



**Horticulture™**  
New Zealand  
Ahumāra Kai Aotearoa

# Recognised Seasonal Employer

Information booklet - Samoa





**Official name:** The Independent State of Samoa is part of the Polynesian island countries consisting of two main islands (Upolu and Savai'i), and three smaller islands.

**Capital:** Apia (located on the island of Upolu)

**Languages:** Samoan and English

**Currency:** Tālā

**Population:** 205,557 people

Samoa joined the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme in 2007.





## Who oversees the RSE scheme in Samoa?

The Samoa Labour Employment & Export Programme (LEEP) currently sits under the Samoa Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (MCIL). The Labour Employment & Export Programme is responsible for the administration of recognised labour mobility schemes in New Zealand (RSE) and Australia (PALM), providing employment opportunities for its people, especially those who are most vulnerable.

In addition, the Labour Employment & Export Programme also engages with all relevant stakeholders in-country in support of Samoa's labour mobility aspirations.

The Labour Employment & Export Programme office is located on Level 1 of the SNPF Building in Apia.

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## What is the role of the Samoan liaison officers?

The liaison officers sit under the Samoa Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Their role is to advocate, support and facilitate meetings between employers and workers to resolve differences from a cultural understanding and from Samoa's expectations.

The liaison officers will work with employers and New Zealand government officials to understand expectations of the government of Samoa and play an advocacy role. The liaison officers also work closely with the Samoa Trade Commissioner and the Labour Employment & Export Programme (a division of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (MCIL)).

## Who do I talk to before I recruit RSE workers?

Employers are encouraged to contact the RSE engagement partner to connect to the Labour Employment & Export Programme in Samoa. Employers can make direct contact with the Samoan liaison officers to understand the recruitment and selection process and expectations of Samoa.

The Cabinet of Samoa approved in 2023 its Labour Mobility Policy for New Zealand and Australia. A number of key reforms were proposed, including centralising oversight of RSE by the government Ministry that is responsible for the Labour Employment & Export Programme.

Prior to recruitment, approved employers must notify the Labour Employment & Export Programme. The Labour Employment & Export Programme oversees registrations and endorsement of all RSE recruiters, recognised seasonal employers, contractors and workers.

The Labour Employment & Export Programme also has oversight of the work ready pool and In-country Recruitment Database. The In-country Recruitment Database contains information on all candidates including returning workers, new registrants and work-ready candidates. The In-country Recruitment Database tracks the movement of workers and provides real-time reporting on all the labour mobility programmes under the Labour Employment & Export Programme's administration.

***Another important change noted in the Samoa Labour Mobility Policy 2023 is the introduction of fees as part of cost recovery and self-sustaining measures aimed at improving service quality and covering basic administration and operations costs.***

Approved fees include:

1. **Administration fee for workers:** WST \$50 (paid by workers who successfully receive visas). Effective July 2024.
2. **Annual participation fee:** WST \$1,000 (paid by district councils). Effective July 2024.
3. **Approved employer accreditation fee:** NZD \$50 per RSE worker (paid by RSE employer at the conclusion of the season). Recently approved by the Revenue Board, May 2025.
4. **Third party/licensed agent fees:** WST \$10,000 per annum.



## What is the recruitment timeframe?

The timeframe for the end-to-end process from when the Labour Employment & Export Programme is in receipt of an Agreement to Recruit, to when the worker boards the flight is eight weeks (minimum).

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

Samoan workers are deployed to New Zealand from seven months in an 11-month period. Visa applications are assessed and approved by the Immigration New Zealand, Apia office.

# Recruitment process

## Pre-selection: district councils

In line with Samoa's Labour Mobility Policy 2023, interested candidates can only be considered for labour mobility schemes if they have registered/have information in the In-country Recruitment Database and have undergone pre-screening by both district councils and the Labour Employment & Export Programme.

Any candidate seeking employment under the RSE scheme BUT has NOT registered can register directly via their respective district committee. There are 51 districts in Samoa. District committees now have controlled access to the In-country Recruitment Database which allows the registration/pre-screening process to be done remotely with ease. All the information is shared via the In-country Recruitment Database (which is under the oversight of Labour Employment & Export Programme). Registration requires candidates to provide the following documents:

1. Village mayor reference – attests to the candidate being an upholding citizen in the village and is engaged in community responsibilities.
2. Church minister reference – attests to the candidate being a member of a church and of good character and involved in church activities.
3. Birth certificate.
4. Passport (if available) or other form of ID (e.g. driver licence).

Candidates' confirmation from the Labour Employment & Export Programme is already registered via the In-country Recruitment Database. Candidates DO NOT need to re-register with their district councils. Registration is free.

## Screening: Labour Employment & Export Programme

The Labour Employment & Export Programme facilitates a pre-assessment of eligibility of candidates to ensure they are work-ready, including:

- Character reference check
- Physical fitness and English test
- Ensuring candidates have all the documents required.

***Note: It is important for a worker to uphold the reputation of their village. Employers need to understand when a worker is in New Zealand, they are representing their families (immediate/extended), communities and country.***

## Recruitment-selection-departure

### Worker selection – Labour Employment & Export Programme

**Step 1:** Employer emails the following documents to the Labour Employment & Export Programme:

- Immigration New Zealand Agreement to Recruit
- List of returning workers
- Contracts to be read, agreed and signed by worker
- Deduction form to be read, agreed and signed by worker
- Employer confirmations of travel arrangements
- Proposed travel/departure information (if available).

**Step 2:** If the employer has provided a list of returning workers, the Labour Employment & Export Programme will contact workers to provide required documentation to start the process **OR** if the employer has not provided a list of workers, the Labour Employment & Export Programme will select from either the In-country Recruitment Database, work-ready pool **OR** engage with the district committee for workers.

**Step 3:** Depending on the recruitment arrangement, the Labour Employment & Export Programme will facilitate or support any pre-selection assessments (if required by employers).

### Visa application process

Effective from October 2024, RSE visa applications for workers from Samoa must go via the Visa Application Centre, which will check to ensure they are complete before they proceed to lodging with Immigration New Zealand. The Visa Application Centre process takes up to five business days and the Immigration New Zealand process is an additional five business days (minimum).

It is important to note that the **Visa Application Centre will not accept any RSE visa application** that has not been submitted and vetted by the Labour Employment & Export Programme. This is why its crucial employers liaise with the Labour Employment & Export Programme prior to undertaking any recruitment and mobilisation activities.

To prevent delays with visa application processing, please ensure documents are complete when submitted to the Visa Application Centre.

Information on required documents for RSE visas and processing times can be accessed here: <https://visa.vfsglobal.com/wsm/en/nzl/RSE>



## Pre-departure

Selected candidates go through pre-departure training conducted by the Labour Employment & Export Programme.

A presentation is provided by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

The Labour Employment & Export Programme will prepare a travel information pack which includes the following documents:

- Passport
- Visa
- Ticket/itinerary.

These documents are released once the Labour Employment & Export Programme confirms the worker has paid their WST \$50 administration fee to the Ministry of Finance.

Once the team(s) have departed, the Labour Employment & Export Programme will confirm the departure of workers, and resolve any concerns encountered at the airport.

## What flights can be booked for workers?

Flights to and from Samoa and New Zealand include:

- Air New Zealand direct flights from Faleolo to Auckland
- Fiji Airways from Faleolo to Auckland/Wellington/Christchurch (via Nadi)
- Virgin Airlines from Faleolo to Auckland (via Brisbane).



## 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:

<http://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 a village. There are ways for employers to increase their cultural awareness. At the heart of the 'fa'a Samoa' is 'aiga' - family. The definition of 'aiga' includes one's wider family group, such as extended family and community.

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

- Church
- Funerals
- Weddings
- Independence celebrations.

There will be workers who have a sense of responsibility to attend certain ceremonies and church depending on their status in their family and/or village.

### Practical advice for closer collaboration with workers

- Be patient and understanding when communicating with workers and their families. Be polite and communicate in a courteous manner when addressing older workers.
- Employers should take the 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 being rude. It can mean they do not understand, do not know how to respond, or speaking up can be seen as disrespectful.
- 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, clean their room, wash their dishes, put out the rubbish etc.
- Hold leadership trainings – employers are encouraged to use liaison officers/ Pacific representatives to support content.
- If workers are all from different villages, treat them all the same.
- Reach out to liaison officers/High Commission representatives to provide support on mitigating serious incidents.
- Champion performers by working with team leaders to ensure information is disseminated accurately and behavioral concerns are managed and addressed appropriately.
- Respect their faith and try to join in whenever there is a blessing (i.e. before eating) or a group prayer.
- Ensure workers have time to attend church/seek spiritual guidance.
- 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 may damage hierarchy as chief status is highly respected in Samoan culture.
- Avoid derogatory words or gestures as this is a sign of disrespect and suggests the employer does not value the workers' contribution to their business. There is a difference between being assertive and being disrespectful.

- Take the time to ensure workers understand your work values and practices.
- Never house men and women in the same accommodation or have them sharing the same bathroom facilities. Be sensitive that Samoa respect women and see them as their sisters (even if they are not related) – ‘teu le vā’ refers to respecting your boundaries (knowing your place – men and women know their place in their family and society).

### Addressing issues amongst workers

- Build trust that you are there to help resolve the matter.
- Reach out to the team leader (if the team leader is not involved) for support and language barriers.
- Depending on the severity of the case, reach out to the following people for support:
  - Immigration New Zealand RSE engagement partners
  - Liaison officers/Pacific representatives
  - Village/district representative
- Depending on the matter, reach out to a family member of the worker.
- Be patient and respectful when explaining things to the worker(s). What an employer sees as normal, may appear foreign for workers.

### Other considerations

- Staying in touch with family back home is important especially if workers are in isolated areas or regions not easily accessed by local families/diaspora.
- Be mindful of selecting leaders who do not hold chief titles – discuss amongst the workers the reasons for selecting leaders and possibly allowing them to have a say.
- Attending church – ‘lotu’ is an important part of the faáSamoa and if workers want to attend ‘lotu’ this should be respected.
- Dress appropriately and research the customs and relations between men and women from the villages/regions you recruit from.
- Mocking of each other or joking around is common and may appear to be offensive by others.

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**Note:** Many of the workers are recruited from rural or outer villages. They will not have been exposed to many of the things they will see or have access to in New Zealand.

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## What do you do when an RSE worker dies while working in New Zealand?

1. Handle the situation with care and sensitivity particularly around family members of the deceased worker.
2. Reach out to liaison officers/Pacific High Commission representatives to understand cultural protocols and government requirements.
3. The definition of family member extends more than their immediate family.
4. You may come across involvement of a church pastor, 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; the decision can sit with the wider family.
6. Communicate to other teams asking them 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 need to be aware of insurance and ACC policies and the support available for the deceased worker's family.
8. During the entire process keep the Labour Sending Unit/liaison officer/ High Commission and family updated if you are in direct contact with the next-of-kin or family representative.

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

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Key steps to aid employers:

### Step 1: Report the death

Employer to inform:

- 1.1 The next-of-kin immediately. Ascertain what the family would like to do with the body of their loved one.
- 1.2 The Immigration New Zealand RSE engagement partner on visa and pastoral care requirements.

Depending on the country's protocols, inform:

- The Labour Sending Unit - they will require information including the name of the deceased, date/place/cause of death etc. This will assist with their briefing to the respective Minister(s).
- The Office of the High Commission - RSE workers are non-citizens of New Zealand. It is important that the Heads of Mission are informed of the passing of one of their citizens.
- Liaison officers - they will provide support around government protocols, translation and/or cultural advice.

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**Note:** Protocols and processes will vary across the nine counties and remedial intervention will be necessary depending on circumstances surrounding the death. It is important you reach out to the right people for guidance.

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### 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 the deceased worker's benefits and entitlements.

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

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**Note:** Employer will need to liaise with Labour Sending Unit/liaison officers regarding the documents required to clear repatriation.

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#### Step 4: Payroll and benefits

Employer initiates the process for final payments and necessary paperwork.

#### Step 5: Facilitate family/funeral service

There may be customary practices requested before repatriation of the deceased worker. The employer is encouraged to work with the liaison officer/family spokesperson of the deceased to obtain advice.

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**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 this is customary in Samoa.

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#### Step 6: Transportation

The employer should facilitate travel arrangements for one family member from Samoa to accompany the deceased worker. This is covered by the worker's insurance.

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**Note:** The employer may choose to travel with the deceased worker and family. It may vary from country to country. The liaison officer or selected official may also accompany the worker back home.

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## What do you need to know before visiting Samoa?

Employers are encouraged to visit the country and homes of their workers.

Things to note:

1. Gifts are sometimes exchanged at meetings.
2. Take something with you whenever you visit someone at their home. Food or souvenirs from New Zealand 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, i.e. cover shoulders and knees.
4. Inform the Labour Employment & Export Programme of your visit to Samoa including your agenda.
5. Driving is on the left-hand side.

## Useful words to enhance communication with Samoan workers.

**Hello/Hi** – Tālofa lava/Malo lava (add 'lava' if you want to be formal)

**Welcome** – Afio mai

**Goodbye** – Tōfa

**Have a nice day** – Manuia le aso

**Please** - Faámolemole

**Thank you** – Faáfetai lava (add 'lava' if you want to be formal)

**Family** – extended family- āiga

**Yes** – Ia or ioe

**No** – Leai



Scan the QR code for more words.





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