

# SECURING NEW ZEALAND'S FUTURE



**BUDGET  
2026**

## Hon Erica Stanford Minister of Immigration

28 May 2026

### More resources to combat migrant exploitation

Budget 2026 funds more frontline teams to respond to migrant exploitation and immigration non-compliance.

As part of Budget 2026, the Government is investing \$18 million over four years to strengthen our response to migrant exploitation and immigration non-compliance, with three new frontline teams to respond to serious offending, protect people from harm and exploitation, and increase the number of cases investigated.

Immigration Minister Erica Stanford says the funding responds to sustained growth in demand for labour inspectorate and immigration compliance activity since the border fully reopened in July 2022.

“In an increasingly uncertain world, we’re seeing more complex cases that require investigation or enforcement, and an increase in asylum-related cases,” Ms Stanford says.

“We are also, for the first time, holding the line on a maximum continuous stay (MCS) that requires people on temporary work visas to depart New Zealand if they are not eligible for another visa.

“Frontline staff are making prioritisation decisions every day to identify and respond to serious offending and protect vulnerable people. However, without additional resources, that inevitably means longer delays for some cases and a reduced ability to intervene early.

“Delays in responding to migrant exploitation, bad behaviour by employers, finding people who are subject to deportation liability, or identifying people who are in breach of visa conditions have real consequences. They can prolong harm to victims, weaken deterrence, allow offending to continue, reduce the effectiveness of prosecutions, and undermine public trust and confidence in the immigration system. Without additional resources, New Zealand’s ability to enforce immigration and labour standards and hold people to account for migrant exploitation in a timely and effective way would remain significantly constrained.”

The Government has already moved to strengthen deportation settings and immigration compliance to help build trust in New Zealand's immigration system. Under legislation that came into effect in November last year a new offence was created for knowingly seeking or receiving premiums for employment with penalties of up to seven years' imprisonment or a \$100,000 fine. The Immigration (Enhanced Risk Management) Amendment Bill currently going through Parliament will strengthen the tools available to respond to serious immigration breaches even further and increases the maximum penalty for migrant exploitation from seven to 10 years' imprisonment.

Budget 2026 complements work already completed and underway by establishing three additional frontline teams within Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's Immigration Compliance and Investigations branch, and the Labour Inspectorate, operating under a graduated compliance model that ranges from voluntary compliance and warnings through to investigation, prosecution, and deportation, where necessary.

"This investment recognises the strong work already underway, and provides the additional teams needed to make that work more effective and sustainable over time," Ms Stanford says.

"It will strengthen the system's ability to respond proportionately, dealing with lower-level non-compliance early, while ensuring serious and high-risk cases remain prioritised."

The funding will result in an additional 22 FTE to create:

- another Immigration Investigations team, targeted at reducing complex case backlogs and responding to serious immigration offending
- an additional Labour Inspectorate team, expanding capacity to detect and respond to migrant exploitation and serious breaches of employment standards
- a new Immigration Compliance team, focused on addressing lower-level employer non-compliance and people in New Zealand unlawfully or in breach of their visa conditions.

The new compliance team will enable approximately 70 additional infringement notices each year. The new investigations team will have capacity to close an additional 50–60 serious cases annually and undertake 10–14 additional prosecutions. The new labour inspectorate team will increase enforcement capacity by around 30 per cent.

"By increasing the number of frontline teams across compliance, investigations and the labour inspectorate, we can reduce backlogs, increase enforcement action and ensure the highest-risk cases receive the attention they require, particularly where harm or exploitation is occurring," Ms Stanford says.

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