

PACIFIC LABOUR MOBILITY: RESEARCH AND ANALYTICAL WORK

Research Priorities



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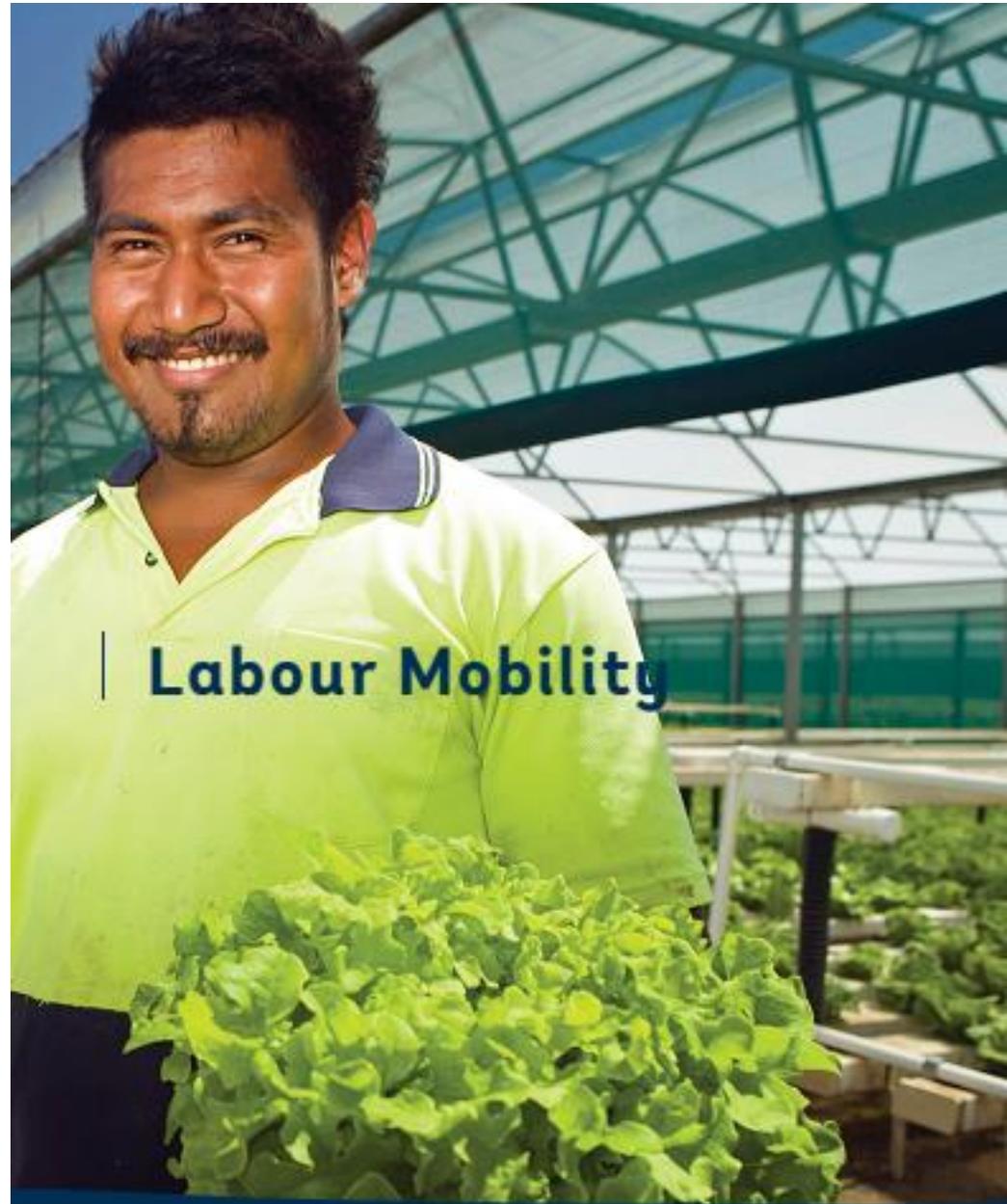
Role of analytical work and research

Pacific Islands At Home & Away

Expanding Job Opportunities for Pacific Islanders Through Labor Mobility

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Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Sector Unit
East Asia and Pacific Region



Labour Mobility

Priorities

Recruitment practices & governance

The way in which Pacific island workers are recruited under Australia's temporary labour mobility schemes will affect the growth and impact of these schemes.

The end objective is to improve recruitment processes and governance under both schemes in order to: (i) provide more reliable workers for employers at lower cost, and (ii) reduce financial costs and risks for workers and their households, with a view to (iii) maximising development outcomes for Pacific islanders, including by addressing inequality of opportunity where possible.

Pre-departure and financing costs

Average pre-departure costs per season incurred by workers under the SWP are AU\$1,470, equating to 17% of the earnings that are saved or remitted over the course of a season. Part of these costs result from lack of decentralization of key pre-departure services (police clearances, medical check-ups, visas etc.). There is clearly scope for cost reduction.

We should also examine how to minimise both the front-end financial burden placed on employers (with a view to maximising demand) and the need for workers to borrow money at high interest rates.

Labour market skills

There continues to be a lack of detailed information relating to skills shortages in Pacific island countries. Initiatives that could help address this include:

- Collection and analysis of data designed to identify skills shortages as well as surpluses in Pacific island countries
- Support for and analysis of regular labour force surveys and strengthening of skills-related questions in HIES and Census
- Support to identify the skills investments required over the next 5-10 years to capitalize opportunities under the PLS, Pacific Trades Partnership and beyond (including in new markets) – with an eye to impacts of technological change

Analysis of the Pacific Labour Scheme

With the Pacific Labour Scheme only recently commencing, there is a unique opportunity to establish a solid baseline to assess the scheme's social and economic development impacts – for sending workers, communities and participating countries.

A move away from ad hoc surveys towards a regular omnibus survey would be ideal

Gendered impacts

It is well known that female participation in existing seasonal worker programs has been limited. At the same time, females in sending households have played an important role in both facilitating household participation in the schemes and determining how savings from work overseas are utilised. The introduction of longer-term visas under the Pacific Labour Scheme makes the examination of gendered impacts even more important.

Social impacts and reintegration

- The social impacts of labour mobility remain under-researched in the Pacific. Research under this theme would examine the implications of labour mobility for intra-household dynamics and structure, impacts on domestic and agricultural work burdens, and effects on traditional social structures.
- Reintegration into the national economy is a well-established priority in Pacific island countries where sizeable portions of the working age population are employed overseas in seasonal employment schemes. Social aspects of reintegration are equally significant.

Remittances and superannuation

- Remittance costs for Pacific workers sending money home from Australia are far above the global average. We need to better understand why remittance costs in the Pacific are so high, and how best they can be reduced.
- Issues that would be examined include market structure, the reach of money transfer operators, regulatory burden (including that resulting from AML/CFT requirements), and demand for alternate remittance tools among workers/diaspora communities.
- A distinction needs to be made between different sending groups, including workers in low-skilled seasonal worker programs, semi-skilled schemes, and other diaspora groups

Impact in recipient communities

- The impacts of a scheme like the PLS in recipient communities will be varied, but are potentially significant for small communities. Understanding this impact is important given the politically vexed nature of migration.
- Potentially, this work would involve modelling of economic, labour market, and health and education impacts, with modelling used to inform future development of schemes like PLS (including on questions such as granting of partner visas) and migration policy more broadly.

Roles and partnerships

Priorities

1. Recruitment practices and governance
2. Pre-departure costs and financing
3. Labour market skills analysis
4. Analysis of the Pacific labour scheme / an omnibus survey
5. Gendered impacts
6. Social impacts and re-integration
7. Remittances and superannuation
8. Impact in recipient communities

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