

# Kiribati's initial PEV progress: quick wins amid systemic hurdles



I-Kiribati community gathering in Nerriga, NSW  
*Photo Credit: Rimon Rimon*

by Akka Rimon

29 April 2026

Kiribati's inclusion in the **second round** of Australia's **Pacific Engagement Visa** (PEV), marking its first year participating in the scheme, has generated a mix of excitement, anticipation and uncertainty among prospective migrants and their families. Early implementation outcomes indicate substantial progress: at least 65% of selected primary applicants have already secured formal job offers and visa approvals. Yet, alongside these promising developments, digital hurdles, migration costs and limited tailored support emerge as structural constraints.

This study is drawn from The Australian National University's **PEV survey** focused this year on Kiribati and Papua New Guinea, and complemented by information from the PEV **support office** in Tarawa. Preliminary findings illustrate both substantial strides and persistent systemic barriers. It should be noted that Kiribati is participating for the first time, while PNG is in its second year of the scheme. As such, more established data exist for PNG, reflecting two years of tracking applicants' journeys, whereas for Kiribati, this is the first year of participation and data from the live survey were still being collected at the time of writing.

The current Kiribati cohort consists of 29 ballot winners, and their 71 partners and dependants. These are the successful primary applicants, selected from a pool of 2,523. The applicants, their partners and dependants were competing for just 100 visas, Kiribati's quota. Including partners and dependants, 10,145 people registered for the PEV ballot, thereby expressing interest in a pathway that could only accommodate 1% of them, and highlighting a striking mismatch between demand and opportunity.

Of the 29 selected primary applicants, 19 (approximately 65%) have so far secured jobs across key sectors, predominantly in agriculture and aged care, with two landing consulting roles. Seven of these 19 job recipients are engaged in the PALM scheme with at least half of them already in Australia.

PALM experience clearly helps applicants with recruitment, while facilitating skill alignment with employer demand and eligibility criteria. The subclass 192 PEV,

under the Pacific Engagement stream, also adds value by reuniting **separated workers** with their families.

In contrast, first-time prospective migrants faced inconsistent internet access, limited familiarity with online platforms and communication challenges. They experienced delays in completing documentation and responding to employer requests.

That said, while it is still too early for a full assessment, initial data reveals that the PEV support service, both in Australia and offshore in Tarawa, has enabled significant job offers. Notably, first-time applicants with university qualifications landed consulting roles in land surveying and administrative office roles early on in the process.

Another striking finding is the predominantly female composition of successful primary applicants: women account for more than 75% of selected primary applicants. Given the ballot is random, they must also have accounted for a large majority of registrants. This marks a significant shift in Kiribati's labour migration landscape, historically dominated by **male seafarers**. The PEV appears to be accelerating a broader trend already visible in New Zealand's **Recognised Seasonal Employer** (RSE) scheme and the PALM program, where I-Kiribati women have increasingly **taken up** overseas employment opportunities. The PEV ballot reinforces this trajectory of women's participation becoming a defining feature of Kiribati's evolving migration profile, a welcome development for a country with **limited migration opportunities**.

Additionally, survey responses shed light on the motivations shaping I-Kiribati decisions to pursue migration to Australia. While employment prospects and improved living standards remain central, climate-related stressors emerged as an influential factor, with respondents citing coastal erosion, sea-level rise and water security as key determinants.

These insights offer a nuanced understanding of the **complex factors** driving migration in Kiribati, and speak to how climate impacts are **being navigated** through the PEV. This is a question the government of Kiribati must reckon with directly, exercising proactive leadership and wielding diplomatic agency if it is seriously committed to delivering people-centred adaptation policies. Central to that commitment is the government's obligation to ensure pathways exist for citizens to pursue informed choices, not only in response to climate change but to adapt to impacts shaped by growing **global economic, political and climate insecurity** including the ongoing fuel crisis.

In 2024, when the Kiribati government announced it would not participate in the inaugural PEV cohort, I provided [an analysis](#) that made the case for Kiribati to take advantage of the scheme, citing growing unemployment, limited economic prospects, overpopulation and climate change as rationales. While keeping its people in place remains Kiribati's foremost priority, its geographical position makes it inherently vulnerable, and adaptation beyond borders unavoidable. Securing increased PEV quotas therefore constitutes not merely a diplomatic opportunity but also a strong opportunity for strategic leadership.

Despite the overall success, the demands of digitalised application systems and persistent technological disparities emerged as significant pressure points. For many applicants, navigating multiple online platforms, uploading documents and searching for jobs remotely, while responding promptly to employer and departmental requests, proved challenging.

Most primary applicants are from the capital, South Tarawa, with only two from outer islands: Kiritimati and Tamana. This reflects the [digital gap](#) between the capital and remote villages. Applicants were generally young, economically active and held senior secondary or vocational qualifications, with few university graduates.

A major obstacle was the burden of meeting compliance requirements and obligations such as obtaining medical clearances, police certificates and passports for family members, which is both time-consuming and financially demanding. One applicant expressed concern about the cost of bringing her family of five to Australia and considered a staged relocation as a potential solution.

Across the cohort, applicants consistently identified digital access and literacy as central barriers to navigating the process. Many relied heavily on support from family members, friends and the in-country support office, which provided step-by-step assistance with procedural requirements like document uploading and online payments. Concerns about limited computer literacy and unfamiliarity with online systems were repeatedly raised, alongside calls for tailored digital and awareness-building training in the Kiribati language, to strengthen applicants' confidence with platforms such as [ImmiAccount](#).

Applicants, who were determined to fulfil the complex requirements of what many locals call the "Australian PAC" — a nod to New Zealand's [Pacific Access Category](#) that the PEV mirrors — called for clearer communication and tailored on-arrival guidance. They praised in-country support in connection with resumes, employment letters and procedural guidance, yet urged an expansion of settlement guidance towards advice on arrival, housing navigation, pastoral care access and connections

to diaspora and community networks.

Kiribati **ranked sixth** in 2025 among the 12 PEV-eligible countries, both in terms of the absolute number of ballot registrations and in terms of applications per available visa. After a successful first year, the PEV's popularity will only grow going forward. Ongoing analysis of survey responses and future ballots will be critical to understanding emerging trends in relation to Kiribati's participation in this permanent visa pathway.

These early findings highlight both progress and challenges for Kiribati with respect to the PEV. Coordinated support is crucial. Clear communication, strengthened country-led services and mobilised pastoral and diaspora networks will all help the PEV process operate effectively and equitably in supporting Kiribati, with its unique migration capacities and constraints, to build a genuinely representative Pacific family in Australia.

*This article is based on the author's presentation at the 2026 State of the Pacific Conference at the Australian National University on 14 June. The Kiribati PEV results remain preliminary, as the survey went live only two weeks prior to the presentation, and data are still being collected. Results may change once the survey is complete. PEV winners from Kiribati can participate in [the survey here](#).*

## **Disclosures:**

*The Pacific Engagement Visa research project is supported by the [Pacific Research Program](#), with funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views are those of the author only.*

## **Author/s:**

### **Akka Rimon**

Akka Rimon is an I-Kiribati researcher at the The Australian National University. She is a Research and Engagement Fellow at the Pacific Security College and contributes to the Pacific Engagement Visa research project at the Development Policy Centre.

Link:

<https://devpolicy.org/kiribatis-initial-pegv-progress-quick-wins-amid-systemic-hurdles-20260429/>