

Recognised Seasonal Employer - key partners in the worker support ecosystem

The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) policy is administered and enforced by Immigration New Zealand, while employers, workers and labour sending units are the recipients. Immigration New Zealand sets the overarching policy framework, compliance requirements, and visa processes, ensuring that the scheme operates within New Zealand's employment legislation.

Employers and sending countries then operationalise these policies through recruitment and selection, pre-departure training, worker support, and adherence to contractual obligations etc.

There is no single structure for administering the RSE scheme across sending countries or across the horticulture and viticulture industries. Sending countries have each developed labour mobility policies based on their own national mandate, expectations, and available resources. These variations mean that processes such as recruitment, worker preparedness, pastoral care, cultural and reintegration etc. differ from country to country, requiring flexibility and strong communication between all stakeholders, especially sending nations and employers.

For employers, understanding New Zealand's employment laws and Immigration New Zealand RSE requirements is essential, but equally important is knowing the policies and procedures of the sending countries that employers recruit from. This dual awareness helps employers navigate cultural expectations, resolve issues effectively, and maintain compliance with both domestic and international standards. Strong collaboration between Immigration New Zealand, employers, labour sending units, and country liaison officers ensure the success and sustainability of the RSE scheme.

The following summarises the steps needed to be taken by employers:

Employers seasonal demand means there is a need for RSE workers via a labour market test (where there is no available workforce in New Zealand).

1. Employer applies or re-applies for RSE status- <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/work/for-employers/getting-accreditation-or-approval-to-hire/employing-workers-through-the-recognised-seasonal-employer-scheme/applying-and-reapplying-for-recognised-seasonal-employer-status-process-steps/>

- If granted, the status is held for two years (first time applicant), RSE numbers are allocated, and status number for the Agreement to Recruit application.
- If an employer is reapplying and approved, RSE status may be valid for three years.

2. Employer applies for an Agreement to Recruit. The employer must meet all requirements and obtain approval before commencing the recruitment process. Follow the Agreement to Recruit calendar to meet timeframes. <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/work/for-employers/getting-accreditation-or-approval-to-hire/employing-workers-through-the-recognised-seasonal-employer-scheme/applying-for-an-agreement-to-recruit-process-steps/>

Agreement to Recruit calendar

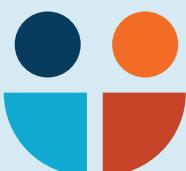
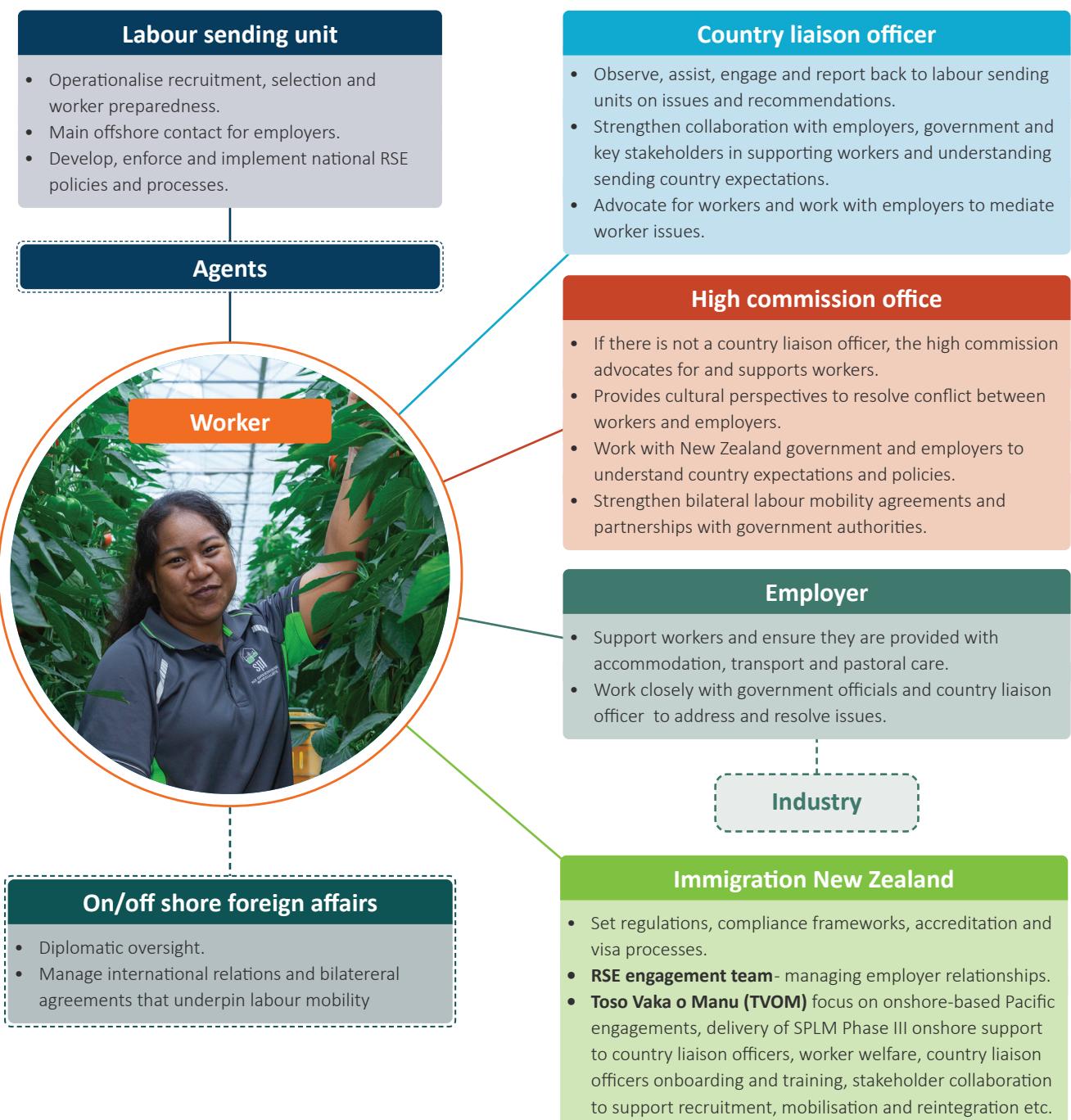
When you want workers to start	When to apply for an Agreement to Recruit
Quarter 1 (July-September)	February
Quarter 2 (October-December)	May
Quarter 3 (January-March)	August
Quarter 4 (April-June)	November

3. The employer engages with labour sending units to commence the recruitment and selection process. Some employers will undertake recruitment themselves, others will work with offshore recruitment agents. This process will depend on labour sending unit requirements and employer preferences.



Key stakeholders

The diagram below highlights the key roles and responsibilities within the RSE scheme and underscores the need for strong communication among these stakeholders. Ongoing engagement ensures alignment on policies, compliance, and expectations, while enabling timely issue resolution and cultural understanding. This collaboration supports worker welfare, strengthens partnerships, and promotes meaningful collaboration and efficiency, making the RSE scheme sustainable and beneficial for both sending countries, workers, employers and New Zealand.



The RSE eco-system is quite broad, view it here: <https://www.hortnz.co.nz/assets/Jobs-and-labour/RSE/NZ-Recognised-Seasonal-Employer-eco-system-2025>, the diagram above focuses on key stakeholders only.

For country specifics view the country information booklets on the HortNZ website:
<https://www.hortnz.co.nz/people-jobs-and-labour/rse-scheme>