

A horizontal green bar with a white circular icon on the left side.

# New Zealand's International Migration Statistics: 1922–2009

A large, light green decorative graphic in the bottom left corner, consisting of several overlapping circles of varying sizes, some with double outlines, creating a pattern that resembles a stylized map or a cluster of data points.

Part of the series: International Travel and Migration Articles

This paper was prepared by the Population Statistics unit of Statistics New Zealand as part of the series: International Travel and Migration Articles.

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# New Zealand's International Migration Statistics: 1922–2009

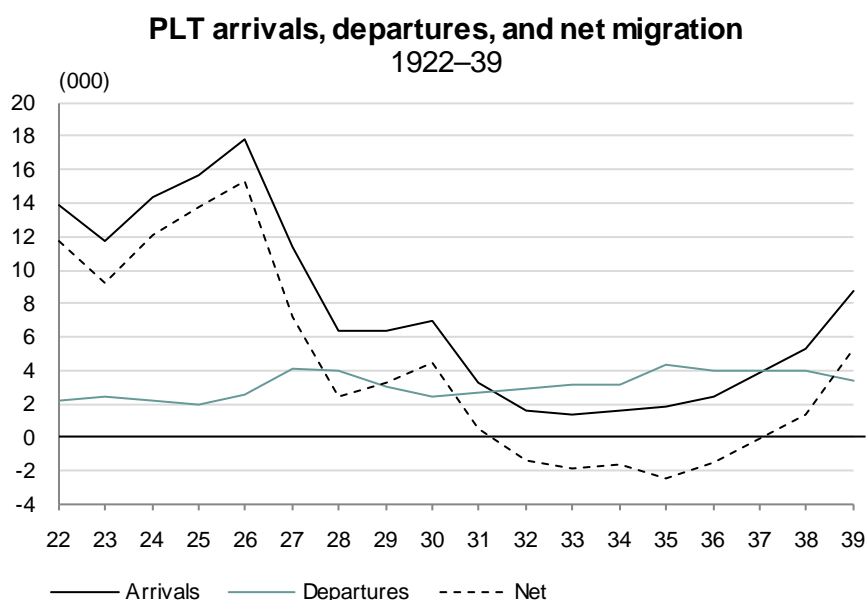
## Introduction

This article continues the story of New Zealand's official migration statistics which began in the article [New Zealand's International Migration Statistics, 1860-1921](#). Arrival and departure cards were introduced to New Zealand in April 1921. The cards provided more detail on travellers than was available from migration data collected through customs officers or passenger lists. This article focuses on permanent and long-term (PLT) migration to and from New Zealand, as net PLT migration impacts on New Zealand's resident population. Short-term travellers, who now make up 98 percent of all passenger movements, are excluded. The migration data in the article is available on Infoshare, Statistics New Zealand's free online time series database. All data refers to year ended December.

## 1922–39

Figure 1 shows PLT arrivals, departures, and net migration for the years 1922 to 1939. As New Zealand had traditionally strong ties with the United Kingdom, most migrants were British subjects, either from the British Isles, Australia, Canada, or other Commonwealth countries (Census and Statistics Office, 1923). A very small percentage arrived from other countries. For example, of the 13,845 PLT arrivals in 1922, only 4 percent were from non-Commonwealth countries. Immigration legislation provided free entry to New Zealand for people of British and Irish birth or descent, while restricting other nationalities (Parliamentary Library, 2008). Also, the British and New Zealand governments assisted migration to New Zealand by subsidising the fares of eligible migrants (Te Ara, 2010).

Figure 1



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Between 1922 and 1926, there was an average annual inflow of 12,400 migrants. The inflow dropped sharply to 7,200 in 1927, following an economic downturn (Te Ara, 2010). The drop was due to a 37

percent decrease in PLT arrivals from the peak of 17,900 in 1926. Despite this drop, net PLT migration did not fall below zero until the 1930s, after the Great Depression began.

Assisted immigration, in the form of fare subsidies, halted in 1931, and New Zealand's Department of Immigration was closed in 1932 (Te Ara, 2010). The impact of immigration restrictions, as well as the Great Depression, is reflected in net PLT outflows between 1932 and 1937, compared with the high numbers of arrivals, and high net migration, of the early 1920s. The greatest net PLT outflow was 2,500 in 1935.

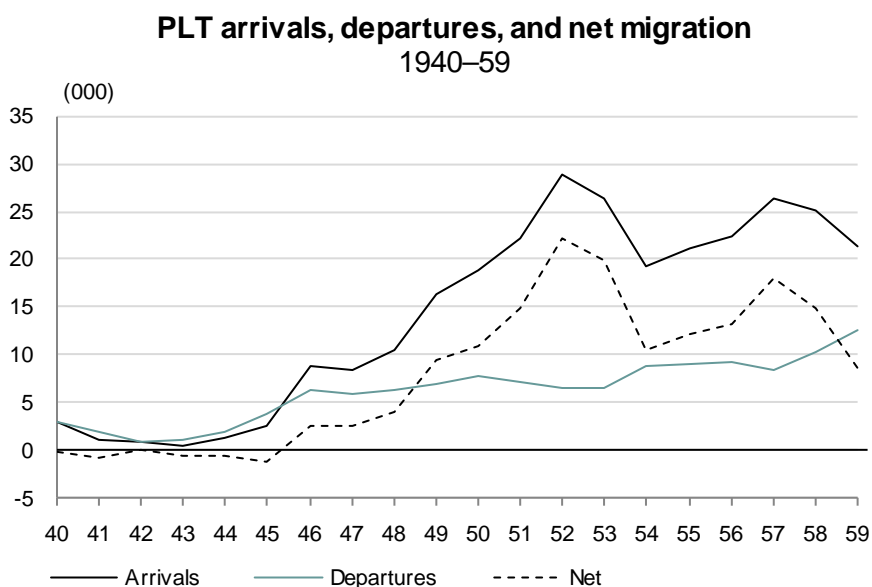
By the end of the 1930s, economic conditions had improved and net PLT migration was once again positive. PLT arrivals increased from a low of 1,400 in 1933 to 8,800 in 1939. Departures were stable, averaging 3,400 annually during the 1930s. The increase in PLT arrivals saw the net PLT inflow reach 5,400 in 1939.

## 1940–59

World War II began at the end of 1939. Between 1940 and 1945, when the war ended, there was an average annual net PLT outflow of 500 people, with both arrivals and departures at low levels. Military movements are excluded from migration statistics. Travel during the war years was restricted, as it was dangerous, and resources were required for the war effort (Te Ara, 2010).

Arrivals began to take off again after the war ended, with the 8,800 PLT arrivals in 1946 almost doubling to 16,300 by 1949. The number of arrivals was boosted by the reintroduction of the assisted and free passage scheme for British immigrants in July 1947. The scheme offered free passage to some migrants, while others had to pay £10 (New Zealand Official Yearbook, 1964, p. 77).

Figure 2



Source: Statistics New Zealand

The 1940s saw the introduction of air travel to New Zealand (Tourism and Migration, 2000). Air travel increased capacity and opened access to New Zealand by reducing travel time. Sailing ships took around

two to three months to reach New Zealand from Europe, while the later steamships reduced the time to around six weeks. While it still took days for European migrants to reach New Zealand by plane, air travel was to become an increasingly popular mode of travel from the 1940s onward (Te Ara, 2010). By 1961, two-thirds of travel to and from New Zealand was by air (Tourism and Migration, 2000).

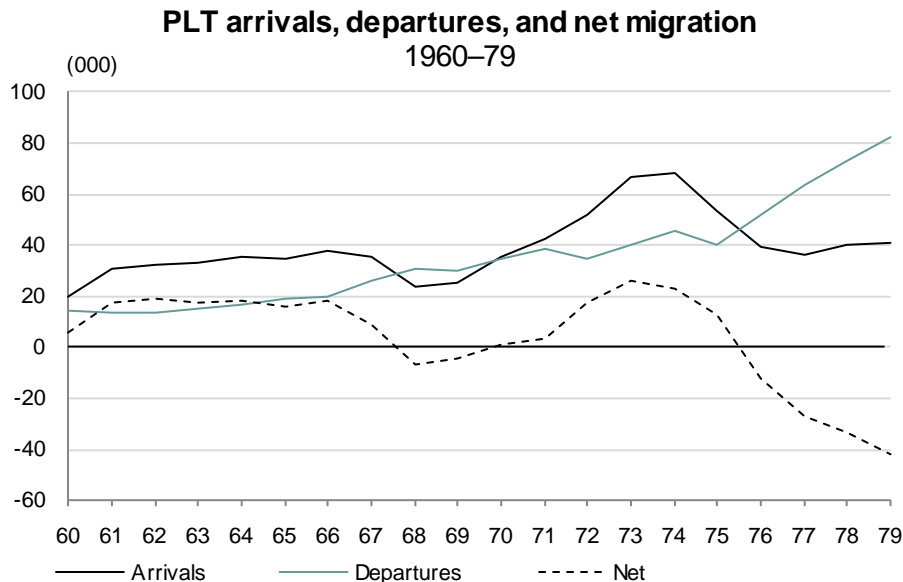
New Zealand entered a period of economic prosperity in the 1950s. This was due, in part, to the demand for New Zealand wool booming. Prices tripled overnight as the United States aimed to increase their strategic stockpiles after becoming involved in the Korean War in 1950 (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2007). PLT arrivals increased by 30 percent from 1951 to 1952, leading to a peak net inflow of 22,200 in 1952.

At the end of 1958, New Zealand tightened the criteria for assisted immigration for British migrants by limiting male migrants to skilled and experienced workers only, and married workers to those with no more than two children (NZ Official Yearbook, 1964, p.77). PLT arrivals dropped from 26,400 in 1957 to 21,300 in 1959.

### 1960–79

Net PLT migration was positive during the early and mid 1960s, when New Zealand was still experiencing economic prosperity. Between 1960 and 1967, there was an average annual net inflow of 15,100 migrants. However in December 1967, wool prices fell by 30 percent, due to increasing competition from synthetic fibres (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2007). As wool represented over a third of New Zealand's total export earnings, the drop in prices led the country into recession, with increased levels of unemployment in 1968 and 1969. These two years saw a net loss of 11,000 migrants, as PLT arrivals decreased and departures increased.

Figure 3



Source: Statistics New Zealand

PLT arrivals grew again in the early 1970s, as New Zealand attracted migrants in response to labour shortages (Parliamentary Library, 2008). There was a peak of 68,100 PLT arrivals in 1974. Around the

same time, New Zealand's economy was hit when the United Kingdom, its largest export market, joined the European Economic Community. This marked the end of almost all trade agreements with New Zealand. The only exception was the Luxembourg Agreement, which guaranteed access and prices for defined quantities of New Zealand butter, cheese, and lamb (Te Ara, 2010). Increases in oil and commodity prices at the beginning and the end of the 1970s also had negative effects on New Zealand's economy (Treasury, 2009).

The increase in net migration, rising oil and commodity prices, and changes to New Zealand's export market all placed strain on the economy during the mid 1970s. As a result, changes were made to immigration policy (NZ Official Yearbook, 1975, p.74). The assisted immigration scheme for British subjects ended in April 1975, as New Zealand aimed to retain employment opportunities for New Zealand workers (NZ Official Yearbook, 1976, p.74). Despite assisted immigration ending, New Zealand still favoured migrants from the 'traditional' source countries, such as the United Kingdom, Europe, and Northern America.

In 1973, Australia and New Zealand signed the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement, which formalised the long-standing arrangement of free movement between the two countries. Australia continues to be the main destination for the majority of New Zealand citizen PLT departures.

In the second half of the 1970s, PLT departures began to increase sharply as the economy deteriorated. The 40,500 PLT departures in 1975 more than doubled by 1979 to reach 82,600 PLT departures, of which 78 percent were New Zealand citizens. This peak in departures resulted in a net outflow of 41,800 people, the highest ever experienced in New Zealand. Most of the net PLT outflow (33,400) was to Australia, while a further 5,100 was to the United Kingdom.

## 1980–99

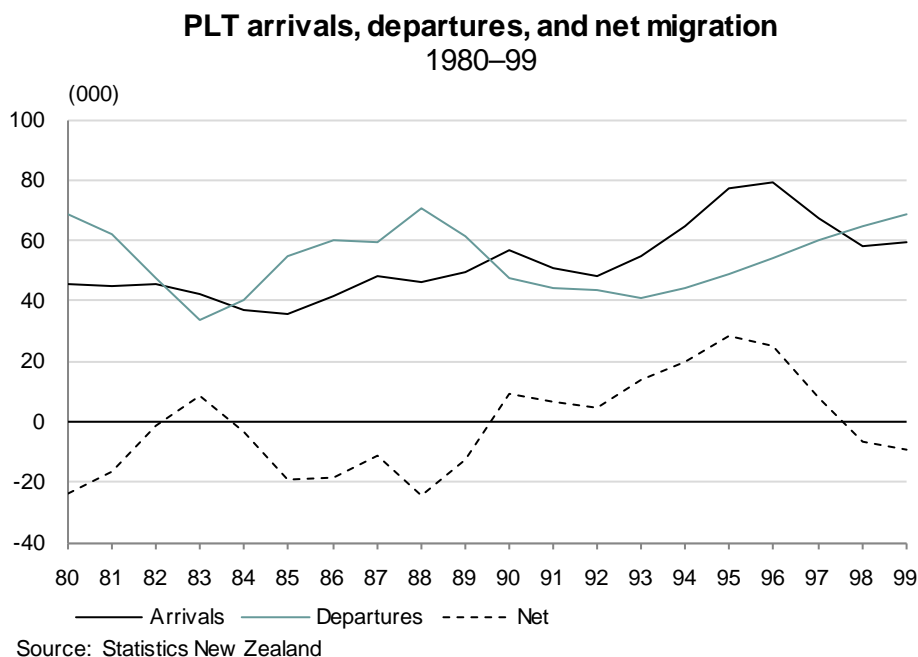
There were net PLT outflows of migrants for most of the 1980s, despite PLT departures falling in the early 1980s. Between 1980 and 1989, New Zealand lost a net 122,500 migrants. The high net outflow to Australia in this period (183,400) was influenced, in part, by unfavourable economic conditions in New Zealand, and higher wages in Australia (Reserve Bank of New Zealand, 1986).

In 1983, the only year in that decade to record a positive net inflow (8,300), there were only 33,900 PLT departures. Departures began to rise again in 1984, reaching a peak of 70,700 in 1988. Most of these departures (58,000) were New Zealand citizens. Although PLT arrivals did not fluctuate as much as departures during the 1980s, they still ranged from 35,400 in 1985 to 49,300 in 1989.

In 1987, a new immigration act was passed which moved to selection on personal characteristics such as educational qualifications, rather than favouring certain source countries (Treasury, 2009). This act led the way for increasing immigration from Asian countries, though the United Kingdom remained an important source of migrants to New Zealand.

A new immigration system was introduced in 1991, using a points system (Treasury, 2009). Potential migrants gained points depending on their age, work history, and other relevant demographics. New Zealand experienced high net inflows in the mid 1990s, as PLT arrivals increased. In 1995, a peak net inflow of 28,500 was reached. The source countries had also changed. In 1995, there was a net PLT inflow of 3,600 from the United Kingdom, New Zealand's traditional source of migrants, while the combined inflow from the Asian countries of Korea, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan was 15,500.

Figure 4



A review of immigration policy in 1995 led to a tightening in English language requirements, while the points system was adapted so that migration targets could be controlled (Te Ara, 2010).

PLT migration decreased to an outflow by the end of the 1990s. In 1999, there was a net outflow of 9,000, driven by fewer PLT arrivals and increasing PLT departures.

## 2000–09

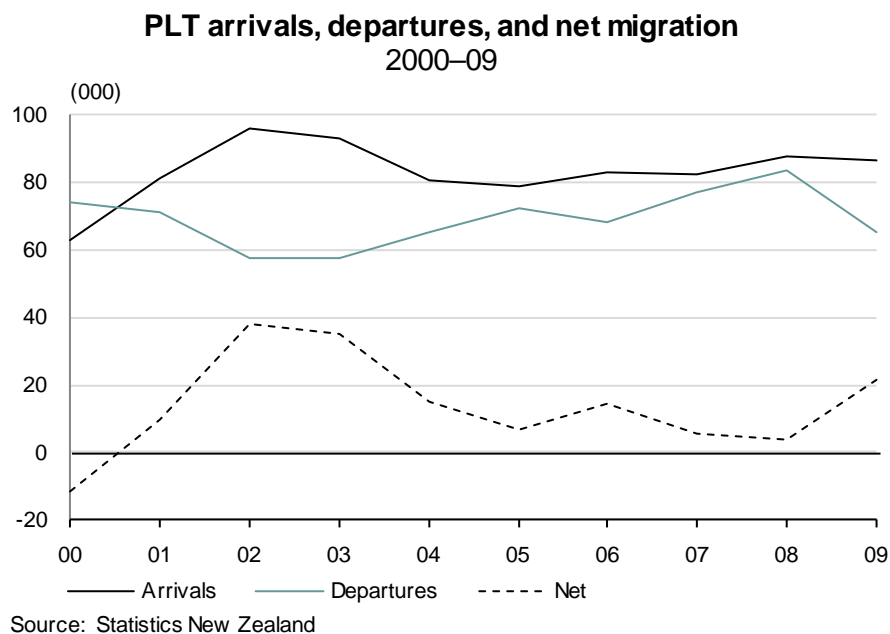
The negative net PLT migration of the late 1990s continued in 2000, with PLT arrivals still at lower levels than departures. However, this reversed the following year, with the net outflow of 11,300 in 2000 becoming a net inflow of 9,700 in 2001, then 38,200 in 2002. This inflow was driven by the record arrival of 96,000 migrants, as well as a relatively low number of PLT departures (57,800).

Many of the new migrants in 2002 and 2003 were international students arriving in New Zealand to study. Reasons for the rapid growth, especially in Chinese students, included New Zealand's reputation as a safe country to study in, the lower New Zealand dollar, more interest from Chinese in gaining Western tertiary qualifications, and New Zealand's comparatively open immigration system (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Enrolments of international students, especially from Asia, peaked at 126,900 in 2002 (Ministry of Education, 2009). As some of these students were arriving for less than 12 months, they would be counted as short-term arrivals, while students already in the country would not be counted in migration data. The main net PLT inflows in 2002 were from China (14,700) and India (6,600), with the United Kingdom in third place (5,900).

By 2005, the net migration inflow had eased to 7,000. The United Kingdom once again dominated as the main source country, with a net inflow of 9,600. There were lower net PLT inflows from India (1,900) and China (1,100), attributable partly to increasing competition from other countries keen to attract international students (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Figure 5



PLT departures increased in 2008, driven by record numbers of New Zealand citizens emigrating to Australia as a result of favourable labour market conditions across the Tasman. There were 43,500 New Zealand citizen PLT departures to Australia in 2008, surpassing the previous high of 40,600 in 1988.

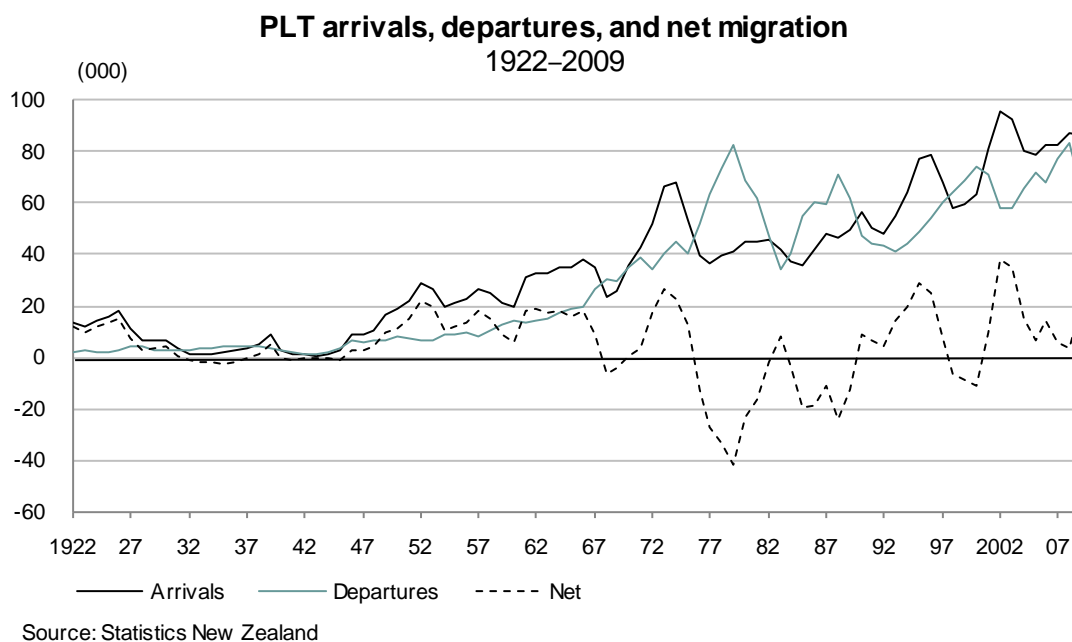
By 2009, PLT departures of New Zealand citizens to Australia had dropped by 34 percent, to 28,600, due in part to weaker labour market conditions in Australia following the global economic downturn. Overall net PLT migration remained positive, at 21,300. PLT arrivals have remained relatively constant since the peaks in 2002 and 2003, with more variability being experienced in departure numbers.

The countries that were the main sources of net PLT migration to New Zealand in 2009 were the United Kingdom (9,100), India (6,000), and China (3,800).

## Conclusion

Net PLT migration varied greatly between 1922 and 2009, as illustrated in figure 6. Migration flows were influenced by legislative and economic factors in New Zealand and overseas. The most PLT arrivals in a December year were 96,000 in 2002, while the highest number of PLT departures occurred in 2008 (83,600). The year 1979 saw the highest net PLT outflow of migrants ever recorded in New Zealand (-41,800), while the greatest net PLT inflow was in 2002 (38,200).

Figure 6



## Data sources

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