



NEW ZEALAND
IMMIGRATION

Immigration Factsheets

Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme

May 2021

COVID-19 response changes to Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Scheme

- In August 2020, the Government extended RSE visas by six months for workers who are still in New Zealand and are unable to return home. This allowed RSE workers with visa expiry dates between 18 August and 31 December 2020 to stay and work in New Zealand.
- It also provided RSE workers currently in New Zealand, and their employers, more certainty about worker availability for the coming season.
- The requirement for RSE workers to return to their home country between seasons has also been lifted in light of current travel restrictions.
- The RSE scheme will be maintained at its current 14,400 cap.
- RSE workers already in New Zealand can choose whether to stay and work, and if required extend their visa for the current season, or choose to return home should flights be available.
- RSE workers will have opportunities to transfer and work for other RSE employers under an approved Agreement to Recruit (ATR).

Border exceptions

- The Government has announced two class border exceptions for RSE workers, recognising the importance of the RSE Scheme to our Pacific neighbours and the horticulture and viticulture industries in New Zealand.
- The first class border exception was announced in November 2020 and allowed 2,000 RSE workers to travel to New Zealand for the summer season. All workers under this exception arrived between January and March 2021.
- The second class border exception, announced on 10 May 2021, allows 150 RSE workers to travel to New Zealand every 16 days starting in June. This exception means that there could be approximately 2400 more RSE workers in the country to support the peak harvest period in March 2022.



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- To participate in the second class border exception, Pacific countries will need to have an agreed plan in place for the repatriation of workers who are still in New Zealand from last season, who may choose to return home. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) will work with Pacific partners on repatriation plans.
- Only RSE workers from Pacific countries that have been assessed as a low-risk COVID-19 country by the Ministry of Health will be able to participate in this border exception, and allow workers to enter New Zealand.
- RSE employers employing border exception workers will need to pay a minimum of \$22.10 an hour to all the RSE workers they employ, including RSE border exception workers and existing RSE workers from the start of a new contract.
- RSE workers will be required to stay in managed isolation and quarantine when they arrive in New Zealand. Employers must pay the full costs for managed isolation and quarantine. This fee will be charged on top of the standard critical worker charge to cover additional costs such as translations, dietary requirements and pastoral support.

RSE Scheme overview

- The RSE scheme was announced in October 2006 and came into effect in April 2007.
- The policy allows the horticulture and viticulture industries to recruit workers from overseas for seasonal work when there are not enough New Zealand workers.
- There is an administrative limit or cap on the number of RSE places that can be taken up in any one year.
- This cap was set at 5,000 places when the scheme was established in 2007. Increased demand from employers has led to the cap being increased to 8,000 places in 2009, 9,000 in November 2014, 9,500 in December 2015, 10,500 in December 2016, 11,100 in December 2017, 12,850 in November 2018 and 14,400 in September 2019.
- The cap of 14,400 was put in place before COVID-19. Due to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, fewer RSE workers have been able to enter the country. It is unlikely that the cap will be reached while border restrictions remain in place.
- In November 2020, the Government granted a border exception for around 2,000 experienced Pacific Island RSE workers to enter New Zealand to work in the horticulture and viticulture industries.
- Employers can apply to recruit overseas workers under the RSE policy only when there are no New Zealanders available to do the work.
- Employers apply to Immigration New Zealand to become a Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE). As part of the processing of the RSE status application, INZ has to be satisfied that the employer has good workplace practices, including a history of compliance with immigration and employment law.
- RSE employers must comply with minimum remuneration and pay deductions requirements. RSE workers must be paid no less than the market rate for the job. Employment agreements need to specify the per hour rate for the work to be done and where piece rates apply the piece rate must be specified.
- All workers receive information on RSE rights and responsibilities. RSE employers are responsible for ensuring RSE workers' welfare and pastoral care needs are met.

Employers are provided support and advice on standards and obligations and conditions are monitored closely.

- RSE employers must make available safe and suitable accommodation and on-site facilities at work for their workers. Workers are expected to pay a fair rent, power and other living costs associated with accommodation. Deductions under RSE Instructions must be for actual, reasonable and verifiable costs so maximum amounts are not specified.
- In 2019 new requirements were introduced that restricted further RSE employer use of residential accommodation. This was done to reduce the risk of increased demand for public housing as a result of the RSE cap increase. Exemptions are allowed for regions with low housing pressure.
- Any decision to raise the cap for RSE workers is made by the Minister of Immigration, whereas decisions on total regional allocations are made by Immigration New Zealand and the Ministry of Social Development in consultation with industry.
- Unless employers can show they have pre-established relationships with workers from other countries, they may only recruit workers under RSE policy from the following eligible Pacific countries: Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.
- Workers must meet health and character requirements and provide evidence of arrangements to leave New Zealand at the end of their stay.
- People employed under the RSE policy may stay in New Zealand for up to seven months during any 11-month period. Exceptions to this are workers from Tuvalu and Kiribati, who can stay for nine months because of the distance from New Zealand and the cost of travel.

RSE workers arrival into New Zealand

2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
9,278	10,437	11,078	12,581	11,152

Top 5 nationalities

2015/16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Vanuatu 3,726	Vanuatu 4,170	Vanuatu 4,445	Vanuatu 5,130	Vanuatu 4,237
Tonga 1,687	Tonga 1,820	Tonga 1,899	Samoa 2,315	Samoa 2,409
Samoa 1,454	Samoa 1,689	Samoa 1,878	Tonga 2,037	Tonga 1,807
Thailand 637	Thailand 633	Thailand 629	Solomon Islands 696	Solomon Islands 756
Solomon Islands 590	Solomon Islands 592	Solomon Islands 643	Thailand 628	Fiji 487



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