

Recognised Seasonal Employer

Information booklet -
Vanuatu





Official name: The Republic of Vanuatu is part of the Melanesia Island countries, consisting of four main islands and 80 smaller islands.

Capital: Port Vila

Languages: Bislama, English, French

Religion: Christianity

Currency: Vatu

Population: 300,000

Vanuatu joined the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme in 2007.





Who oversees the RSE scheme in Vanuatu?

The Employment Service Unit sits within the Department of Labour which is under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Department of Labour facilitates employment opportunities for the people of Vanuatu. It manages labour mobility programmes including the RSE scheme. Recruitment of seasonal workers is overseen by the Labour Sending Unit within the Employment Service Unit.

What is the role of the Vanuatu country liaison officer?

The country liaison officer is the Vanuatu government official based in New Zealand. The country liaison officer advocates, supports and intervenes to resolve any concerns of major issues and reports back to the Employment Service Unit with recommendations for endorsement and/or directive.

The country liaison officer will work with employers and New Zealand government officials to understand expectations of Vanuatu in relation to operations under the mandate of the Employment Service Unit.

Vanuatu country liaison officer

Olivia Johnson

Phone: 021 025 51977

Email: ojohnson@vanuatu.gov.vu

High Commissioner

His Excellency Jimmy Nipo

Email: jnipo@vanuatu.gov.vu

Vanuatu Consul General

McKenzie Kalotiti

Email: m.kalotiti@xtra.co.nz

Who do I talk to before I recruit RSE workers?

To ensure you have the current information about Vanuatu's recruitment process contact:

- Immigration New Zealand's RSE engagement partner they have relationships with the Labour Sending Units and will connect you with the Employment Service Unit.
- The country liaison officer who will provide you with the necessary information about Vanuatu's recruitment processes and connect you to the Employment Service Unit.

There are two recruitment options for employers:

1. **Employer direct recruitment:** Employers wishing to recruit direct through the Vanuatu Government will need to apply for a permit to recruit. Permits are approved by the Commissioner of Labour, once a permit has been granted employers work with the Labour Sending Unit on selection and mobilisation.
2. **Vanuatu recruitment agent:** Employers employ a registered agent in Vanuatu to recruit on their behalf. The agent works with the employer on selection and the agent will lead on mobilisation. Upon request the country liaison officer can share the current list of licensed agents.

Refer to the recruitment process for a detailed explanation of the two processes.

What is the recruitment timeframe?

The timeframe from when the Labour Sending Unit is in receipt of an Agreement to Recruit to when the worker boards the flight to travel to New Zealand is usually around five to six weeks.

What is the length of an RSE visa and where are they assessed?

Vanuatu workers are deployed to New Zealand for up to seven months in an eleven-month period. Visa applications are lodged with the New Zealand Visa Application Centre in Port Vila. Visas are then assessed and approved by Immigration New Zealand in Suva, Fiji. Visa application fees can be paid onshore in New Zealand.

Email: rse_southpacific@vfsglobal.com

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 8:30am-4:30pm

The timeframe for visa assessment is ten working days on receipt of the Visa Application Centre receiving the visa application.

Recruitment process

Option 1: Employer direct recruitment

Step 1: Employer receives Agreement to Recruit approval and decides to recruit direct.

Step 2: Employer emails the country liaison officer who will then make formal introductions to the RSE team within the Labour Sending Unit to obtain approval from the Commissioner of Labour for a Permit to Recruit.

Employers recruiting direct will need to:

- Provide evidence of RSE accreditation status.
- Complete the Application for Recruitment Permit.
- Have a clean history of recruiting in Vanuatu – no formal complaints lodged with the Employment Service Unit or other local authorities.
- A strategy document to demonstrate management of worker welfare.

Step 3: The Labour Sending Unit works with the employer to match participants from the work ready pool with the employer's criteria, including if the employer already has selected returning workers.

Step 4: The employer plans new/returning workers visa.

Step 5: Employer validates character of selected candidates before finalising list. Worker accepts the offer of employment and signs contract and visa application.

Step 6: Labour Sending Unit collates and completes all the documents:

- Signed worker visa application
- Signed worker employment contract and deduction form
- National identification birth certificate
- Valid passport and two passport photos if new candidate
- Police clearance (visa)
- Complete medical examination (visa requirement).

Step 7: Employer sends fees to New Zealand Visa Application Centre.

Step 8: Labour Sending Unit completes and lodges visa applications once fees to the New Zealand Visa Application Centre have cleared.

Step 9: The New Zealand Visa Application Centre informs the employer of the visa decision:

- Approved – progress to the next step.
- Require more information – Labour Sending Unit contacts employer or worker to rectify.
- Decline – inform employer and worker.

Step 10: Employment Service Unit conducts pre-departure briefing. Presentation slides are provided by the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment.

Step 11: Worker departs for New Zealand and Labour Sending Unit informs the employer.

Option 2: Vanuatu recruitment agent

Step 1: Vanuatu recruitment agents must apply and obtain approval from the Commissioner of Labour for a license to recruit.

Step 2: The employer receives an Agreement to Recruit approval and decides to recruit via a licensed Vanuatu recruitment agent. The employer can request from the Employment Service Unit and/or country liaison officer a list of licensed agents to select from.

Step 3: The agent sources candidates from a work ready pool, churches and/or village communities.

Step 4: The agent works with the employer and undertakes interviews to identify and verify suitable candidates.

Step 5: The agent collates and completes all documents:

- Signed worker visa application
- Signed worker employment contract and deduction form
- National identification birth certificate
- Valid passport and two passport photos if new candidate
- Police clearance (visa)
- Complete panel medical examination (visa requirement)

Step 6: Agent lodges visa application once fees with New Zealand Visa Application Centre have cleared.

Step 7: New Zealand Visa Application Centre informs the employer of the visa decision:

- Approved – progress to the next step
- Require more information – agent to notify employer
- Decline – agent to inform employer and worker.

Step 8: Employment Service Unit will conduct pre-departure briefing. Regardless of how the worker was recruited, it is mandatory for seasonal workers to attend this.

Step 9: Worker departs for New Zealand and agent informs the employer.

Note: RSE seasonal workers sign a Vanuatu Code of Conduct to uphold the reputation of Vanuatu. However, this Code of Conduct does not have legal jurisdiction in New Zealand. Vanuatu seasonal workers are representing their families (immediate/extended), communities and country and must adhere to the rules of the Vanuatu government.

Employers are encouraged to select from Vanuatu's work ready pool for any new seasonal workers they require.

What flights can be booked for workers?

Flights to and from Vanuatu to New Zealand (and vice versa) include:

- Solomon Airlines (direct)
- Fiji Airways (via Fiji)

Pastoral care

What does good pastoral care look like?

Immigration New Zealand provides information for employers on Pastoral Care as part of the Agreement to Recruit application process and maintaining RSE status:

<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/assets/inz/documents/employer-resources/rse-employer-pastoral-care-guide.pdf>

The RSE scheme is complex and to be able to support workers from diverse backgrounds, experiences and beliefs requires patience and understanding.

Workers may wish to participate in/attend the following ceremonies:

- Church
- Funerals
- Weddings
- Independence celebrations – July

Note: there will be workers that have a sense of responsibility to attend certain ceremonies depending on their status/affiliations in their family and/or provinces.

Practical advice for closer collaboration with workers

- Be patient and understanding when communicating with the workers and their families in Vanuatu.
- Employers should take time to listen and explore all avenues to provide the worker with support to be comfortable to engage.
- A no answer does NOT mean they are guilty or rude. It can mean that they do not understand, do not know how to respond, or speaking up can be seen as a disrespectful act.



- Family (immediate/extended) is important to workers, be understanding of when family want to visit workers. Put in place visiting rules but avoid prohibiting workers from seeing family.
- Have a good induction programme (not rushed) when welcoming and/or inducting new and/or returning workers around the rules and expectations in the orchards, accommodation, and behaviour in public/community. Clearly demonstrate the 'how' in basic English and in their language.
- Use signs in both English and their language of how to operate a washing machine, microwave, change their sheets, wash dishes, put out rubbish etc.
- Hold leadership trainings – employers are encouraged to use country liaison officers/Pacific representatives to support content.
- If workers are from different villages or tribes, treat them equally.
- Reach out to country liaison officers/High Commission representatives to provide support on mitigating serious incidents.
- Champion high performers by working with team leaders to ensure information is disseminated accurately and behavioural concerns are managed and addressed appropriately.
- Avoid making assumptions when workers do not reply immediately.
- Don't belittle a team leader or someone of high status (chief) in front of the team. Shaming workers in front of their peers is not appropriate, especially if they are someone with a chief title.
- Avoid using derogatory words or gestures as this is a sign of disrespect and suggests the employer does not value their contribution to their business. There is a difference between being assertive and being disrespectful.
- Don't impose European values and practices with the hope workers will feel comfortable and safe in New Zealand. This will only confuse the workers of what their families and government expect of them.
- Don't show favoritism.
- Never house men and women in the same accommodation and have separate bathroom facilities for them. Be sensitive of custom practices between the different provinces.

Addressing issues amongst workers

- Build trust that you are there to help resolve the matter. Try and avoid showing disgust or anger, instead show you are interested in helping resolve the matter.
- Reach out to the team leader (if the team leader is not involved) for support and language barriers.
- Depending on severity, reach out to the following people for support:
 - RSE engagement partners
 - Country liaison officers
 - Labour Sending Unit
- Consider reaching out to a family member of the worker if you are in touch with them.
- Be patient and respectful when explaining things to the worker(s). What an employer sees as normal, may appear foreign for many new workers.

Other considerations

- Staying in touch with families back home is important especially if workers are in isolated areas or regions.
- Be mindful of selecting leaders from different provinces – discuss amongst the workers reasons for selecting leaders and possibly allowing them to have a say.
- Dress appropriately and research the customs and relations between men and women from the villages/regions you recruit from.
- Be aware that Ni-Vanuatu workers prefer to live and eat on their own- not communal.

Note: Many workers are recruited from the rural or outer islands, and they would not have been exposed to many of the things they will see or have access to in New Zealand. Many of the men would not be expected to cook, clean or make their own beds as this was the responsibility of others back home. Additionally, selecting a team leader based on their English proficiency is not encouraged. In circumstances where a worker is best to lead, assign an assistant team leader who can translate.

What you do is an RSE worker passes away while in New Zealand

1. Handle the situation with care and sensitivity particularly around family members of the deceased worker.
2. Reach out to the country liaison officer/Pacific High Commission representatives to understand cultural protocols and government requirements.
3. The definition of family member extends to more than just their immediate family; it may include aunties, uncles, cousins, grandparents.
4. You may come across intervention of a church pastor or chief of the village or family who has the blessing from the next-of-kin to speak on behalf of the family of the deceased worker.
5. You may come across a situation where the next-of-kin may not always have the say when it comes to organising the repatriation of the deceased worker, this may rest with the wider family.
6. Ask workers to refrain from sharing information about the deceased on social media until the family have been informed.
7. Depending on the cause of death, as the employer you should be aware of the insurance and ACC policies and support available for the deceased workers family.
8. During the whole process keep the Employment Service Unit, country liaison officer/High Commission and family updated if you are in direct contact with the next-of-kin or family representative.

Note: The process will vary depending on government protocols, cultural practices, and repatriation requirements of each country and what the family of the deceased would like to do. The next-of-kin and/or immediate family of the deceased (either in New Zealand or overseas) are the decision makers.

Key steps to aid employers with what to do:

Step 1: Report the death

Employer to inform:

- 1.1 Find out from the team leader or team members whether the deceased has family or extended family in the group or close by.
- 1.2 Notify next-of-kin immediately and find out the final resting place for the deceased.
- 1.3 Immigration New Zealand RSE engagement partner on visa and pastoral care requirements.



Depending on country protocols inform:

- Direct recruitment – inform country liaison officer who will then liaise with the Employment Service Unit on arrangements.
- Recruitment through agent – inform licensed agent who will liaise with Employment Service Unit and country liaison officer on arrangements.
- The Office of the High Commission – RSE workers are non-citizens of New Zealand and therefore it is important the Heads of Mission are informed of the passing of one of their citizens.
- Country liaison officers will offer support around government protocols, translation and/or cultural advice.

Note: Protocols and processes will vary across the nine countries and remedial intervention will be necessary depending on circumstances surrounding the death. It is important to note that if the worker is from another island but residing in Port Vila, the final resting place will be the village on their island.

Step 2: Engage a funeral director

Liaise with the funeral director to progress and discuss requirements.

Step 3: Documentation

The following documentation is required to facilitate clearance for the body to be repatriated home and to process deceased worker benefits and entitlements.

- 3.1 Death certificate to confirm cause of death.
- 3.2 Clearance from respective government organisations (Ministry of Health, Customs New Zealand Service and Immigration New Zealand).

Note: Employer will need to liaise with the Employment Service Unit/country liaison officers to check which documents are required to clear repatriation. The Employment Service Unit will provide on the ground support throughout repatriation of the deceased.



Step 4: Payroll and benefits

The employer should process final payments and paperwork.

Step 5: Facilitate family/funeral service

There may be customary practices requested before repatriation of the deceased worker. Workers may come together to show their respects such as eating together and drinking Kava. The employer is encouraged to work with the country liaison officer and family spokesperson of the deceased to better understand these and how the employer can proceed if requested by the next-of-kin or family of the deceased worker.

Note: Employers may witness the custom of giving from other workers, family, friends and communities. Not all employers will accept this custom as it is not a familiar practice BUT it is customary in many Pacific countries and employers are encouraged not to judge.

Step 6: Transportation

Depending on whether the deceased has family with them, the family member may choose to accompany the body home. Each individual case is different and not to be treated the same.

Note: If the worker has a family member working with them, they may decide to accompany the deceased worker home.



What do you need to know before visiting Vanuatu?

Understand the expectations of the government of Vanuatu, the community and families, employers are encouraged to visit the country and homes of their workers.

Things to note:

1. Gifts are sometimes exchanged at meetings.
2. Bring something with you whenever you visit someone at their home. Food or souvenirs are often appreciated gifts, e.g. New Zealand chocolate.
3. Dress respectfully and modestly when meeting with officials and visiting villages or families of workers.
4. Inform the Employment Service Unit of your visit to Vanuatu and your agenda if visiting officials and/or district committees.
5. Driving is on the right-hand side.

Useful words to enhance communication with Ni-Vanuatu workers

Hello/Hi – Halo

Welcome – Welkam

Goodbye – Tata Lukim yu

Have a nice day – Pasem wan naes dei

Please – Plis

Thank you – Tankiu

Thank you very much – Tankiu tumas

Family – extended family – famli/tawian

Yes – Yes

No – No



Scan the QR code for more words.





www.hortnz.co.nz



August 2025

