

Labour mobility and development assistance still stalling PACER Plus talks

by Ashlee Betteridge
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The Chief Trade Advisor to Pacific Islands nations in the stalled PACER Plus negotiations has said that Australia and New Zealand will have to make significant concessions on labour mobility and development assistance for the agreement to go ahead.

Dr Edwini Kessie [told Islands Business](#) that these two areas were where the least progress had been made thus far.

“Regarding development assistance, for example, the FICs (Forum Islands Countries) would like to see the establishment of a dedicated fund which would help address the supply-side constraints which have prevented them from taking advantage of market access opportunities under various preferential trade agreements,” Dr Kessie said.

“Regarding labour mobility, Australia and New Zealand would be required to relax border controls to facilitate the movement of Pacific workers into their territories to work for temporary periods. As you can see, these are difficult issues and would take time for the parties to bridge their differences.”

These two issues are expected to be on the agenda as negotiators meet for the next round of talks in Auckland next month.

Whether PACER Plus will survive the newly elected Australian government remains to be seen. Prior to the election, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop [told](#) a Fiji-Australia business group in August that she [believed](#) that a more selective approach, working with fewer countries, may be a better approach. As she put it, rather than aiming “for an agreement encompassing all Pacific Island Forum countries at once, consideration should be given to signing a higher quality agreement with countries willing and able to do so.”

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Ashlee Betteridge was the Manager of the Development Policy Centre until April 2021. She was previously a Research Officer at the centre from 2013-2017. A former journalist, she holds a Master of Public Policy (Development Policy) from ANU and has development experience in Indonesia and Timor-Leste. She now has her own consultancy, Better Things Consulting, and works across several large projects with managing contractors.

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