

Campaign promises

The two main political parties' campaign promises on employment law are set out below.

[Labour](#) is committed to helping working New Zealanders by raising wages, protecting them while they are at work, growing jobs and investing in the economy. Good labour standards protect good employers as well as good workers by preventing a race to the bottom.

It's time to get our economy moving again, and supporting our workers plays a key role in that.

- We will implement a major support package to assist businesses in hiring at least 40,000 New Zealanders whose employment is impacted by COVID-19.
- We will progressively extend Living Wage guarantees to contractors to the public sector – such as our cleaners, caterers, and security guards.
- We will increase minimum sick leave entitlements from five days to ten days a year.
- We will increase the minimum wage to \$20 an hour in 2021.
- We will make it easier for women to gain pay equity in their organisation or across their industry, by ensuring there are better records of pay equity across New Zealand, including by ethnicity and age as well as gender.
- We will make it easier for workers to receive fair wages and conditions and avoid the 'race to the bottom' that occurs within competitive industries by implementing Fair Pay Agreements.
- We will strengthen and simplify the Holidays Act and allow sick leave to be taken when needed.
- We will protect vulnerable workers by legislating protections for dependent contractors and by recognising security guards as vulnerable workers to ensure their terms and conditions are protected.
- We will raise the age for workers to be allowed to perform hazardous work, ensure all workers have the right to elect health and safety representatives, and ensure Seafarer Welfare Centres provide better services.

[National](#) promises Fairer Employment Law for Small Businesses. They say -

Right now, more than 200,000 New Zealanders are on unemployment benefits. Better employment law and incentives for job creation will help businesses take on new staff to get them off unemployment benefits. National will simplify industrial relations legislation to reduce red tape and encourage businesses, in particular small businesses, to create new jobs.

Small businesses need to be trusted to do the right things by their staff without overly burdensome employment law and red tape holding them back.

National believes in a flexible, productive workplace where workers get a fair deal and businesses are productive.

National supports an approach where employees and employers are trusted to work employment matters out themselves in good faith.

National backs the private sector to create jobs and get New Zealand moving again. Our JobStart policy will encourage businesses to create new jobs, get New Zealanders back into work and off Government welfare.

National's JobStart scheme will:

- Provide a \$10,000 cash payment to businesses that hire additional staff as part of our commitment to keeping New Zealanders in jobs.
- Give businesses greater confidence to hire new fulltime permanent staff and could incentivise up to 50,000 new jobs.

As well as JobStart, National will:

- Repeal the Government's changes to the Employment Relations Act.
- Simplify the employment dispute resolution process.
- Get rid of the "no win no fee" provisions in the Employment Relations Act.
- Ensure our laws and polices get the right balance between health and safety and productivity

Resident visa holders now offshore

The [Government](#) is making changes to help new residents stuck offshore keep their residency status while COVID-19 travel restrictions remain in place.

"The Government understands the uncertainty that COVID-19 has had on a number of visa holders, particularly individuals overseas who have not been able to travel to New Zealand to activate their new resident visa, or who have been unable to return to New Zealand before their travel conditions expired," Immigration Minister Kris Faafoi said.

Individuals who are granted a resident visa must travel to New Zealand within a certain timeframe to activate their visa. With current border restrictions preventing travel to New Zealand, such visas have or could expire.

"... individuals whose travel conditions are about to expire will receive a 12 month extension to travel to New Zealand, and those whose travel conditions have expired on or after 2 February 2020 (when travel restrictions began) will be issued a new visa, also valid for 12 months.

"These changes will provide around 5,600 resident visa holders, who have invested a lot of time and money to be granted a resident visa, with more certainty about their ability to come and settle in New Zealand in the future," Kris Faafoi said.

Individuals will only be able to travel to New Zealand if they are exempt from the current border restrictions or have been granted an exception. Extending travel conditions for these visa holders or issuing a new visa does not mean these individuals are now exempt from the current border restrictions if they were not previously.

These changes build on other changes made by the Minister of Immigration using his new powers under the Act, including:

- extending by six months onshore temporary work visas and those of their families due to expire by the end of 2020, which would benefit around 16,500 workers and their families.
- extending by five months onshore visitor visas that were due to expire before the end of October 2020.
- extending Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (RSE) visas by six months for workers who are still in New Zealand and unable to return home, as well as allowing more flexible hours and roles for those RSE workers still in New Zealand.

Eligibility expanded for COVID-19 leave support

The [Government](#) has made COVID-19 leave support more widely available. The expanded scheme will cover:

- People who have COVID-19 like symptoms and meet the Ministry of Health's criteria and need to self-isolate while awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test.
- People who are directed to self-isolate by a Medical Officer of Health or their delegate or on advice of their Health Practitioner, even if they do not have symptoms or have returned a negative test.
- Many people who have COVID-19 like symptoms working in health, disability, and aged care sectors who should get tested and stay home while waiting for their results.
- The parent or caregiver of a dependant who is directed to self-isolate and needs support to do so safely.

“The COVID-19 Leave Support Scheme has been effective in supporting workers to self-isolate and break the chain of transmission for the virus. We have continued to review the scheme, to make sure that it is providing support where needed,” says Andrew Little.

“We are now making improvements to the scheme, to cover those who have been told or recommended to self-isolate and can't work from home. We want them to do the right thing, get a COVID-19 test and stay away from work. The period of subsidy will also be matched to the general two-week self-isolation requirement.

“We expect the scheme will be needed for some time yet and for this reason further changes are being considered as we seek to refine the scheme to ensure it provides the best possible support,” Andrew Little says.

More information on the expanded eligibility criteria, and who can access the Leave Support Scheme is available on the Work and Income website.

Payments for the scheme will now cover a two-week period – the amount of time most people are required to self-isolate for. If a longer period of self-isolation is required, employers can apply for a further two-week payment. The weekly rates of the scheme will remain at \$585.80 for full-time workers and \$350 for part-time workers. Other existing features of the COVID-19 Leave Support Scheme remain the same.

“One of our lines of defence is to self-isolate and test and break the chain of transmission. We know many workers may feel pressure to continue working, even if symptomatic. Expanding the eligibility criteria means these workers will be able to continue to receive an income and maintain their employment connections,” says Carmel Sepuloni.

The changes came into effect on Monday 28 September and will continue to be administered by the Ministry of Social Development. Applications made up until the changes come into effect will continue to be processed and approved.

This article is brought to you by the Window and Glass Association's free employment helpline 0800 692 384. If you have any questions or would like to discuss the article above, please call Philip or Anthony on the helpline.