

## MIGRATION PATHWAYS

# Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS)

### Overview

The Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) offers temporary work visas in low- and semi-skilled nonseasonal occupations. The uncapped scheme connects workers from nine Pacific islands and Timor-Leste with employers across Australia. The scheme is financed by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), which administers it in partnership with the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF).

### Why was it started?

The PLS was created to help fill labor gaps in Australian towns and farms by providing access to a reliable and productive workforce. It builds on the successful Northern Australia Worker Pilot Program (NAWPP), which increased labor mobility from the Pacific Islands in targeted non-seasonal sectors. The PLS seeks to boost economic activity and competitiveness in Australia and promote economic and skills development in the Pacific.

### How does it work?

Through their labor-sending units, governments in nine Pacific Island Countries and Timor-Leste build work-ready pools of qualified workers. The PLF then connects approved employers in regional Australia with these workers.

Workers 21–45 who are eligible for visas and accepted into the scheme are allowed to live and work in Australia for one to three years. They

*Countries all around the world utilize migration pathways to train and bring over workers with needed skills. The CGD Migration Pathways database documents these pathways to promote innovation in this space. To explore the database, visit [GSP.cgdev.org](https://GSP.cgdev.org).*



Country of Destination  
**AUSTRALIA**

Country of Origin  
**FIJI, KIRIBATI, NAURU, PAPUA  
NEW GUINEA, SAMOA,  
SOLOMON ISLANDS, TIMOR-  
LESTE, TONGA, TUVALU, AND  
VANUATU**

Skill  
**NOT SPECIFIED, WITH MOST  
WORKERS IN TOURISM  
AND HOSPITALITY, ELDER  
CARE, AND NONSEASONAL  
AGRICULTURE** 🕒 💰 🩺

Skill Level  
**LOW AND MID-LEVEL**

Timeline  
**2018–ONGOING**

Beneficiaries  
**2,180 TO DATE (UNCAPPED)**

are not permitted to bring their families with them. Workers must cover the costs of all visa and health checks themselves, though approved employers can help with these costs up front and recoup them through deductions from workers' pay.

The PLF supports Pacific governments in recruiting and preparing workers before their departure to Australia. In Australia, the PLF facilitates a “community of care” approach with approved employers and community organizations, to reduce risks to worker welfare and maximize program benefits. Workers are protected by the same workplace laws as Australians.

### What impact has it had?

The PLS got off to a slow start. By July 2019, a year after it began, only a small fraction of the 50 employers that had received approval to hire workers did so. As a result, only 203 workers from the Pacific Islands entered Australia, with the majority going to a single state (Queensland).

A year and a half later, the scheme picked up pace. By the end of March 2021, 2,180 visas had been granted, 17 percent of them to women. One hundred and nineteen employers had been granted approval to hire workers. Workers are spread out across a range of industries and geographic areas, with many working in the meat-processing industry.

Early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, workers were unable to enter Australia. In September 2020, the Australian government announced that it was reallowing entrants from the Pacific islands. Since then, demand for workers in agriculture/horticulture and meat-processing has been high.

The long-term aim will be to better align training provided by the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) with opportunities provided under the PLS, in order to make the PLS a sustainable system for labor mobility. Program designers are working to improve alignment between workers and employers and to have employers and sending countries take on some of the functions currently handled by the program.

### Further readings

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