

Do Pacific communities in Australia earn less? Part 2

by Huiyuan Liu and Toan Nguyen

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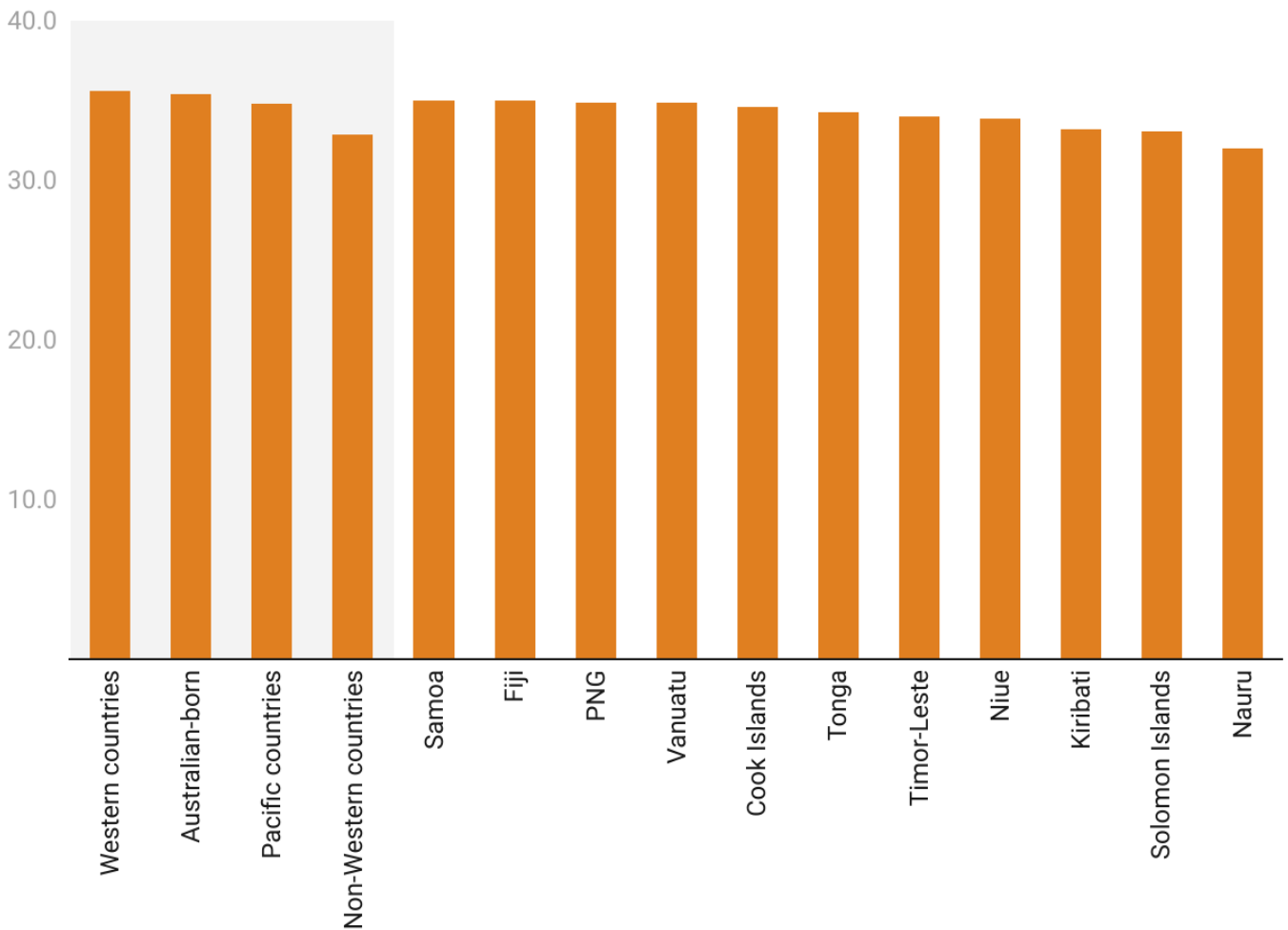
PALM scheme workers from Timor Leste present traditional song and dance at the 2025 Vintage Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony in Cowaramup, Western Australia.

Photo Credit: [Facebook/PALMScheme](#)

In [the first part](#) of this two-part blog, we found that Pacific migrants in Australia have incomes similar to those of migrants from non-Western countries but earn significantly less than Australian-born residents and migrants from Western countries. This income gap is partly due to Pacific migrants' low labour-force participation. However, even among those who are employed, fewer Pacific migrants earn high incomes compared to other groups. In this second part, we examine working hours and occupations to explore this disparity.

According to [Australian Census data](#), in 2021 an employed Pacific migrant worked an average of 34.8 hours per week, slightly less than Australian-born people and Western migrants (Figure 1). Non-Western migrants have the shortest work week (33 hours), with migrants from Nauru being the only Pacific group working fewer hours than that (32 hours).

Figure 1: Average weekly working hours by place of birth for employed people aged 25-59 (2021 Australian Census)

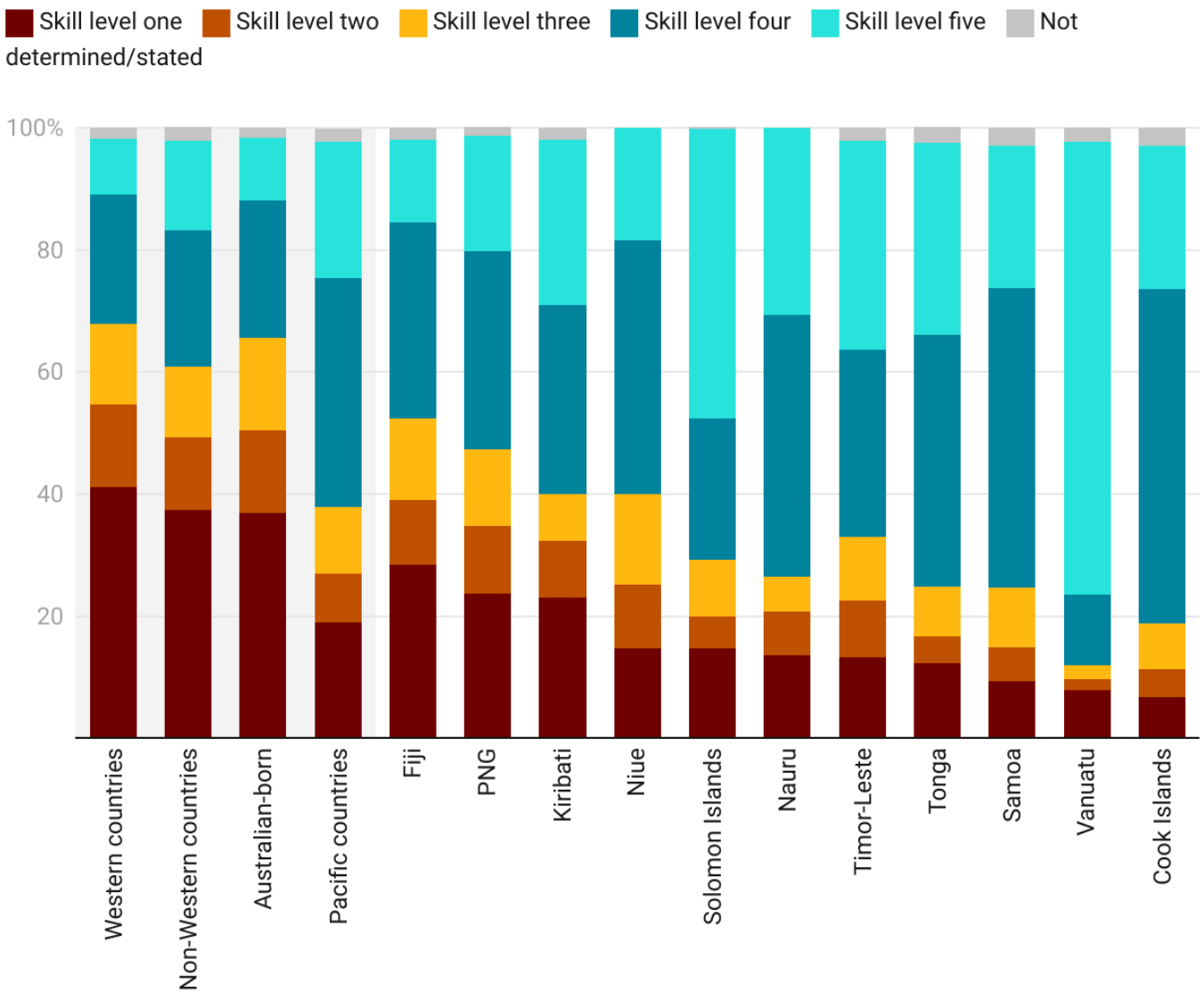


Note: 1% to 4% of the employed populations fail to report working hours and are excluded from our calculations of ratios.

Source: 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data • Created with Datawrapper

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) organises occupations into five skill levels based on task complexity. Figure 2 highlights a stark contrast in occupational skill levels between Pacific migrants and other groups, leading to substantial earning differences. Only 27% of Pacific migrants are employed in the high-skill occupations (levels 1 and 2, for example, managers and professionals), while 60% work in lower skill roles (levels 4 and 5, for example, labourers).

Figure 2: Skill levels by place of birth for employed people aged 25-59 in the 2021 Census



Skill levels are defined based on Australian and New Zealand Standard Classifications of Occupations (ANZSCO). Level one is the highest level of skill while level five is the lowest.

Source: 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data • Created with Datawrapper

In contrast, at least half of the employed Australian-born population, as well as Western and non-Western migrants, are in the top two skill levels. As of August 2024, **the median hourly wage** for skill-level-5 occupations was only \$29.10, compared to \$55.70 for skill level 1.

Table 1 reveals the top three occupations by share for each birthplace group. Pacific migrants are commonly employed as farm, forestry and garden workers, factory process workers, carers and aides, cleaners, laundry workers and storepersons. Farm, forestry, and garden workers make up nearly 60% of ni-Vanuatu migrants, 23% of Solomon Islander migrants and 12% of Tongan migrants. Carers and aides account for 13% of PNG migrants, 19% of i-Kiribati migrants and

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10% of Nauruan migrants. In contrast, 11% of Western migrants are specialist managers, while 8% of non-Western migrants work as business, human resources and marketing professionals.

Table 1: Top 3 occupations of Pacific migrants by share for each birthplace group

	1st		2nd		3rd		Share of total
Australian-born	Specialist Managers	9%	Business, HR and Marketing Professionals	6%	Education Professionals	6%	21%
Pacific countries	Factory Process Workers	7%	Carers and Aides	6%	Farm, Forestry and Garden Workers	5%	18%
Western countries	Specialist Managers	11%	Business, HR and Marketing Professionals	8%	Health Professionals	6%	25%
Non-Western countries	Business, HR and Marketing Professionals	8%	Carers and Aides	8%	Health Professionals	7%	23%
PNG	Carers and Aides	13%	Cleaners and Laundry Workers	7%	Specialist Managers	5%	25%
Solomon Islands	Farm, Forestry and Garden Workers	23%	Factory Process Workers	21%	Carers and Aides	11%	55%
Vanuatu	Farm, Forestry and Garden Workers	58%	Factory Process Workers	17%	Farmers and Farm Managers	5%	81%
Kiribati	Carers and Aides	19%	Health Professionals	15%	Farm, Forestry and Garden Workers	13%	47%
Nauru	Carers and Aides	10%	Cleaners and Laundry Workers	10%	Factory Process Workers	10%	30%
Cook Islands	Construction and Mining Labourers	16%	Factory Process Workers	10%	Storepersons	10%	37%
Fiji	Health and Welfare Support Workers	8%	Education Professionals	6%	Specialist Managers	5%	18%
Niue	Storepersons	10%	Carers and Aides	9%	Specialist Managers	7%	25%
Samoa	Factory Process Workers	13%	Storepersons	10%	Carers and Aides	8%	30%
Tonga	Farm, Forestry and Garden Workers	12%	Carers and Aides	10%	Factory Process Workers	8%	29%
Timor-Leste	Factory Process Workers	10%	Farm, Forestry and Garden Workers	10%	Storepersons	6%	27%

Note: 1% to 3% of the employed population in most groups fail to identify their occupations and are excluded from our calculations of ratios. The proportion of non-reporting for Fiji is particularly high, about 18%.

Source: 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data • Created with Datawrapper

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To sum up, while Pacific migrants in Australia work around the same hours as Western migrants and Australian-born workers, and slightly more than non-Western migrants, a much smaller proportion has advanced up the job-skill ladder and secured better earning outcomes. With the exception of Fijian migrants, a significant proportion of Pacific migrants is employed in sectors not commonly pursued by Australian-born workers and other migrant groups.

Further research is needed to identify the barriers preventing Pacific migrants from accessing jobs which require a higher level of skills and training and deliver higher wages. Addressing these barriers could improve their economic outcomes in Australia.

Read Part 1. Read the [Understanding Pacific communities in Australia blog series](#).

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Link: <https://devpolicy.org/do-pacific-communities-in-australia-earn-less-part-2/>