



**Inland Revenue**  
Te Tari Taake

National Research & Evaluation Unit  
Te Wāhanga ā-motu mo te Rangahau me Aromātai



# Christchurch Rebuild Workforce: A baseline measure of their characteristics

**Dr Alice Cleland & Virginia Burns**

**Pathways, Circuits and Crossroads Conference | July 2015**



- Phase 1: in-depth interviews with 17 IR subject matter experts
- Phase 2: in-depth interviews with 17 members of the Canterbury community
- Phase 3: telephone survey of 1,000 business owners and employees based in Canterbury

# Workforce Characteristics



**“Before the earthquake we were employing English people. After the earthquake we had a few that came down from the North Island.... And now we are bringing people in from the Philippines. And so we have six Filipino, seven Filipinos working for us and we’ve got more coming.”**

**Construction Sector Interviewee**

**“It’s really hard to get accurate figures. I get one figure from Immigration New Zealand. I get another figure from the Employer’s Chamber of Commerce. I get a completely different figure every time I pick up *The Press*.”**

**Settlement Support Interviewee**

**“I suppose 2/3 New Zealand [workers] and 1/3 [migrant workers]. That’s only pretty brief – what you see when you’re on a job somewhere.”**

**Construction Sector Interviewee**

**86%**

**Male**

**55%**

**35-54 years old**

**77%**

**Pakeha**

**80%**

**Born in Aotearoa /NZ**



# Settlement and Integration



**“I think they will stay here so long as there’s work. I mean they’re fleeing the UK and Ireland like rats off a ship at the moment because there’s absolutely no work. If that happens in New Zealand, in ten years’ time when the construction’s all done and suddenly boom we have 2000 carpenters in Christchurch with no work to do then I think they will just bounce on to the next country because they need to go where there’s work.”**

**Immigration Consultant**

“I mean some with working holiday visas are staying.... **If they’re from countries that are quite poor or going through hardships they’re more likely to want to stay here** and work longer and apply for additional visas. **If they’re from wealthy countries they’re more here on a holiday for an experience for 6-9-12 months and then want to head off to the next place or head home.”**

Recruitment Agent

**62%**

**Had always lived in Christchurch**

**35%**

**Moved to Christchurch**

**64%**

**Intended to stay for 5yrs+**

**37%**

**Work to Residence Visa**

**14%**

**Essential Skills Visa**

**14%**

**Working Holiday Scheme**

**11%**

**Permanent/Residence Visa**

**“[New migrants] have no idea [of what to expect].** They don’t like the temperature, it’s too cold. And **the customs are quite different.** We’re rougher and all that sort of thing. But I think they find us a bit more charitable or easy going. They’re always used to paying for everything whereas we sort of yes do you want to go out for a beer I’m shouting?

They are very subservient so **they’re not used to the answering back and giving each other a hard time. So they take a while to adjust....** You being the boss you’re right and whatever you say is right and I’m just going to do it, because they do not want to go home early. No, and if they do something wrong they’re absolutely horrified.”

**Construction Sector Interviewee**

**“It’s not the attitude of the arrivals, it’s the attitudes of the host community.... These people are here because it’s beautiful, they’re going to build a beautiful city and then we’re all going to live in it happily together. That’s a much better story and that’s the one we want to make happen.”**

**Public Health Interviewee**

**28%**

**Sometimes I think people treat me differently because of my ethnicity**

**45%**



# Effect of the Rebuild



**50%**

**Were businesses in the mature phase**

**33%**

**Did not operate in Christchurch before the earthquakes**

**62%**

**Of new businesses that had been set up to take part in the Rebuild**

**21%**

**I am struggling financially/  
I am struggling to make ends meet**

**48%**

**Taken on other types of work**

**36%**

**Reduced profit margins**

**35%**

**Had difficulties making payments**

“One of the problems with the Rebuild is it’s very stop-start, so **often companies are vying for particular contracts. If they win that contract they suddenly need a lot of people.** They need a lot of bodies to complete the work. It’s quite dangerous for a company to take on too many employees because if they can’t get enough work, they’ve got difficulty offloading them because the employment laws here are very strong.”

**Immigration Consultant**

# Regulatory Attitudes and Behaviours



**26%**

**The tax system is unfair**

**88%**

**Paying tax is the right thing to do**

**27%**

**Did not provide employee with written employment agreement**

**16%**

**Employee worked without payment**

**5%**

**Employee asked to pay their own ACC levies**

“But I mean normally **you see it happening in the vulnerable people who don’t necessarily speak English**, who don’t know how to get a visa themselves and therefore may leave it too late and then things don’t work out. **They try and put an application in themselves**, because a lot of them will be at the minimum wage so they can’t afford an advisor. And then they don’t do it right so it gets returned to them, **and then they go unlawful because they’ve passed the deadline.**”

Generally you’d be looking at **your Asians and your Filipinos and your Indians and your Islanders**, because they don’t know and they don’t have the English language skills to be able to figure out what on earth’s going on.”

**Immigration Consultant**



“Yes... **migrants are extremely vulnerable** and often because their visa’s linked to their job they have to be very careful what they say to their employer. **We’ve heard of people especially in the 90 day rule period being told to get out if they don’t do what they’re told.**

We’ve come across a big company last year where five staff had said **after a 60 hour week they’d been asked to work the weekend** and they said no we need a break and so they were told to pack their bags, get out.”

**Immigration Consultant**

**“The biggest exploitation is happening by the Filipinos at the Filipino end. So it’s the amount of money that they’re being made to pay for accessing jobs in New Zealand.**

**Some Filipinos are paying up to \$10,000 to come here, and they’re paying that back in the Philippines. So it’s a huge amount to pay back and they feel if they complain they may lose their jobs and be kicked out of the country, and they have to return to this debt which they have no way of paying.”**

**Settlement Support Interviewee**

# Conclusions



- Perception of a population in flux, but has a stable base
- Stop-start nature of the Rebuild creates labour supply issues
- Some poor business practice, with specific risks for international migrants