

[Premium](#) [Opinion](#) [Home / Business](#)

# Sasha Borissenko: New Zealand's social housing waiting list is embarrassing



Opinion by

**Sasha Borissenko**

NZ Herald · 12 Oct, 2023 06:57 PM ⌚ 5 mins to read

Freelance journalist who has reported extensively on the law industry

[📁 Gift article](#) [🔖 Save](#) [📤 Share](#)

Te Mātāwai on Greys Ave, Auckland, where Kāinga Ora has built 276 new homes for people on the housing register and others. There were 24,716 people sitting on the waiting list in June this year. Photo / Michael Craig

## OPINION

"When one in every 100 people is homeless, half of whom are under 25 years; when thousands are living in vehicles or housed in motels provided by the State; when houses are in such disrepair that they cause otherwise-

preventable illness and disease; and when middle-income earners are finding it difficult to afford an accessible and decent home, the result is not just a housing crisis, it is a human rights crisis of significant proportions," UN Special Rapporteur Leilani Farha said following her visit to the country in 2020.

These conditions were not only violations of the right to housing, but also of the right to health, security, and life, she said.

The number of people on the waiting list for social housing (not including all family members) was 16,308 at the time of Farha's visit. In 2017, the list ranged between 3000-4000, peaking at 26,868 in March 2022. Sitting at 24,716 in June this year, 49 per cent identify as Māori.

Farha said although Aotearoa had ratified various international human rights treaties, there was insufficient expression of the right to adequate housing in law, policies and programmes, and their implementation.

Fast forward to May this year, when the Waitangi Tribunal released its stage one report of the Housing Policy and Services Kaupapa Inquiry on Māori Homelessness between 2009 and 2021.

In the report's introduction, Judge Craig Coxhead, Dr Paul Hamer, Prue Kapua, and Basil Morrison said homelessness among Māori was the outcome of the entire range of problems the Waitangi Tribunal must traverse - from supply, affordability, and discrimination, to policy failure and historical grievances.

"It is arguably the sharp end of a system that has marginalised Māori for decades, and the result of Māori dispossession since the nineteenth century."

It found the Crown had breached the Treaty of Waitangi by its failure to adequately consult Maori over the Statistics New Zealand definition of homelessness in 2009. Over the following seven years, "the Crown did practically nothing to address Maori homelessness".

Māori had borne and were continuing to bear the brunt of systematic failures and multiple Treaty breaches, the report read.

Tokenism or virtue signalling - my words, not the report's - was made worse by public agencies claiming policies put "Māori" at the heart of the response, supporting a "by Māori, with Māori, for Māori approach", the report read.

Other examples included: "genuine Treaty partnership", "by Māori, for Māori", and "put whānau at the centre".

"They were thus mere 'buzz-words'," the report read.

"The Crown should also be careful to avoid over-reach in its use of Māori methods, values, and names. Such over-reach risks those who are not qualified employing terms they do not understand."

Fast forward to September this year. Labour campaigned to build 6000 additional public and transitional houses, totalling 27,000 houses by 2027.

Housing Minister Megan Woods said the Labour Party wanted to eliminate the public housing waitlist, saying National wanted to "turn off the public housing tap yet again, with no further commitment for public housing beyond 2025".







Megan Woods, Minister for Housing. Photo / Alex Cairns

National's Chris Bishop pledged to review Kāinga Ora's approach if elected and to make its funding contestable. The party has promised to continue to increase social housing stock beyond 2025, but funding was up for debate.

Review of the system is a must, but National's stance to cut social security benefits through indexing to cost of living rather than wage rises could have catastrophic effects for the country's most marginalised.

Lawyer Michael Sharp, who was involved in the Waitangi Tribunal hearings, told me one of the issues is the lack of central government funding for acquiring additional social houses.

"This task is left to Kāinga Ora and community housing providers (CHPs) who with little central government support have been unable to add nearly enough additional social housing to reduce the waiting list."

Kāinga Ora has also failed to meet its 2018-2022 budget for additional social housing places set by the Government, Sharp said.

Of the total 9043 additional places added during the budget period, Kāinga Ora added 3070 social housing places, while CHPs contributed 5973. Kāinga Ora was budgeted to provide 4480 places.

Central government's funding of social housing largely consists of 'income-related rent supplements' paid to Kāinga Ora and CHPs for each of their social housing tenants.

Sharp told me it leaves Kāinga Ora and CHPs to fund the acquisition of any additional social houses that may be required to meet unmet demand represented by the waiting list.

---

## Read More

- [Sasha Borissenko: Duty lawyer pay rise - a win or slap ...](#)
- [Sasha Borissenko: A better way to deal with lawyers' ...](#)

- [Sasha Borissenko: Legal staff working a day a week ...](#)
  - [Sasha Borissenko: Why National's crackdown on crime ...](#)
- 

The issue is Labour's pledge to budget for an additional 6000 social housing places relates to income-related rent supplements for social housing tenants, rather than any funding for building social housing needed to reduce the waiting list - meaning it doesn't relieve any pressure on our housing supply crisis.

Across the ditch, the Australian federal government announced its A\$2 billion (\$2.13b) Social Housing Accelerator in June, which will increase Australia's housing supply by providing direct government funding creating thousands of social homes across Australia.

As New Zealand's most vulnerable continue to be weaponised, Australia's progressive stance on social housing - together with the UN and Waitangi Tribunal - highlights our representatives' continual wilful incompetence.

