



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

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FORUM ECONOMIC MINISTERS MEETING

1-2 August 2024

INFORMATION PAPER 5: PACIFIC REGIONAL LABOUR MOBILITY PRINCIPLES

Purpose and Summary

Purpose

This paper presents an update on the work underway in regard to the development of the Pacific Regional labour mobility Principles (PRLMP).

Summary

In 2020, Forum Trade Ministers endorsed labour mobility as a standing agenda item and directed the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) to undertake a comprehensive assessment on labour mobility arrangements, including regional and sub-regional agreements.

This assessment was completed in 2021 under the oversight of a Labour Mobility Reference Group (LMRG). In February 2023, Forum Leaders in their Special Leaders Retreat tasked the Secretariat to work with all participating countries to hold further dialogue to better understand challenges, opportunities, and report back to leaders as required, mindful that certain issues can only be resolved at national level.

The comprehensive assessment was presented to Trade Ministers at the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting (FTMM) in 2023. Ministers noted a proposal to develop a regional labour mobility strategy however, this was later noted by Forum Leaders at their meeting in November 2023 as a Pacific regional labour mobility principles.

To deliver on the mandate by Forum Leaders, the Secretariat undertook national consultations to inform a proposed approach to develop the PRLMP in close consultation with Members, partners, Non-State Actors, CROP, and development partners.

The Secretariat will provide an update on the work underway to Leaders in Tonga in August 2024. The Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Principles will be submitted to Forum Trade Ministers Meeting in 2025 for their consideration.

Forum Island Countries (FICs) engaged in the Labour Mobility Schemes are Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, including Timor Leste as Pacific ACP country.

A. Overview- Situational Background

Labour Mobility schemes have been in existence in the region since 2007 through a pilot arrangement to establish a Recognized Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme by New Zealand aimed at employing Pacific seasonal workers in horticulture and viticulture. There has been a significant increase since then in terms of RSE workers to NZ with data obtained indicating a cap increase from 8000 workers in 2009/2010 to 19,500 in 2023/2024.¹

2. The Australian Seasonal Workers Programme (SWP) and Pacific Labour Mobility Facility (PLS) now known as Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) were launched a year after New Zealand. Data available as of March 2024 revealed that there are now 32,880 workers from the Pacific now working in Australia.

3. These schemes employed workers from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu (Timor Leste – Australia only).

4. At the 2020 meeting of the Secretariat was tasked with developing comprehensive Assessment on the status of labour mobility schemes in the region. In 2022, Forum Trade Officials endorsed the comprehensive assessment out-of-session, including its three key recommendations:

- establish a regional platform for decision-making on labour mobility and policy support;
- develop a regional labour mobility strategy; and
- develop a regional information sharing network

5. The Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders Meeting held in August 2023 in Suva also discussed labor mobility schemes within the region and highlighted the need to address the negative social impacts these schemes have on families.

6. In October 2023, Forum Trade Ministers requested that the Secretariat, the PACER Plus Implementation Unit (PPIU), Members and key stakeholders to develop a Concept Note for the development of a Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Scheme (PRLMS). The PRLMS was intended to create synergies between existing labor mobility schemes, remove potential duplications and overlaps and set collective regional priorities that the region can collectively work towards.

7. In November 2023, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders agreed for the region to develop a set of principles, to be known as the Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Principles, instead of the FTMM proposed strategy. At the same meeting, Forum Leaders also “reaffirmed that the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting (FTMM) remains the principal Ministerial Meeting with oversight on this issue and acknowledged the complementary role of Forum Economic Ministers, particularly as it relates to the socio- economic impact of labour mobility on Pacific economies.” Leaders emphasised an “inclusive approach that ensures both Parties and non-Parties to the PACER Plus, have equal decision-making role on regional labour mobility issues. The FTMM is supported by the Forum Trade Officials Meeting (FTOM).

8. Recognising that labour mobility in the Pacific has increased over the years, the schemes continue to play a crucial role in driving economic development in the Pacific. Remittances received by countries contribute significantly towards GDP growth, improving livelihoods and assists in reducing poverty and other socio-economic challenges.

¹ <https://www.immigration.govt.nz>

9. While the intent of these schemes was to address the unemployment issues faced by the Forum Island Countries (FICs), there are unintended consequences that FICs are currently facing. is Brain drain and labour shortages are being experienced by sending countries as skilled people are leaving the country because of better pay and work conditions. As highlighted earlier, there are also serious social challenges surfacing because of separation with impacts being felt by family members left behind.

10. In addition to the development of the Regional Labour Mobility Principles, an important related development came out of the April 2024, Regional Labour Ministers’ Tripartite High-Level Dialogue. At the meeting, regional Labour Ministers agreed that labour related issues required specific intervention from Labour Ministries and tasked the Secretariat to explore the setting up of a regular Pacific Labour Ministers Meeting. Additionally, Labour Ministers unanimously supported the convening of a Regional Tripartite Meeting and agreed that proposals for both meetings be considered by Leaders at the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum in Tonga.”

11. The proposed Principles will seek to address the ongoing and emerging challenges facing labour mobility in the region. Building on existing international labour standards and commitments, through a contextualized Pacific Lens, the principles will seek to re-shape the current narrative to focus attention on people. This change is important as Members have reflected that too often, workers are considered a commodity.

12. A working draft Principle is currently being developed and going through Member consultation. Some of the key strategic considerations that the principles will look to address are tabulated below for further Member consideration in the draft concept note:

Serial	Key Strategic Considerations
1	Fostering regional standards for worker treatment, protection and wellbeing.
2	Strengthening labour mobility governance, coordination and data management.
3	Optimising the social and economic benefits of labour migration while addressing associated social issues.
4	Ensuring adequate labour supply in sending countries and strengthening intra-Pacific mobility to minimise ongoing challenges.

B. Discussion and linkages to current regional initiatives

13. The Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Principles is aligned to Regional Economic Development (RED) thematic area under the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. A thorough articulation of the implementation of the RED component of the 2050 Strategy is currently being finalised through the Pacific Roadmap for Economic Development. The Pacific Partnership for Prosperity (PPfP) has identified some regional collective actions for the 2050 Strategy implementation. Chosen for their strategic significance and potential for capitalisation in providing an opportunity for "early impactful wins". The third priority area under the PPfP is to develop a Pacific Labour Mobility Framework.

14. There are other existing works being done in the region, both at the national and regional level to address labour mobility schemes issues. The consultation process will be in

built into the concept note to ensure that initiatives that are being progressed at the national level and work being undertaken by regional agencies such as the PPIU are taken into consideration.

C. Next Steps

15. The proposed timeline for the development of the Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Principles is tabulated below:

Tentative Timelines	Methodology
July-August 2024	Virtual consultations with members and stakeholders to consider scope of Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Principles.
August 2024	Submit information papers to FEMM, FOC and FFMM
26-30 August 2024	Submit an information paper to Forum Leaders Meeting
25-27 September 2024	Regional Consultation (Technical) on the Draft Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Principles
7-8 November 2024	Discussion paper on the draft principles to the FTOM
12-14 November 2024	Information paper/ side event in the margin of Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting (PLMAM)
TBC 2025	Seek endorsement of the draft principles at the FTOM and FTMM
TBC 2025	Seek endorsement of the principles at the PIF Leaders Meeting

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat,
25 July 2024