

# The 2025 Pacific Engagement Visa is open — how did it go in 2024?

by Natasha Turia and Stephen Howes

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Brisbane airport, the arrival point for many people granted a Pacific Engagement Visa  
*Photo Credit: Natasha Turia*

The Pacific Engagement Visa (PEV) is a new permanent residency visa dedicated to the Pacific and Timor-Leste. Some 56,000 people entered the first PEV ballot which opened in June last year.

The 3,000 people lucky enough to be selected through the ballot were then eligible to apply for a PEV. The key requirement at this stage is a job offer in Australia.

How has the PEV process gone? While the **PEV ballot was incredibly popular**, the post-ballot process has no doubt been difficult. As at the end of April, some 2,280 visa applications (including for partners and dependants) had been received by Australia's Department of Home Affairs (DHA). This means that three-quarters of the randomly selected ballot winners invited to apply for a visa actually did so.

Looking at the country level, Fiji stands out with 93% of lottery winners applying as of end-April. Most countries have a ratio of visa applications to lottery winners in the range 66-82%. But Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Palau stand out, with fewer than half of those entering the ballot applying for visas. (The numbers applying in FSM and Palau were tiny, such that everyone who entered the ballot automatically got the right to apply for a visa.)

It might seem odd that not all lottery winners took the next step of applying for a visa. After all, the right to permanent residency in Australia is incredibly valuable. However, for some it might not have been the right time to apply — for example, on account of ill health in the family. Others may have been unable to fund or arrange the medical checks required. Some applicants might have thought they needed a job offer in order to make an initial visa application, though in fact this was not the case.

How many of those who have applied for a PEV have actually got one? The government's **latest press release** tells us that as of the end of July over 1,000 visas had been offered. We only have data on visas by country for the end of April, at which point only 491 visas had been issued. Back then, Fiji was again the best

performer with 58% of those lodging applications securing a visa. Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu were next with a 26-31% success rate. Three other countries were in the 10-20% range (PNG, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu).

Fiji's stand-out success is not really a surprise. It has the **biggest diaspora** of any Pacific nation in Australia and the most skilled workforce. Both these factors would have given Fijians a big advantage in finding the jobs required to get a visa.

One good piece of news is the gender balance, with 48% of the visas issued going to women. It is also interesting to note that (again as of end-April) just over 20% of visa lodgements came from individuals already holding some other visa — that is, applicants already in Australia. Most of them were working on the PALM scheme, but a number were students. They made up about half of the total end-April primary applicants, so a very significant share. (The overall quota of 3,000 includes partners and dependants of primary applicants.)

Overall, it is a slow start. There has been a **lot of commentary** about the difficulty of finding a job in Australia after winning a place in the lottery, and that has to be the key area for improvement going forward. Of course, we would expect the visa grant numbers to continue to rise. Nevertheless, 1,000 is a long way from 3,000. Most ballots closed in August last year so applicants have had almost a year. No doubt some will have given up.

Meanwhile, the 2025-26 PEV ballot opened 28 July and will close 25 August. This round will only run for one month, compared to around two months last year in most countries. Samoa and Kiribati, the two countries that elected not to be involved last year, have joined this year, while **Tuvalu**, which now has access to the more generous Falepili Union version of the PEV, appears to be opting out.

In total, 2,850 visas are up for grabs this year, with 150 to be held in reserve. Country quotas are the **same as last year**, with the new entrants, Samoa and Kiribati, getting quotas of 150 and 100 respectively, and Tuvalu giving up (or at least not yet claiming) its “regular PEV” quota, which last year was 100.

The conversion rate from applications to visa grants in the second PEV year, 2025-26, should improve as awareness of the PEV among Australian employers grows. That said, clearly winning the lottery does not guarantee you a visa. One sensible response to this would be to select from the ballot more applicants than there are visas available, as New Zealand does, to recognise both that not all selected were successful last year, and that not all will be this year.

*We have updated **our PEV factsheet** to help applicants interested in the 2025 ballot.*

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## Author/s:

### **Natasha Turia**

Natasha Turia is a Papua New Guinean PhD candidate with the Department of Pacific Affairs and a Research Officer at the Development Policy Centre at the Australian National University.

### **Stephen Howes**

Stephen Howes is Director of the Development Policy Centre and Professor of Economics at the Crawford School of Public Policy at The Australian National University.

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