

MIGRATION PATHWAYS

Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme (PSWPS)

Overview

The Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme (PSWPS) was established in 2008 to provide seasonal horticultural opportunities to workers from Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, and Vanuatu. Take-up of the scheme was low, for many reasons, including lack of information and the perceived level of risks and costs. In 2012, the scheme was expanded and rebranded as the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP).

Why was it started?

The Australian horticultural sector has been growing rapidly for decades. Given the remote, difficult, and seasonal nature of the work, it has increasingly relied on temporary labor to staff skill shortages. After lobbying from Pacific Island governments, it was agreed that a seasonal worker scheme would allow workers from the Pacific Islands to access these opportunities. In August 2008, the Australian government announced the creation of the PSWPS.

How does it work?

The scheme, which lasted four years, had a visa cap of 2,500 people. Workers were able to come to Australia for up to 7 months in any 12-month period to work in seasonal, horticulture.

The Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) were responsible for selecting approved employers, who could be growers or labor-hire companies. The approved employers were responsible for sourcing workers; guaranteeing work at Australian standards; helping the workers access healthcare, pastoral care, and legal redress; and supporting visa compliance issues.



Country of Destination
AUSTRALIA

Country of Origin
**KIRIBATI, PAPUA NEW
GUINEA, TONGA, AND
VANUATU**

Skill
HORTICULTURE 

Skill Level
LOW

Timeline
2008–11

Beneficiaries
1,623

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.

What impact has it had?

Take-up of the scheme was low. Over its entire duration, only 1,623 people came to Australia under the scheme, 65 percent of the total cap. Low take-up was attributed to lack of information about the scheme (a survey found that half of all growers did not know about it) and the high perceived level of risks and costs (concerns over exploitation had led to layers of bureaucracy, which put growers off participating).

Employers and workers who did participate benefited. The final evaluation of the scheme found that employers experienced productivity gains of more than 30 percent, offsetting their costs. The experience was also positive for workers, with an average gain per participating household of AUD\$2,600, 39 percent more than the per capita annual household income in Tonga.

On December 19, 2011, the Australian government announced that it would rebrand the scheme as the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP), make it permanent, and expand it to new sectors and countries.

Further readings

Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. 2011. *Final evaluation of the Pacific Seasonal Worker pilot scheme*. <https://Pacificalabourmobility.Com.Au/About/Research/?Pg=3v>

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Gibson, J., and D. McKenzie. 2011. *Australia's Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme (PSWPS): Development impacts in the first two years*. Working Paper in Economics 09/11, University of Waikato, New Zealand. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/pswps-development-impacts.pdf>

Hay, D., and S. Howes. 2012. *Australia's Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme: Why has take-up been so low?* Australian National University Development Policy Centre Discussion Paper 17. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2041833



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