

Read for more information on LGBTQ+ rights in New Zealand, race and ethnicity, religious diversity, and women's rights

LGBTQ+ in New Zealand

New Zealand provides a generally safe and welcoming home for members of the LGBTQ+ community. Presently New Zealand has the queerest parliament in the world with 11 Members of Parliament openly queer out of the total 120, including the Minister of Finance. All people of the rainbow community are protected by law: homosexuality was decriminalised in 1986. The Human Rights Act (1993) outlaws discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Same sex couples can legally adopt children and access government funded IVF treatment, both in exactly the same way as heterosexual couples. Same sex marriage has been legal since 2013 (the 13th country in the world to do so). Transgender rights include the right to change name and registered sex on official documents including birth certificates. (Though students transitioning please know the name on your NZ university ID card must match the name on your passport). Although all Arcadia programs in New Zealand are in cities with active LGBTQ+ communities and former students tell us it is easy to find queer friends, it is in the larger cities of Auckland and Wellington where the community is more vibrant and established. While former students tell us they felt safe they also said there is still some ignorance and lack of understanding in the wider community.

Race and Ethnicity in New Zealand

New Zealand is a vibrant and culturally diverse country that is a generally kind and accepting place for people of all racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds. Discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity and nationality is prohibited by the Human Rights Act (1993). Despite this, ignorance and racism is an ongoing issue in New Zealand.

Māori are the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand and have a rich culture, based on iwi (tribe), with the whanau (extended family), elders (kaumātua and kuia), the marae (ancestral home), mana (special powers), whakapapa (ancestral line), whenua (land), waiata and kapa haka (song and dance) all playing important roles. In 1769 Captain Cook was the first British explorer to set foot on New Zealand, and whalers, sealers and those seeking new opportunities soon followed to what was becoming an increasingly lawless society. In 1840 the Crown and over 500 Māori chiefs signed te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi. This document, written in both English and Māori, intended to provide protection and rights to Māori as British citizens, to give Māori full ownership of their lands, forests, fisheries, treasures (taonga), and possessions, give the Crown the exclusive right to buy Māori land, and give sovereignty/governance of New Zealand to the British. The two versions of the Treaty held differences that continue to be disputed today, and over the next hundred years, Māori saw much of their land wrongfully sold to, or confiscated by the Crown. After much protest, and various court cases, in 1975 Parliament passed the Treaty of Waitangi Act and established the Waitangi Tribunal whose job it is to interpret the Treaty, research breaches of the Treaty by the Crown and suggest means of reparations. Many iwi have received significant pay outs and apologies through this on-going process.

Today Māori language and culture are part of every school's curriculum, Māori have increased presence in government,

local council and local media, as well as the arts and sport - but still racism and the lasting effects of white colonisation mean there is an overrepresentation of Māori in prisons and as hospital patients, and a lower life expectancy.

Māori represent 16.5% of the population, according to the 2018 census. Europeans (also called pākehā) make up 70%, the Asian ethnic group is 15%, Pacific people (Pasifika) represent 8% of the population, and Middle Eastern/Latin American/African ethnic groups represent 1.5 percent. Based on these statistics and our own students' experiences, diversity in New Zealand may look different from what most American students are familiar with.

Women's Rights in New Zealand

New Zealand is a generally safe place for women, and discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity and marital status is unlawful according to the Human Rights Act (1993). However, discrimination, the gender pay gap, domestic violence and violence against women are still major issues.

In many ways New Zealand has helped pave the way for other nations. In 1893, New Zealand was the first country in the world to give women the right to vote. The suffrage movement was led by Kate Sheppard, whose face is on the \$10 note, in acknowledgment of her achievements. In present times, New Zealand boasts strong participation from women in politics and national positions of power. New Zealand has had women prime ministers for 15 of the last 24 years (Jenny Shipley, Helen Clark and Jacinda Adern). In 2021, not only is Jacinda Adern starting her second term in parliament but the Leader of the Opposition party, Judith Collins, is a woman, the Queen's representative, the Governor General, is a woman (Dame Patsy Reddy) and the Chief Justice, Helen Winkelman, is a woman. It should also be noted that Jacinda Adern took office when she was only 37 years old, unmarried (now engaged to her partner) and pregnant, and is only the second elected head of government to give birth while in office.

In 2020 abortion was removed from the Crimes Act 1961 and replaced with the Abortion Legalisation Act 2020 which permits abortion up to and including 20 weeks. While healthcare providers are allowed to consciously object to performing abortions, the process of getting an abortion has become much simpler and less daunting for those that opt for this procedure.

Intimate partner violence and domestic violence are pervasive issues in New Zealand and the government has recently passed the Family Violence Act and Family Violence (Amendments) Act to provide a modern framework to effectively address family violence and sexual assault, including the right of all employees to a maximum of 10 days of paid Domestic Violence leave each year, separate to sick leave. There has also been widespread media reporting on these issues and an It's Not OK campaign in an attempt to combat the issue of family violence.

There is also a government department, the Ministry of Women, that has been in place since 1984 and focuses on ensuring the contribution of women and girls is valued, that women and girls are financially secure to participate and thrive, and

works towards creating a society where all women and girls are free from violence and harassment. While there is still much work to be done, having a government department dedicated to the equality and advancement of women is a step in the right direction, with one clear result being that in 2021 almost all state boards and councils now have 50% women membership.

Religious Diversity in New Zealand

New Zealand is a secular nation with no official or established religion. This has been the case since the start of New Zealand's colonial political history, when at the very first session of the New Zealand Parliament in 1854, there was a debate around whether Parliament should begin with a Church of England prayer. Not all the representatives were Anglican or even Christian, and so it was agreed that no one faith would have "preeminence". NZ would not follow England in having an established church, and all religions were to have a "perfect political equality". Having said that, most of the colonial migrants were of Christian faith and there was much effort into converting Māori to Christianity, hence Christmas and Easter are still both important vacations. In more recent years, as different migrant groups settle in NZ, religious diversity is increasing but at the same time religious apathy is growing, with nearly 50% of New Zealanders in the 2018 census stating they were not affiliated with any religion. (The others were 27% Christian, 2.6% Hindu, 1.2% Islam, Judaism 0.07% (other religions were all less than 1%). Advice to students coming is that New Zealand students often see attending church as something for the elderly, Pasifika, or fervent, and students of Islam or Jewish faith often find it challenging to find places of worship as communities are very small. But resoundingly, those that make the effort to connect with local places of worship are embraced warmly by local communities, and often develop lasting friendships.