

Providing adequate pastoral care is a critical feature of both the Australia's Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) and New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme. Experiences employers and seasonal workers have with pastoral care requirements and expectations will inform their ongoing participation within and the success of these schemes. Positive and negative experiences are often discussed when workers return home, thus affecting uptakes of future participants. Both RSE and SWP have been criticised for pastoral care neglect. Addressing this is critical for policy success. This In Brief uses evidence-based research from New Zealand examining pastoral care. It highlights policy expectations and experiences for employers and employees, which affect uptake in seasonal worker programs; consequences on productivity and decisions for future participation.

Expensive pastoral care requirements impact decisions on employers' participation, and undelivered pastoral care often results in unwanted negative media attention and non-returning workers — with serious policy implications. Furthermore, employers not meeting pastoral care obligations face the possibility of losing their status as an RSE employer. Pastoral care responsibilities range from transportation for workers at arriving and departing ports as well as work transportation, suitable and affordable accommodation, induction to New Zealand's work and social life, access to health care and banking, protective equipment, translators if necessary, access to religious observations, recreation and links to local community and church groups. Only RSE workers have this level of care, whereas those on Working Holiday Visas, backpackers and local workers do not access this direct wellbeing approach.

Employers' Pastoral Care Obligations

To obtain RSE employer status, employers are obligated to meet the pastoral care policy requirements mentioned above. Providing adequate pastoral care for RSE workers was considered burdensome by many growers, especially those with small-scale operations (Bailey 2009). Charlotte Bedford (2013:200), found average costs of pastoral care for

RSE employers was approximately 'NZD465 per worker, per season.' These significant costs and obligations are a deterrent for growers to participate; however, they are established for the protection of seasonal workers and the success of these policies. Nonetheless, evidence has shown that, over time, pastoral care becomes less difficult for employers. The RSE Monitoring — 2014 Employers Survey Working Report showed a significant decrease from 44% of RSEs reporting problems in 2008 to 26% in 2014. Of those findings the main difficulty was sourcing suitable accommodation at a reasonable cost.

Inspections

Monitoring pastoral care obligations is difficult. Time, shortage of inspectors and geographical logistics are factors in irregular inspections. Geographical distances are more extensive for Australian Government authorities. One contractor was concerned that inspectors lacked cultural awareness or language of workers and recommended Pacific governments should also send representatives (Bailey 2009). In 2009, Vanuatu officials visited some work and accommodation sites. Workers gave positive feedback of this experience, adding that they could discuss pastoral care difficulties more freely. Furthermore, given the importance and responsibilities of pastoral care within interagency agreements, collaborative inspections and interactions with workers would prove valuable in monitoring policy requirements. Secondments have been made by representatives of Pacific island states to New Zealand, partly aided by the RSE-Strengthening Partnership Program.

Complaints

Most workers' complaints are about accommodation, wages and deductions, and restrictions during their free time (Bailey 2009). Bedford's (2013:201) study analysed reported pastoral care problems for growers; noting 63% of employers reported problems in the first season, 37% in the second; season three 22% and season four 23%. Pastoral care problems reduced over time, through interventions and co-operation between employers, governments and workers.

Cross-cultural communication was an area that the RSE scheme needed to improve (Bailey 2009). Initially, supervisors reported communication problems with Pacific RSE workers; however, this was nothing new, as they experienced this with other nationalities in the industry. Labourers experiencing unfairness in the workplace, who were anxious in speaking out, responded by working slowly and taking extra toilet breaks. As a result, productivity was reduced. However, when good working relationships are formed with employers, productivity rises and loyalty is gained, resulting in efficient and returning workers.

Recruitment

Recruitment and placement of workers needs considerable deliberation; how workers are recruited impacts experiences of participation. For example, RSE employers found that hiring workers from similar cultural backgrounds provided additional social support for employees (Bailey 2009). Additionally, pastoral care is delivered effectively and more efficiently through the use of returning workers. Employers realised it was beneficial to have a mix of experienced and new workers together, noting that new labourers are inducted by experienced workers, making pastoral care less 'hands on' (Bailey 2009).

Accommodation

[Suitable accommodation](#) is a significant factor of pastoral care. There has been public criticism of workers' accommodation. Reports show that some workers were placed in overcrowded and substandard lodgings with inadequate facilities, and rental rates being set too high (Bailey 2009). Although improvements have been made, constant monitoring of workers' living conditions is required, as any neglect will impact negatively on experiences, health and productivity.

Health Care

Prior to arrival, RSE workers must provide a medical certificate and a chest x-ray if countries have a high incidence or risk of HIV/AIDS or tuberculosis. Employers are expected to provide access to health care. Employers need labourers to be at optimum health to work productively. Health care provision was an unexpected burden and overwhelming for

some employers, 'What we really didn't anticipate was the level of health care that was going to be required' (Contractor cited in Bailey 2009:109). In the RSE Monitoring — 2014 Employers Survey Working Report 26% of employers stated at least one worker was not in good health. It is often difficult and expensive for employers to provide these services when their locations are often remote and far from townships that have adequate health services. Furthermore, seasonal workers are accompanied by a staff member of the employing company, adding further costs.

Conclusion

For employers, it does not appear advantageous to participate in RSE and SWP given the various pastoral care obligations, which are not required for other seasonal workers. Nonetheless, 96% of participants in the 2014 survey (RNZ 2014) stated that benefits outweighed costs. Retaining experienced workers with similar cultural backgrounds not only provides employers with a pool of readily trained labourers but also aids in the delivery of pastoral care. Ineffective provision of pastoral care can result in negative health, productivity and participation outcomes. Continuous monitoring and facilitation of pastoral care requirements will impact current and future participation and policy decisions of labour schemes.

Author Notes

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Endnotes

1. The RSE and SWP pastoral care policies govern accommodation and workplace practices to protect the rights of seasonal workers.

References

- Bailey, R. 2009. Unfree Labour: Ni-Vanuatu Worker in New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme. MA thesis, University of Canterbury.
- Bedford, C. 2013. Picking Winners? New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Policy and its Impacts on Employers, Pacific Workers and the Island-Based Communities. PhD thesis, University of Adelaide.
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