

# Understanding Pacific communities in Australia: where do they live?



Dancers at Pacific Vibes Festival 2023, Brisbane  
Photo Credit: [Facebook/pasifikavibesfestival2014](https://www.facebook.com/pasifikavibesfestival2014)

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Following our [previous blogs](#) on the age distribution of, and labour market outcomes for, Pacific migrants in Australia, we continue in this blog to use [2021 Australian Census data](#) to examine the geographical distribution of Pacific migrants across the country. We found that, although there are some differences among Pacific countries, Pacific migrants are generally concentrated in major cities. However, they tend to cluster in disadvantaged areas compared to the broader population.

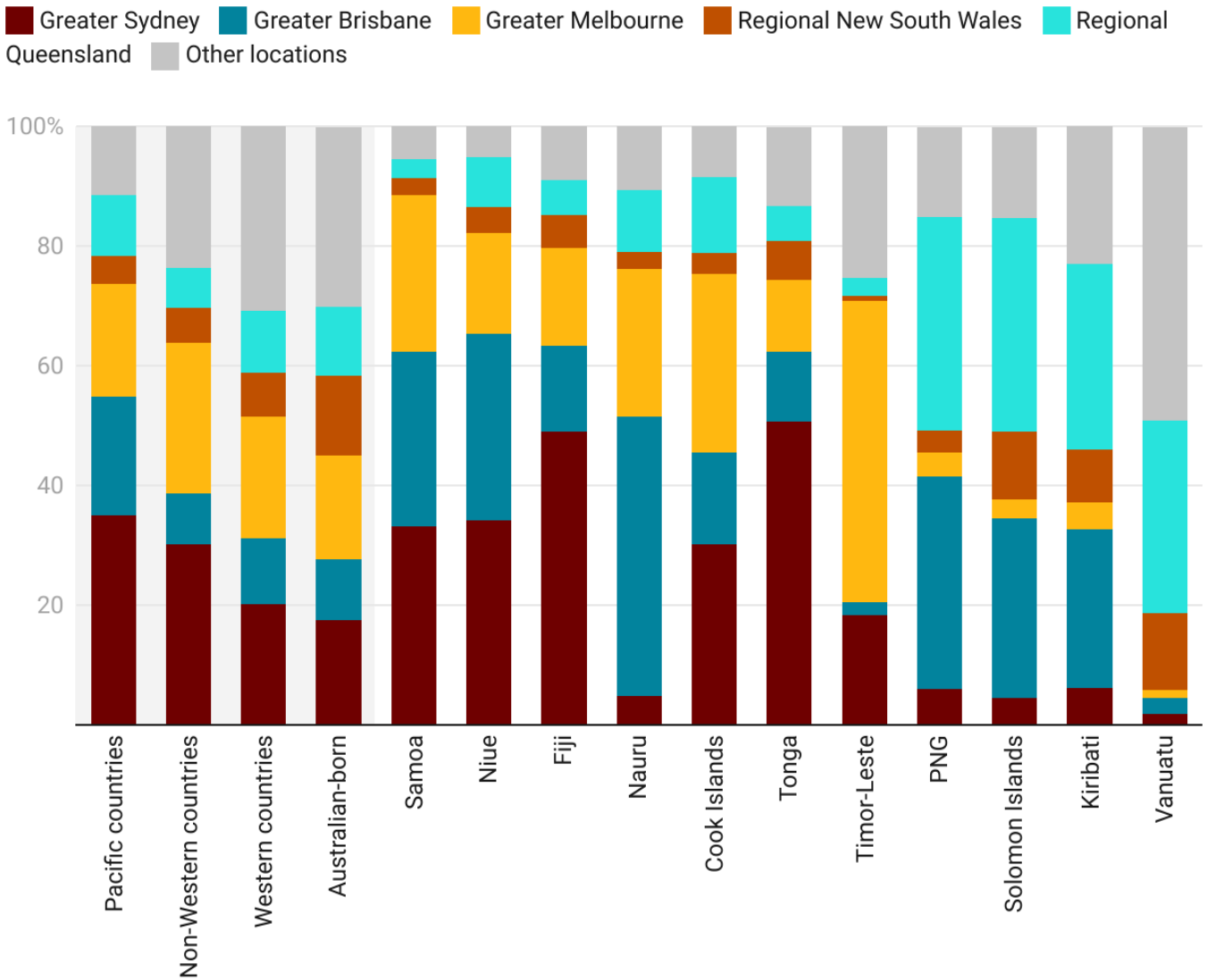
Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of Pacific migrants, highlighting their high concentration in major cities. More than 70% of Pacific migrants reside in Greater Sydney, Greater Brisbane, and Greater Melbourne, compared to 45% of the Australian-born population, 51% of Western migrants, and 64% of non-Western migrants. Among these cities, Greater Brisbane stands out as the second-largest hub for Pacific migrants — likely due to its warm climate and geographical proximity to their ancestral homelands — with nearly 20% of Pacific migrants living there. This figure is significantly higher than the corresponding figures for the Australian-born population (10%), Western migrants (11%), and non-Western migrants (9%). In contrast, the latter three groups are more likely to settle in Melbourne than in Brisbane, with 17%, 20%, and 25% residing there, respectively.

There are exceptions to these general patterns, driven by historical settlement arrangements and current visa constraints. Migrants from Vanuatu, with a large share of its population participating in the Pacific Labour Scheme (now the long-term stream of the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme), are highly dispersed. About 94% of them settle outside major cities, particularly in horticulture regions across Australia. Meanwhile, half of the migrants from Timor-Leste reside in Greater Melbourne, shaped by [early refugee settlement patterns and the subsequent demand for family reunification](#).

Additionally, migrants from Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Nauru show high concentrations in Queensland, with 71%, 66%, 58%, and 57% of these

groups respectively settling in this state. While most Nauruans live in Greater Brisbane (47%), Papua New Guineans, Solomon Islanders and i-Kiribati are more or less evenly split between Greater Brisbane and regional Queensland, with 36%, 36% and 31% residing in the regional areas, respectively.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Pacific migrants living in Australia**



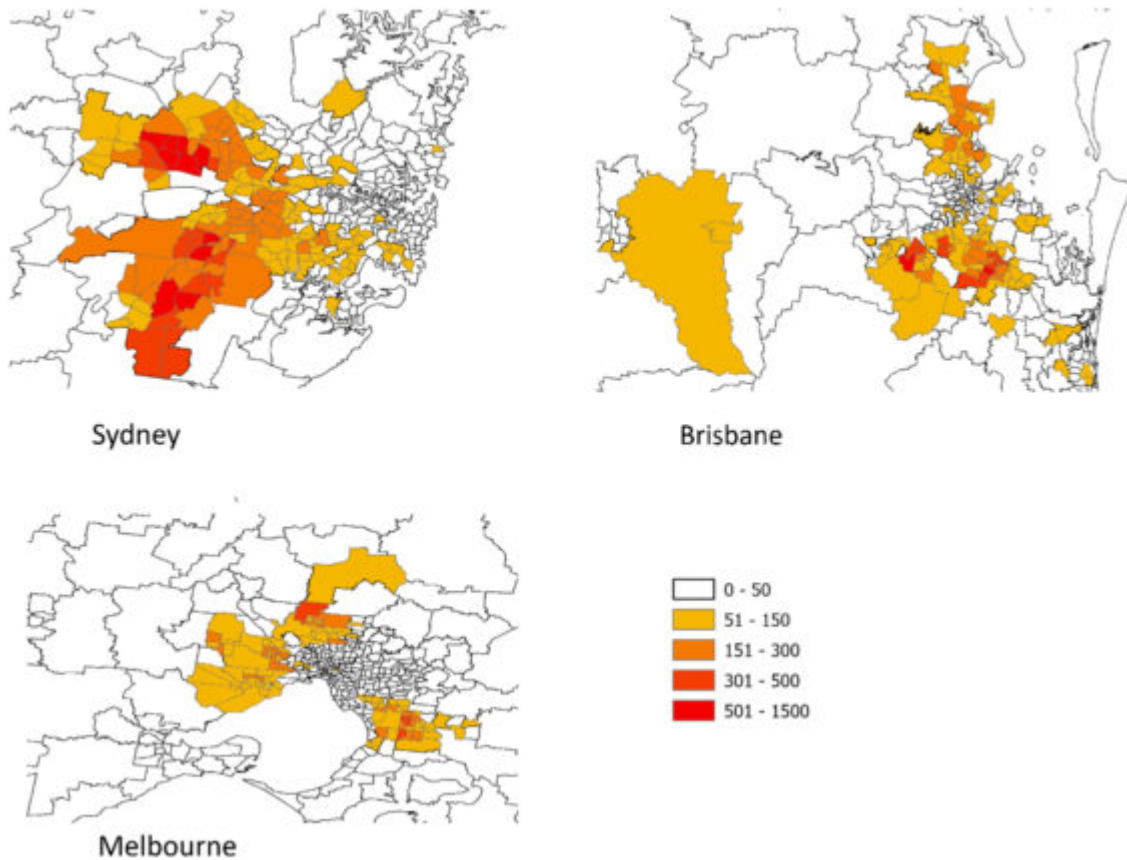
*Pacific migrants refer to those born in independent Pacific states (including the ones listed above as well as Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and Tuvalu) with ancestry from the region (including Fijian Indian). Other migrant groups refer to those born in the corresponding regions. Overseas visitors who were visiting Australia for less than one year are excluded.*

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

Within major cities, Pacific migrants tend to cluster in lower-income suburban parts of our capital cities, where housing also tends to be cheaper. Figure 2 provides a detailed view of the distribution of Pacific migrants across subregions in three major cities: Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. In Sydney, they are primarily settled in the southwest and northwest areas, where the housing prices are **much lower** than in the eastern area. Similarly, in Melbourne and Brisbane, Pacific migrants are

concentrated in affordable housing areas, such as Mickleham, Yuroke, Hampton and Cranbourne West in Melbourne, and Ipswich and Logan in Brisbane.

**Figure 2: Distribution of Pacific migrants in three Australian cities**



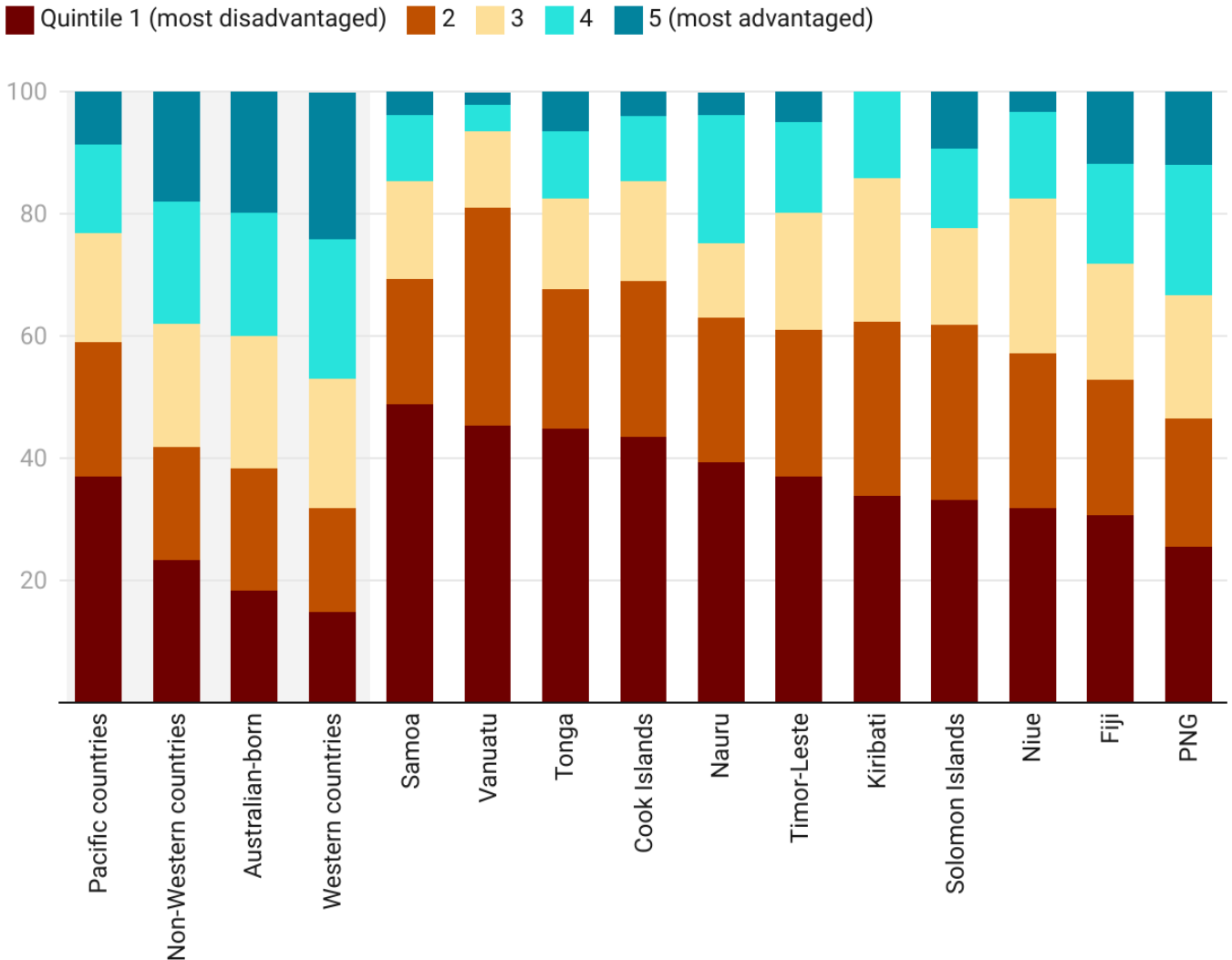
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Census 2021

Another way to examine the clustering of Pacific migrants is by using the **Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD)** developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which reflects the economic and social conditions of people living in an area in 2021. Areas with a lower score are characterised by a higher proportion of households with low income, more people without qualifications and more people in unskilled occupations. In other words, these areas are more likely to be considered “disadvantaged”.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of populations across the five quintiles of the IRSD index for the Australian-born population as well as Western, Pacific and non-Western migrants. Pacific migrants are concentrated in disadvantaged areas, with 37% living in quintile 1 and 22% in quintile 2. Samoa has the highest share in the most disadvantaged areas (49%), followed by Vanuatu (45%) and Tonga (45%). In contrast, Papua New Guinea (26%) and Fiji (31%) have the lowest shares among Pacific groups living in these areas. For comparison, Western migrants are much less likely to reside in disadvantaged areas, with only 15% in quintile 1, while the

Australian-born population (18% in quintile 1) and non-Western migrants (23% in quintile 1) have a more even distribution across quintiles.

### Figure 3: Distribution of Pacific migrants by Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage



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

These results align with our earlier analysis of labour market outcomes for Pacific migrants, where we found that Pacific migrants generally earn less than Australian-born individuals and Western migrants. This analysis also adds important geographical context: while Pacific migrants tend to move to major cities and live within close-knit communities, they are more likely to be concentrated in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas compared to the broader population.

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

## Disclosures:

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Link:

<https://devpolicy.org/understanding-pacific-communities-in-australia-where-do-they-live-20250410/>