

MIGRATION PATHWAYS

Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE)

Overview

The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme allows for the temporary entry of low-skilled seasonal workers within the horticulture and viticulture industries. The scheme allows workers from a range of Pacific Island countries to work in New Zealand for up to seven months at a time. In 2020/21, the cap was set at 14,400 workers.

Why was it started?

New Zealand's horticulture and viticulture industries have been expanding rapidly since the mid-2000s. It suffers from shortages of seasonal labor. A 2008 study found that the shortage and poor quality of labor was costing the horticultural industry NZD\$180–300 million a year.

The RSE scheme was envisioned as a way to meet the industry's labor needs while helping foster economic growth and regional integration throughout the Pacific. At the time the scheme was launched, in mid-2007, it was the only significant offshore seasonal work opportunity available to Pacific Island countries.

How does it work?

In designing the scheme, the New Zealand government sought to learn from previous similar programs. It required employers to lodge their vacancies with local work providers before attempting

Countries all around the world utilize migration pathways to train and bring over workers with needed skills. The CGD Migration Pathways database documents these pathways to promote innovation in this space. To explore the database, visit GSP.cgdev.org.



Country of Destination
NEW ZEALAND

Country of Origin
FIJI, KIRIBATI, THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS, THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA, NAURU, PALAU, PAPUA NEW GUINEA, SAMOA, THE SOLOMON ISLANDS, TONGA, TUVALU, AND VANUATU

Skill
SEASONAL AGRICULTURE (🌾)

Skill Level
LOW

Timeline
2007–ONGOING

Beneficiaries
CAPPED AT 14,400 A YEAR

to recruit offshore. Once granted recognized employer status, employers are able to recruit from either a work-ready pool, through an agent, or directly. Employers must pay half of their employee's airfare and ensure that workers have access to accommodation and food, medical insurance and health services, translation services, and religious and cultural activities.

The scheme provides 7-month visas in any 11-month period. It is open to citizens throughout the Pacific Islands. Jobs are strictly seasonal, and repeat recruitment is encouraged. Workers are not allowed to bring their families. The initial cap was 5,000 a year. It was steadily increased over time. It is now set at 14,400 workers a year. In 2019–20, 11,152 workers came to New Zealand under the scheme, most of them from Vanuatu, Samoa, and Tonga.

What impact has it had?

Although the RSE scheme provides a relatively small number of workers, it has played a critical role in enabling the expansion of the sector while reducing potential abuses. Few policies have been as rigorously evaluated and emerged with as clean a bill of health.

The scheme has been beneficial to both employers and employees. According to the most recent employer survey (2019), 96 percent of employers felt the benefits of engaging workers through the program outweighed the costs, 80 percent were able to invest in new equipment as result of the hires, and 82 percent were able to hire additional New Zealanders. Employees also

benefited. Between 2010 and 2014, RSE workers earned more than NZD\$460 million in gross income. A 2010 study found that per capita incomes of participating households rose by 30 percent. A study of 640 workers from Samoa and Tonga conducted in 2014–15 found that they remitted 42 percent of their take-home pay.

Further readings

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