



# Media

## Fact Sheet 24a - Priority Processing for Skilled Migration Visas

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The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Bowen, has set new priority processing arrangements for certain skilled migration visas. These arrangements will give effect to the minister's announcement on 10 May 2011 that regional visas will be given the highest processing priority.

Priority processing refers to the order in which the department considers skilled migration applications. The minister is able to consider and finalise visa applications in an order of priority that the minister considers appropriate. The changes to priority processing do not change visa eligibility criteria.

The new priority processing arrangements apply to the following visas:

- Employer Nomination Scheme (ENS)
- Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS)
- certain General Skilled Migration (GSM).

See: [Fact Sheet 24 – Overview of Skilled Migration to Australia](#)

**From 1 July 2011**, processing priorities (with highest priority listed first) are:

1. applications from people who are employer sponsored under the RSMS program or who have applied for a Skilled – Regional (subclass 887) visa
2. applications from people who are applying under the ENS program
3. applications from people who are nominated by a state or territory government agency for an occupation specified on that agency's state migration plan
4. applications from people who have nominated an occupation on the Skilled Occupation List (SOL) – Schedule 1 in effect from 1 July 2011  
**See: [Annual Update of Skilled Occupation List \(111KB PDF file\)](#)**
5. all other applications.

Priority processing arrangements have been designed to complement other recent changes to skilled migration to ensure that the economy gets the skills it needs now. They help to better address the needs of industry by targeting skills in demand across a number of sectors, and help ensure that the skilled migration program is responsive to the current economic climate and the needs of the Australian economy. Priority processing arrangements are subject to further change in response to the economic climate and the demand for particular skills in the Australian economy.

Priority processing arrangements apply to current applications, including those in the final stages of processing. Departmental case officers must follow the direction made by the minister about priority processing. Case officers are not able to respond to requests to process individual applications outside of the order set out in these processing priority arrangements. Refunds of costs incurred during processing are not available for delays in processing.

## GSM visas affected

The following GSM visas are affected by priority processing:

- Skilled – Independent subclass 175
- Skilled – Sponsored subclass 176
- Skilled – Regional Sponsored subclass 475
- Skilled – Regional Sponsored subclass 487

- Skilled – Independent Regional subclass 495
- Skilled – Designated Area-sponsored (Provisional) subclass 496
- Graduate – Skilled subclass 497
- Skilled – Onshore Independent New Zealand Citizen subclass 861
- Skilled – Onshore Australian-sponsored New Zealand Citizen subclass 862
- Skilled – Onshore Designated Area-sponsored New Zealand Citizen subclass 863
- Skilled – Independent Overseas Student subclass 880
- Skilled – Australian-sponsored subclass 881
- Skilled – Designated Area-sponsored Overseas Student subclass 882
- Skilled – Independent subclass 885
- Skilled – Sponsored subclass 886
- Skilled – Regional subclass 887

## **GSM visas exempt**

The following visa subclasses are exempt from priority processing and will be processed in the order in which they are received:

- Skilled – Recognised Graduate subclass 476
- Skilled – Graduate subclass 485
- Skilled – Designated Area – Sponsored (Residence) subclass 883

The following situations are also exempt from priority processing and will be processed in the order in which they are received:

- applications that are remitted to the department by the Migration Review Tribunal (MRT)
- applications where it is readily apparent that the criteria for grant of a visa would not be satisfied
- applications from subsequent entrants.

## **RSMS, ENS and state migration plans—priority groups 1, 2 and 3**

Applications from people who are applying under the RSMS are processed as priority group 1. Those applying under the ENS are processed as priority group 2.

Applications from people who are nominated by a state or territory government agency with a nominated occupation that is specified on the state or territory's state migration plan receive the third highest level of priority processing. State migration plans are developed by state or territory governments in consultation with the department. They include occupations that are in demand in each individual state and territory.

As a transitional arrangement, applicants who were nominated by a state or territory government for an 'off-list' occupation prior to the implementation of state migration plans will also receive processing under priority group 3.

## **Occupations on the SOL—Schedule 1 in effect at 1 July 2011—priority group 4**

All applicants with a nominated occupation on the SOL—Schedule 1 are included in priority group 4. This includes both independent applicants and applicants sponsored by an Australian family member.

## **All other applications—priority group 5**

Applicants with a nominated occupation that is not on the SOL—Schedule 1 in effect at 1 July 2011 and who are not employer sponsored or nominated by a state or territory government under a state migration plan, will be processed under priority group 5.

Applicants with a nominated occupation that is not on the SOL—Schedule 1 in effect at 1 July 2011 can only move into a higher priority group by lodging a new application with an employer sponsorship or a state or territory government nomination in an occupation specified under a state migration plan. Alternatively, applicants can only nominate a different occupation that is on the SOL—Schedule 1 by lodging a new application. It is not possible to change a nominated occupation or to change to an employer sponsored or state nominated visa category, unless a new application is lodged. A new application would require the payment of a new Visa Application Charge.

Applicants should not contact the department to request that their application be exempt from the priority processing direction. Case officers do not have discretion to exempt applications.

## **Options available to applicants in priority group 5**

Applicants with nominated occupations in priority group 5 should note that these changes are designed to facilitate priority processing of group 1. Group 5 will however still have a long wait for visa processing. **The options available are as follows.**

**For applicants who were outside Australia when they made their application:**

- **continue to await a decision on their visa application**
- **consider eligibility for an employer sponsored visa, which would require a new visa application**
- **consider eligibility for nomination by a state or territory government under a state migration plan, which would require a new visa application**
- **withdraw their application.**

For applicants who were in Australia when they made their application:

- continue to live and work in Australia (if their visa permits) while awaiting a decision on their visa application
- consider eligibility for an employer sponsored visa, which would require a new visa application
- consider eligibility for nomination by a state and territory government under a state migration plan, which would require a new visa application
- apply for another substantive visa
- withdraw their application and depart Australia.

**Note:** Applicants are not entitled to a refund of their Visa Application Charge or compensation for other costs incurred in making an application.

Applicants who are in Australia and need to travel overseas while waiting for their application to be processed should approach their local office of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to discuss an application for a Bridging visa B. Bridging visa B is generally not issued for greater than three months. Applicants should not contact the visa processing centre where they lodged their application to request a Bridging visa B.

Bridging visa C holders who want to apply for work rights should contact the visa processing centre where they lodged their application.

## Processing Times

Estimates of processing times that may apply to different types of applicants are provided as a guide only. As processing times are dependent on a range of factors, individual processing times may vary considerably from the published estimates. Estimates are subject to change in response to changes in application rates and skilled migration policy.

Information on estimated processing times is available in the Client Services Charter.

**See:** [Skilled Migration Visa Processing Times](#)

Further information is available on the department's website.

**See:** [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)

The department also operates a national general enquiries line.

**Telephone:** 131 881

**Hours of operation:** Monday to Friday from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm (recorded information is available outside these hours).

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# About the Department

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The tables below detail the processing time service standards for skilled migration visas.

**Note:** We aim to process applications within these service standards, however, actual processing times may vary depending on a range of factors.

**See:** [Processing Time Service Standards](#)

## Processing priority groups

Priority processing arrangements apply to skilled migration applications. They determine the order in which the department considers applications. Applications accorded a higher priority under the arrangements will be processed ahead of lower priority applications, regardless of when the application is lodged.

The following table details processing priorities for skilled migration applications.

**Note:** The highest priority is listed first.

Priority group number	Application Type
1	Employer sponsored under the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) program or who have applied for a Skilled – Regional (subclass 887) visa.
2	Employer sponsored under the Employer Nomination Scheme (ENS) program.
3	Nominated by a state or territory government agency for an occupation specified on that agency's state migration plan
4	Applicants who have nominated an occupation on the Skilled Occupation List (SOL) – Schedule 1. <b>See:</b> <a href="#">Skilled Occupation List</a>
5	All other applications

## Processing times – skilled migration applications affected by processing priorities

The below table describes the processing times for the following visa subclasses.

Priority	Visa Subclass	Processing Time
1	RSMS (subclass 119, 857) Skilled Regional (subclass 887)	5 – 8 months
2	ENS (subclass 121, 856)	5 – 8 months
3	State Migration Plans (subclass 176, 475, 487, 886)	12 – 24 months
4	Nominated Occupation on the SOL – Schedule 1 (subclass 175, 495, 496, 861, 862, 863, 880, 881, 882, 883, 885, 886)	18 months
5	All other visas	Assessment will commence <b>when all cases in priority groups 1-4 are finalised.</b>

## Processing times – skilled migration applications **exempt** from processing priorities

The following visa subclasses are exempt from priority processing. These subclasses are processed in the order in which they are received.

Visa Subclass	Processing Time
476	7 months.
485	<b>12 months.</b> <b>Note:</b> From 13 April 2011 temporary processing arrangements were introduced for subclass 485 visa applications which may affect processing times. <b>See:</b> <a href="#">Processing Arrangements for Skilled Graduate (Subclass 485) Visa Applications</a> ( 43KB PDF file)
120, 855	5 – 8 months.

More information on worker category visas is available.

**See:** [Workers](#)