

MIQ VIRTUAL LOBBY SURVEY

RESULTS REPORT

25 SEPTEMBER 2021

Following the first “virtual lobby” to apply for Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) vouchers in New Zealand on Monday 20 September 2021, Grounded Kiwis surveyed individuals who had used the system. In total, 902 people responded.

These respondents answered questions regarding whether they had made it through the lobby, whether they had secured a voucher, how easy/hard the system was to use, and whether they experienced any technical difficulties.

Respondents could also comment on their overall experience using the lobby system, and the impact of securing or not securing an MIQ voucher.

Lobby

In total, 902 individuals responded to the survey request. Of these:



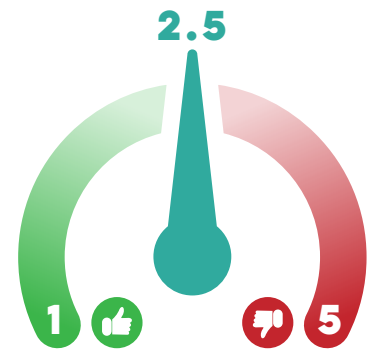
This equates to a **success rate of 11%**, which is broadly consistent with the MIQ data showing that 31,800 individuals entered the lobby and 3,200 rooms were booked.

Respondents were asked their queue number, which ranged from position 5 to position 27,000+ in the queue.

Usability

On average, **respondents scored the system a 2.5/5** for usability (with 1 being easy and 5 being hard).

Approximately **25%** of respondents said they experienced **technical difficulties** with the system, with 18% providing explanatory comments.



Of these, the most common themes included:



Grounded Kiwis has provided this data in detailed form to the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) to inform their system design.

Experience

On average respondents rated their **overall experience** of the new virtual lobby booking system at **3.6 out of 10 stars**.



Of the respondents who **did not obtain a voucher**, the **average** rating was **3.2 stars**.
Of the respondents who **did obtain a voucher**, the **average** rating was **6.4 stars**.

Impact

Respondents were asked to provide optional comments to the question:

**What was the impact of getting/not getting a voucher in this lottery for you?
How do you feel about the result? How does it affect your life?**

MIQ voucher secured ✓

Of those who secured a voucher, the top emotional themes that emerged were a sense of **relief**, closely followed by feelings of **guilt**, on the basis they had obtained a voucher while others had missed out.

“Feel sooo lucky to be coming home, last year has been tough on my own and such a weight off to know it will be over soon.”

Anonymous

“‘Relieved’ – on one hand then immediately felt ‘guilty’ as well. It’s irrational but I know so many more heartbreaking stories out there of people that didn’t get one.”

Ed, USA

“I feel incredibly guilty, as I know there are others more desperate than I am.”

Lizzie, UK

The primary impact was a sense of **life certainty** and ability to plan for the future – accommodation, career, finances, and education. **Reuniting with whānau**, including sick relatives, or partners or children who had been separated from one another, was another key impact mentioned.

MIQ voucher not secured ✗

Of those who did not secure a voucher, the most common emotional themes were individuals feeling **devastated**, **heartbroken**, **disappointed**, and **frustrated**. A number of respondents expressed feeling **disenfranchised** or **abandoned** by New Zealand.

“Disappointed, heartbroken, defeated.”

Jessica, Canada

“Depressed. I spent a sleepless night waiting in vain then a very emotionally drained day in tears knowing I can’t go home.”

Amy, France

“Hopeless, feel trapped and isolated from my home.”

Alex, Canada

The primary impacts noted were **separation from whānau**, including being unable to care for ill relatives, life being in **limbo**, and **financial** concerns. **Mental health** concerns were expressed frequently, with individuals being concerned for their own, or their relatives', mental health.



Separation from whānau

Separation from whānau was the leading impact identified in the comments, with over a third of respondents mentioning whānau or family in their comments..

“I want to return to NZ to be with my family after undergoing cancer treatment on my own without support over the past year (during a Covid outbreak and lockdown). I am returning for good and have not been in a position to come earlier than now due to treatment.”

Sarah, London, UK

“It's life shattering because my wife is sick in NZ and my two little children are with her. I'm trying to get back to help care for all three of them.”

Fala, Australia

“Resigned to never get a slot. Probably won't see my mum in UK before she dies. I can't go not knowing if I will get back within a reasonable time frame. Will lose job.”

Caroline, NZ

“I have not been able to see any of my family in NZ in nearly 3 years. I share custody of my child with her British dad so I cannot permanently move to NZ, however visiting our Kiwi family every 12-24 months has been our lifeline of support.”

Lizzie, London, UK



“With 3 young kids and a wife back in NZ, it's hard to put into words how gut wrenching this process has been. I was up at 3.30am, ready to go. Messages from lots of friends and family back home wishing me well. Only to be 18,000+ in the queue. It's inhumane.”

Tim, Singapore



“Another year goes by. Elderly parents may die soon. Daughter may have baby and I won't be there. My wife Gina died before she could get back. She was so looking forward to going home to see her elderly parents.”

Paul, USA

Life in limbo

A sense of being in limbo with no ability to make future plans, including where to live, work, or enroll children in school, was a common theme. For those who did secure a voucher, it was a huge relief to have some certainty. Many respondents referred to being homeless or in temporary accommodation due to leases expiring or homes being sold. Others pointed out that moving a family to another country is very difficult to arrange within three months (or less), even if they had been “lucky” enough to secure a voucher.

“Wanted to cry, we need to relocate back home, and in January I’m no longer having valid visa to stay. Don’t know what to do after that, begging to stay where I am is not a solution, no place to stay – will have to get a hotel or some kind of accommodation, all extra expenses plus kids need to attend schools in NZ in which they are already enrolled next year. Mentally nerve racking.”

Sabine, Malaysia



“35 weeks pregnant and was living out of a van waiting to be able to travel home with my partner. Tried for emergency allocation but was denied so this was our only hope of getting home before the baby was born. I was absolutely stoked to get a spot, but understand with the way the system is set up this could have gone the complete opposite way.”

Sarah, Australia

“I’ve been in limbo with my kids for a year, this means we’ll be in limbo for longer. They’ll have to repeat a year of school because of this.”

Evan, USA

Financial impact

Many respondents cited financial ramifications, including redundancy, inability to commit to a new job or not being able to take a job due to visas. Others mentioned worries about education, with school places or university courses now in doubt for 2022 because of no clarity about when an MIQ voucher may be obtained.



“Scary and stressful.

Our superannuation is at risk because we haven't gotten back to NZ as planned due to the bubble being suspended. The govt helps businesses during lockdown, why not support those stuck overseas with super due to be cut off? We are also double-vaccinated and have the ability to self-isolate in Christchurch.”

Tekla, Western Australia

“I think it is disgusting that the NZ government expects other countries to look after its citizens. Meanwhile, I'm using my savings as it's illegal to work, can't rent as landlords don't want to touch me. Decades of savings towards super going down the drain while I wait. Luckily the UK govt vaccinated me!”

Sarah, UK

“It was massive impact wise. I had been made redundant recently and wanted to travel home to NZ, but with the uncertainty around when this could happen, applying for jobs, or rather knowing which country to apply for jobs made life difficult.”

David, Sydney



“I now owe nearly 10,000 NZ dollars for emergency and cardiology treatment to get my blood pressure under control. Tonight, waiting for almost 8000 people ahead of me to disappear so I could obtain a voucher was more anxiety producing. When I was finally invited to enter the only dates available were the 21st and 23rd of September for which there were no flights from my location or time to land on either of those days so I had to leave the system. That was torture. This is not just. I am just one small story of many that I have heard and that impacts my life every day as I grow more and more alarmed at what we are all suffering under the present system. Please just let us come home!”

Connie, USA



Mental health

Mental health stood out as a worrying trend. Respondents mentioned crying, anxiety, depression and calling offshore support agencies such as Lifeline. Others have family either outside of New Zealand or in New Zealand who are also impacted by anxiety at the separation, and in some cases worrying that they will never see each other again.

“False hope. To make it into the booking system only to see the available dates were for 21-25th September and no matching flights is soul crushing and heart breaking. Been trying to get back to my fiancé and family for 14 months. My anxiety is shot. Stress levels through the roof. I’m barely eating and haven’t slept in days / months. My mental health of being separated from my family is going downhill fast, to the point where I have had to call Lifeline. Possibility of losing a job that was lined up over there and worst case my relationship. Completely heartbreaking and I’m just 1 of thousands. There has to be a better way.”

Anonymous, Australia

“It was just mind blowing sitting there waiting in the lobby to see where you would be placed in the queue. I am ex military and am ready for most things life throws at you but the waiting game in the lobby is next level stress full. It’s a mixed bag of emotions, all hit me in one hour waiting for the clock to strike 9am.”

Ele, Qatar



“I am becoming increasingly panicky and overwhelmed about how to keep going. I have 2 small children and our house is sold and we will eventually be homeless but we don’t qualify for an emergency application. I feel incredibly depressed and struggling to do daily life with my kids.”

Jodie, Australia

“I’m suffering from postnatal anxiety and depression while I care for my 9-week-old baby in Sydney, isolated from our family in NZ. We were meant to move home to NZ in August/Sept after she was born and had prepared all year to do so. When I got to the booking page 21 & 22 Sept was available but there are no flights from Sydney on those days. We even considered trying to go via Singapore. The inadequate MIQ supply has devastated my entire family as her grandparents continue to miss out on seeing her grow. These are days with her that we will never get back. I also have physical birth injuries that make it difficult to care for her so I need family support. We live with half our belongings packed up in boxes waiting to go at a moment’s notice.”

Kiara, Sydney, Australia

Disenfranchisement

The inability to enter New Zealand was cited by some as breaching a human right. Some New Zealanders living offshore felt alienated from their home, and the current MIQ system and attitude towards the offshore “one million” is making them question whether they want to return to Aotearoa to live. Others expressed feeling embarrassed or ashamed of their country.



“The anxiety and stress caused by today’s debacle has left me feeling dejected and disenfranchised. Such a degrading and disheartening experience just to come home. Coming home to our tūrangawaewae is a right, not a contest!”

Sharon, Australia

“I was relieved but felt sad/bad for all the people who didn’t get a voucher ... it’s their right as NZ citizens.”

Claire, Hong Kong



“I feel abandoned by my own country. I feel that there is a breach in the contract between the citizen and the nation state. I am wanting to return home permanently after 2 years away without my family and am starting work in a job next March in Auckland. I am angry that it seems like I am not allowed to return and contribute to the economy. If my country does not look out for me, why should I do things for my country? I am worried I will not be able to start work next year.”

Josh, Switzerland



“Embarrassed to be a NZ citizen. I don’t feel like I have a home country when they’re treating their citizens like this. It’s a joke.”

Anonymous, UK

“So demoralising to have to enter a lottery to ‘win’ the right to be able to return home.”

Meridee, Australia

“I feel like I have been abandoned from my own country. Leaving 8 years ago, I would have never thought I’d be treated like a concert ticket consumer.”

Bryony, UK

“Totally demoralizing. Hunger games is a good analogy.”

Sue, New Zealand

Conclusion

The virtual lobby requires Kiwis to enter a lottery, and assigns them a number in a queue, to determine their entitlement to use MIQ and enter New Zealand. The fundamental right to return is being left to a game of chance.

The survey results show that many Kiwis have been separated from their loved ones, and have not seen their whānau for significant periods of time. Families and individuals moving back to New Zealand expressed needing months to plan leaving homes, ending school terms, shipping household contents, selling cars, and resigning from and seeking jobs, few of which can be done within the short notice of the current MIAS allocations. Similarly, those who are in New Zealand expressed a need for certainty of when they can get back. Many respondents reported significant mental health impacts of the current system, including stress, anxiety, and depression.

These are not numbers. These are lives.

