



19 May 2021

Artur

fyi-request-15007-72b1cab9@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref: DOIA 2021-1914

Dear Artur,

Thank you for your email of 27 March 2021 requesting under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA), the following information:

“Could you, please, answer several question I have regarding SMC residency category queue.

- 1) What is the lodgement date of non-priority SMC and RFW applications you are allocating to the case officers at the time of response?*
- 2) Could you, please, provide a weekly breakdown of non-priority and priority SMC and RFW applications you allocated to the case officers from 1 January 2021 to the time you write a response to this OIA request?*
- 3) What are the lodgement dates of applications from non-priority and priority SMC/RFW queue you allocated to the case officers from 1 January 2021 to the time of your response? (Weakly breakdown)*
- 4) Could you, please, provide a weakly breakdown of out-of-date-order allocations from non-priority SMC/RFW queue from 1 January 2021 to the time you give your response?*
- 5) What are the general reasons of out-of-date order allocations from non-priority SMC/RFW queue?*
- 6) Could you, please, provide a weakly break down of non-priority SMC/RFW applications that were allocated to the case officers as per Employment Visa Escalations (EVE) mechanism from 1 January 2021 to the time of your response to this OIA request?*
- 7) Could you, please, clarify what sources of information have you used collating the response to my OIA request and who was involved or consulted with to answer my questions (names and positions) if allowed to be released under the Official Information Act 1982?”*

Our Response

As you may be aware, Immigration New Zealand (INZ) has one queue for skilled residence applications. The applications in this queue include Skilled Migrant Category (SMC) and Resident from Work (RFW), and are not split into two separate queues based on the application category.

Question One: “What is the lodgement date of non-priority SMC and RFW applications you are allocating to the case officers at the time of response?”

As at 17 May 2021, INZ is allocating non prioritised SMC and RFW applications received on 20 August 2019. This is the date that all information required for the acceptance of the application was received by INZ.

It is important to note that, skilled residence queue data is not static due to the complex nature of visa processing operations. Applications move between queues and this needs to be taken into account when comparing data over time. The data changes over time for reasons such as, but not limited to:

- Applicants arriving into New Zealand on critical purpose visas result in their applications moving from the offshore queue to one of the onshore queues;

- A change in an applicant’s circumstances resulting in their application meeting the priority criteria and being moved to the priority queue;
- Applications being escalated via the Employment Visa Escalation (EVE) process - <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/media-centre/newsletters/korero/korero-july-2019/employment-visa-escalations-eve>;

Question Two: “Could you, please, provide a weekly breakdown of non-priority and priority SMC and RFW applications you allocated to the case officers from 1 January 2021 to the time you write a response to this OIA request?”

Question Three: What are the lodgement dates of applications from non-priority and priority SMC/RFW queue you allocated to the case officers from 1 January 2021 to the time of your response? (Weakly breakdown)”

Allocation information is not held in the Immigration Application Management system in a reportable format. This information is therefore recorded manually by the INZ Manukau office and is limited to the number of applications allocated each week and from which queue, this does not include a breakdown by application type or their lodgement dates. We can however provide the total number of skilled residence applications that were allocated from the onshore non priority queue, priority queue, and via the Employment Visa Escalation (EVE) process between the allocation weeks 04 January 2021 to 17 May 2021 (see Table one below).

Please note that allocations of applications to immigration officers occur weekly and the number of applications that are allocated is dependent upon processing capacity. The Government is currently reviewing its approach to the New Zealand Residence Programme (NZRP) and is considering replacing the planning range with a more targeted approach that focuses on management of specific residence visa types. In the meantime, INZ will continue to process applications at the same volume and with the same level of resourcing as the previous NZRP allowed for. This has an impact on the number of applications that can be allocated and the timeliness of application processing.

Also note that in February 2021, the Auckland region moved into Alert Level 3 twice which had an impact on the processing of skilled residence applications, and the capacity for immigration officers to be allocated new applications. With reduced processing capacity and reduced ability for some staff to access INZ offices during the COVID-19 response, for several weeks the INZ Manukau office had limited numbers of staff processing skilled residence applications from the office and reduced productivity for those working from home.

Table One

Allocation week	Priority Queue	Non Priority Queue	Employment Visa Escalation Process (EVE)
4-Jan-21	47	104	4
11-Jan-21	16	97	2
18-Jan-21	49	114	0
25-Jan-21	58	92	5
1-Feb-21	41	129	3
8-Feb-21	17	177	0
15-Feb-21	60	17	6
22-Feb-21	21	49	0
1-Mar-21	35	30	1
8-Mar-21	52	0	0
15-Mar-21	73	49	0
22-Mar-21	16	118	0

29-Mar-21	26	80	2
5-Apr-21	47	20	0
12-Apr-21	37	31	1
19-Apr-21	79	4	0
26-Apr-21	45	39	3
3-May-21	41	46	0
10-May-21	69	83	0
17-May-21	68	101	0

Question Four: “Could you, please, provide a weekly breakdown of out-of-date-order allocations from non-priority SMC/RFW queue from 1 January 2021 to the time you give your response?;

Question Five: What are the general reasons of out-of-date order allocations from non-priority SMC/RFW queue?;

Question Six: Could you, please, provide a weekly break down of non-priority SMC/RFW applications that were allocated to the case officers as per Employment Visa Escalations (EVE) mechanism from 1 January 2021 to the time of your response to this OIA request?”

The SMC and RFW applications will be prioritised for allocation to an immigration officer if the principal applicant is in New Zealand and:

- is paid twice the median wage or higher (currently NZD \$51 an hour or NZD \$106,080 a year), or
- works in an occupation where registration is required by immigration instructions and holds that registration.

Applications that do not meet the criterion for prioritisation are allocated to an immigration officer in the order they are received. Applications however, can be prioritised or deprioritised if an applicant’s circumstances change.

As noted earlier, applications move between queues and can be allocated out of date order for reasons such as, but not limited to:

- Applicants arriving into New Zealand on critical purpose visas result in their applications moving from the offshore queue to one of the onshore queues;
- A change in an applicant’s circumstances resulting in their application meeting the priority criteria and being moved to the priority queue;
- Applications being escalated via the Employment Visa Escalation (EVE) process - <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/media-centre/newsletters/korero/korero-july-2019/employment-visa-escalations-eve>;

Table one includes a breakdown of the number of applications that were allocated from the priority queue and via the EVE process between allocation weeks 04 January 2021 to 17 May 2021.

Question Seven: “Could you, please, clarify what sources of information have you used collating the response to my OIA request and who was involved or consulted with to answer my questions (names and positions) if allowed to be released under the Official Information Act 1982?”

Allocation information is manually collated and reported on by a team within the INZ Manukau Office. This team is managed by Immigration Manager, Emma McFarland.

Any updates in regards to the allocation of applications can be found via the following link: <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/new-zealand-visas/waiting-for-a-visa/how-long-it-takes-to-process-your-visa-application/smc-and-rfw-timeframe-information>

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

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Hogg', is centered on the page.

Nicola Hogg
General Manager - Border and Visa Operations
Immigration New Zealand