

Moanaroa Mana Ola presentation

Pacific migrant workers in the RSE scheme

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Tribute to Mum

“Without family I have nothing”

My parents were migrant workers in the 1970s

Navigated the Dawn Raids

Honouring intergenerational resilience and sacrifice

Overview

Foundation: Honouring 1970s Dawn Raids history and current RSE family ties.

The Problem: Systemic literature gaps and top-down policy exclusion.

The Framework: Multi-institutional alignment (VUW/AUT/SIT) and inclusive social epistemology.

September plan: Plan for fieldwork in the South Island.

Positionality

Fai‘aki e ‘ilo, ‘oua ‘e fai‘aki e fanongo

Do it by knowing, not by hearing

- Deep ties to active Tongan RSE workers and communities.
- Moving past surface-level hearsay (*fanongo*) to deep empirical truth (*‘ilo*).
- Proximity demands objective, flawless academic accountability.

Institutional guidelines

Primary Ethics: Victoria University of Wellington (VUW HEC Approved).

AUT Framework: Aligned with *Moana-roa* Pacific Research Guidelines (Management briefed).

SIT Framework: Aligned with *Te Pūkenga* Research Ethics Code (Management briefed).



Context

- Top-down design of the RSE scheme
- Workers and home nations excluded from 2024 policy consultations
- The 2024 changes were introduced following a review of the scheme by the previous government
- Criticism from Pacific nations and human rights groups over lack of consultation
- Regulations built on administrative assumptions (*fanongo*), not lived realities
- Centring silenced worker narratives through empirical research

2024 policy changes

- Increase in the RSE cap from 19,500 to 20,750 workers
- Average out the 30-hour minimum weekly work requirement over 4 weeks
- Only experienced workers 10% above the minimum wage
- Employers can apply for a temporary increase in accommodation costs
- An increase in flexibility for RSE workers to move between employers and regions
- RSE workers are eligible for a multi-entry visa and can leave and return to Aotearoa during a season
- Timor-Leste added to the RSE scheme
- RSE workers may be able to study, train and develop skills
- RSE workers no longer need to be screened for HIV



Immigration New Zealand. (2026, March 2).
Recognised Seasonal Employer Limited Visa.
<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/visas/recognised-seasonal-employer-limited-visa/>

2026 policy changes

- Top-performing employers get 3- to 6-year renewals instead of 1-year
- Streamlined recruitment processes for businesses endorsed by the MSD
- Stricter, transparent rules on what employers can charge for housing and transport
- Easier movement between approved employers during the season
- Access to a 6-month visa if facing workplace abuse
- Mandatory internet access required in all worker accommodation



Stanford, E. (2026, July 28). *Simpler, clearer, more effective RSE scheme*. National Party.
<https://www.national.org.nz/news/20260728-honericastanford>

Immigration New Zealand. (2026, July 28). *Changes announced to the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme*.
<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/news-centre/changes-announced-to-the-recognised-seasonal-employer-scheme/>

Literature gaps

- **Methodological:** Reliance on top-down macro-data
- **Temporal:** Literature pre-dates recent shifts on the 2024 changes or the July 2026 changes
- **Conceptual Myth:** Over-reliance on the Western *Triple Win* framework; ignores deep structural asymmetries and social costs
- **Historical:** Scheme isolated as post-2007, ignores intergenerational links to 1970s Dawn Raids trauma
- **Epistemological:** Knowledge built on employer/ministry perspectives; complete exclusion of active worker voices from policy design

Research Question

How do the changes to the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme impact Pacific Migrant Workers and their home countries?

Methodology

- **Approach:** Purposive sampling approach
- **Method:** Focus groups via face-to-face *Talanoa*.
- **Framing:** Inclusive social epistemology
- **Analysis:** Thematic analysis framework
- **Ethics:** Approved (VUW HEC & data protection)

September fieldwork

- September 2026
- Finalising a South Island location
- Coordinating 2–3 face-to-face *Talanoa* focus groups
- Neutral, community-vetted spaces independent of employer oversight

Summary

- **Centring active RSE worker narratives to evaluate 2024 policy impacts**
- **Fully approved by VUW ethics and secure data protection protocols**
- **Cross-compliance with AUT and SIT Research Offices to be formalised**
- **Launching NZ-based talanoa sessions (focus groups) in late September 2026**



Mālō 'aupito!