

Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Inquiry into the value of skilled migration

5 January 2025



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Who We Are

Master Builders is the nation's peak building and construction industry association, which was federated on a national basis in 1890. Master Builders' members are the Master Builder State and Territory Associations. Over 130 years, the Master Builders network has grown to more than 32,000 businesses nationwide, including the top 100 construction companies. Master Builders is the only industry association representing all three sectors: residential, commercial, and civil construction.

The Master Builders network also delivers vocational education and training through its network of registered and group training organisations across Australia. This includes trade qualifications in building and carpentry as well as ongoing professional development training.

Membership with Master Builders is a stamp of quality, demonstrating that a builder values high standards of skill, integrity, and responsibility to their clients.

Master Builders' vision is for a profitable and sustainable building and construction industry.

Executive Summary

Master Builders Australia (Master Builders) provides this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration inquiry into the value of skilled migration.

While the Terms of Reference for this inquiry are broad-ranging, they fundamentally seek to examine the value of skilled migration to Australia and the scope and effectiveness of the current skilled migration settings.

Skilled migration is key to relieving the acute structural strain the building and construction industry workforce is under, yet policy settings are preventing this lever from completely unlocking its potential.

Australia's building and construction industry is confronting a range of pressures including a persistent national housing shortfall, an ageing construction workforce, declining apprenticeship commencements and completions, longstanding productivity decline, and a policy environment that is demanding more complex, labour-intensive construction outcomes.

These pressures represent a material risk to housing delivery, infrastructure investment, productivity growth and broader economic performance.

The Reserve Bank of Australia has repeatedly observed that new housing supply continues to fall short of demand, contributing to historically low vacancy rates, upward pressure on rents and elevated dwelling prices. The National Housing Supply Council has similarly warned that labour shortages and regulatory constraints mean construction labour supply "consistently falls short of what is required," with some projects becoming unviable even at high prices.

In response, governments have committed to delivering 1.2 million new, well-located homes by 2029 under the National Housing Accord. Achieving this target, alongside major infrastructure programs and Net Zero commitments, requires a sustained uplift in construction workforce capacity across trades, supervisory, technical and specialist roles.

On current settings, the domestic labour market cannot meet this demand.

Apprenticeship commencements and completions have deteriorated steadily since 2020. By the end of 2024, there were 112,207 construction apprentices in training, a decline of 3.9 per cent from the previous year, with commencements down a further 7 per cent compared to 2023. Completion rates remain low, with many apprentices leaving due to income pressures, inconsistent supervision and limited progression pathways.

At the same time, the workforce is ageing. In 1985, just 8.0 per cent of construction workers were aged over 54. By 2025, this share had doubled to 16.9 per cent, while the proportion of workers under 25 has fallen materially. As experienced tradespeople, supervisors and inspectors exit the industry, capacity and capability are lost faster than they can be replaced.

With unemployment around 4 per cent, there is no latent domestic labour pool to draw upon. Even with significant reform to vocational education and training, it will take three to five years before additional apprentices or graduates translate into fully qualified tradespeople and industry workers, and longer again to reach scale. Domestic reform is essential but cannot address immediate workforce shortages.

Labour scarcity is compounding long-standing productivity decline. The Productivity Commission has found that Australian homebuilders now deliver around half as many homes per hour worked as they did three decades ago, reflecting a 25 per cent decline in construction productivity and a doubling

of labour input per dwelling since the 1990s. Reserve Bank liaison confirms that workforce shortages are directly contributing to longer build times, inefficient sequencing, re-mobilisation of trades, project delays and escalating construction costs.

These dynamics mean that workforce shortages do not simply limit output: they actively suppress productivity and raise costs across the entire construction pipeline, further undermining housing affordability and infrastructure delivery

If Australia does not materially increase the supply of qualified construction workers, the consequences are unavoidable. The National Housing Accord target will not be met. Infrastructure delivery will slow. Construction costs will remain elevated. Productivity will continue to lag international peers. National objectives relating to decarbonisation, electrification, disaster resilience and defence capability will be compromised.

Skilled migration is not a substitute for rebuilding the domestic training pipeline. It is the essential bridge that buys time for Long-term reforms across for example education, training, regulation, planning and innovation to take effect while ensuring that national priorities remain deliverable.

Despite high overall migration levels, construction trades remain significantly under-represented.

As at June 2025, there were approximately 46,100 primary skilled visa holders classified as “Technicians and Trades Workers” nationally, with analysis indicating that only around 3,644 were working in core construction trade roles. This quantum is wholly inconsistent with the scale of workforce demand implied by the Housing Accord and national infrastructure pipelines.

At the same time, Australia is failing to utilise skilled migrants already in the country. An estimated 18,400 permanent migrants hold building and construction qualifications but are working below their skill level, primarily due to fragmented, costly and slow skills recognition and licensing arrangements. Activating this cohort represents one of the fastest and least-cost opportunities to lift housing output and productivity.

Australia will only meet its housing, infrastructure and productivity objectives if the migration system is recalibrated to deliver the right construction skills, in the right locations, at the right time.

This requires recognising construction as a national priority sector, aligning migration intake with verified workforce demand, reducing cost and administrative barriers for SMEs and regional employers, and enabling faster activation of skilled migrants already in Australia.

Outline of submission

This submission is divided into five parts:

Part 1 paints the picture of the workforce challenges across the building and construction industry. The significant deficiency of labour, exacerbated by an ageing workforce, weak apprentice completion rates and the increased complexity of building are just the tip of the iceberg.

Specific labour challenges are faced by small and medium-sized businesses, and attracting labour to regional areas is incredibly difficult. All of which constrain productivity across the industry.

Part 2 moves to explore the reasons why skilled migration is an important immediate lever to support the building and construction industry workforce. Skilled migration can respond quickly to demand and workforce needs, directly supporting productivity, responding to the industries cyclical nature and offering support in regional and remote communities.

Part 3 examines the barriers to skilled migration namely the cost and time involved in looking at engaging in the process, as well as the mismatch between the current arrangements and the way the construction industry operates.

Part 4 does a deep dive into the barriers to the full utilisation of skilled migrants created by a lack of effective skills recognition and fragmented occupational licensing and mutual recognition requirements. Significant underutilisation of skilled migrants along with a slow, costly and duplicative trade recognition process compound these barriers.

Part 5 provides a pathway to recalibrate Australia's migration system to deliver the skills needed to support the building and construction needs of the country. These are summarised in the key recommendations below.

Key Recommendations

Master Builders proposes a package of practical, evidence-based reforms:

- ▶ Establish a dedicated Construction Skills Pathway to fast-track qualified tradespeople and technicians, drawing on international best practice.
- ▶ Remove or significantly reduce the Skilling Australia Fund (SAF) levy and simplify employer-sponsored visa settings to reduce costs for small and regional builders.
- ▶ Streamline skills recognition and licensing, including expanded mutual recognition, nationally consistent standards, accessible gap-training pathways and fit-for-purpose English requirements.
- ▶ Improve pathways to permanency for construction workers, including those already in Australia.
- ▶ Activate the estimated 18,400 skilled permanent migrants with construction qualifications currently working below their skill level.
- ▶ Strengthen the use of forward-looking data, employer-led demand signals and project pipelines to align migration with real workforce needs.
- ▶ Expand the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) program to include non-licensed construction roles, with integrated training and clear pathways to permanent employment.

Australia cannot deliver its national housing, productivity and infrastructure objectives without a better-functioning migration system. The reforms proposed by Master Builders offer a practical, workable and immediate path to strengthen the construction workforce, reduce cost pressures, improve productivity and support the national interest.

Part 1 | Workforce Challenges in the Building and Construction Industry

Australia's building and construction industry is facing workforce pressures that are structural, systemic and intensifying. These pressures arise from the interaction of strong population growth, constrained housing supply, demographic change, declining domestic training outcomes and an unprecedented pipeline of housing, infrastructure, decarbonisation and resilience work.

A system under strain: magnitude of the workforce gap

The construction sector employs approximately 1.37 million people, making it one of the largest industries in the country. But this workforce is insufficient to meet national demand.

The Housing Accord commits governments and industry to delivering 1.2 million new, well-located homes between 2024 and 2029, requiring a scale-up in capacity far beyond existing workforce levels. Numerous independent assessments confirm the severity of this gap.

There are shortages across the country in core trades such as carpentry, bricklaying, concreting, tiling, plastering and electrical. These shortages create cascading delays across the construction pipeline, including:

- ▶ delays in site preparation due to shortages of civil, surveying and concreting crews,
- ▶ bottlenecks in compliance and inspection where supervisory and certification capacity is constrained, and
- ▶ delays in energy-efficiency compliance due to shortages of accredited assessors and specialist trades.

BuildSkills Australia estimates that meeting the Housing Accord alone will require an additional 139,000 workers in residential construction. Infrastructure Australia estimates the current national infrastructure workforce shortfall at 141,000 workers, potentially rising to 300,000 by 2027. These estimates align with modelling from Jobs and Skills Australia and multiple state workforce strategies.

Workforce shortages are further exacerbated by the underutilisation of skilled migrants already residing in Australia who hold construction qualifications but face regulatory barriers to workforce entry.

Demographic pressures and an ageing workforce

A further structural constraint is the demographic profile of the existing workforce.

Australia's construction workforce has been steadily ageing for decades.

In 1985, just 8.0 per cent of our workers were older than 54 years. This proportion has since doubled, and during August 2025, 16.9 per cent of those employed in construction were of older age groups. Over the same timeframe, the prevalence of younger workers has dropped. In 1985, over 20 per cent of the construction workforce was under 25 years. Now, 16.7 per cent of workers are in this age group.

An ageing workforce matters not only because of anticipated retirements, but because of the expertise lost with experienced workers. Senior tradespeople, site supervisors, estimators and inspectors carry tacit knowledge and mentoring capability that is difficult to replace quickly. As these workers transition out of the sector, both capacity and capability decline. This compounds skill shortages and reduces the industry's ability to absorb and train new entrants at the pace required.

Declining domestic training and apprenticeship outcomes

Domestic training alone cannot meet demand, and recent trends underscore this reality.

By the end of 2024, the number of construction apprentices in training had fallen to 112,207 – a decline of 3.9 per cent from the previous year. Apprenticeship commencements were down 7 per cent compared to 2023. These declines represent not merely cyclical fluctuation but a persistent pattern that has emerged over several years of labour market tightness and competing career pathways for young people.

Completion rates remain weak. Many apprentices leave part-way through due to:

- ▶ income pressures during training,
- ▶ inconsistent supervision and job continuity,
- ▶ limited career progression visibility,
- ▶ competition from higher-paid, lower-training-burden employment

Even under optimistic assumptions, rebuilding the apprenticeship pipeline will take three to five years before additional qualified tradespeople enter the workforce, and longer again before numbers reach the scale required.

Domestic training reform is essential, but cannot resolve immediate shortages.

Increasing complexity of construction work

Workforce needs are driven not only by volume but by complexity. Modern construction requires workers capable of:

- ▶ meeting higher energy-efficiency standards under the National Construction Code,
- ▶ installing or maintaining electric heating and cooling systems,
- ▶ delivering electrification and decarbonisation upgrades,
- ▶ implementing fire safety and building durability measures, and
- ▶ integrating digital technologies and off-site manufacturing methods.

These tasks require a combination of traditional trades, new skill sets and hybrid occupations. Many of these areas face acute shortages because the training system has not kept pace with technological and regulatory change. Workforce shortages in these emerging areas also constrain progress toward national Net Zero targets and delay essential retrofit programs.

Capacity challenges in SMEs and regional areas

Small and medium-sized builders constitute 98 per cent of the sector and are disproportionately impacted by labour shortages. Unlike large firms, SMEs have limited capacity to absorb delays, cost increases, or long-term vacancies in critical roles. These businesses typically operate on narrow margins and rely on the predictable sequencing of trades – averaging margins of 2-5 per cent for residential builders. Workforce shortages create operational and financial instability, threatening business viability.¹

¹ [IA25 Market Capacity Report 1.pdf](#)

Regional employers face even greater challenges. Housing projects outside metropolitan centres routinely experience delays due to an absence of available trades, driving up costs and limiting the viability of housing supply in regional growth areas.²

Migration can play a vital role in regional workforce development, but existing migration settings, including visa eligibility, SAF levy burdens, and limited ability to sponsor workers, make it extremely difficult for regional SMEs to utilise migration pathways.

Productivity constraints linked to labour shortages

Workforce shortages are directly suppressing productivity across the construction industry and amplifying cost pressures throughout the housing and infrastructure pipeline. Longstanding productivity decline has combined with acute labour scarcity to reduce output per worker, lengthen build times and increase project risk.

The Productivity Commission has found that Australian homebuilders now deliver around half as many homes per hour worked as they did three decades ago. This reflects an estimated 25 per cent decline in construction productivity since the 1990s and a doubling of labour input per dwelling. While regulatory complexity and changing building standards play a role, labour shortages are a central driver of this decline.

Reserve Bank industry liaison³ indicates that labour scarcity forces inefficient sequencing of work, including:

- ▶ repeated mobilisation and demobilisation of subcontractors,
- ▶ compressed and unpredictable schedules,
- ▶ extended project durations, and
- ▶ higher financing, holding and compliance costs.

Labour shortages also constrain the industry's ability to adopt productivity-enhancing construction methods. Modern approaches such as prefabrication, modular construction and digital engineering require stable, skilled teams to operate at scale. In an environment of persistent workforce gaps, firms are forced to prioritise immediate delivery over longer-term productivity investment.

The link between workforce capacity and housing output is measurable. Industry data indicates that every 100 qualified tradespeople support the delivery of approximately 45 completed homes per year. This means that for every 1,000 additional qualified tradespeople, around 400 extra homes can be delivered annually, or approximately 2,000 homes over a five-year period. Without increasing the supply of skilled labour, productivity constraints will continue to translate directly into lower housing output.

These dynamics demonstrate that workforce shortages are not only a labour market issue but a core productivity constraint. Addressing them is essential to improving construction efficiency, reducing costs and meeting national housing and infrastructure targets.

² Ibid.

³ [Statement on Monetary Policy](#)

Part 2 | Why Migration is the Immediate Lever

Skilled migration plays a critical role in Australia's construction workforce because it operates simultaneously as a demand and supply mechanism. While population growth increases demand for housing, infrastructure and services, skilled migration is also the only policy lever capable of rapidly expanding construction labour supply in the short to medium term.

Despite historically high migration levels, construction outcomes have remained weak because skilled migration settings are not delivering workers into trade and technical roles at the scale required.

As at June 2025, approximately 46,100 primary skilled visa holders were classified as Technicians and Trades Workers nationally. Of these, analysis indicates that only around 3,644 were working in core construction trade occupations. This outcome is wholly inconsistent with the workforce requirements implied by the National Housing Accord, major infrastructure pipelines and Net Zero delivery programs.

This misalignment means that migration is currently adding to housing demand without delivering commensurate construction capacity. As a result, population growth intensifies pressure on housing supply while the workforce required to respond remains constrained.

Migration policy is therefore not functioning as an effective workforce delivery mechanism for construction.

Skilled migration directly increases housing output

The relationship between workforce numbers and housing output is direct and measurable. Industry analysis indicates that:

- ▶ For every 100 qualified tradies, approximately 45 homes are completed annually.⁴
- ▶ Therefore, an additional 1,000 tradies would produce around 400 more homes each year.
- ▶ Over five years, this equates to 2,000 additional homes.

Skilled migration can also play a role in stabilising construction cycles which are inherently volatile by:

- ▶ helping businesses retain core workforce capacity during peaks and troughs,
- ▶ reducing reliance on overtime and burnout-inducing workloads,
- ▶ preventing project cancellations due to labour scarcity,
- ▶ providing a buffer against retirement and attrition.

For SMEs, migration can be the difference between securing contracts or withdrawing from the market altogether due to workforce constraints.

No other workforce policy lever can increase construction output so quickly.

Domestic reforms are necessary but slow and cannot meet demand

Long term reforms to domestic training, education and productivity settings are essential and strongly supported by Master Builders. However, these reforms cannot address immediate shortages.

⁴ [Housing Workforce Capacity Study | BuildSkills Australia](#)

The Government and industry are investing heavily in rebuilding the training pipeline and modernising the vocational system. Initiatives such as fee-free TAFE, reform of foundation skills programs, and industry-led apprenticeship models are positive developments. However, even if apprenticeship commencements were to increase significantly today, the first substantial cohort of qualified tradespeople would not enter the workforce for three to five years, and larger numbers would take longer again.

At the same time, apprenticeship completions remain stubbornly low, and many existing workers transition out of the industry before new ones can be trained. These structural issues cannot be resolved quickly enough to address immediate labour shortages.

The scale of demand for construction labour far outpaces what domestic labour market dynamics can provide. Labour supply has already been stretched to breaking point, as evidenced by:

- ▶ historically low unemployment (around 4 per cent), meaning there is no significant pool of available domestic labour to draw from,
- ▶ declining apprenticeship numbers and completions,
- ▶ demographic shifts leading to large numbers of experienced tradespeople retiring,
- ▶ demand from competing sectors, including infrastructure, defence, and renewables, drawing on the same limited pool of workers.

The Reserve Bank notes industry feedback that workforce shortages are directly linked to productivity declines and higher construction costs. Without additional skilled workers entering the system, project pipelines will slow further, and housing delivery will remain constrained.⁵

In this context, skilled migration is the only the only short-term mechanism capable of injecting job ready workers into the construction sector at the speed and scale required over the next five years.⁶

Skilled migration fills critical roles

Migration policy is not simply a population lever; it is a workforce lever. Skilled migration provides access to workers who are already trained, experienced, and job-ready. This makes it uniquely capable of:

- ▶ adding capacity in core trades (carpentry, bricklaying, concreting, plastering, electrical, plumbing) as well as finishing trades (cabinetry, glazing, painting, fitting etc.),
- ▶ filling supervisory and project management gaps,
- ▶ enabling delivery of energy-efficiency, electrification, and climate-resilience upgrades,
- ▶ supporting regional construction, where domestic labour markets are the smallest,
- ▶ providing specialised expertise required to scale modern construction methods.

Skilled migration can also respond dynamically to emerging industry needs and the Government's broader reform agenda, something the domestic system cannot do quickly because qualifications, training packages, and workforce development initiatives take years to update and implement.

⁵ [State of the Housing System 2025](#)

⁶ [Apprentice completions reach decade highs but new apprentice numbers still too low – Master Builders Australia](#)

Many major policy priorities, housing supply, infrastructure resilience, Net Zero, productivity uplift, and modern construction methods, cannot succeed without a larger, more skilled construction workforce. Skilled migration:

- ▶ buys time for domestic training reforms to take effect;
- ▶ supports the transition to new building standards;
- ▶ underpins energy-efficiency retrofits and electrification;
- ▶ lifts capacity for digital and off-site production technologies; and
- ▶ enhances the sector's resilience to economic shocks

Net Zero

Australia's Net Zero goals require a large and specialised construction workforce capable of delivering energy-efficient buildings, electrification upgrades, thermal envelope improvements, low carbon material installations and integrated digital energy systems. The existing domestic training capacity is insufficient to meet these needs at the required pace.

Skilled migration is essential to supply tradespeople and technicians with prior experience in high-performance construction, retrofit programs, and modern building technologies. Migration pathways should therefore recognise and prioritise skills that contribute directly to emissions reduction, energy efficiency and resilient design, and gap training should include mandatory modules in energy performance and electrification.

The failure to align migration intake with construction workforce demand is therefore not a sectoral issue but a national risk. Unless skilled migration settings are recalibrated to prioritise construction trades and technical roles, Australia will not meet its housing targets, infrastructure commitments or productivity objectives.

Migration supports productivity

Increasing the sustainable supply of skilled workers does more than fill vacancies: it increases overall productivity. With adequate workforce numbers:

- ▶ projects can be sequenced efficiently;
- ▶ delays are reduced, lowering holding costs for builders and developers;
- ▶ capacity becomes available to invest in training, mentoring, and innovation;
- ▶ new technologies can be deployed more broadly; and
- ▶ supervision standards improve as experienced workers remain in the system

Advanced construction methods, such as off-site manufacturing, modular or prefabricated housing, and digital engineering, require stable, skilled teams to scale effectively. Skilled migration provides these workers. Without them, Australia will continue to fall behind on productivity benchmarks, as demonstrated by the Productivity Commission's finding that homebuilders deliver only half as many homes per year as they did thirty years ago.⁷

⁷ [Housing construction productivity: Can we fix it?](#)

Migration supports regional and remote communities

Regional Australia is experiencing some of the most acute housing shortages, yet regional employers often face the greatest difficulty securing labour. The Regional Australian Institute estimates trade vacancies of 40-70 per cent higher in regional areas compared to metropolitan.⁸ Similarly, the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council highlighted that regional supply is well below required levels due to persistent shortages of builders and trades.⁹ Skilled migration can help fill these gaps, but only if visa settings are designed to:

- ▶ allow regional employers to sponsor workers more easily,
- ▶ reduce costs and compliance burdens,
- ▶ streamline skills recognition,
- ▶ accommodate non-licensed trades in regional programs,
- ▶ enable regional pathways to permanent residency.

Without targeted migration pathways, regional housing and infrastructure delivery will continue to lag behind need, undermining both population policy and regional development objectives.

⁸ [Regional Labour Markets Update – October 2025; Progress Reports](#)

⁹ [State of the Housing System 2025](#)

Part 3 | Barriers in the Current Migration System

Despite clear workforce shortages and strong evidence that skilled migration is essential to meeting Australia's housing and infrastructure needs, the current migration system presents significant barriers that prevent construction employers, particularly small and regional businesses, from accessing the workers they require.

These barriers exist across every stage of the system: occupation eligibility, costs, visa processing, sponsorship obligations, skills recognition, licensing, and pathways to permanency. Collectively, they render skilled migration slow, expensive, administratively complex, and ultimately unreliable as a workforce strategy.

For many employers, especially SMEs, the risks and burdens of engaging with the migration system outweigh the potential benefits. This inhibits the sector's capacity to bring in qualified workers at the scale needed to meet national economic and productivity goals.

High financial costs for employers

One of the most significant barriers for employers is the prohibitive cost of sponsoring a skilled migrant.

For a small or regional builder, the total outlay to recruit a single skilled tradesperson typically ranges between \$18,000 and \$31,000, once all government fees, mandatory skills assessments, and professional charges are included. These costs are disproportionately heavy for SMEs, which operate on thin margins and highly variable project pipelines.

Key cost components include:

- ▶ Skilling Australia Fund (SAF) levy: \$1,200 per year for small businesses, or \$4,800 for a standard four-year visa, payable upfront and non-refundable even if the worker leaves early.
- ▶ Visa application charges: Approximately \$3,210 for primary applicants.
- ▶ Nomination fees: Around \$750.
- ▶ Trades Recognition Australia (TRA) assessments: Typically between \$3,000 and \$5,500.
- ▶ Migration agent or legal fees: Commonly \$2,500 to \$7,000 per candidate.
- ▶ Relocation, licensing, and onboarding costs: Often \$2,000 to \$10,000, depending on the role and location.

For small builders bidding on competitive tenders or navigating unpredictable market conditions, these combined costs represent a substantial financial risk. Many employers simply cannot afford to engage with the system, even when facing severe labour shortages.

Slow and uncertain visa processing times

Construction is highly time-sensitive, and workforce gaps quickly translate into project delays, cost blowouts, and contractual risk. However, current visa processing times make skilled migration incompatible with industry project cycles.

- ▶ The Temporary Skill Shortage (subclass 482) visa, which should provide responsive short-term labour, has a median processing time of 21 business days for decision-ready applications.
- ▶ Employer-sponsored permanent visas such as the ENS (subclass 186) take 12 to 18 months to finalise.

- ▶ Regional employer-sponsored visas (subclass 494) often take even longer, owing to nomination complexity and regional certifying body requirements.

These delays significantly reduce the utility of migration for workforce planning. Builders cannot wait months or years for skilled workers when construction schedules require labour within weeks. As a result, many employers either abandon the migration process entirely or revert to costlier, less sustainable workarounds such as extended overtime or labour-hire arrangements.

Occupational eligibility and the CSOL constraints

While the Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL) is intended to target high-demand occupations, it has historically failed to reflect the realities of the construction workforce.

Its prescriptive, point-in-time design means it often lags behind emerging needs, excludes critical trade occupations, and does not reflect regional or project-based labour demand.

Although recent updates have corrected some prior omissions, the CSOL still:

- ▶ relies on retrospective labour market data rather than forward-looking workforce planning,
- ▶ underestimates the needs of trades and technician-level workers,
- ▶ does not reflect the complexity of new regulatory, digital and energy-efficiency demands on the workforce,
- ▶ is not sufficiently responsive to large-scale project cycles or the requisite interlinked occupations that feed into project cycles.

The system struggles to adapt to rapid changes in housing policy, reconstruction needs following natural disasters, or the evolving nature of construction roles, making it poorly suited to a sector that must scale quickly and flexibly.

Administrative complexity and sponsorship burdens

The process of becoming an approved employer sponsor is excessively complex and time-consuming, particularly for SMEs without in-house HR teams. Many small builders report that:

- ▶ Sponsorship obligations are opaque and difficult to interpret.
- ▶ Compliance requires significant administrative capacity.
- ▶ Record-keeping and reporting obligations are disproportionate for small employers.
- ▶ Missteps, even inadvertent, carry significant penalties or the risk of sponsorship cancellation.

This complexity discourages legitimate employers from engaging with the migration system, while creating a market for costly intermediaries, raising overall costs further.

Skills Recognition and Licensing Barriers

Employers also face uncertainty and costs associated with ensuring their overseas hires meet Australian licensing and compliance requirements. While essential for workplace safety and regulatory compliance, these obligations are complex, differ by state and occupation, and create administrative burdens for SMEs.

Challenges include:

- ▶ TRA fees contribute significantly to employer costs.

- ▶ Licensing requirements create uncertainty about compliance obligations and may delay workforce deployment.

These factors increase risk exposure for employers and reduce the overall attractiveness of skilled migration as a workforce solution.

Limited pathways to permanency reduce attractiveness and retention

Skilled migration is most effective when it supports settlement and long-term retention. However, pathways to permanent residency for construction workers are inconsistent, slow, and often incompatible with industry realities.

Barriers include:

- ▶ Lengthy processing times for ENS and regional visas.
- ▶ Occupation list restrictions that prevent otherwise qualified tradespeople from transitioning.
- ▶ Inflexible points-test criteria that disadvantage trades relative to degree-qualified workers.
- ▶ Temporary visa conditions that restrict job mobility and can lock workers into poor employment conditions.

Without clear, reliable pathways to permanency, skilled workers are less likely to choose Australia, and those already here may leave for countries with simpler, more welcoming systems (e.g., Canada, New Zealand, the UK). This undermines the return on investment for employers who sponsor overseas workers.

A system not designed for construction

Australia's migration system was not explicitly designed to exclude small and medium businesses, but its architecture has evolved around the needs and operating models of larger, professionalised employers.

Its settings reflect a framework optimised for office-based, higher-skilled professions, characterised by long planning horizons, predictable labour demand, substantial HR and compliance capacity, and clear qualification comparability. While the system does not assume minimal licensing requirements, it has historically failed to integrate state-based licensing realities, creating additional barriers for trades-based SMEs.

Construction operates in a fundamentally different environment:

- ▶ Nearly 98 per cent of construction businesses are small firms without specialist HR capacity.
- ▶ Labour needs shift rapidly across short project cycles depending on contract timing, weather, regulatory changes, materials delays and market conditions.
- ▶ The sector depends heavily on trade-qualified and technical workers, most of whom must meet strict and often state-specific licensing, safety, and supervisory requirements.

These factors make the migration process, which is already lengthy, costly, and administrative, especially difficult for construction employers to navigate.

This structural mismatch between the system's design and the industry's workforce reality explains why skilled migration delivers so few trade workers despite high overall migration levels. Only 3,644 skilled visa holders nationally are currently working in core construction trade occupations, a number wholly inconsistent with the scale of labour shortages and the demands of the National Housing Accord.

The inability to activate skilled migrants already in Australia due to recognition and licensing barriers further reduces the effectiveness of employer sponsored migration pathways, as outlined later in this submission.

The result is a system that is effectively calibrated for other sectors, while construction, one of the industries most dependent on skilled labour and most critical to national housing and infrastructure priorities, struggles to access the workers it urgently needs.

Part 4 | Skills Recognition and Licensing Arrangements

Skills recognition and occupational licensing are among the most significant constraints in Australia's migration and workforce system. These barriers prevent thousands of experienced tradespeople, both migrants already living in Australia and prospective skilled migrants offshore, from entering the building and construction workforce at a time when the country urgently needs them.

Despite the essential role of qualifications, licensing, and safety standards in the construction industry, the processes designed to assess comparable overseas experience are among the slowest, most complex, and most expensive components of Australia's migration framework. These processes do not adequately differentiate between countries with demonstrably comparable training systems, nor do they provide efficient pathways for gap training when a worker does not fully match Australian occupational standards.

The inefficiencies in Australia's skills recognition and licensing framework generate wide-ranging economic and productivity consequences, including:

- ▶ Lost housing output – Qualified migrant tradespeople often spend months waiting for recognition or navigating duplicative assessments, leaving critical labour idle during a period of severe housing shortages. This slows construction pipelines and reduces the industry's capacity to contribute to Housing Accord targets.
- ▶ Higher construction costs – Labour scarcity caused by delays in bringing skilled migrants online pushes up wages and subcontractor rates. These costs flow directly into higher build prices for consumers, governments and developers, compounding affordability pressures.
- ▶ Delayed infrastructure delivery – Major projects, particularly in regional and remote areas, face significant setbacks when migrant workers cannot commence due to licensing or skills assessment bottlenecks. These delays can increase project risk, disrupt sequencing, and escalate overall delivery costs.
- ▶ Reduced workforce productivity – When skilled migrant labour is unavailable, employers must rely on less experienced workers, stretch existing teams, or sequence work inefficiently. This contributes to slower build times, more rework, and declining labour productivity across the sector.
- ▶ Missed opportunities for innovation and modernisation – Labour shortages limit the industry's ability to adopt digital tools, offsite manufacturing, advanced construction technologies, and energy-efficient building practices. These innovations require a stable, adequately staffed workforce, which current skills recognition delays prevent.

In practice, the skills recognition system operates as a critical bottleneck that suppresses labour supply, constrains productivity growth, and impedes progress toward national housing and infrastructure objectives.

The result is a system that is simultaneously overprotective and under-responsive: stringent in imposing procedural requirements and financial burdens, yet slow and inconsistent in assessing workers and integrating them into the workforce. This represents a missed opportunity in the context of acute labour shortages, housing system pressures, and national productivity challenges.

The scale of underutilised construction skills in Australia

The limitations of current skills recognition processes are most evident in the large number of migrants already living in Australia who are unable to work in their trained profession. Approximately 18,400

permanent migrants possess qualifications in building and construction fields but are employed in lower-skilled or unrelated occupations due to:

- ▶ difficulty obtaining Australian-equivalent recognition
- ▶ delays in accessing Trades Recognition Australia (TRA) assessments
- ▶ challenges providing documentation required by assessment authorities
- ▶ inconsistencies in state and territory licensing requirements
- ▶ lack of structured and accessible gap-training pathways
- ▶ prohibitive costs associated with assessments, training, and licensing

This “skills underutilisation gap” comes at a significant national cost. Based on industry productivity ratios, if this cohort could be fully activated into the construction workforce, they could contribute up to 30,000 additional homes over the Housing Accord period, while also bolstering supervisory capability, elevating productivity, and stabilising project pipelines.

Yet these workers remain unable to contribute at their skill level, despite having the qualifications and experience Australia urgently needs.

Trades Recognition Australia (TRA) processes: slow, costly and duplicative

TRA assessments are a central gateway for migrants seeking to work in licensed or trade-based occupations. However, these assessments are widely viewed by employers and migrants as one of the most burdensome components of the migration process.

Key problems:

Long processing times

Despite additional resourcing announced in the 2024 Budget to prioritise construction-related occupations, assessment times remain lengthy and unpredictable. The requirement to provide extensive historical documentation, for example, employer statements, payslips, or training records from several decades earlier, creates delays and often prevents otherwise qualified workers from progressing.

High financial costs

TRA costs typically range between \$3,000 and \$5,500 per worker. For many migrants, especially those coming from lower-income countries, these costs are prohibitive, particularly when combined with visa fees, English-language testing, licensing costs, and relocation expenses.

Documentation requirements difficult to meet

Many migrant tradespeople have extensive experience and strong skills but lack formal documents due to:

- ▶ the passage of time,
- ▶ employers shutting down,
- ▶ different record-keeping practices in their home countries, and
- ▶ natural disasters, conflict or displacement disrupting access to records.

Rigid documentation requirements often result in qualified workers being deemed ineligible for assessment, regardless of their real-world experience.

Lack of alignment with licensing systems

Skills recognition and licensing processes operate in parallel rather than in coordination. A worker may receive a positive skills assessment but still face lengthy licensing requirements that effectively duplicate the assessment process. In some cases, workers must complete additional training that replicates material already verified by TRA.

The net effect is a system that is slow, costly, duplicative and disconnected from industry needs.

Skills recognition does not reflect modern construction needs

Skills recognition processes often fail to account for contemporary construction practices, including:

- ▶ digital modelling,
- ▶ off-site manufacturing and modular construction,
- ▶ energy-efficiency retrofits,
- ▶ new materials and construction technologies,
- ▶ climate resilience requirements.

This means that skilled workers in modern methods, who are in short supply, may not have their skills recognised, even when their experience is highly relevant to emerging industry needs. The system remains oriented toward traditional occupational categories and outdated job definitions.

Fragmented licensing arrangements

Construction licensing in Australia is governed by state and territory legislation, resulting in inconsistent standards, documentation requirements, and assessment pathways. For example:

- ▶ A worker licensed in Queensland may have to repeat licensing assessments in New South Wales.
- ▶ Occupations licensed in one jurisdiction may be unlicensed in another, causing confusion for both migrants and employers.
- ▶ Recognition of overseas qualifications varies widely across states.

For migrants, this means:

- ▶ They may not know which jurisdiction's licensing system to navigate
- ▶ They may meet licensing requirements in one state but not another
- ▶ Moving interstate resets parts of the licensing process
- ▶ They may be required to undertake multiple assessments or courses that do not build on each other

For employers, particularly those operating across borders, inconsistent licensing regimes create administrative burdens and limit the mobility of labour, further exacerbating workforce shortages.

Lack of structured, accessible gap training pathways

Gap training is one of the most effective ways to transition skilled migrants into the workforce while ensuring Australian standards are upheld. However, Australia lacks a coordinated national system for gap training in the trades.

Current challenges include:

- ▶ limited availability of trade-specific gap training programs across jurisdictions,
- ▶ high costs that deter participation from migrants and employers,
- ▶ long wait times, particularly for assessments that require supervised work,
- ▶ inconsistent integration with TRA processes or state licensing pathways,
- ▶ no national curriculum for bridging skills from common source-country qualifications.

This results in a binary system: migrants are either assessed as fully qualified or entirely unqualified, with little middle ground.

Other countries, including Canada, New Zealand, the UK and Germany, provide structured transition programs that assess skills, identify gaps and provide targeted training to bring workers up to standard quickly and efficiently. Australia lacks these pathways, despite clear evidence of industry need.

English language requirements

For many non-licensed construction occupations, English-language requirements are higher than what is needed to perform the job safely and effectively. While communication is critical in construction, the current standardised English tests often assess academic English rather than workplace communication.

As a result:

- ▶ Capable workers are excluded despite demonstrating adequate workplace English.
- ▶ Workers who have been living and working in Australia for years are required to take expensive tests that have little relevance to their trade.
- ▶ Employers lose access to workers who could safely and effectively contribute under supervised arrangements.

Other countries differentiate between licensed, public-facing occupations and non-licensed, site-based roles. Australia does not, despite construction being dominated by practical, site-based work conducted within supervised teams.

Lack of mutual recognition with comparable countries

Australia does not have widely implemented Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) for construction trades, even with countries that:

- ▶ train to similar competency-based systems
- ▶ use similar apprenticeship models
- ▶ maintain comparable building and safety standards

These include countries such as:

- ▶ United Kingdom
- ▶ New Zealand
- ▶ Ireland
- ▶ Canada

- ▶ Germany
- ▶ Singapore

MRAs for construction trades would allow qualified workers from these countries to have their qualifications recognised immediately or through streamlined assessments. This would significantly accelerate workforce supply while maintaining safety and quality standards. Despite longstanding industry support, progress has been slow and fragmented.

Part 5 | Solutions

Australia's migration system must be recalibrated to deliver the skilled construction workforce needed to meet national housing, infrastructure, productivity, and economic objectives.

The existing system is not sufficiently responsive, affordable, accessible, or aligned with the operational realities of the building and construction industry. The reforms outlined below form a comprehensive, coherent package designed to unlock skilled migration as an immediate productivity lever while complementing long-term investment in domestic skills and training.

The package is built around seven pillars:

1. Create a dedicated Construction Skills Pathway to directly attract qualified tradespeople and technicians.
2. Align migration settings with labour market demand, not retrospective occupation lists.
3. Streamline skills recognition and licensing, ensuring workers can enter the industry efficiently and safely.
4. Reduce high costs and administrative burdens that prevent SMEs and regional employers from accessing skilled migrants.
5. Expand training and qualification pathways, including activation of migrants already in Australia.
6. Provide clear and efficient pathways to permanency to support attraction, retention, and workforce stability.
7. Expand the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) program to include non-licensed construction trades, remove location restrictions, broaden eligible employer types, and integrate apprenticeship or gap-training pathways through APTC

1. Dedicated construction skills pathway

The current migration system does not provide an efficient or targeted pathway for critical construction trades and technicians.

Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom all operate dedicated pathways that directly link construction skills to immigration settings, prioritising workers in shortage occupations and reducing barriers to entry.

Australia needs a specialised migration stream that explicitly recognises construction as a national priority sector.

Key features of a dedicated construction skills pathway include:

- ▶ A new Construction Skills Pathway visa, allowing direct entry for qualified trades and construction technicians, modelled on international best practice.
- ▶ Uncapped annual intake, tied to verified labour market shortages and national housing targets.
- ▶ Fast-tracked, low-cost processing to support project-based and regional demand cycles.

- ▶ Automatic recognition of qualifications from comparable countries, with clear assessment pathways for others.
- ▶ Direct pathways to permanent residency, encouraging retention and long-term participation.
- ▶ Employer nomination options tailored to SMEs, regional employers, and subcontractor-based business models.

[Appendix I](#) summarises the Canadian model which could be used as a starting point for an Australian approach.

2. Align migration settings with labour market demand

The Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL), while useful for high-level planning, is too rigid and backward-looking for a rapidly evolving, project-driven sector. Master Builders recommends replacing or reforming the CSOL with a dynamic, market-responsive mechanism that:

- ▶ draws on real-time workforce data from industry and employer groups;
- ▶ integrates forward project pipelines (e.g., housing targets, major infrastructure, disaster recovery);
- ▶ anticipates emerging occupational needs (e.g., energy efficiency, digital modelling, off-site manufacturing); and
- ▶ enables rapid updates as industry needs change.

The development of a National Construction Workforce Demand Signal framework is recommended, drawing on:

- ▶ employer-led forecasting;
- ▶ project-specific workforce modelling (e.g., Housing Accord);
- ▶ regional shortages and infrastructure sequencing; and
- ▶ forward-looking labour-market analytics.

This framework should directly inform skilled migration intake, replacing retrospective occupation lists with a skills-in-demand evidence platform that reflects real workforce needs.

3. Streamline Skills Recognition and Licensing

Skills recognition is the single most significant barrier preventing the activation of qualified construction workers, both migrants already in Australia and those seeking to migrate. Reforming this area will produce the fastest and most significant uplift in workforce capacity.

Fast-track recognition from comparable countries

Introduce Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) with countries that share similar technical training and apprenticeship systems (e.g., UK, New Zealand, Ireland, Canada, Germany, Singapore).

These MRAs should allow:

- ▶ immediate or near-immediate recognition of trade qualifications;
- ▶ streamlined licensing transfers;
- ▶ reduced documentation requirements; and
- ▶ exemption from TRA assessments except where safety-critical.

Streamlined TRA processes for all construction trades

Building on the Government's \$1.8 million allocation, TRA should:

- ▶ implement risk-based, fit-for-purpose assessments;
- ▶ accept a wider range of evidence to verify skills;
- ▶ prioritise high-demand construction occupations;
- ▶ reduce processing times to weeks, not months; and
- ▶ adopt digital verification systems where possible.

Nationally consistent licensing

Federal, state and territory governments should jointly establish:

- ▶ uniform competency standards;
- ▶ standardised documentation requirements; and
- ▶ reciprocal state recognition for construction licences.

This would reduce duplication and allow labour mobility across borders.

National gap training pathways

Develop a national, fully accredited Gap Training Framework for common construction trades, including carpentry, bricklaying, plastering, formwork, concreting, tiling, painting, welding and electrical trades.

Gap training must be:

- ▶ affordable;
- ▶ delivered through TAFEs, RTOs, and employer-led models;
- ▶ linked directly to licensing requirements; and
- ▶ available through a single national platform.

Fit-for-purpose English-language requirements

Non-licensed trades should be assessed against practical workplace English, not academic English tests, removing one of the biggest barriers for skilled workers.

4. Reduce employer costs and administrative burden

High costs prevent SMEs and regional employers from participating in skilled migration. Reducing employer burdens will increase uptake exponentially.

Cut or remove the Skilling Australia Fund (SAF) levy for construction employers

The SAF levy is expensive, paid upfront, non-refundable, and disproportionate for small businesses. Master Builders recommends. The Skilling Australia Fund should remain a mechanism for supporting domestic training but must be restructured so that small and regional builders are not deterred from sponsoring skilled workers. Master Builders recommends:

- ▶ full removal for small businesses under a predefined revenue threshold;
- ▶ significant reduction aligned to genuine risk profiles;
- ▶ contributions should convert to training credits that can be used for apprenticeships, gap training and upskilling delivered through registered training organisations; and
- ▶ refund or rollover options when a worker leaves early.

Reduce visa and nomination charges

Construction should be prioritised for cost-reduction given its national economic role.

Introduce SME-friendly sponsorship rules

This includes:

- ▶ simplified record-keeping;
- ▶ reduced compliance obligations for small builders;
- ▶ online tools for sponsorship management; and
- ▶ flexible employment arrangements reflecting project-based work.

Expand state and federal incentives

Build on WA's Construction Visa Subsidy Program by introducing national subsidies that cover:

- ▶ skills assessments;
- ▶ visa application fees;
- ▶ migration agent fees;
- ▶ relocation costs; and
- ▶ licensing charges.

These reforms would significantly reduce barriers for the 98 per cent of the industry made up of small and medium-sized builders.

5. Expand training and pathways for skilled migrants already in Australia

There are 18,400 migrants already in Australia with building and construction qualifications who are not working in their field. These workers can be activated faster than any offshore cohort.

A National Skills Activation Program

Identify, assess, and mobilise migrants with existing construction qualifications through:

- ▶ rapid skills assessments;
- ▶ free or low-cost gap training;
- ▶ fast-tracked licensing; and
- ▶ targeted employment matching.

Expand Job Ready Program linkages to construction

Allow international students with construction-related Australian qualifications to transition into apprenticeships, gap training, or employment more easily.

Expand Graduate Visas for construction qualifications

All Certificate III+ qualifications relevant to construction should be eligible for a two-year graduate visa, enabling graduates to gain experience and transition to permanent roles.

Support employer–migrant matching systems nationwide

Scale successful programs such as BuildConnect and integrate them with federal skills activation programs.

6. Clear, efficient pathways to permanent residency

Permanent residency (PR) is essential for attracting and retaining skilled tradespeople. Workers increasingly choose Canada and New Zealand because of their clear, simple PR pathways.

Construction workers automatically eligible for PR pathways

All construction trades should have direct access to:

- ▶ employer-sponsored permanent visas;
- ▶ regional permanent visas; and
- ▶ points-tested PR categories.

Reduce processing times for skilled migration PR visas

Employer-sponsored PR approvals should occur in months, not years.

Points test reform

The points test should value construction trades equally with degree-qualified occupations by recognising:

- ▶ years of skilled trade experience;
- ▶ technical proficiency;
- ▶ Australian employment;
- ▶ completion of gap training;
- ▶ regional work; and
- ▶ industry credentials.

Allow smoother transitions between visa types

Workers already in Australia should be able to move from temporary to permanent pathways efficiently, without duplicative assessments.

7. Expand the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Program

The PALM program is an established, government-led mechanism that successfully supplies seasonal and semi-skilled labour to Australia's regions.

Construction faces acute regional shortages and a high concentration of small and medium employers who cannot absorb the costs and administrative burden of conventional sponsorship.

Expanding PALM into non-licensed trades (for example labourers, general carpentry assistants, plastering assistants, tilers' assistants, basic concreting roles and similar entry-to-trade roles) offers a rapid, lower-cost, and tightly supervised route to bolster regional construction capacity while protecting worker welfare and community cohesion.

It is recommended that the PALM program be expanded to explicitly include non-licensed building and construction trades, remove restrictive location rules, broaden the types of eligible employers, and integrate structured apprenticeship or gap-training delivered through the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC).

This targeted expansion should create clear, supervised pathways from temporary employment to permanent employment for participants. The estimated additional program funding to support this expansion is \$9 million per year.

Program Design Features

- ▶ **Eligible occupations:** Add a defined list of non-licensed and entry trade roles required by regional councils and employers (e.g., construction labourer, assistant carpentry, formwork assistant, general concreter assistant, tiling assistant). Occupations should be assessed and updated annually via employer-led demand signals.
- ▶ **Location rules:** Remove arbitrary location restrictions that prevent PALM workers from working across a broader set of regional and peri-urban projects; instead allow placement within agreed regions based on project pipelines and state/territory endorsement.
- ▶ **Employer eligibility:** Broaden eligible employers beyond currently defined agricultural/seasonal businesses to include small and medium regional builders, licensed subcontractors, and industry social enterprises, subject to probity and compliance checks.
- ▶ **Training & accreditation:** Integrate APTC-delivered pre-departure orientation and in-Australia gap training and micro-credentials aligned to Certificate II/III trade units. Structured apprenticeships or supervised on-the-job gap training should be offered where a worker requires additional local competencies to meet licensing pathways.
- ▶ **Pathways to permanency:** Establish explicit transition pathways for high-performing PALM participants (e.g., through employer nomination, regional visas or sectoral fast-tracks) so that PALM becomes a stepping stone to long-term settlement for those meeting skill, language and conduct benchmarks.
- ▶ **Employer support:** Provide targeted financial subsidies or co-payments to offset recruitment, travel and initial accommodation costs for SMEs (linked to existing WA Construction Visa Subsidy model but nationally scaled).
- ▶ **Worker protections & monitoring:** Maintain strict safeguards, standard contracts, minimum wages, access to dispute resolution, periodic welfare checks, and independent monitoring, to ensure ethical recruitment and decent work standards.

Appendix I

Canadian Construction Skills Pathway | Federal Skilled Trades Program

The Federal Skilled Trades Program (FSTP) is Canada's main federal permanent residency (PR) pathway for people qualified in a skilled trade. It sits inside Express Entry and lists eligible trades across construction sectors (e.g., electricians, carpenters, welders, ironworkers, sheet-metal workers, boilermakers, supervisors and other construction trades). Eligibility typically requires trade work experience, a job offer or certificate of qualification, language levels and other standard checks.¹⁰

This program was set up in recognition of Canada's mandate to build 6 million homes by 2030. Like Australia, Canada has significant skilled labour shortages in construction and has created this measure to attract skilled migrants to bolster its domestic workforce. Unlike Australia, Canada's construction workforce consists of 23 per cent immigrants – compared to Australia's 4 per cent.

The Federal Skilled Trades Program requirements

Immigrants must have at least 2 years of full-time (or equivalent) work experience in a *skilled trade* within the past 5 years. This includes many construction trades (e.g., electricians, carpenters, welders, concrete finishers) under specified National Occupational Classification (NOC) groups.

They must either have a valid job offer for at least 1 year *from a Canadian employer* or a certificate of qualification in their trade issued by a Canadian provincial/territorial authority.

They must meet language requirements in English or French.

Importantly, the FSTP does not require formal schooling but does require trade-related experience and either a job offer or a provincial qualification certificate.¹¹

Employers can support temporary foreign workers or prospective permanent residents by:

- ▶ Obtaining a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA): Shows a need for a foreign worker when no Canadian is available.
- ▶ Supporting Express Entry applications: A valid job offer backed by an LMIA can strengthen an Express Entry profile under FSTP.

Express Entry processing times can take up to 6 months, compared to 20 months for traditional Provincial Nominee Programs.

Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) Options

Many provinces operate construction-focused streams under their PNPs (not federally controlled), allowing provinces to nominate construction workers directly for permanent residence to address local labour shortages (e.g., critical worker streams). This complements the FSTP/Express Entry routes.¹²

Impact:

Between January 2019 and March 2024, more than 50,000 permanent residents with *construction trade experience* arrived via FSTP and other economic pathways (e.g., CEC, PNP, Atlantic immigration programs, Temporary Resident to PR pathway). However, the FSTP for trades was less than 1 per cent

¹⁰ [Canada takes action to support housing with new immigration measures - Canada.ca](#)

¹¹ [Express Entry: Federal Skilled Trades Program - Canada.ca](#)

¹² [Hire a skilled worker or tradesperson through Express Entry - Canada.ca](#)

according to the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's quarterly updates. A key reason for this is that provincial programs are better supported and easier to access compared to the FSTP, which relies on infrequent nominations/invitations.

Australian Solution:

Australia should establish a construction-specific visa stream that:

- ▶ requires only verified trade experience or apprenticeship completion,
- ▶ prioritises occupations on a national shortage list,
- ▶ allows temporary work while credential recognition is finalised,
- ▶ allocates invitations or nominations based on state labour demand,
- ▶ guarantees processing within 6–8 months.

Completion of X number of years (or completion of certain project types) could put that person on a permanent residency fast track list.