

PACER PLUS

OUTCOMES: LABOUR MOBILITY ARRANGEMENT

The use of 'circular' labour mobility between Australia and Pacific island countries delivers strong mutual benefits within the region. Australian businesses in regional and rural areas can supplement their seasonal and longer-term labour needs with a reliable, returning Pacific workforce in industries where domestic labour supply is insufficient to meet growing demand. Pacific workers benefit from the opportunity to gain skills and experience, earn higher incomes and increase their remittances back home that can be used to pay for children's education, setting up businesses, building houses and community facilities.

PACER Plus includes a Movement of Natural Persons chapter which covers the employer-sponsored temporary entry and stay of skilled workers. In keeping with global Free Trade Agreement practices, negotiating members agreed not to include treaty-level commitments on unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Instead they agreed to a separate Labour Mobility Arrangement to facilitate the circulation of temporary workers from the Pacific island countries to Australia and New Zealand, including through the enhancement of existing schemes.



Australia's Initiatives

Australia piloted the Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme in 2009 and launched the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) in 2012 as a capped program, primarily in the agriculture industry (horticulture sector). Since 2012, more than 16,000 seasonal workers from nine Pacific island countries (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) and Timor-Leste have participated in the Seasonal Worker Programme.

In July 2015, as part of the Government's Northern Australia White Paper, the cap on the Seasonal Worker Programme was removed and the program was expanded to additional industries in certain locations, such as hospitality and tourism, accommodation and livestock agriculture. This created an alternative source of labour for Australian employers that addressed seasonal business peaks, and maintained a focus on employer-driven demand in a variety of industries, while meeting the primary aid objective of the programme.

In addition to enhancing the Seasonal Worker Programme, in July 2015, the Government announced a new program – the Northern Australia Worker Pilot Program – to bring up to 250 workers from Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu to work in Northern Australia for 2-3 years in low and semi-skilled occupations. This was to be used by businesses that could demonstrate that no Australian workers were available to fill those vacancies.



The Labour Mobility Arrangement

The Labour Mobility Arrangement complements and expands Australia's existing initiatives. Australia and New Zealand have agreed to work with Pacific island countries to improve worker pre-departure briefing contents and processes and increase the number and quality of workers participating in the programme. The countries have also agreed to support targeted activities to increase the benefits (financial and other) for workers and their communities resulting from their participation in labour mobility programs. The Labour Mobility Arrangement also establishes the Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting (PLMAM), which

will serve as a forum to discuss regional labour mobility priorities such as enhancing existing initiatives and exploring options for new areas of cooperation.



Capacity building

Australia and New Zealand are committed to helping Pacific island countries maximise the opportunities for potentially transformative labour mobility programs - to strengthen economic progress and improve livelihoods in the region. Australia's [Labour Mobility Assistance Program](#) and Pastoral Care Program support Pacific island countries through the development and implementation of plans and strategies in sending countries. The programs improve the supply and quality of workers and build people's capacity for reintegration, to ensure workers utilise their savings and skills for productive activities when they return home. The programs also provide participating workers with local area orientation, Australian laws and customs, financial and personal banking and other training while in Australia. To ensure participating workers receive objective advice on the most cost-effective way to remit money, Australia funds [SendMoneyPacific](#).

Australia also funds the [Australia-Pacific Technical College](#) (APTC) with five campuses in the region providing Australian-standard qualifications. The next, newly-designed phase of the APTC, will provide an opportunity for Australian industry and enterprises to connect with graduates who meet domestic and international workforce requirements and are prepared for Australia's and New Zealand's 'circular' labour migration pathways.