Delayed, disrupted or reconfigured?

Aspirations, desire and infrastructures for migration in pandemic times

Migration and the Future of Work
CERC Migration and Integration Conference 2021

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Migration, delayed and disrupted

Natasha James

- Arrived as a nurse on a temporary work visa 4 January 2020
- 3 children and husband remain in South Africa

"Everything (for the visas) has been paid – it had gone to be processed, but it's just frozen in the system.

"I've tried everything that people have been suggesting, I've phoned my local MPs, I've even contacted Lawrence Yule, ex-MP for Tukituki.

"I'm a strong person, generally. But this has taken a huge toll emotionally and mentally – it's seriously breaking me down."

Stuff National News, 28 January 2021

https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/124038040/its-breaking-me-down-mums-13month-separation-from-her-family-in-south-africa

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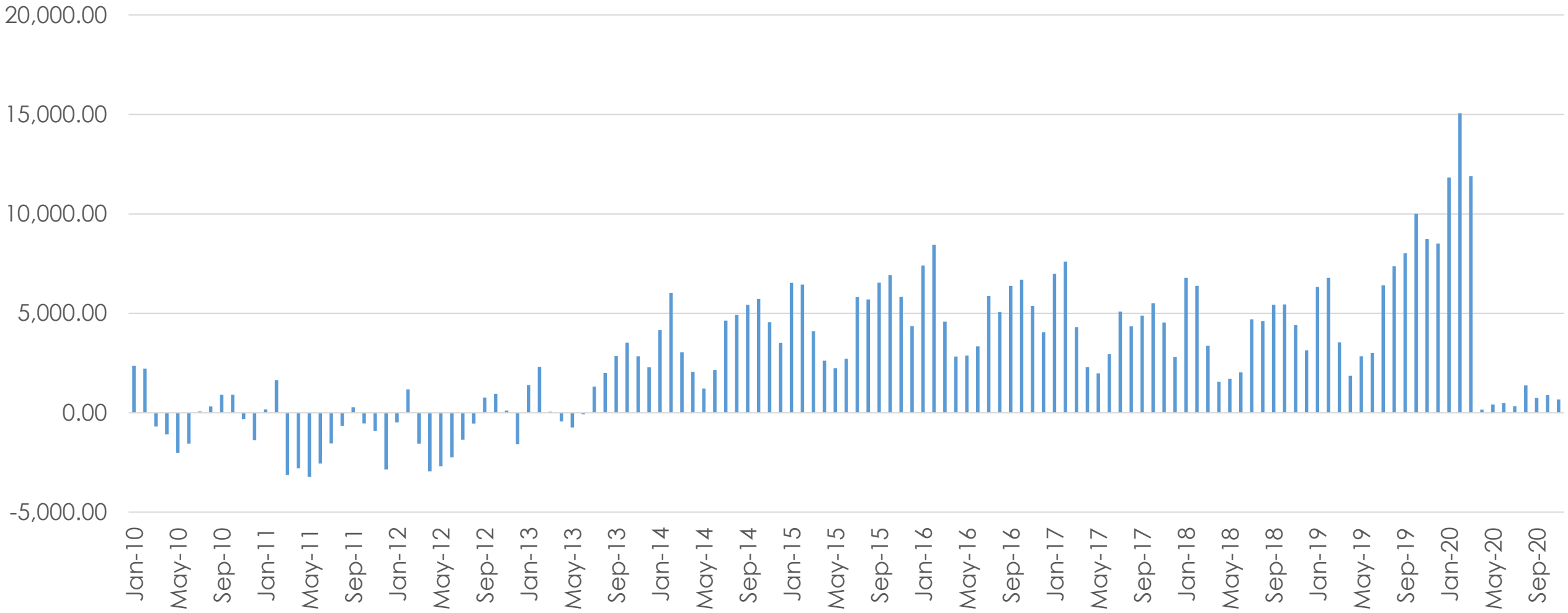
Net migration 2010-2020 (monthly)



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Pandemic and migration: end of an era?

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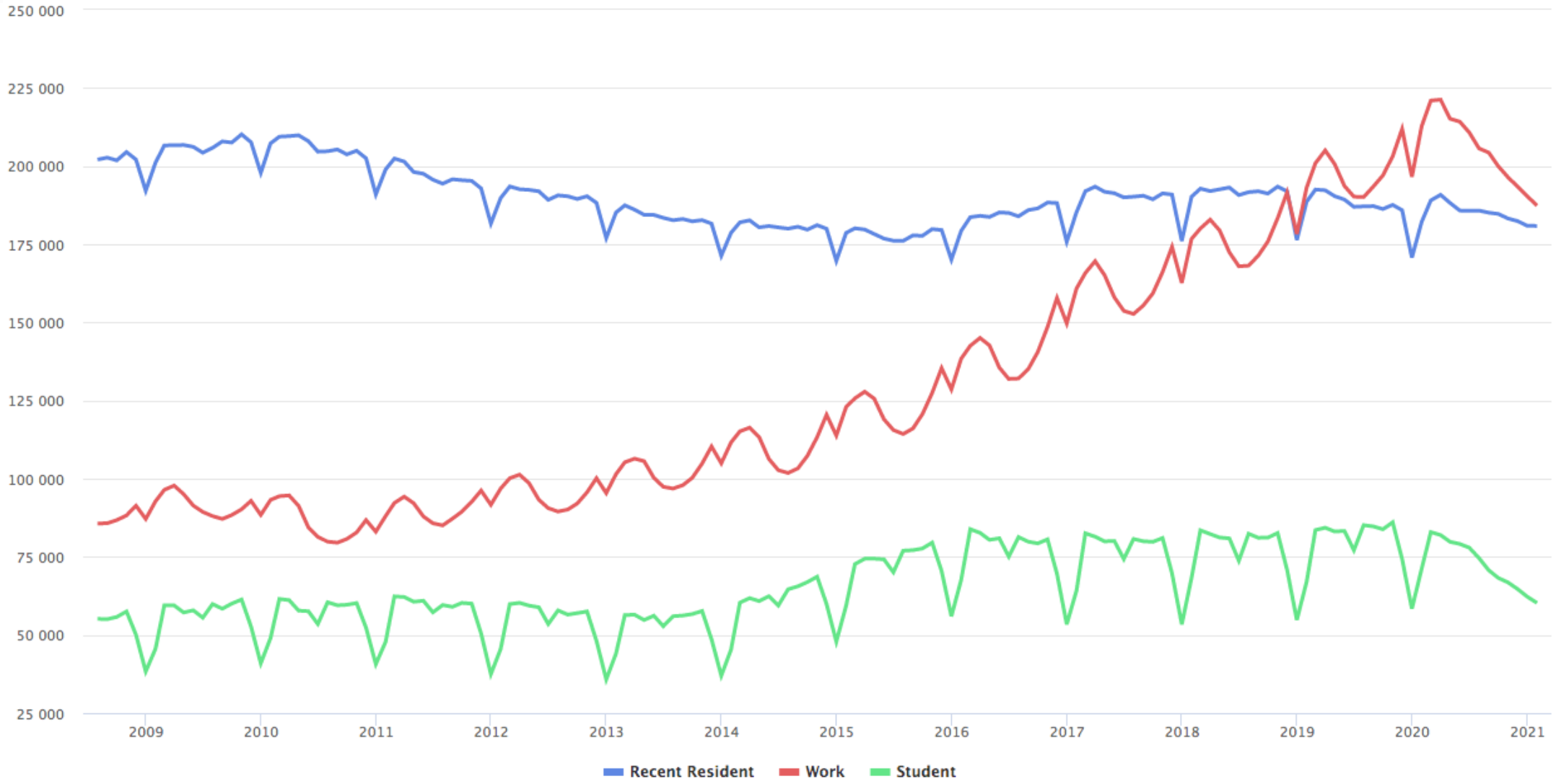
‘Temporary’ migration in the pandemic



Source: Migration Data Explorer https://mbienz.shinyapps.io/migration_data_explorer/

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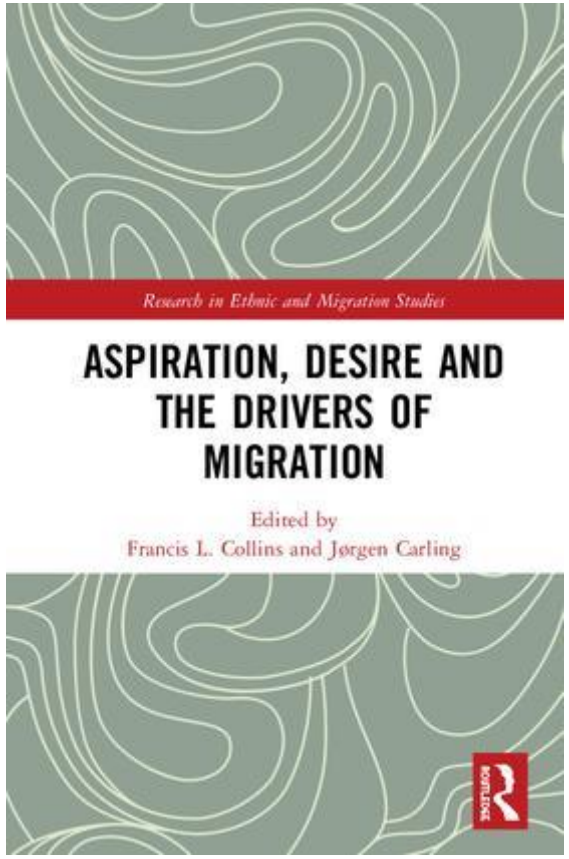
Rethinking migration decisions

- Migration problematic; presumption that
  - Decisions are principally economic
  - Individual as the 'decision-maker'
  - Decision making as singular event

- Aspirations, desire and the drivers of migration
  - Understanding aspiration and ability dynamic
  - Emotional dimensions of migration generation
  - Mediation and configuration as central: migration regimes, industries, infrastructures



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Industry and infrastructure

Migration industries:
(Cranston, Schapendonk & Spaan 2018)

- Brokers; smugglers; recruitment;employment and education agents, etc.
- Arrange and facilitate migration for profit

Migration infrastructure:
(Lin, Lindquist, Xiang and Yeoh 2017)

- Commercial, regulatory, technological, humanitarian and social
- "the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility" (Xiang and Lindquist 2014: S124)

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Pandemic infrastructure and regimes

- Border closure
- Restricted travel opportunities
- Immigration processing suspended
- Surveillance and control
- Exclusions and exemptions to border control

- Intermediated border avoidance
- Peer-to-peer information sharing
- Health screening
- Amplifying advance passenger screening
- Testing and vaccine certifications / passports

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Decisions/Desire, reconfigured

- Pandemic as a blockage to desiring-migration
- Suspension or limitation of agency for stranded migrants
- Normalisation of new regimes of control shaping what decisions are possible, how desire directs migration

Shaun Tan, *The Arrival*

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Conclusion

- Delayed, disrupted or reconfigured?
  - All of the above

- Looking beyond the singular 'event' of migration decisions
- Accounting for infrastructural dimensions of migration
- New regimes of control in and beyond the pandemic
- What kinds of desiring migration will emerge in the next normal?

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