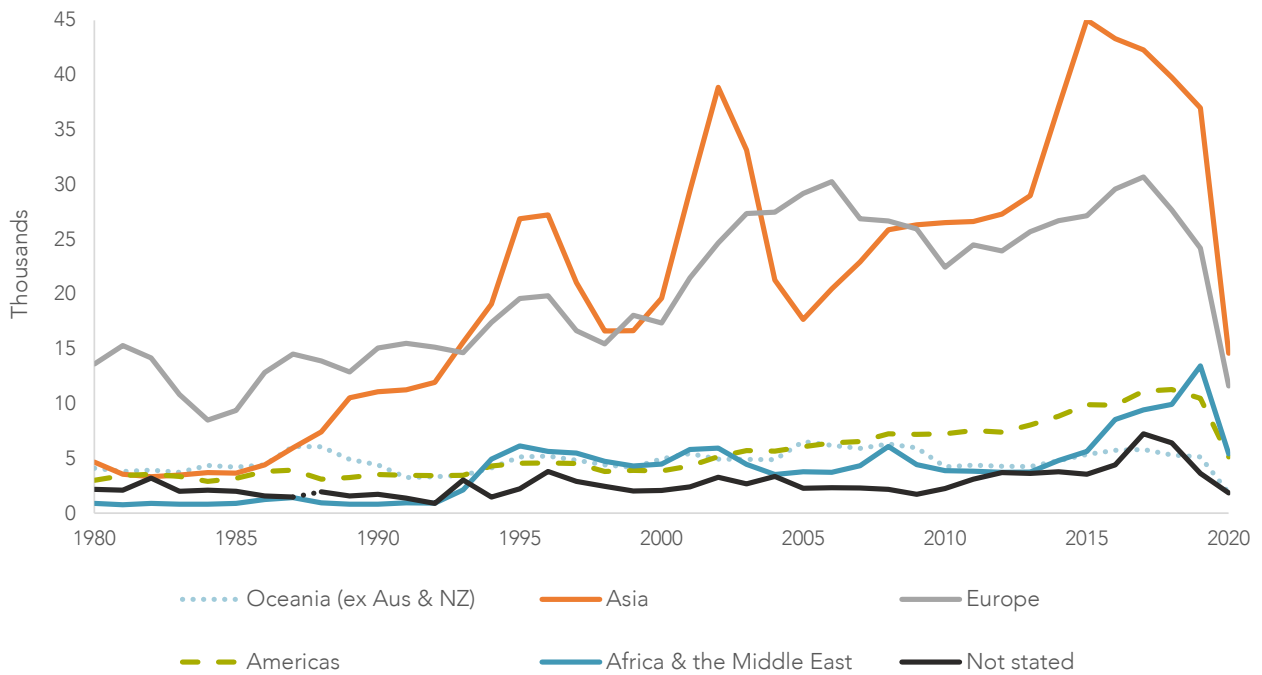
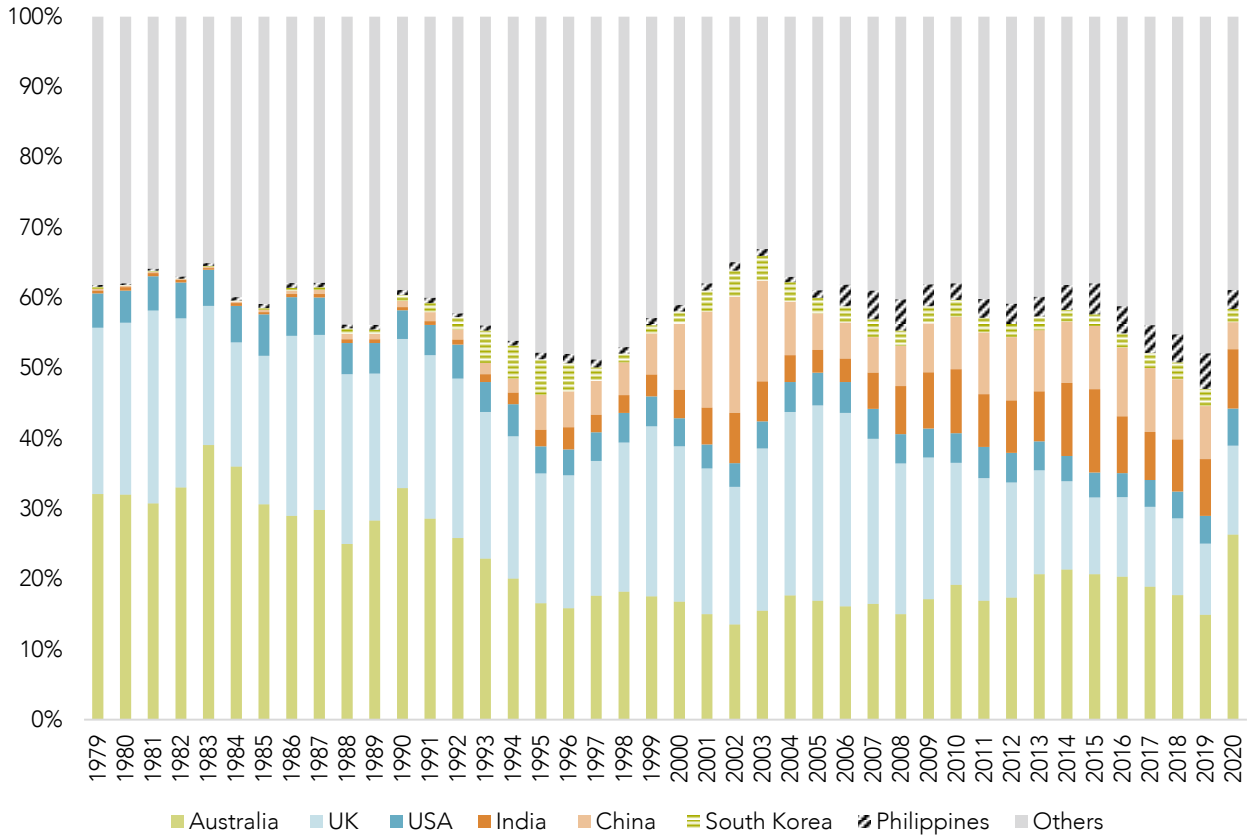


Figure 3.2 Distribution of permanent and long-term migrants by country of residence

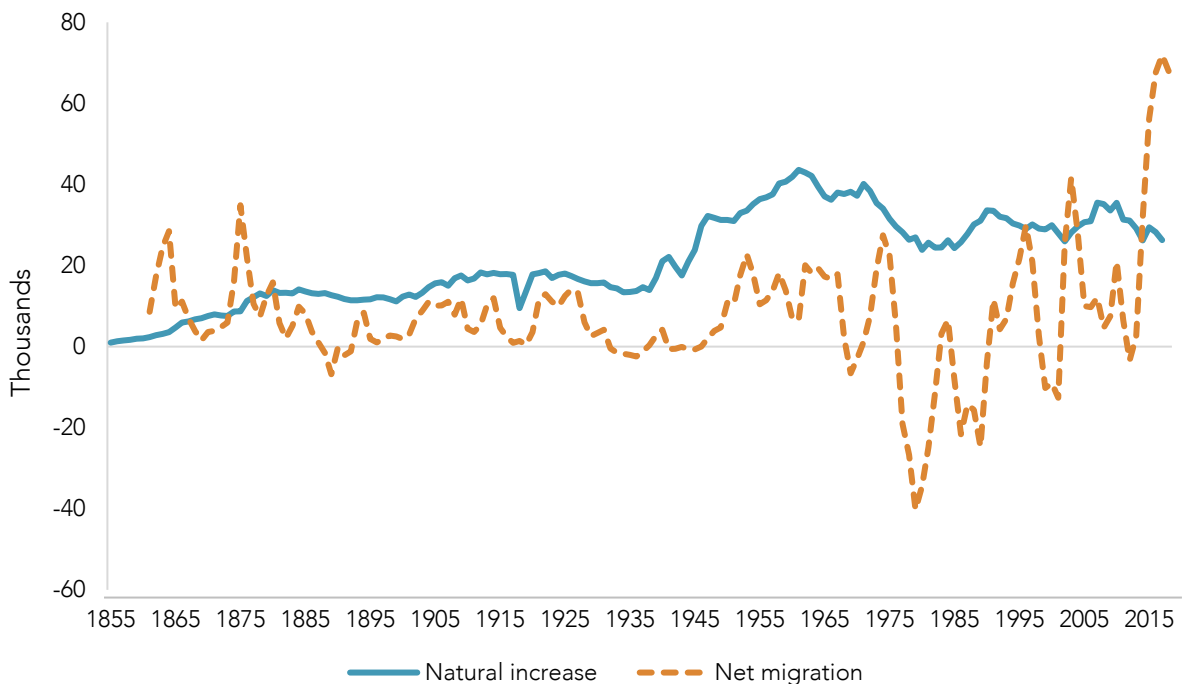


Source: NZPC analysis of Stats NZ data (2021b).

Immigration’s contribution to population growth has been sporadic

Although net migration has been a significant driver of New Zealand’s population growth in recent years, this is a relatively new phenomenon. After the surges of immigration in the 1860s and 1870s, the majority of population growth over the 1876–2000 period was due to natural increase (Pool, 2015).

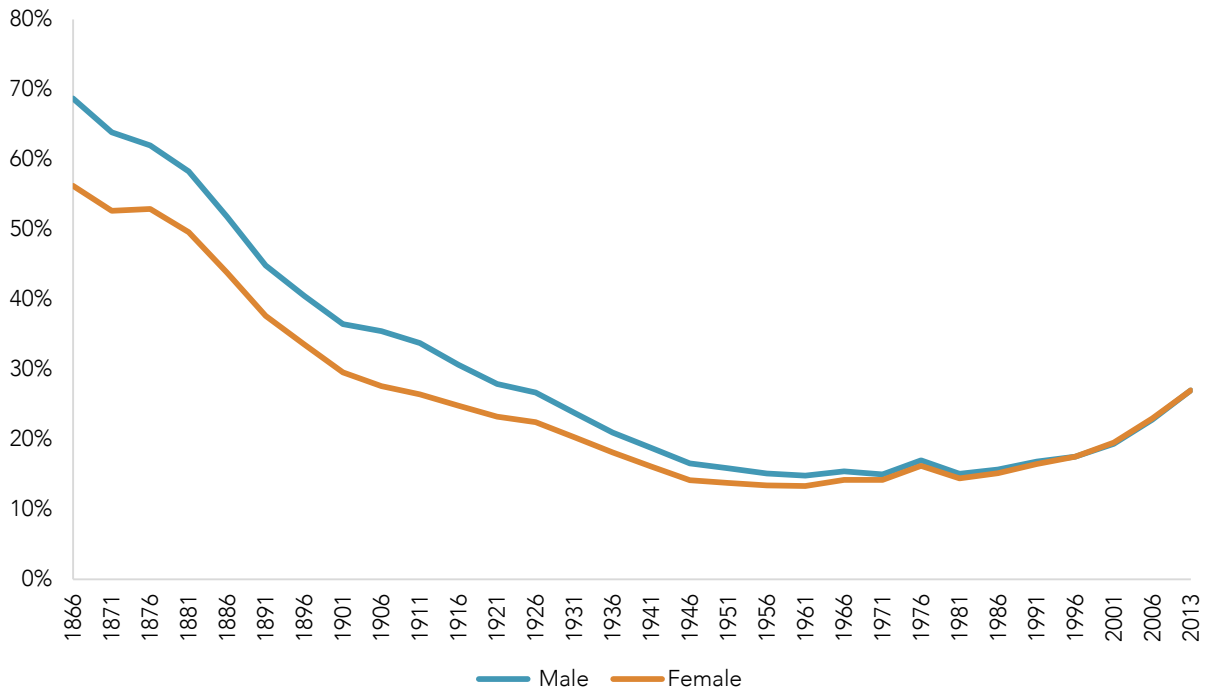
Figure 3.3 Components of population growth



Source: Data1850 (2019).

One result of the dominance of natural increase is that the share of overseas-born residents steadily fell up until the mid-1960s (Figure 3.4). Despite this, New Zealand had a comparatively high share of foreign-born people well into the mid-20th century. In the 1930s, the proportion of New Zealand's population that was born overseas was higher than equivalents in England and Wales, France and the US (Davis, 1974, p. 100).

Figure 3.4 Overseas-born as a proportion of the New Zealand population, by gender



Source: Pool & Jackson (2018b).

4 Movements and motivations

The reasons for coming to, staying in, and leaving New Zealand have changed over time. Movements have increasingly included New Zealanders, substantial numbers of whom have emigrated, mainly to Australia. Since the 1960s, New Zealand has become a country of both high inward and high outward migration.

A search for better opportunities

Immigration is typically driven by the desire to improve one's circumstances and seek a better life. In the latter half of the 19th century (when much of this country's initial Pākehā immigration occurred), New Zealand offered a range of advantages over life in Britain. These included high incomes, a relatively flexible and fluid social structure, good nutrition, and comparatively high levels of health measured by factors such as longevity and infant mortality rates (Easton, 2020). Perhaps more than anything else, New Zealand offered opportunities for agency, security and advancement, as Simpson (1997, p. 209) says of the British migrants during the 1870s.

They wanted access to land, the availability of smallholdings and allotments, a home from which they could not be evicted on the whim of a landlord, and some hope of security in their old age from the shadow of the hated Poor Laws and the workhouse. And like all the rest who had come, they wanted autonomy in their lives, and a future for their children which promised more than it had for them.

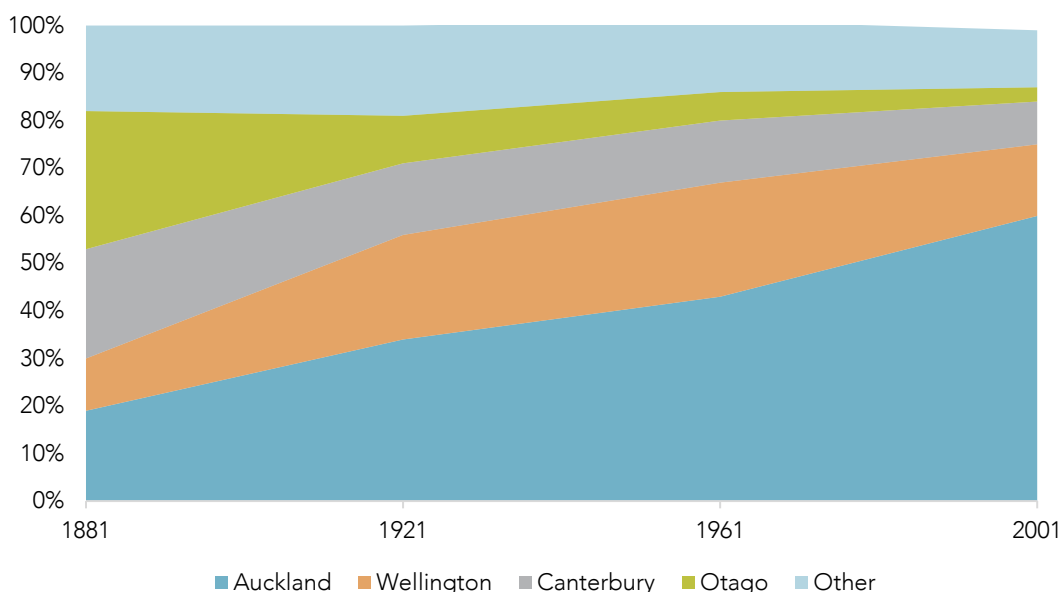
Over time, chain migration also played an important role in attracting people to New Zealand. Once one family member had moved and successfully settled, other family members then sought to follow.

New Zealand continued to offer high incomes and living standards in the post-World War Two period (as well as being free from the destruction of war), but this advantage against other developed nations quickly eroded.

Migrants have followed New Zealand's shifting economic centre of gravity

In recent years, Auckland has been the preferred destination for many immigrants. However, in the decades following the signing of the Treaty, many migrants settled in the South Island, reflecting the attractions there of farming and the gold rush and the disruptions in the North Island caused by the New Zealand Wars (Pool, 2015).

Figure 4.1 Distribution (%) of the male overseas-born population by region



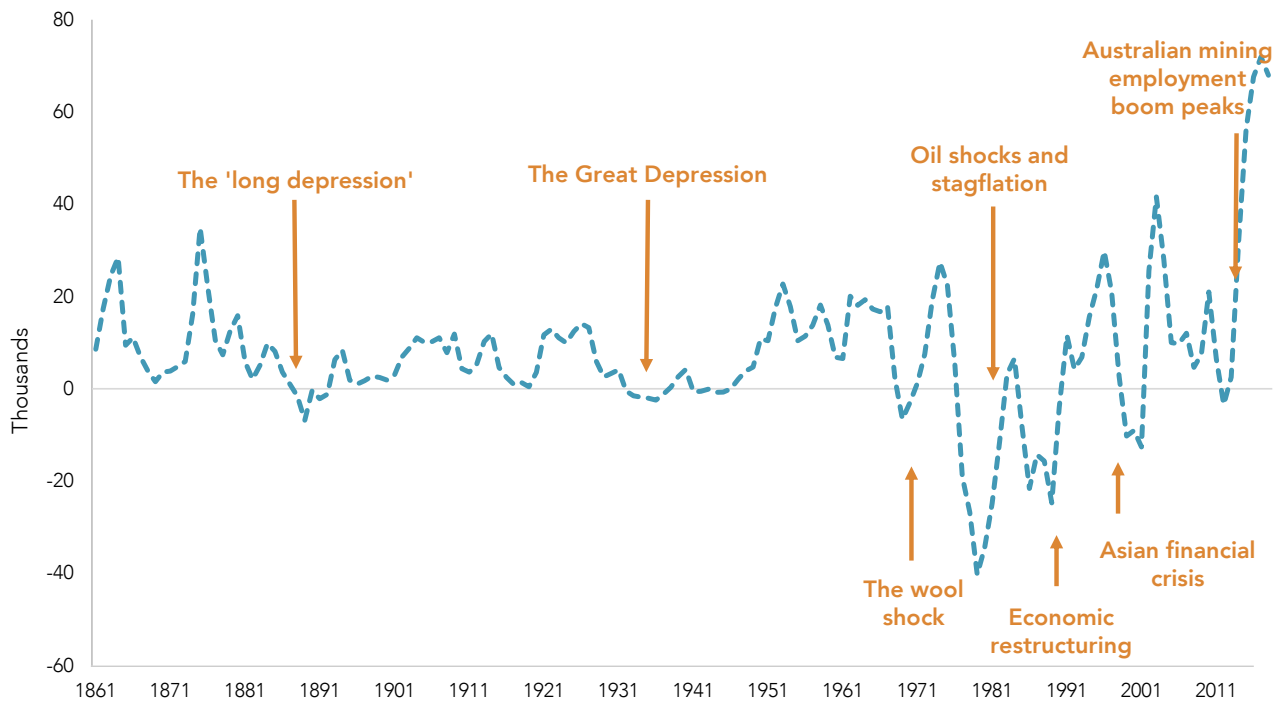
Source: Pool (2015, p. 54).

Note: Regions are 'provinces', historically, or their approximations in recent years. Male and female geographical distributions are very similar.

Net migration has always been sensitive to downturns and relative economic performance...

However, the advantages offered by New Zealand were always relative and migration has been sensitive to deteriorating local circumstances. Throughout this country's history, there have been net outflows of people when the local economy was doing poorly, or when New Zealand's performance lagged those of other countries, especially Australia (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Net migration and economic shocks

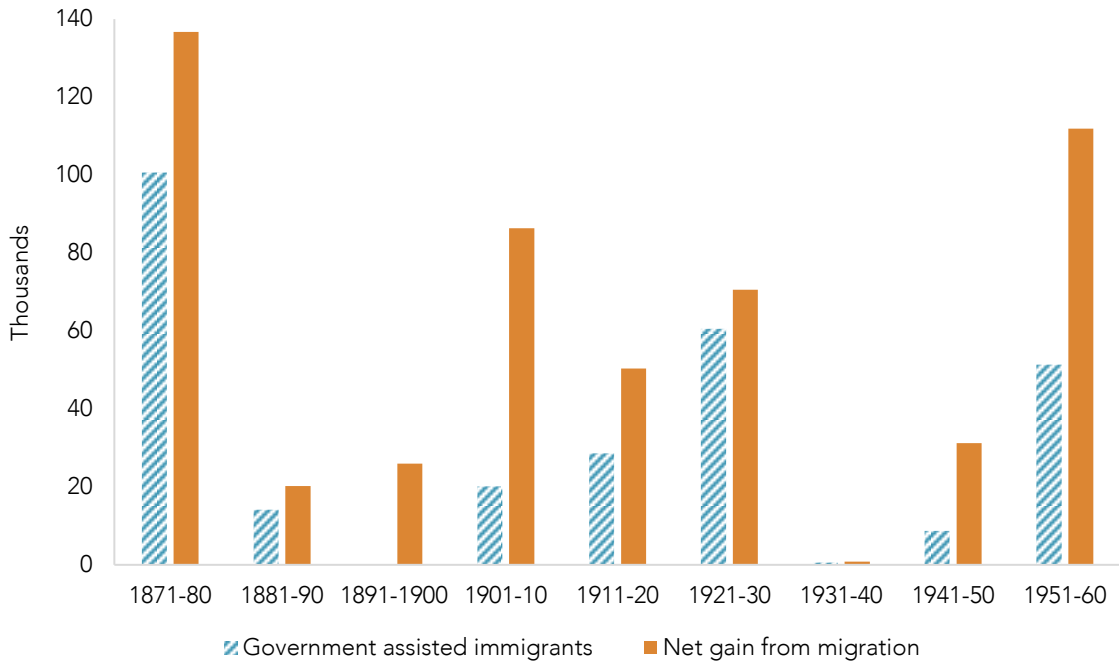


Source: NZPC analysis of Data1850 (2019).

Government policy changes probably amplified the sensitivity of net migration to economic circumstances. Assisted migration schemes were closed between 1891 and 1903 and between 1927 and 1947 – both periods of economic downturn (and, in the latter case, war). The Government also tightened entry criteria in 1974 in response to large inflows and deteriorating economic performance. Skills shortage lists could also be expanded or tightened, depending on economic conditions. For example, Mitchell (2003, p. 90) notes that in December 1974:

...the list contained 179 occupations, but in late 1975 as immigrant numbers were considered too high, it was reduced to 53 and then 32 occupations. In September 1976, as New Zealand faced the problem of net emigration, the list was expanded to 120 occupations, and in May 1977 when New Zealand had a worrying level of net emigration, it included 243.

Figure 4.3 Assisted migrants and net migration gain, 1871–1960

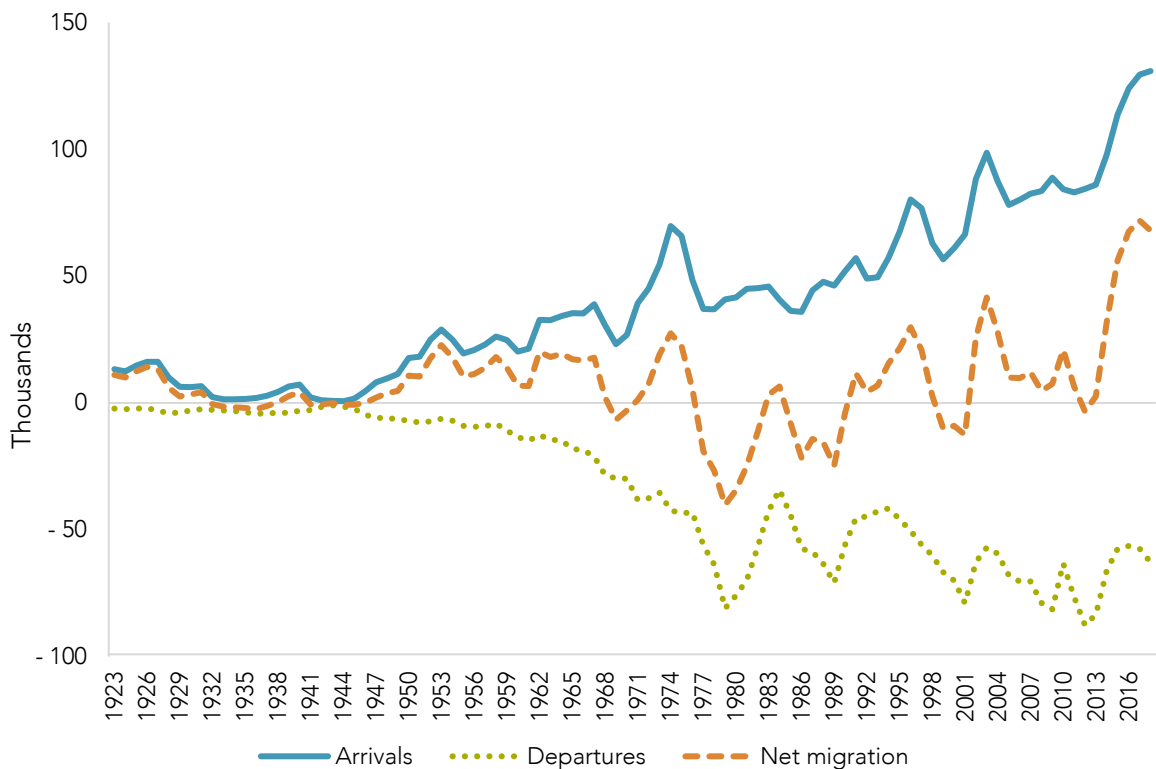


Source: McLintock (1966).

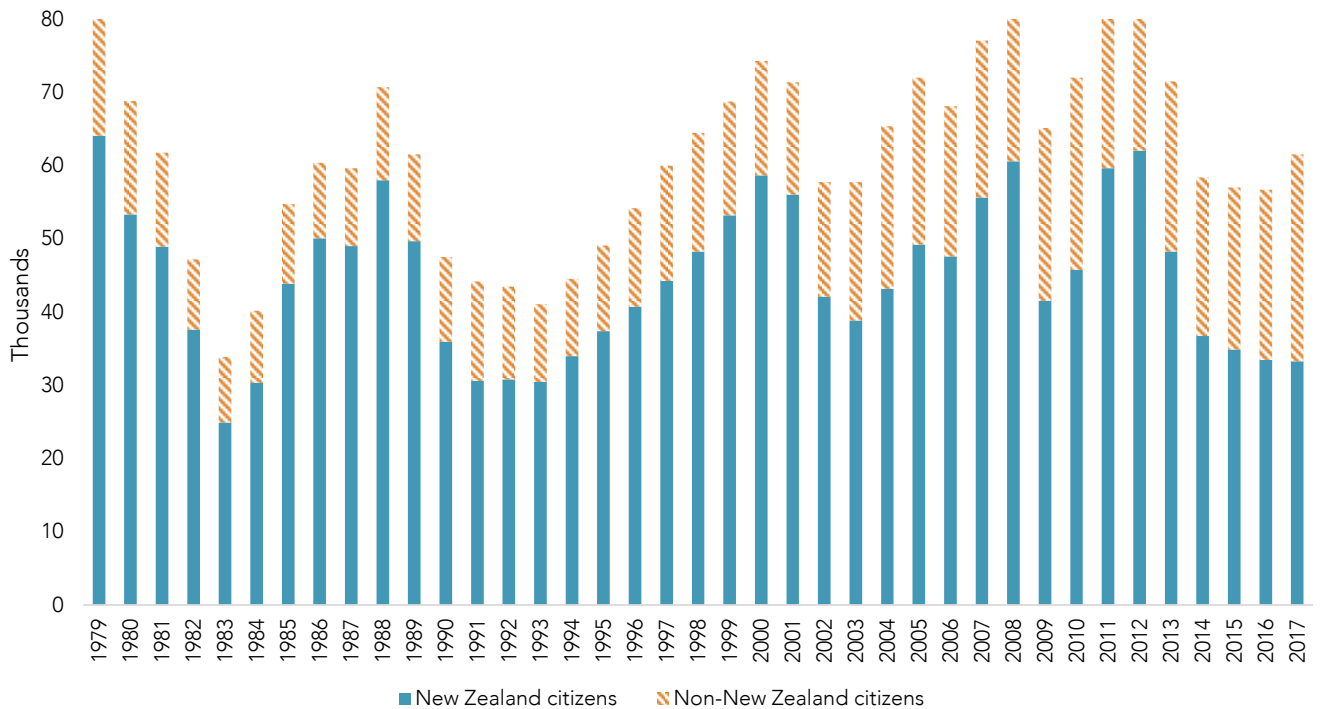
...but especially from the 1960s

From the 1960s onwards, the nature and volume of immigration changed, with outward migration (especially of New Zealanders) becoming an increasingly important feature. One result of this is that New Zealand has had some of the highest per capita rates of both inward and outward migration in the OECD, marking it out as unusual in the developed world (Poot, 2009).

Figure 4.4 Net migration, 1923–2016



Source: NZPC analysis of Data1850 (2019).

Figure 4.5 Permanent and long-term departures by citizenship, 1979–2017

Source: Stats NZ (2021c).

The overwhelming majority of these departing New Zealanders left for Australia. This was a reversal of previous trends, where between 1858 and 1965 New Zealand had had a net gain of migration from Australia of over 123 000 people (Bedford et al., 2000). Outflows to Australia reflected a divergence in the economic performance of Australia and New Zealand, higher wages across the Tasman, low barriers to entry and declining costs of travel.⁶

Migration to Australia differs from outflows of New Zealanders to other countries in that they can stay in Australia as long as they like, provided they live within the law. The overwhelming majority of New Zealanders who left for other countries over the past two decades returned home, whereas only about one-third of those who left for Australia did (Carey, 2019). Rates of net migration by New Zealand citizens have fallen since 2013, although it is an open question about whether higher net outflows will resume in the future.

⁶ Poot illustrates the falling costs of Trans-Tasman travel: "Around 1950, a one-way trans-Tasman airfare required about 3.5 weeks of work for a man on award wages. Subsequently, the real costs of transportation declined to one week or award wages in 1990" (1993, p. 294).

5 What have governments tried to achieve through immigration?

Economic considerations have underpinned immigration policy for much of modern New Zealand's history, although the policy goals pursued have changed over time. For most of the period, filling particular gaps or meeting excess demand for jobs has been an important (but not the only) objective of immigration policy.

An early and expansive economic development strategy...

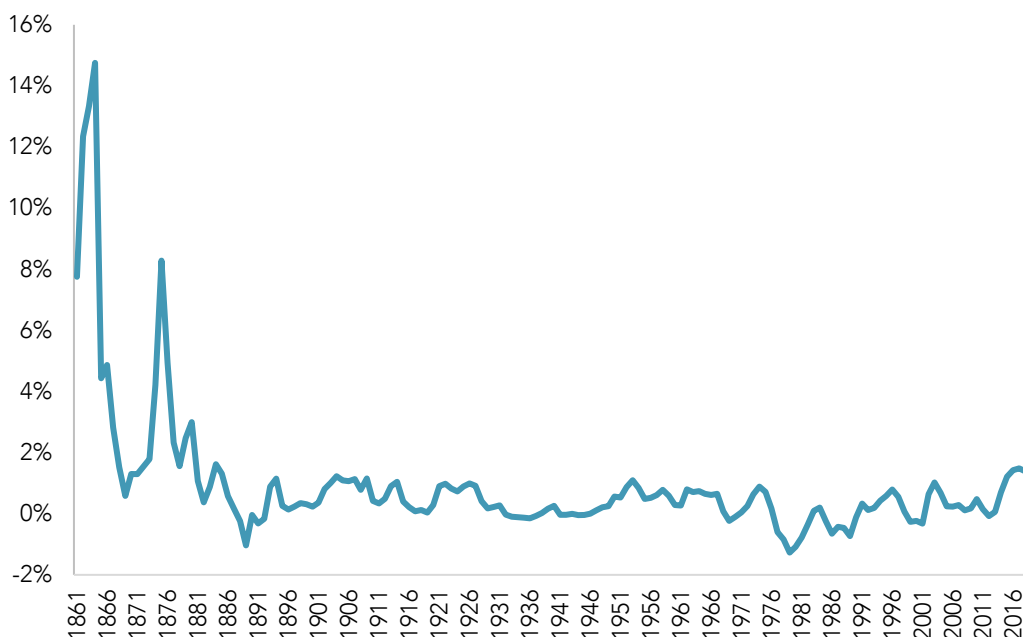
In the 1870s and 1880s, immigration was a core part of an expansive economic development strategy. The Government borrowed large sums of money on international markets to finance investment in infrastructure such as railways, roads and bridges, and to subsidise immigrants. Immigration would provide the labour to build these assets and to develop the (often Māori-owned) land opened up by the investment. This would, in turn, increase production and economic growth and enable the development of more technologically-advanced sectors, such as manufacturing (Gardner, 1992). Government policy also explicitly encouraged the migration of women, to promote a more even balance of the sexes and offset the large inflows of men that followed the gold rushes (Graham, 1992).

The scale of inward migration that resulted was immense, by both contemporary and historical standards. McKinnon (1996, p. 174) comments that more "than 200 000 people entered New Zealand as immigrants between 1870 and 1880. The peak year was 1874, when an astonishing 43 965 arrived." This period, and the gold rush of the early 1860s, made up an outsized proportion of historical migration:

Of all net migrants over the period 1840–2000, 41 per cent had arrived before 1900, with 20 per cent arriving in just two quinquennia: 1861–65 and 1871–75. That means that a fifth of all migrants over that 160-year period arrived during 6 per cent of the period, with this enormous inflow occurring before 1876. (Pool, 2015, p. 49)

Measured relative to the population, the 1860s and 1870s were the historical highpoint of net migration.

Figure 5.1 Net migration as a share of the New Zealand population, 1861–2018



Source: NZPC analysis of Data1850 (2019).

...followed by a prolonged shift to labour market targeting

An economic downturn in the 1880s and 1890s led to the winding down of government assistance and a corresponding fall in net migration. Financial assistance for migration was important for offsetting the considerable costs involved in travelling to New Zealand in the 19th century, which could amount to more than half the annual earnings of an agricultural labourer (Hawke, 1985).⁷

Assisted migration started again in the early 1900s, but on a more selective and conservative basis than the 1870s programme. Public opinion also took on a more sceptical attitude. The rising labour movement was hostile to state-sponsored immigration, perceiving it as a source of unemployment and pressure on resources (Constantine, 1990; Hawke, 1985). French writer and scholar André Siegfried (1982, p. 205) described the tone of public sentiment towards immigration during his visit to New Zealand in 1899:

[New Zealand] never conceals the small amount of enthusiasm with which the arrival of new citizens inspires, and its protectionism applies to men as well as to things.

Labour market goals played an important role in immigration policy for much of the 20th century. Subsidies were initially available in a limited range of occupations or migrants had to be nominated by a New Zealand employer. The list of targeted occupations expanded and changed over time. In the early 1900s, key roles targeted were domestic servants, farmers and farm labourers. In the post-World War Two period, occupational targeting shifted more to manufacturing and services roles on the grounds that these were the sectors being actively promoted by government policy and were where the excess labour demand was likely to be.⁸ An Immigration Council of national industry bodies was established in 1950 to advise the Minister on "policy and size from time to time" (McLintock, 1966). However, for most of the post-war period, high fertility rates meant that much of the country's labour demand was met from natural population increases, with immigration playing a largely supplementary role.

Settlement and integration

Official policy favoured permanent settlement over temporary migration and assisted migration schemes generally tried to select people deemed more likely to settle successfully. Successful settlement implied integration into, and acceptance of, predominant Pākehā social and cultural norms. This tended to reinforce the preference for migrants from British and northern European backgrounds. Indeed, the 1946 Parliamentary Dominion Population Committee said as much in blunt terms:

...if it is proposed to encourage immigration of other European types, they should be of such character as will, within a relatively short space of time, become completely assimilated within the New Zealand population and have a distinctly New Zealand point of view. Quite apart from any question of allegiance to the King's enemies, the emergence of racial islands in such a small country as New Zealand must inevitably lead to serious maladjustment. The southern European tends at times to be merely an itinerant settler in this country, and in many cases retains his roots in his country of origin. There is some evidence that when such settlers have accumulated a certain amount of wealth they tend to return to the country of origin and have no intention whatever of ultimately becoming New Zealand citizens. (New Zealand House of Representatives, 1946, p. 99)

In practice, "permanent" migration can be less enduring. Research conducted by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment found that one-quarter of skilled migrants re-migrated within five years of taking residence (Krassoi-Peach, 2013).⁹ This was not a new issue; the 1960 Industrial Development Conference pointed to problems retaining skilled workers, following high levels of emigration over the previous couple of years (Poot, 1986, p. 13).

⁷ That said, there were few barriers to unassisted migration over this period, at least for people of British birth or descent.

⁸ By contrast, the Dominion Population Committee concluded in 1946 that there was "little scope for the absorption of workers" in the agricultural sector due to increasing mechanisation (New Zealand House of Representatives, 1946, p. 117).

⁹ The author did note, however, that insofar as international comparisons were possible the New Zealand figures were "roughly comparable to other so-called settlement countries", such as Australia, Canada and the US (ibid, p. 1).

One notable exception to the official preference for permanent settlement was the introduction of the permit schemes for some Pacific Islands workers (primarily people from Samoa, Fiji and Tonga) in the 1960s. These were explicitly temporary schemes, offering three- or six-month permits with no right to remain in New Zealand after this period.¹⁰ In practice, and especially during periods of high labour demand and economic growth, permit terms were not rigorously enforced and authorities sometimes overlooked irregularities in permit applications (Mitchell, 2003, p. 34). A significant number of Pacific workers also came to New Zealand on visitor visas, which did not provide work rights.

By the early 1970s, this temporary migration had become so economically significant that Immigration Minister Fraser Colman observed that “New Zealand industry was dependent on illegal Island labour... [without which]... production and export targets would not be met” (Mitchell, 2003, p. 34). Despite this, Pacific Islands labour was clearly seen as a temporary and disposable input. Indeed, a Member of Parliament referred to it as a “recession buffer” which could be sent home if unemployment rose (ibid). A downturn in the mid-1970s led to an infamous crackdown on Pacific Island “overstayers” (Box 2).

Box 2 The “Dawn Raids”

The “Dawn Raids” were a programme of intensive police enforcement against Pacific people in the mid-1970s, ostensibly to check migrants’ immigration status and arrest “overstayers”. The raids began in 1974 under the Third Labour Government and were part of a wider reassessment of policy towards Pacific immigration. This included the establishment of a special Auckland police taskforce to enforce immigration laws, the suspension of the issue of entry permits for Pacific people in April 1974, a two-month amnesty for Tongan people whose permits had expired to register and seek an extension, and a deportation programme.

The new National Government expanded and intensified the enforcement programme in 1976, including random street checks of people’s immigration status. These checks were intrusive, often public and extremely broad in scope, as one example illustrates:

...police squads conducted random checks for overstayers at any public or private places and at any time of the day or night. Drinkers in pubs, passengers at taxi ranks, pedestrians on Auckland streets, workers in factories, New Zealand-born Pacific people, university students, Māori: all were counted among the more than 850 who were picked up and questioned and the many others who were raided in their homes. (Anae, 2020, pp. 109–110)

Although the “Dawn Raids” were the most dramatic and public manifestation of the Government targeting Pacific migrants, they were in reality one part of a longer-term pattern. Police had long had powers to demand people to produce passports or work permits and had used these against Pacific people well before the 1974–76 raids. The Government formally apologised for the dawn raids on 1 August 2021, acknowledging that Pacific communities “at the time felt targeted and terrorised and there is clear evidence the raids were discriminatory and have had a lasting negative impact” (Arden & Sio, 2021).

Attempts to expand the ability of Pacific people to work and live in this country were resisted by the Government, most publicly in the case of Samoan citizens. New Zealand had seized Samoa from Germany during World War One and administered the country under a League of Nations and United Nations mandate up until 1962 when Samoa gained independence. Falema’i Lesa, a Samoan citizen in New Zealand who was charged as an “overstayer”, challenged her prosecution in the courts on the grounds that her father (who was born in New Zealand-administered Samoa) was a British subject and hence she had the right to New Zealand citizenship by descent (Tagupa, 1994).

¹⁰ A capped number of short-term (eg, usually three months’ duration) work permits were made available to people from Samoa in 1964, and Fijian people could work for up to six months from 1967, also subject to a cap (Anae, 2020, p. 94).

The Privy Council ultimately agreed, ruling that all Samoans born between 1924 and 1948 were British subjects and that in 1949 they and their children became New Zealand citizens (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2020).¹¹ Following consultation with Samoa's Prime Minister, the New Zealand Parliament passed legislation in 1982 overturning the Privy Council decision and giving citizenship only to Samoan people who were living in New Zealand or who subsequently obtained permanent residence (MacDonald, 1986).

Access to the New Zealand labour market by Samoan people (and people from outside the Realm countries of Tokelau, Niue and the Cook Islands) remains limited to this day.¹² However, some specific Treaty-level commitments were made: the Samoan Quota was formalised (1 100 Samoan citizens can migrate to New Zealand annually) and Samoan citizens who can gain residence and arrive in New Zealand can apply and be granted for New Zealand citizenship immediately. A similar, but smaller,¹³ Pacific Access Category was established for citizens of Tonga, Fiji, Kiribati and Tuvalu. Although the numbers of residence visas offered through these schemes are small relative to New Zealand's population, they are more significant when compared to the populations of the Pacific nations (eg, 1 100 residence visas compared to Samoa's total population of just under 200 000).

Balancing labour market need and absorptive capacity

A recurring theme in immigration policy has been concerns about absorptive capacity. Economic pressures arising from large-scale inward migration were visible as far back as the 1870s, where the need to house new arrivals diverted investment away from export- and income-generating sectors. Gardner (1992, p. 72) notes of the Vogel immigration boom that expenditure:

...on housing accounted for nearly half the gross private capital formation in the mid-1870s, whereas investment in farming did not reach one-third of this total in the same period. The investment boom was directed more to the internal economy than to exporting activities.

Public and official concerns about the local impacts of immigration were most prominent during periods of economic downturns and in the aftermath of the World Wars, but first emerged in the 1880s (Kasper, 1990, p. 25). Access to jobs, housing and public services were particular points of concern.

The 1946 Dominion Population Committee expressed these worries in a characteristically stark manner, declining a call to allow in more refugees because "the housing situation in New Zealand was so desperate as to make it impossible to recommend any immediate immigration policy which would have the effect of creating any extra demand for houses" (New Zealand House of Representatives, 1946, p. 100). The Committee also noted the likely impact of large-scale immigration on demand for schools and cautioned that any such increase would require prioritising the building of new schools over houses, lowering accommodation standards for schools, using untrained or partially trained teachers and potentially reducing the "length of the school-life of the average child" (ibid, p. 103). In brief, the Committee concluded that "large-scale immigration involving children cannot be achieved within the next few years without a reduction in the standard of the education that is offered to children already in New Zealand" (ibid).

Similar issues emerged in 1974, when the Kirk Government removed the ability of British and Irish citizens to enter New Zealand without a permit. In announcing these restrictions, the Prime Minister stated that a rapid increase in the volume of British arrivals had put "considerable pressure on housing and other services" (Kirk, 1974, p. 14) In other public comments, the Prime Minister attributed an increase in the waiting lists for state housing to immigration (Mitchell, 2003, p. 38). Statements of government immigration policy in 1974 and 1986 both emphasised the need to remain within New Zealand's capacity "to provide employment, housing and community services" (Department of Labour, 1986, p. 3).

¹¹ These dates referred to changes in New Zealand immigration and citizenship legislation.

¹² Pacific peoples are, however, able to apply for permanent residence through the general Skilled Migrant and Family streams.

¹³ The total number of residence visas available through the Pacific Access Category each year has typically been 650, with specific allocations for each of the four countries.

Official policy also favoured limiting immigration volumes to manage pressures on wider resources. Work by the Monetary and Economic Council and others raised concerns that too much immigration “would be inflationary, induce a balance of payments deficit and increase labour shortages through the excess aggregate demand effect” (Poot, 1986, p. 13). Some economists expressed concern that overly rapid population growth would dilute the amount of capital available per worker and undermine living standards (Brooke et al., 2018). Tight controls on immigration were also consistent with the predominant economic policy model, namely “a highly interventionist trade policy, import controls, exchange controls, fixed exchange rates, centralised wage fixing and later, export subsidies, and activist industrial policies” (ibid, p. 205).

However, concerns about absorptive capacity were not universally held. Employer groups consistently lobbied for larger intakes of migrants over the 20th century on the grounds this would ease business constraints and promote growth (Brooke et al., 2018; Constantine, 1990; Top Tier Group, 1989). In addition, the predominant public opinion in the mid-20th century was that New Zealand benefited from more people (Gould, 1982; Hawke, 1985).

Towards economic growth and potential future contributions...

Economic growth took on greater importance in immigration policy during the 1980s and 1990s. Whereas earlier settings had sought to fill gaps in the existing labour market within economic and social constraints, now policy sought to raise economic growth by attracting “[q]uality migrants” who would “bring skills, capital and energy which will increase domestic demand and provide employment opportunities” (Birch, 1991b). Business and investor migrant programmes were also expanded through this period, and similarly sought to “add significantly to the wealth of this country, create jobs and help further technological innovation” (ibid).

Box 3 Business and investor migrant schemes

The first modern investor migrant policy (the Entrepreneur Investment Policy) began in the late 1970s, aimed at encouraging European migrants with capital to invest in the “Think Big” strategy pursued by the Muldoon Government. It had only limited effect, with 225 migrants approved for entry and NZ\$106 million raised between 1978 and 1986 (Bedford et al., 2000).

The Entrepreneur Investor Policy was replaced in 1986 with a more expansive Business Investment Programme, which sought to target people with experience and capital to invest (at least \$200 000) rather than prospective investments. Following a change of government in 1990, the programme was renamed the Business Investor Category, investment requirements were increased to \$500 000, and English language and age requirements were loosened (Birch, 1991a). Distinctions were also drawn for active investors and those invested outside Auckland and Wellington who faced lower monetary thresholds (Fry & Wilson, 2018). The 1980s and 1990s policy changes had a significant impact on the volumes and make-up of business investors. As Bedford et al. comment, depending “on how one counts approvals for entry for potential entrepreneurs, up to 20 000 immigrants with investment capital or business skills could have been approved between April 1986 and March 1998... Over half of these immigrants were from Hong Kong and Taiwan” (2000, p. 22).

As with the points system for skilled migrants (see below), business and investor policies have been subject to repeated modifications. For example, minimum English language standards were reintroduced in 1995, points for age were added to a new Investor Category in 1998, and investment thresholds and types have changed repeatedly (Fry & Wilson, 2018).

The shift to economic growth as a policy objective followed influential research in Australia, New Zealand and other countries which suggested that higher immigration could promote higher GDP growth, greater efficiency and lower unemployment (Norman & Meikle, 1985; Poot et al., 1988). Policy reform took place in two main steps. Legal and policy preferences for “traditional source countries”

were abandoned in 1986, meaning that permanent migrants were now selected primarily on either occupational, family reunification or humanitarian grounds. Occupational (later called “skilled”) migrants have made up the majority of permanent residents for most of the period since the later 1990s.

The second phase occurred in 1991, when the “Occupational Priority List” for skilled permanent migrants was replaced with a points-based system, which allocated applicants points for factors such as their age, qualifications, work experience, occupational skills, settlement funds and having a sponsor. The heaviest weighting was given to employability attributes (skills and qualifications). Applicants went into a pool, with the highest-scoring people granted residency.

The points system was based on Australian and Canadian approaches and differed from earlier New Zealand policies in that:

- it was based on human capital and the *potential* to contribute to the economy, rather than filling *current* labour market gaps (Fry & Wilson, 2018); and
- in its earlier formulations, the points system meant it was hard to control the number of people receiving residency.

When the points system was announced, the Government set a goal of achieving “an annual net migration gain of 20 000 migrants (including New Zealanders leaving from, and returning to, New Zealand)”, but excluding refugees (Farmer, 1997). This was based “more on a judgement regarding the ability of New Zealand’s economy and society to absorb migrants than on an overall population goal” (ibid). Setting a high net migration target during a period of high unemployment was a “marked departure from the former labor market oriented approach” (Ongley & Pearson, 1995, p. 770).

The initial application of the points system meant that the net migration goal was not a hard cap on residents. The ability to qualify for residence was based on meeting a certain number of points (originally out of a total of 40), but the threshold level (set at 28 points in July 1993) proved low relative to the supply of applicants, leading to a large inflows and a realisation that “there was no effective control over residence approval levels in New Zealand” (Farmer, 1997).

The emphasis on “employability” and *potential* contribution rather than filling current jobs also led to problems of poor job matches. Fry and Wilson (2018, p. 61) note that the result was “stories about engineers and doctors driving taxis, because they could not get jobs (often because their professional qualifications were recognised for immigration purposes, but not for occupational registration purposes)”. The large volume of inflows, many of whom came from Asia, also saw an increase in public expressions of antipathy towards immigration and the entry of an openly anti-immigration political party into Parliament (Levi et al., 2021; McKinnon, 1996).

...and back to integration and settlement

A review of the points system in 1995 saw more emphasis placed on attributes that would promote successful labour market integration by skilled migrants, and a further increase in the number of points required to gain residence. In essence, this was a return to the policy priorities of the past. The system has been repeatedly modified over the past 25 years, to improve the prospects of employment and successful integration, and pursue other policy objectives.¹⁴

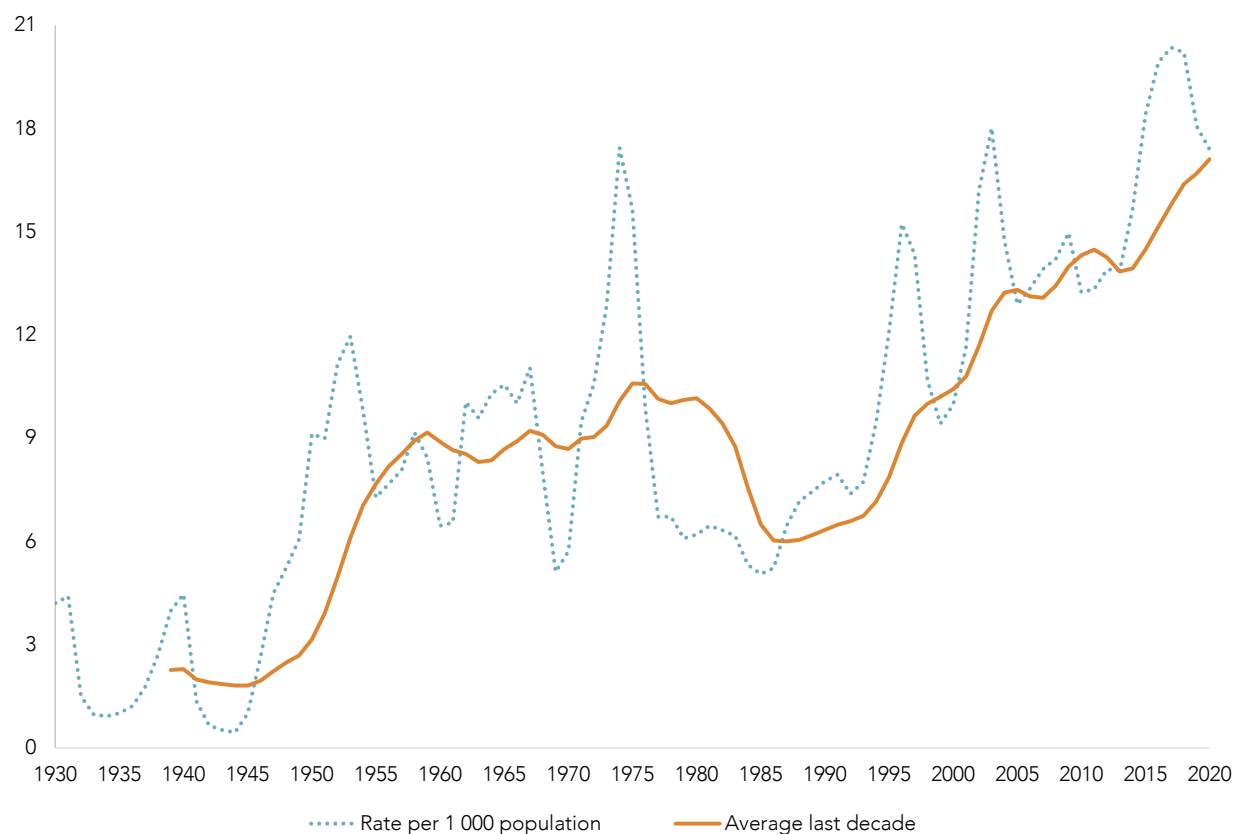
In 2003, the system was replaced with an “active recruitment” model, in which interested parties would lodge an expression of interest (EOI) rather than applying for residence. The EOIs were then placed in a pool, with those having the highest points invited to apply. This model was subsequently adopted by Canada and Australia. A work-to-residence policy was also introduced in 2002. People who would have been eligible for the skilled migrant category if they had a skilled job (and were judged likely to get that

¹⁴ For example, in December 2004, additional points were made available for qualification, work experience or job offers in areas of absolute skills shortage. In November 2015, increased points were offered to applicants with job offers outside Auckland, and in July 2017, new income thresholds were introduced for the Skilled Migrant residency programme. (Fry & Wilson, 2018, p. 64).

job) could be granted a nine-month open visa to search for work. The term of that visa was reduced to six months in 2005 due to the high demand for skilled labour.

In another return to earlier priorities, the Government also began issuing settlement strategies in the mid-2000s, which explicitly sought to assist new arrivals to promote inclusion and integration by migrants in New Zealand's society and economy. This was an implicit acknowledgement that the assumptions made in the 1990s that skilled migrants could successfully settle themselves and family migrants could rely solely on their onshore relatives for support were flawed. Despite moves to manage inflows of permanent residents, New Zealand has had relatively high intakes, especially in the 21st century (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 Non-citizen permanent and long-term arrivals per 1 000 population from 1930



Source: Jacques Poot, pers.comm, 11 August 2021.

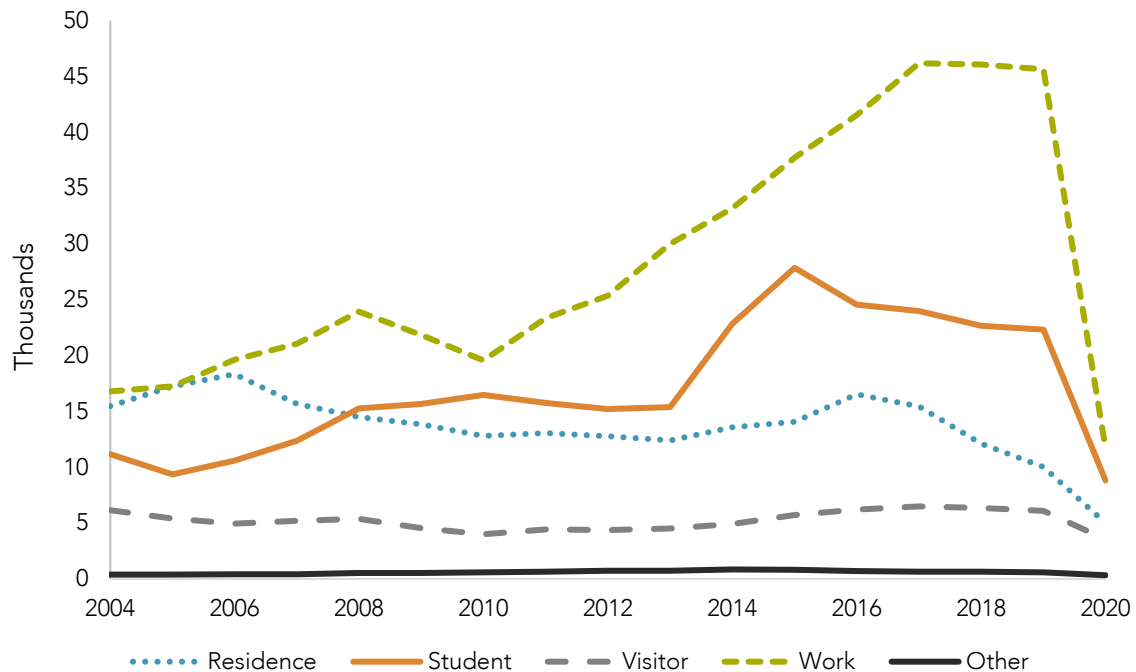
Concerns for inclusion and integration, however, have had to be balanced against other goals such as managing the fiscal costs to the community of immigration. In the early 2000s, the Government decided to manage immigration for permanent residence through three distinct streams: skilled/business migration (60%), family sponsorship (30%) and international flows, which included refugees and the Samoan and Pacific quotas (10%). This division was intended to ensure that intakes were weighted towards skilled migrants and to limit the numbers of people who could require high levels of public support (eg, healthcare, income assistance), such as the elderly.

This distinction created difficult trade-offs for some migrants. The skilled/business stream accommodated single migrants and nuclear families (ie, parents and their dependent offspring), but not other family members, such as parents of the migrants or adult children and siblings. The ability of the family sponsorship stream to permit this wider family reunification was narrowed in 2007 when the Government capped the parent and adult sibling categories. These categories were further limited in 2012 and then closed in 2016. As a result, some migrants seeking to settle in New Zealand have had to face living in transnational families.

The growth of temporary migration

One notable feature of immigration patterns over the past two decades has been the large increase in temporary migrant numbers, that is, people who have work rights (including many students), but who only stay in New Zealand for a limited period.¹⁵ While public debate over immigration typically focuses on the number of permanent migrants, temporary migration has become the dominant feature of New Zealand's system, at least (until the Covid pandemic began in 2020) in terms of arrival volumes (Figure 5.3). The OECD observed in 2014 that New Zealand had the highest rate of temporary migration in the developed world, relative to population.

Figure 5.3 Permanent and long-term arrivals by visa type, 2004–20 (December year)



Source: Stats NZ (2021a).

Note: For Stats NZ's purposes, "long-term arrivals" are those who intend to stay in New Zealand for 12 months or more.

This growth was the result of policy decisions (especially the uncapped nature of most temporary work visas, growth in the number of bilateral working holidaymaker schemes, the decision to expand in-study and post-study work rights to international students,¹⁶ and the creation of pathways to residence for graduates) and falling travel costs. Temporary work, particularly through the Essential Skills and Study to Work visas, has become an increasingly important path to residence.

Temporary migration for work had formed part of immigration into New Zealand in the period before 1920, but higher travel costs and policy settings made it much less common. A proportion of those who arrived for the gold rushes in the 1860s moved on to other countries once the boom had faded. Most Chinese people who entered New Zealand between 1871 and 1920 went home again, although this was largely due to discriminatory policy which made it hard for Chinese women to migrate and increasingly harder for Chinese men to remain here (Belich, 2001, p. 227).

After 1920, work rights for temporary migrants were more tightly controlled. Immigration law began to distinguish between permanent and temporary migration in 1920,¹⁷ and (with the exception of the

¹⁵ As opposed to permanent residents (who may remain indefinitely and work in New Zealand), or visitors (who may not work and can only stay for a limited period).

¹⁶ Some students were permitted to work up to 15 hours a week during term time in 1999. Policy changes in 2014 gave part-time work rights to all international students enrolled in an English language course that was 14 weeks or longer and in an approved provider. Students taking a course for an academic year or longer could work fulltime during holidays, and international doctoral and masters research students had unlimited work rights during study (Fry & Wilson, 2018, pp. 76–77, 79).

¹⁷ Temporary migrants after 1920 could stay in New Zealand for up to six months, whereas previously no time limits were imposed (Fry & Wilson, 2018, p. 74).

special schemes for Pacific Island workers) it was not until 1977 that the right to work was extended to certain temporary visas (Fry & Wilson, 2018, p. 74). Work rights for temporary migrants were further liberalised in 1986, allowing people who had entered New Zealand as non-working visitors to take jobs that could not be filled locally (Ongley & Pearson, 1995).

Temporary work visas vary in the degree of freedoms they provide. At one end of the spectrum, the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, which allows horticulture and viticulture industries to recruit workers from the Pacific for seasonal work, has strict time limits¹⁸ and requires the visa holder to work for a specified employer. Essential Skills visa holders (who work in jobs where New Zealanders could not be hired) can stay in New Zealand for up to three years, but must only work in the specific occupation and for the employer and location listed on their visa. In contrast, working holidaymakers and post-study visa holders face few limits on where and when they can work, but cannot renew their visas. Visa conditions that tie individuals to a specific employer have been identified as a contributing factor to migrant exploitation (Collins & Stringer, 2019).

Recently announced reforms aim to reduce the flows and reliance on temporary migrant workers by increasing the stringency of labour market testing (to ensure New Zealanders are not being displaced), introducing minimum income thresholds, and requiring temporary visa holders to leave New Zealand before they can apply for another visa. At the time of publication, these policies had not come into effect.

¹⁸ Workers from RSE countries can only stay in New Zealand for up to seven months during any 11-month period, with the exception of those from Tuvalu and Kiribati who may stay for nine months.

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