



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

PIFS(25)FEMM.6

FORUM ECONOMIC MINISTERS MEETING

22 - 23 July 2025

Suva, Fiji

AGENDA ITEM 6: SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF HUMAN MOBILITY IN THE PACIFIC

Purpose and Recommendations

Purpose

This paper presents a progress update on Phase 1 of the Socio-economic Impact Assessment of Human Mobility (SEIAHM) and outlines the proposed approach for completing this Assessment. This includes permanent skills migration and skill gaps beyond the labour mobility schemes, and their implications on economic growth, demographics, and socio-economic development.

Summary

At the 7th Pacific Economic Sub Committee (PESC) Meeting held in February 2025, the Forum Secretariat presented a Revised Draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the SEIAHM in the region, including its overall objectives, scope, specific taskings, and administrative arrangements. Members supported the proposed scope of work and endorsed the approach outlined in the Draft ToR. Given that the ToR has been progressively revised in line with guidance and feedback from Members, this paper intends to provide a progressive update for Members' awareness.

As directed by the FEMM in 2024, and in close consultation with relevant agencies of the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP), and other regional agencies, the Secretariat has progressed work on Phase 1 of the SEIAHM, including an analysis of human mobility across the Pacific.

A. Problem/Opportunity Identification

In August 2024, Forum Economic Ministers recognised the importance of human mobility as a critical development issue for the Pacific. Whilst the economic opportunities of human mobility are acknowledged across the region, several Forum Island Countries (FICs) have raised concerns about its unintended or unexpected consequences particularly regarding deepening labour shortages (and loss of skilled workers) in domestic economies, due to human (and labour) mobility and migration.

2. Whilst various international and/or regional organisations have published studies and information on migration, including its benefits to the welfare of Pacific people, very few have referred to the unintended consequences of human mobility, including the impacts of labour mobility on sending economies, especially in relation to the loss of skilled labour, related social issues, and the associated low rates of population and economic growth.

3. Therefore, the impetus of this work is to better understand the socio-economic costs of these unintended consequences. To ensure efficiency, the 2024 FEMM reinforced the importance of consolidating existing work, extending the scope of ongoing work, and engaging with organisations and partners that are already progressing work on these matters.

B. Background

4. In 2024, Forum Economic Ministers noted the work that was to be undertaken by the Secretariat and its partners to support the SEIAHM. Furthermore, Ministers recognised the role of the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting (FTMM) as the principal meeting providing oversight on labour mobility issues, including the Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Principles (PRLMP). In this connection, they also acknowledged that the FTMM's mandate is largely focused on the welfare of the participants in labour mobility schemes.

5. In this regard it is important to clearly distinguish between the respective mandates of the FEMM and the FTMM. The tasking by FEMM to the Secretariat is intended to complement the role of the FTMM. While the FTMM focuses on the operational aspects and worker welfare within labour mobility schemes, FEMM's focus is on the broader macroeconomic and socio-economic implications of human mobility. In particular, Ministers have highlighted the need to better understand and respond to the unintended consequences on domestic economies such as labour shortages, loss of critical skills, and demographic shifts, that may arise from increasing levels of temporary, long-term or permanent migration.

6. This broader focus aligns with the long-term vision of the Region as embedded in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (2050 Strategy) and the 2050 Strategy Implementation Plan (2050 IP). The SEIAHM links directly to the 2050 Strategy through Regional Collective Actions (RCAs) two (2) and nine (9). It also links to the Regional Priority Action (RPA) 1.1.4 of the Pacific Roadmap for Economic Development (PRED). The SEIAHM will also contribute to multiple 2050 Strategy Outcomes, notably 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.6, and 1.7.

7. If endorsed by the FEMM, the Draft ToR (**Annex 1**) will support the continuation of work under Phase 1 and initiate work under Phase 2. Subject to the FEMM's consideration and endorsement, the ToR and the proposed approach will also be socialised with development

partners and technical specialist(s) to garner support for the Secretariat in undertaking the Assessment.

8. In finalising the Draft ToR, the Secretariat engaged with various development partners including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre (PFTAC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), all of whom expressed their interest in and supporting the Assessment.

9. As agreed, by to by the PESC, a two-phased approach will be adopted in conducting the SEIAHM. The **first phase** includes a desktop review, and the compilation of existing data and research materials on the economic impacts of human mobility on Pacific economies, with global insights incorporated where relevant. The second phase will include a detailed analysis of the available data, and the identification of gaps to incorporate analyses of other social and related impacts, as identified in the ToR.

10. Interim and Final Reports will be completed by the appointed technical specialists and consultants for further consideration by the PESC and the FEMM in 2026.

C. Preliminary Findings

11. The preliminary findings suggest that the short-term labour mobility programmes are only one of the factors contributing to the loss of skills and skill gaps arising in many FICs. Permanent migration is another critical factor.

12. It is estimated that around 500,000 Pacific Islanders have permanently migrated from the region over the past thirty years. This represents approximately 40% of the population of the region (excluding Papua New Guinea). With greater opportunities for permanent migration through the various schemes now becoming available, the rate of permanent migration is likely to remain significant, especially through the Australian Pacific Engagement Visa, the Falepili Treaty with Tuvalu, the Pacific Access Category, and the Samoa Quota Visas with New Zealand. Together these formal schemes currently provide permanent migration pathways for up to 5530 persons from the region each year. In addition, other opportunities exist through normal migration channels for skilled workers and family members, as well as the free access available to New Zealand's Realms and the United States (US) Compact Countries.

13. Comparatively, at the end of 2024 there were approximately 40,000 Pacific Islanders engaged in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) and New Zealand Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) labour mobility schemes. For the purposes of the census, these workers are not counted amongst the permanent migrants as they are only considered to be temporarily absent. There are an unknown number of Pacific Islanders working on intra-regional labour mobility arrangements; such arrangements may be formal as the recently signed scheme between Niue and the Solomon Islands or may simply be demand driven as is the case for teachers, nurses, and tourism-related employment opportunities. These figures would be better understood if the relevant data were to be made available from Immigration or Labour Departments in receiving countries.

14. While temporary migration receives significant policy and public attention, it is the

cumulative and accelerating impacts of permanent migration that are having profound and lasting impacts on the demographics of Pacific sending economies. Combined with declining fertility rates, especially in the Melanesian and Micronesian countries, migration is a major contributor to reduced population growth rates, a declining proportion of children in Pacific populations, and an increasingly aging population. These demographic shifts are already straining health and social services, reducing future labour pools, and raising questions around the long-term sustainability of development in many FICs.

15. The level of both labour mobility and permanent migration appears to have increased since the end of the COVID-19 travel restrictions, and the availability of new or expanded migration programmes, especially to Australia and New Zealand.

16. Although the level of remittances being sent from labour mobility participants appears to have increased since the end of COVID-19, there does not appear to have been a consequential or significant increase in the overall rate of economic growth (GDP) in the principal remittance receiving and labour mobility sending countries.

17. This suggests that remittances are being used primarily for consumption expenditure, which mainly contributes to the retail and service sectors of the sending economies. Remittances are being received and then spent primarily on imports, both for immediate and future consumption, and potentially for building materials etc., that might be used for home improvements. Other expenditure is utilised for education, and family, household, and community activities. According to the World Bank's studies,^{1&2} on average, less than 5% of remittances are sent for the purposes of starting a business. These expenditure patterns suggest that while there are benefits to remittance recipients there is little economic multiplier impacts on the domestic economies as a whole, and thus little impact on macroeconomic growth and performance.

18. One important data gap that the Secretariat has not yet been able to fill is whether labour mobility (or other) remittances have been used for unregistered investment in household or family-level micro-enterprises, and other household or family-level asset accumulation. These micro-enterprises are important for generating sustainable future income streams for recipients of labour mobility remittances. Generally, these are not captured by the existing data systems in many FICs.

19. Human mobility has impacted key sectors such as health and education. At the 53rd Forum Leaders Meeting, Leaders acknowledged the ongoing health and education workforce crisis as a result of the out migration of skilled professionals and agreed on the need to consider workforce retention measures.

20. The **second Phase** of the SEIAHM will include a review and analysis of the human mobility work undertaken in other sectors and its impact on service delivery to Pacific communities. This would include work by the health and education sectors, on workforce retention, and the measures that need to be considered as part of this Assessment, and by the economic sector more broadly.

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¹ [Pacific-temporary-migrant-workers-Nov2023.pdf](#)

² [WDR-Pacific-Islands-case-study-FORMATTED.pdf](#)

21. Another important area that needs further analysis is the re-integration of returning migrant workers. While some returnees are fortunate enough to obtain additional skills while on labour mobility schemes, especially PALM, tracer data on these returning workers and how they have applied their new skills is not readily available. Access to this data would be valuable in assessing the skill benefits of such returning workers.

22. Data from censuses and household income and expenditure surveys (HIES) would greatly assist in the analysis of the impact of remittances on the sending economies. Ministers are respectfully encouraged to support their National Statistics Offices in anonymising census and HIES data so that the microdata can be made available for research and analysis purposes.

23. The findings also suggests that whilst those households/families that are receiving labour mobility remittances are benefitting from participation in the schemes, these households represent only a relatively small proportion of all households in the individual sending countries.

24. There are, therefore, many households that are potentially not benefitting from the increase in remittances; with low rates of economic growth in domestic economies, and with wage rates and other domestic income sources failing to keep pace with inflation, this may be resulting in widening inequalities between remittance receiving households and other households without remittances.

25. It is important that further analysis assesses how drivers of economic growth can be enhanced in the FICs. This requires an assessment of how greater use of remittances for business development can be encouraged, and the role that the private sector can play to promote local employment and economic activity.

26. These preliminary findings, supported by the accompanying data, underscore the need to move beyond surface-level analysis. While human mobility, including labour mobility has generated household-level benefits, its broader economic impacts appear limited, uneven, and poorly understood. These findings challenge simple development narratives that assume that remittances will automatically drive national growth.

27. Instead, the findings reveal structural gaps, under-documented informal investments, and possible rising inequality between remittance-receiving and non-receiving households. These insights trigger Phase 2 of the SEIAHM which will involve a deeper, more nuanced analysis, to better understand the socio-economic dynamics at play, and to inform targeted, and inclusive, policy responses.

D. Progress to date, preliminary findings and next steps:

28. The preliminary findings of Phase 1 of the SEIAHM are set out at **Annex 2**.

29. Additional data collection is required to assess skill losses, skill gains, and skill gaps, as well as to estimate the value of remittances received from labour mobility workers by each of the principal sending countries.

Annex 1

PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF HUMAN MOBILITY IN THE REGION

TERMS OF REFERENCE

(As endorsed by PESC7 & Revised with Subsequent Member Inputs)

A. PURPOSE

1. These Terms of Reference (ToR) outline broad parameters and the guiding scope for the proposed assessment of the socio-economic impact of human mobility on the economies of the Pacific region. The ToR covers the study's overall objectives, scope, specific tasks and responsibilities and administrative arrangements.

B. BACKGROUND

2. The 2024 Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM) held in August 2024, recognised the importance of human mobility to the Pacific as a critical development issue. The dynamics around the movement of people whether through labour mobility, skills migration, climate mobility and/or general outmigration has had ripple impacts and opportunity costs on sending countries. These have been seen through socio-economic impacts including a loss of both unskilled and skilled and qualified workers leading to shortages workers for domestic economic activities in both formal and informal sectors. Migration has also resulted in a loss of key family members leading to social and economic problems that may be partly offset by the benefits flowing from remittances to those families that are in receipt of them.

3. These issues were initially raised and discussed by FEMM in 2023 and again in 2024, following preliminary literature research on work that had already been undertaken in the region. It was noted that a significant focus of the work had been on short-term labour mobility and the impacts on participants of labour mobility schemes, and their families. Reports published by the World Bank and International Labour Organisation whilst highlighting the significant impacts that remittances brought to sending countries' economies, largely focused on working conditions, social issues and economic issues impacting labourers or those participating in labour mobility schemes.

4. However, less attention has been given to recent media reports of apparent shortages of skilled personnel in the health, education, tourism and agricultural sectors resulting from migration including labour mobility, and which could potentially have a domino effect on other key service sectors and the private sector at large. Loss of rural labour through both domestic and external migration may also be impacting on food security in some FICs as domestic agricultural produce is replaced by imported food consumption.

5. The Standing Forum Meetings including the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders and FEMM, as well as sectoral meetings for Trade, Health and Education, have discussed the gravity of issues around the socio-economic impacts of labour mobility on sending economies. As we currently progress to key initiatives such as enhancing or strengthening the private sector, shortages of personnel in these key sectors could be detrimental. Whilst initially the focus was on labour mobility, we acknowledge that not all countries in the region are participants of labour mobility initiatives and therefore we have had

to refer to this issue as human mobility encompassing all types of mobility/migration including labour mobility.

6. This is an important distinction as the labour mobility schemes represent only a small part of the overall pattern and scale of migration from the region. Far more people migrate, many permanently, under other arrangements than those through the generally short-term labour mobility schemes. This is especially the case in the Polynesian and Micronesian countries, as well as in Fiji.

7. Whilst regional organisations have called for the need to conduct a socio-economic impact assessment, no regional organisation has yet undertaken such an assessment that focuses on the economies of the sending countries. As the issue was presented and endorsed at the 2024 FEMM, the Secretariat was tasked to develop the ToR, consult with members, CROP agencies and other stakeholders and present a balanced approach for FEMM and Forum Trade Ministers Meeting (FTMM).

8. It is important at the outset to demarcate the responsibilities of FTMM and FEMM to ensure that there is clarity in the scope of the assessment and establish a governance mechanism to provide oversight to the work. The FTMM provides oversight of policies related to regional labour mobility initiatives including contributing to the review of labour schemes managed by Australia and New Zealand^[1] as well as other Members and partners. The focus area is largely on the working conditions, welfare and security of those that participate in these labour mobility schemes and/or the workers that enlist to join these schemes. The human mobility impact assessment tasked by FEMM more specifically focuses on the economies of sending countries and the impacts that labour shortages or a stretched labour force may have on the economic development aspirations of sending economies.

9. There is opportunity to understand the various pieces of work in relation to human mobility including labour mobility and climate mobility and build the ToR coherently to ensure that each of the pieces of work speak to each other and do not contradict nor duplicate efforts.

C. SCOPE

The proposed scope of the work will seek to incorporate economic and social dimensions of Human Mobility. The review will be undertaken in two phases:

Phase 1: Desktop review

The desktop review will be led by the Economic Policy Team of PIFS and cover:

- a. **Literature review** on existing work undertaken on human mobility by other partners and agencies in the region and globally including World Bank, ADB, ILO, IOM, ANU, receiving countries and Forum members.
- b. **Data collection and assessment** on key proxy indicators for periods necessary to inform the study. Potential key proxy indicators include trade and key food imports (rice & noodles); agriculture production; remittances; employment; GDP (consumption; investment; government spending) and balance of payments. These will be sourced from publicly available data from trade, census, household surveys, multiple indicator cluster surveys (UNICEF) amongst others.

^[1] PALM (Australia), RSE (New Zealand)

- c. **Engagement** with relevant organizations working in the human mobility space including, but not limited to, the work on the Regional Labour Mobility Principles and the Pacific Climate Change Migration and Human Security Programme.
- d. **Preparation of a summary** on the main findings, trends, gaps and recommendations on the next steps.

Phase 2: In-depth research analysis

Phase 2 of the review will be informed by the findings of Phase 1. It is anticipated that this phase will be outsourced for in-depth research and analysis.

Consultants will be expected to undertake the following tasks utilising the available data from Phase 1 and identifying where additional data gathering might be necessary to supplement or fill any gaps identified:

- Examination of the:
 - positive and negative impacts of human mobility on employment, skill losses, skill gaps and skill gains from labour mobility related training, economic recovery and growth, critical service sectors including tourism, health, education and infrastructure, the private sector investment and employment creation, and other key sectors as may be identified by Members to support countries in maximising benefits and mitigating negative impacts in line with their own economic development priorities;
 - positive and negative impacts on trade, MSMEs, food security (including productivity of key sectors such as agriculture and fisheries) and on family and community structures including the impacts of internal migration on urban and rural communities;
 - positive and negative impacts of human mobility on community resilience efforts;
 - impacts on gender and cultural values including traditional and communal ways of life as communities explore economic and employment opportunities;
- Recommend potential regional evidence-based solutions to address impacts of socio-economic implications of human mobility at all levels, from policy level to technical to sectoral level to support countries to maximise benefits and mitigate negative impacts in line with their own economic development priorities;
- Review levels of remittances and opportunities and investment parameters that can leverage remittances away from consumption towards investment in enterprises and other productive assets, especially utilising accrued superannuation funds from labour mobility employment;
- Identify and recommend long-term approaches including institutional strengthening, research collaboration, engagement and advocacy, data collection and analysis; and
- Through the PRED, explore ways for FICs to address workforce shortages in key industries including retaining and/or attracting migrants to return home or encourage intra-Pacific migration where there are skills' gaps whilst recognizing existing circular patterns of migration and the drivers for people leaving and returning.

D. Approach

10. The 2024 FEMM reaffirmed the importance of human mobility to the Pacific as a critical development issue. Members also acknowledged the need for mutually beneficial and 'differentiated'

approach towards these issues, acknowledging that individual circumstances vary across members where some countries are labour sending countries and others are receiving countries.

11. The 2024 FEMM endorsed the need for a full and balanced impact assessment of socio-economic and cultural impacts of human mobility in the Pacific to inform improvements in human, financial and intellectual mobility within the region to maximise benefits and minimise costs. The analysis is expected to contribute to identifying future drivers of economic recovery and growth within the constraints and challenges faced by the region.

12. Due to technical capacity constraints, the proposed approach is to tender the work to technical experts either individual or a consortium of experts to undertake a full impact socio-economic assessment within the scope identified in this ToR. Following appointment of the technical expert(s), the Pacific Economic Sub Committee (PESC) will provide oversight and an update as the work progresses leading up to the 2025 FEMM.

13. The draft report will undergo extensive consultation with all Members and stakeholders prior as well as being peer reviewed prior to being finalised for presentation to the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting for endorsement in 2026.

E. Proposed Milestones/Timelines of key activities

Milestone	Activities	Timeline
Draft ToR submitted to PESC6 and PESC7 for consideration	Initial draft and subsequent revised draft of ToR submitted for review	October 2024 February 2025
Initial work on phase 1 data gathering for the study commenced	Data gathering commenced Initial finding presented to PESC7	October 2024 February 2025
Final Draft ToR is prepared and presented to PESC8 for endorsement to process to FEOM and FEMM 2025	Final ToR is submitted to PESC8 for consideration and endorsement for onward processing to FEMM	June 2025
Progress report and initial findings of Phase 1 presented to PESC8	Progress report and initial findings of Phase 1 presented to PESC8	June 2025
ToR to be endorsed by FEMM	Final ToR is submitted to FEMM for consideration and endorsement	July 2025
Progress report submitted to FEMM for information	Progress report submitted to FEMM for information	July 2025
Endorsed ToR is shared with stakeholders, including CROP, ILO, ADB, IMO, WB, IMF, ANU and other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Socialise ToR with stakeholders for potential partners and collaborators. 	August 2025

Milestone	Activities	Timeline
International Organisations working in this space to identify possible support and collaboration.		
Phase 1: Desk Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of existing literature and data and identification of gaps to be filled by Phase 2 	October 2024 – September 2025
Resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify potential partners, identifying available resources PIFS could tap into and work out available resource capacity to fund this work. ▪ Engage with partners, sign MOU's if needed, and organise other administrative tasking. 	March 2025 –August 2025
Onboard technical consultant(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Facilitate tender, evaluation of bids, appointment and approval of consultancy. ▪ Main milestones communicated. ▪ Governance mechanism also communicated. ▪ PESC to be updated as work progresses. 	August – October 2025
Phase 2: Workplan to be developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A detailed workplan is developed with clear methodology of the assessment 	September – October 2025
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Socialise and provide progress updates to PESC 	August 2025 - March 2026
Assessment conducted and final report produced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessment to be conducted with regular updates to PESC 	August – March 2026
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A final report to be prepared for consultation with SMT, Members and key stakeholders 	Jan – March 2026
Peer review and quality check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Circulate to PESC members through SMT for comments ▪ Designate Peer Review Team and circulate for feedback 	March 2026
Finalise Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revise the draft report based on feedback ▪ Present to FEMM 2026 	April - August 2026
Set up implementation framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implementation action plan to be part of report 	September – December 2026

Milestone	Activities	Timeline
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assign tasks and responsibilities within PIFS and discuss with implementing partners ▪ Mainstream actions into PIFS Strategic Planning framework and translate to outputs and KRAs 	
Monitor implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Through P&I 	2026 - 2030

F. Resourcing

14. This work will be coordinated by the Economic Policy (EP) Team in support of the wider Programmes and Initiatives Team including Trade, Climate Resilience and Social Policy Teams. The EP Team will be responsible for any subsequent modification of the Terms of Reference as well as to identify and coordinate feedback required and received on the draft Terms of Reference. The EP Team will also be responsible for logistics and other support required. Once the ToR are endorsed the Secretariat will engage with interested donors for resourcing the study.

15. It is expected that consultants will require a set of diverse skills in order to address the various components of the work including: macroeconomist (human mobility impact on employment, economic recovery and growth, and other sectors, team leader – 6 months intermittent); natural resource economist (food security, private sector, remittances and domestic resource sectors – four months intermittent); social sector economist (resilience, gender and cultural impacts – three months intermittent).

16. The Consultants' inputs will total 13 person months over a twelve -month elapsed period from September 2025 through August 2026.

17. The consultant team will work collectively to complete the interim and final reports within the allotted elapsed time, unless otherwise agreed in writing with PIFS.

ENDS

PIFS Economic Policy Team
July 2025

Agenda Item: PIFS(25)FEMM.6

Annex 2 Update on the Socio-Economic Assessment of Human Mobility in the Region

July 21st – 23rd 2025



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM



Human Mobility in the Region

The following slides illustrate some of the issues to be researched and analysed:

- ToR as requested by FEMM 2024
- Opportunities for Human Mobility in the Region
- Pacific Islanders on Labour Mobility Schemes
- Population, Demography and Economic Growth Rates
- Implications of Human Mobility on FIC Economies
- Supplementary Information

Human Mobility in the Region

ToR: FEMM mandated Social Economic Assessment of Human Mobility endorsed in 2024;

Proposed two phases in the ToR as now presented to PESC:

- Phase 1: Desk research, information and data gathering; to be undertaken by PIFS in collaboration with other relevant data sources and partners. This will identify the critical factors and issues for in-depth analysis in Phase 2 by external specialists:
- Phase 2: Examination of the positive and negative impacts of human mobility on:
 - employment, economic recovery and growth, on critical economic sectors to support FICs in maximising benefits and mitigating negative impacts in line with their own economic development priorities;
 - trade, MSMEs, food security (including productivity of key sectors such as agriculture and fisheries) and family and community structures including the impacts of internal migration on urban and rural communities;
 - community resilience, gender and cultural values including traditional and communal ways of life as communities explore economic and employment opportunities;
- Review levels of remittances and identify opportunities and parameters for investment that can leverage remittances away from consumption;
- Recommend potential regional evidence-based solutions including institutional strengthening, research collaboration, engagement and advocacy, data collection and analysis; and
- Through PRED, explore ways for FICs to address workforce shortages in key industries, including retraining and/or attracting migrants to return home, encouraging intra-Pacific migration and increase opportunities for national skills and education for employment.

Human Mobility in the Region

Initial Findings of the Socio-Economic Analysis of Human Mobility in the Region

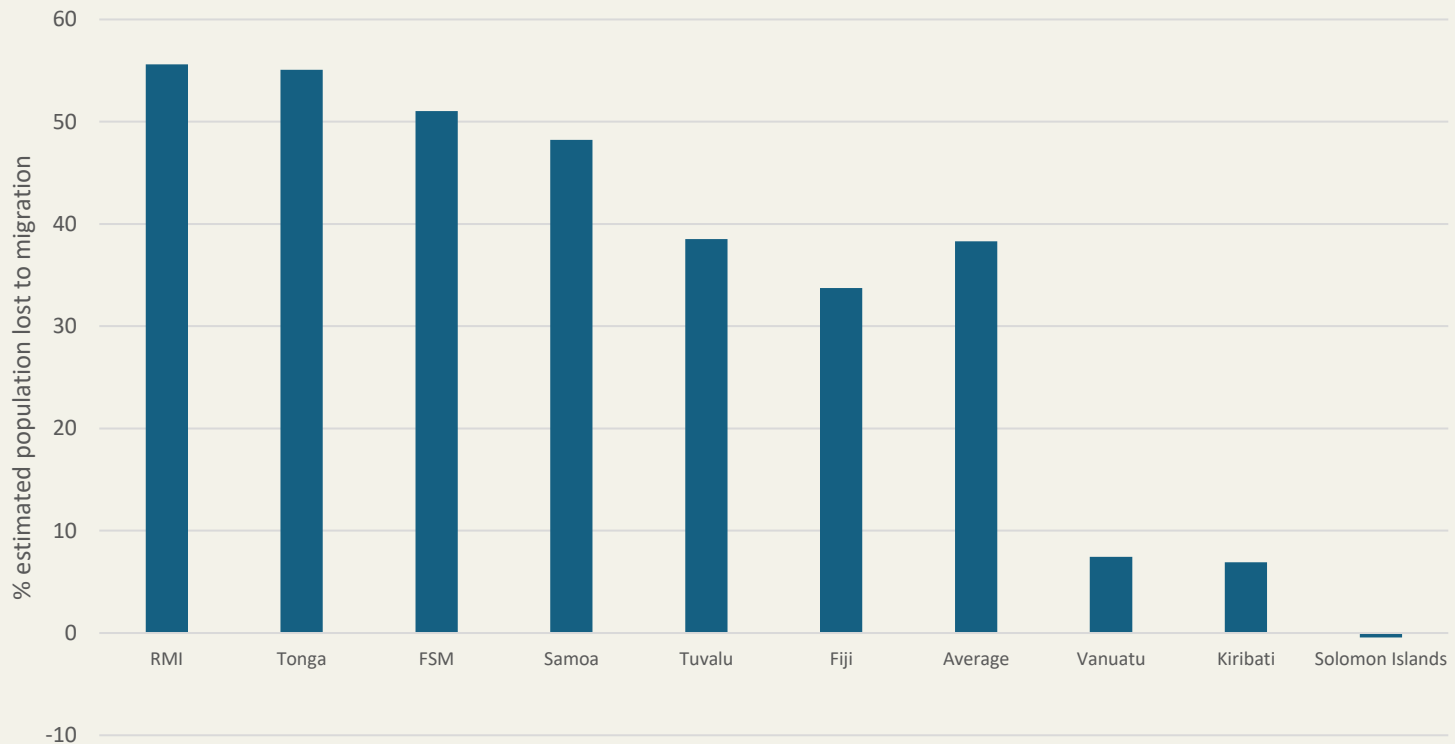
- **Human Mobility, including labour mobility and migration** is having an impact on sending economies through:
 - a) the loss of both skilled and unskilled labour;
 - b) an increasing level of social issues,
 - c) low rates of population growth, and
 - d) low rates of economic growth (GDP) despite of the inflow of remittances from labour mobility employment and migrants;
- Most FICs have recovered from the economic shock of the COVID-19 border closures but sustained future economic growth is required; however,
- **Human mobility is impacting growth prospects;**
 - a) migration is reducing population growth rates; and
 - b) remittances are beneficial to receiving families but are not sufficient as broad-based growth drivers;
 - c) those households not in receipt of remittances may be left behind unless broader and deeper domestic economic growth can be achieved;
- The study identifies issues, actions and measures at regional level that can be adopted at national levels as appropriate by FICs to address the issues.

Human Mobility: Formal Permanent & Long-Term Opportunities

A Snapshot of Human Mobility: Total Migration

Over the last three decades an estimated 500,000 Pacific islanders have migrated permanently

Estimated age group (0-14 years in 1990s) population loss due to migration
%
Approximately 30 years 1990s - 2020s



Human Mobility: Labour Mobility Programmes

A Snapshot of Human Mobility

Labour Mobility Schemes

New Zealand RSE Scheme: Source and Numbers of RSE Workers.

Country Numbers	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Fiji	45	255	321	402	528	651	744	468	1071	1068
Kiribati	168	198	198	300	369	519	609	408	753	636
Nauru	21	21	21	15	18	24	12	0	0	18
PNG	90	111	108	147	189	192	78	111	399	708
Samoa	1368	1737	1890	2109	2754	4167	6846	7434	4236	4029
Solomon Islands	579	669	600	708	846	1026	957	873	1173	1242
Tonga	1830	1932	2103	2244	2193	3660	2928	2634	1995	1938
Tuvalu	99	54	75	84	129	186	210	162	219	201
Vanuatu	3981	4173	4590	4794	5700	5472	9837	11091	7284	7764
Total Pacific	8181	9150	9906	10803	12726	15897	22221	23181	17130	17604
Annual % change	25.4	11.8	8.3	9.1	17.8	24.9	39.8	4.3	-26.1	2.8

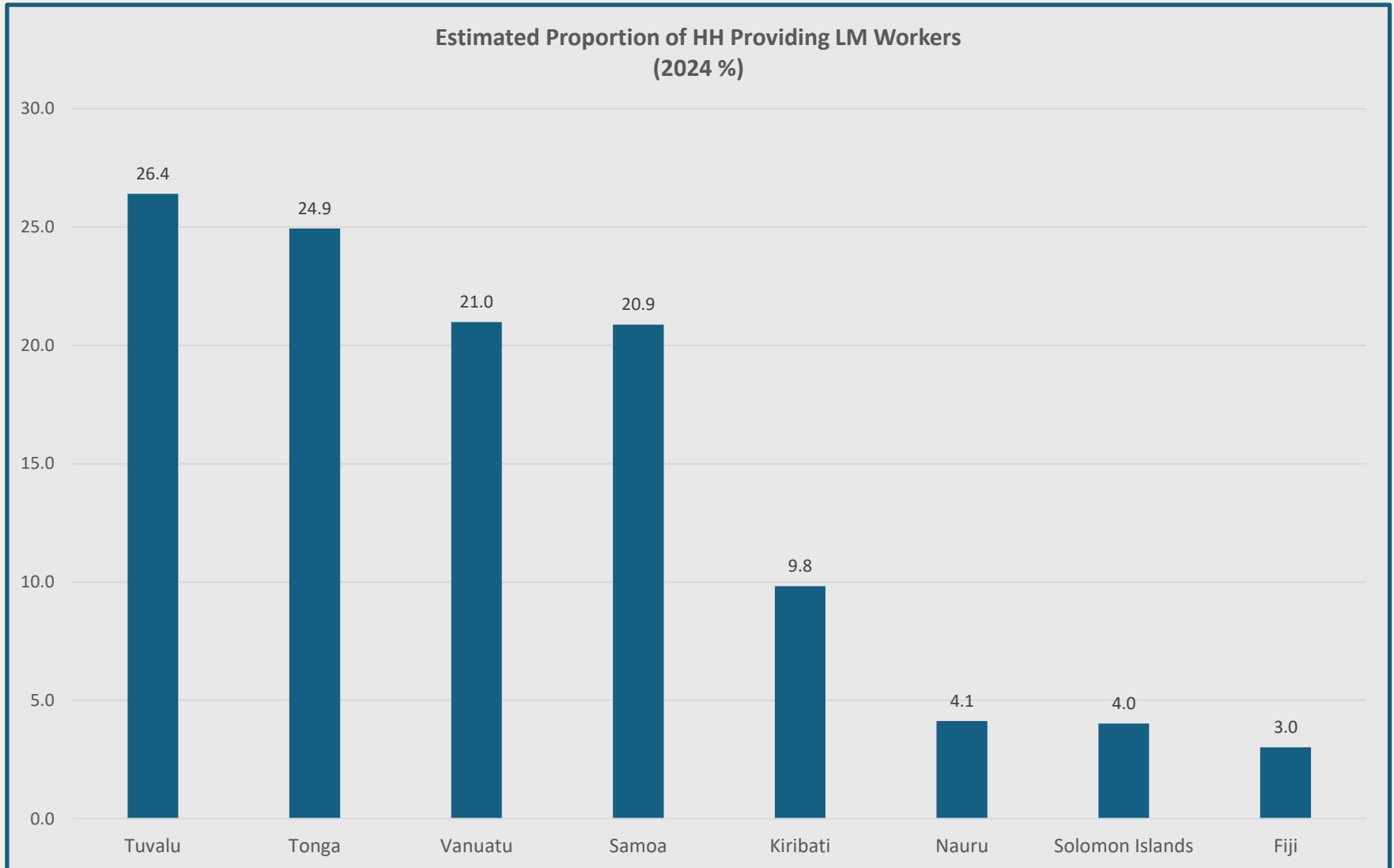
Source: <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/statistics>

Australian Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme

Country	Seasonal Worker Programme						PALM Scheme			
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Dec-22	Dec-23	Dec-24
Fiji	5	160	190	247	436	227		4,510	5,410	4,770
Kiribati	11	20	124	364	377	146		800	1,425	1,365
Nauru	0	17	0	0	0	0		5	10	50
Papua New Guinea	35	42	139	92	128	116		1,085	1,415	1,600
Samoa	185	140	309	527	677	543		4,130	3,215	2,510
Solomon Islands	21	61	87	175	314	228		3,370	3,980	3,845
Tonga	2,179	2,624	2,691	2,790	3,738	2,217		4,350	3,585	2,725
Tuvalu	7	5	0	0	0	0		35	185	275
Vanuatu	567	1,198	2,149	3,348	4,965	4,821		8,265	6,820	5,705
Total	3,010	4,267	5,689	7,543	10,635	8,298		26,550	26,045	22,845
Annual % change	49.5	41.8	33.3	32.6	41.0	-22.0			-1.9	-12.3

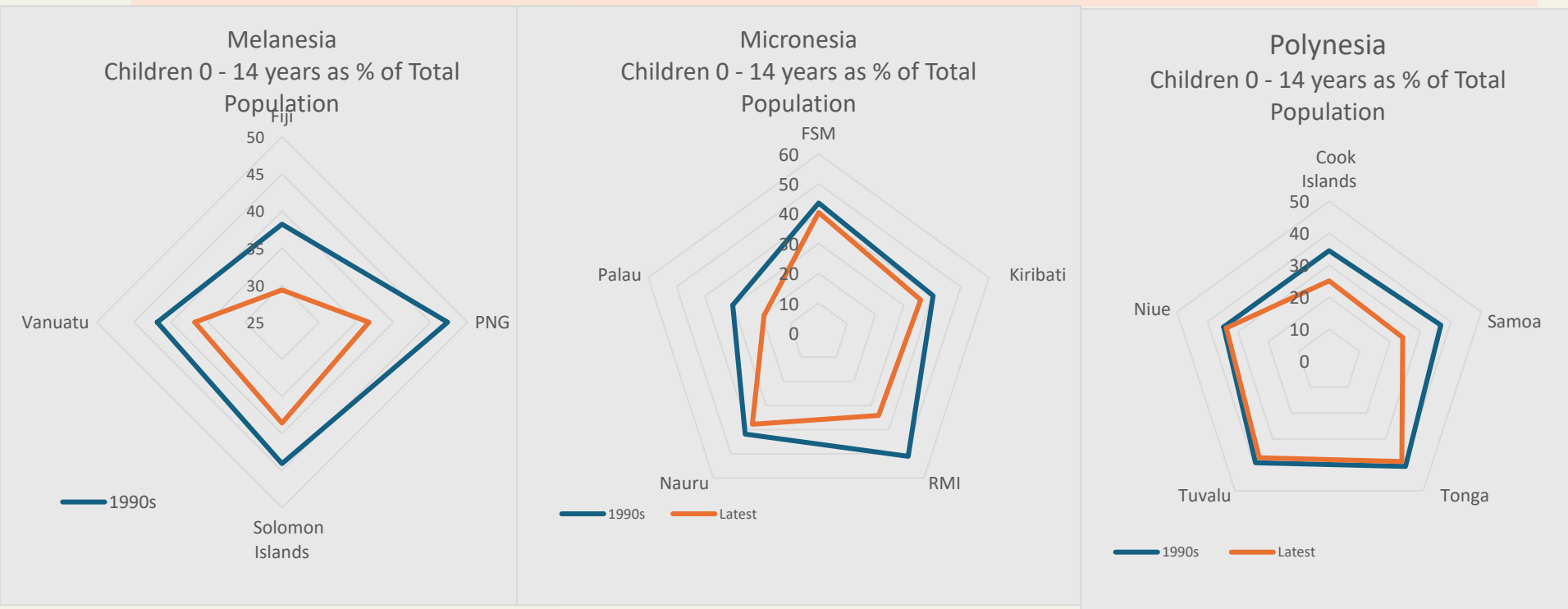
Source: <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/>

Labour Mobility: Estimated % of HH with Labour Mobility Workers 2024



Human Mobility: Demographic Change

Changing Demographics : Children

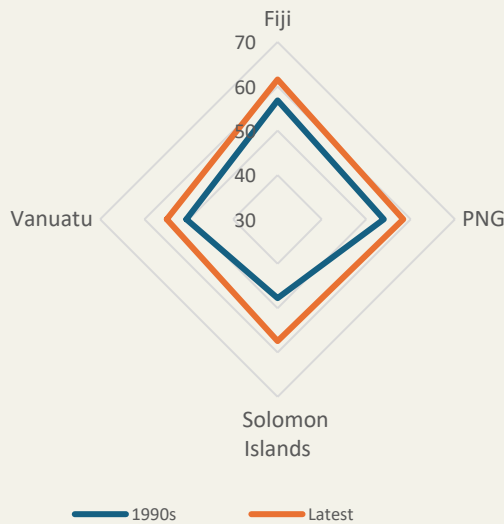


Key points to note

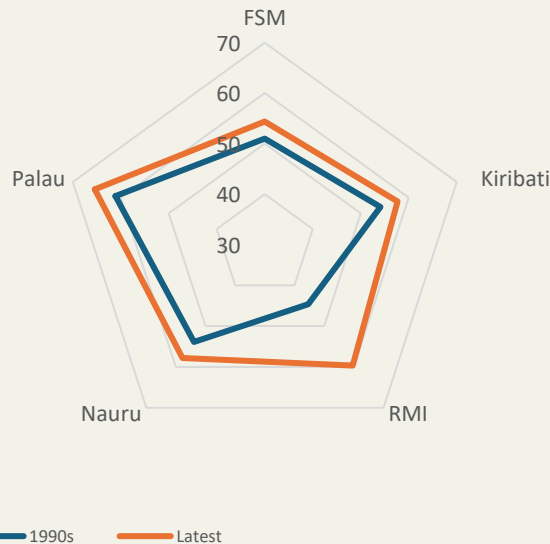
1. Fertility rates have declined especially in the Melanesian countries reducing the proportion of children in the population; high rates of migration from Fiji is exacerbating the fertility issue.
2. In Micronesia population growth rates have declined as migration has increased and fertility rates have declined, but not by as much as in Melanesia; the proportion of children has declined slightly in all Micronesian countries, especially in Marshall Islands and Palau.
3. In Polynesia fertility rates have remained generally stable and have balanced the rates of migration such that the proportion children in the population has been maintained except in Samoa and Cook Islands where the proportions have declined slightly.

Changing Demographics : Working Age

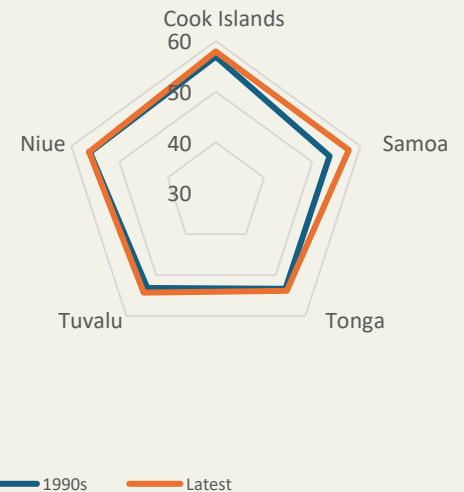
Melanesia
Labour Force 15-59 years % of Total Population



Micronesia
Labour Force 15-59 years % of Total Population



Polynesia
Labour Force 15-59 years % of Total Population

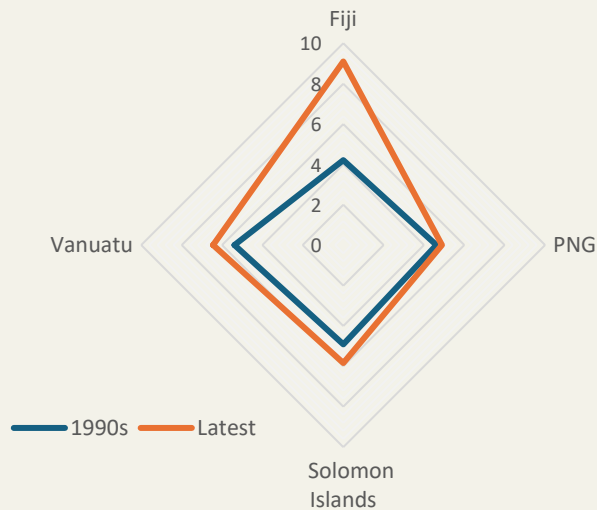


Key points to note

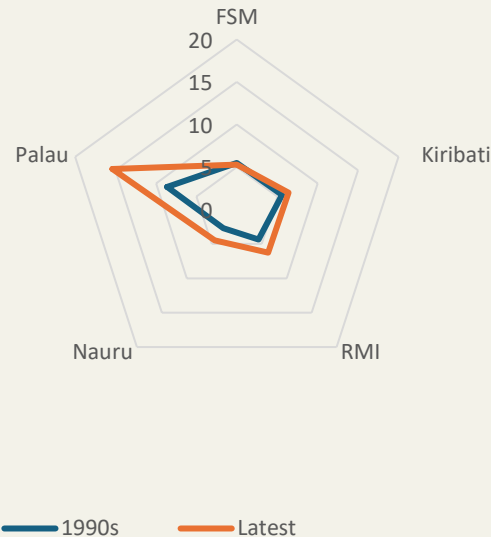
1. The decline in fertility rates over the last two decades, particularly in Melanesia and Micronesia means that proportionately fewer children are progressing into the labour force.
2. Therefore the proportion of the population in the labour force is showing only slight increases in Melanesia & Micronesia, and little change in Polynesia.
3. RMI shows the largest increase, but this needs to be analysed in the context of the recent census showing a sharp decline in the total population.
4. In Polynesia there has been very little increase in proportion of the population in the labour force as new entrants are balanced by those migrating..

Changing Demographics : Elderly

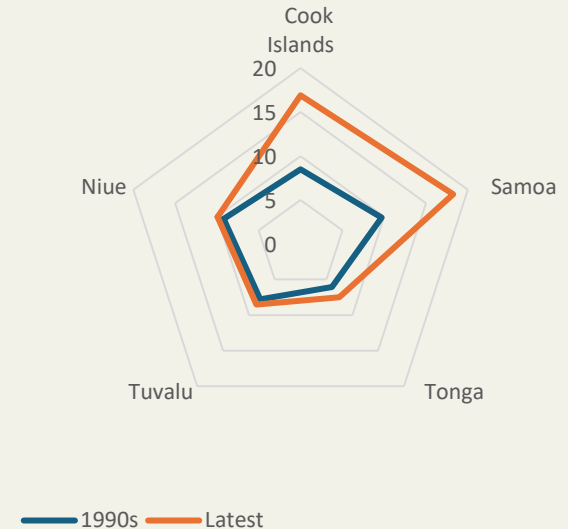
Melanesia
Elderly 60 years & above as % of Total Population



Micronesia
Elderly 60 years & above as % of Total Population



Polynesia
Elderly 60 years & above as % of Total Population



Key points to note

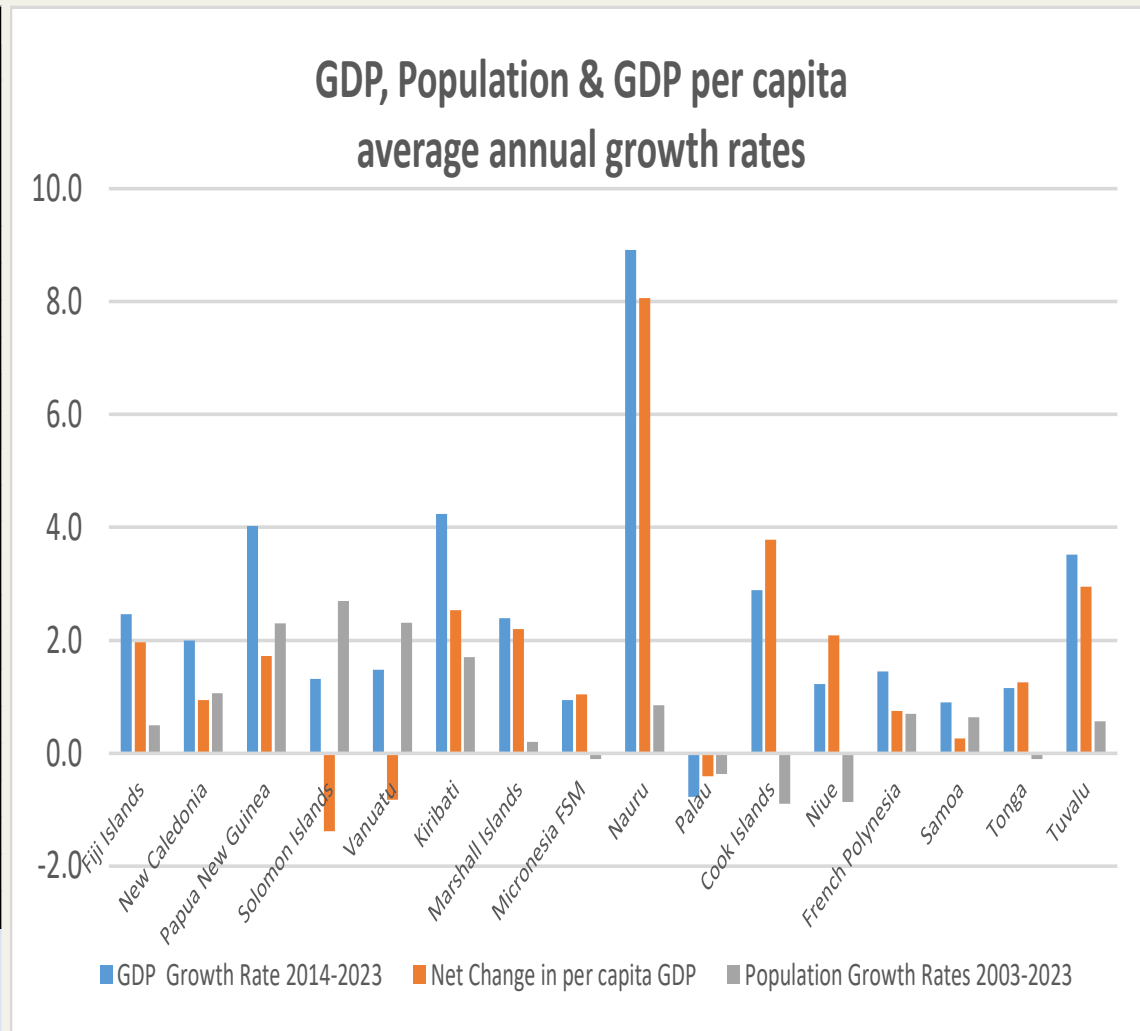
1. Fiji experiencing rapid increase in elderly persons as younger people seek to migrate, both on labour mobility schemes and for permanent migration.
2. In Micronesia, Palau has experienced an increase in % of elderly, but % of elderly in other countries has been relatively stable.
3. In Polynesia, Cook Islands and Samoa experiencing big increases in % of elderly, possibly returning retirees from NZ or elsewhere.

Human Mobility: Implications for Population and Economic Growth Rates

GDP, Population & GDP per capita Growth Rates

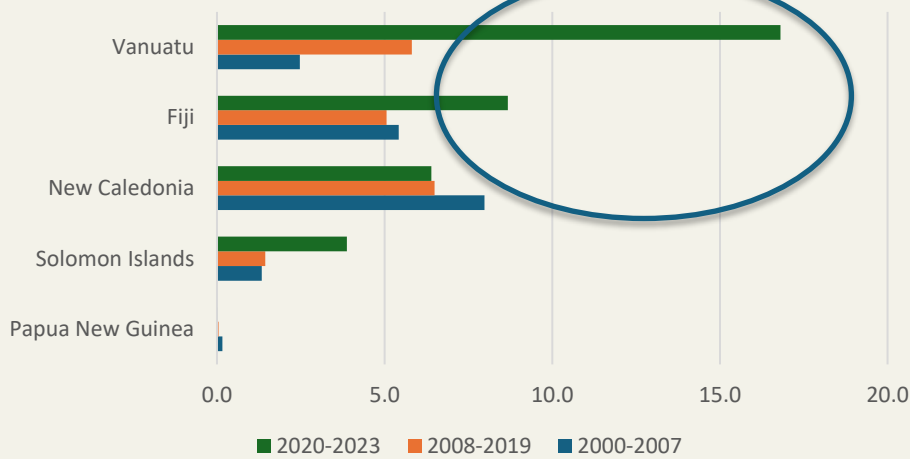
GDP, Population & GDP per capita			
	Average Annual Rates		
FICs	GDP Growth Rate 2014-2023	Population Growth Rates 2003-2023	Net Change in per capita GDP
Melanesia	A	B	A-B
Fiji Islands	2.5	0.5	2.0
New Caledonia	2.0	1.1	0.9
Papua New Guinea	4.0	2.3	1.7
Solomon Islands	1.3	2.7	-1.4
Vanuatu	1.5	2.3	-0.8
Micronesia			
Kiribati	4.2	1.7	2.5
Marshall Islands	2.4	0.2	2.2
Micronesia FSM	0.9	-0.1	1.0
Nauru	8.9	0.8	8.1
Palau	-0.8	-0.4	-0.4
Polynesia			
Cook Islands	2.9	-0.9	3.8
Niue	1.2	-0.9	2.1
French Polynesia	1.4	0.7	0.7
Samoa	0.9	0.6	0.3
Tonga	1.2	-0.1	1.3
Tuvalu	3.5	0.6	3.0

Sources: SPC Population Database:
[https://stats.pacificdata.org/vis?lc=en&df\[ds\]=SPC2&df\[id\]=DF_POCKET&df\[ag\]=SPC&df\[vs\]=3.0&dq=..POPYGR&pd=2003%2C2023&ly\[cl\]=INDICATOR&to\[TIME_PERIOD\]=false](https://stats.pacificdata.org/vis?lc=en&df[ds]=SPC2&df[id]=DF_POCKET&df[ag]=SPC&df[vs]=3.0&dq=..POPYGR&pd=2003%2C2023&ly[cl]=INDICATOR&to[TIME_PERIOD]=false)

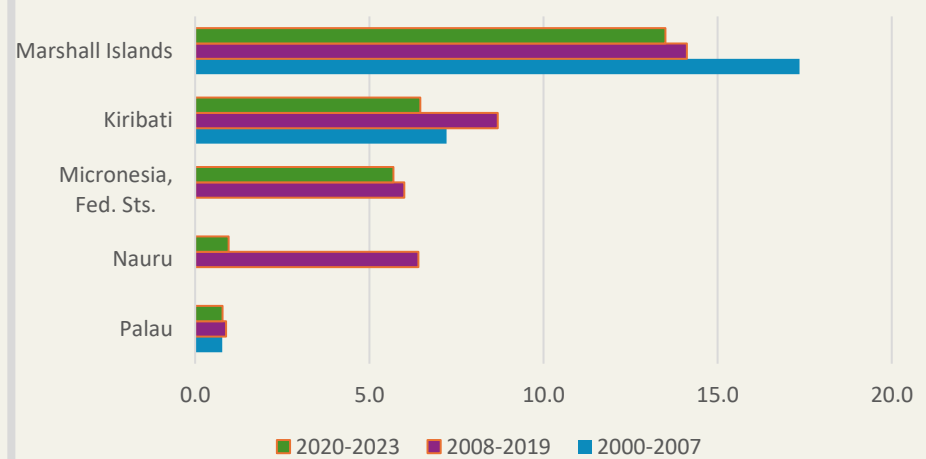


Total Remittances Received Average Annual % of GDP

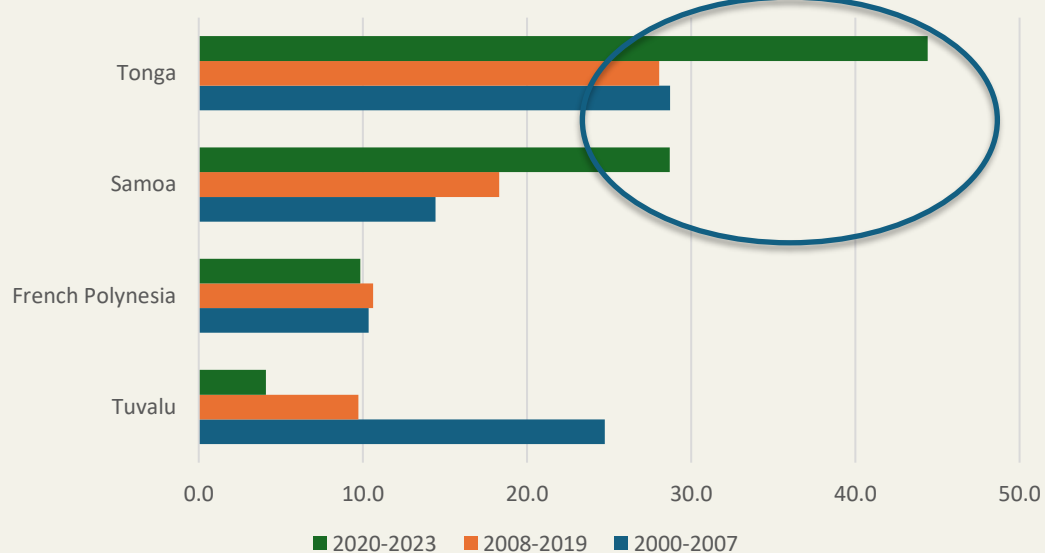
Melanesia: Personal Remittances Received
Average Annual % GDP



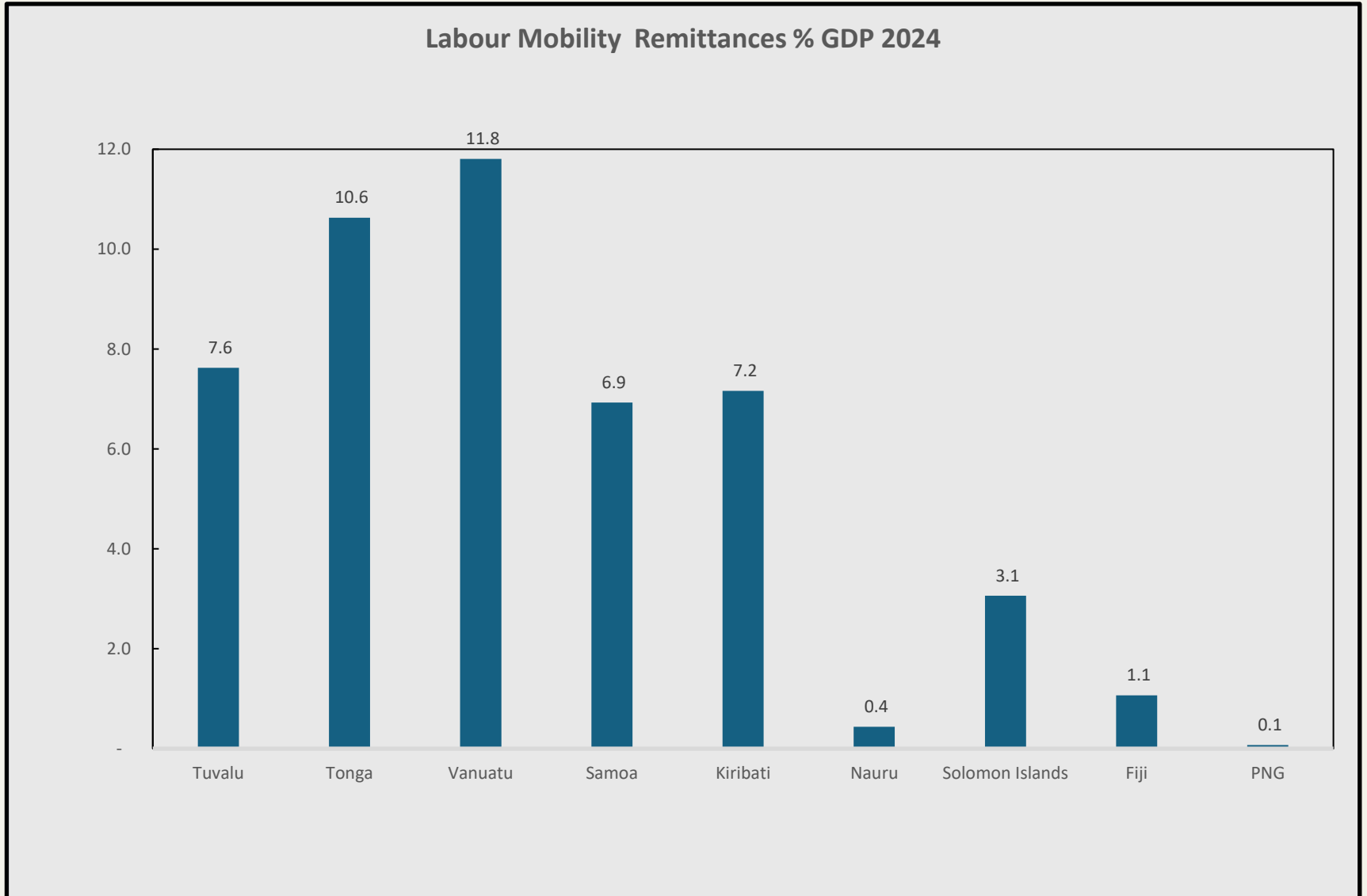
Micronesia: Personal Remittances Received
Average Annual % GDP



Polynesia: Personal Remittances Received
Average Annual % GDP

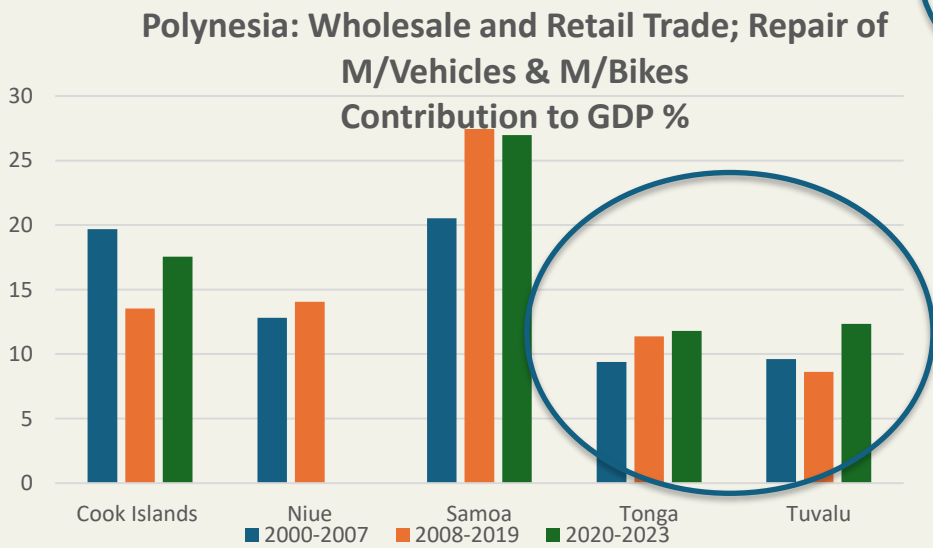
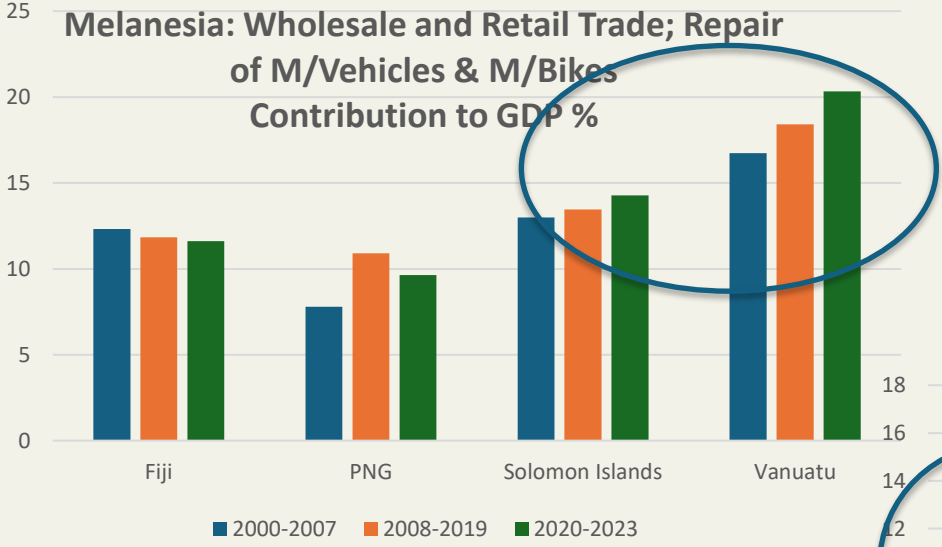


Labour Mobility: Remittances % GDP 2024



Contribution of Retail Sector to GDP %;

Change over time; labour sending countries have seen increases in this sector

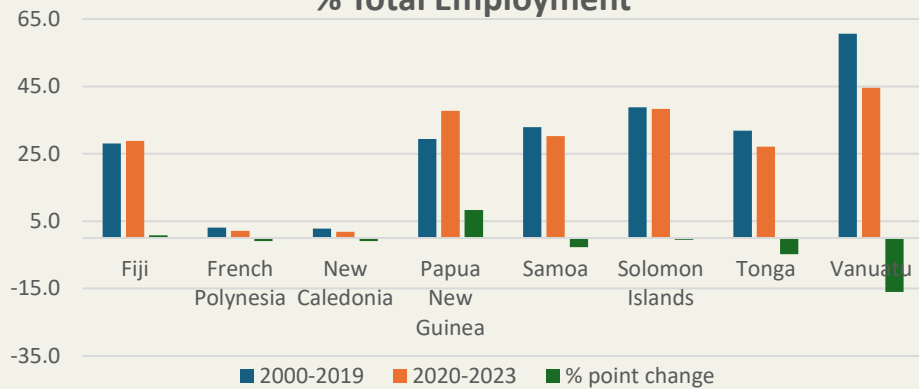


Source: ADB Key Indicators & World Bank WDI April 2025

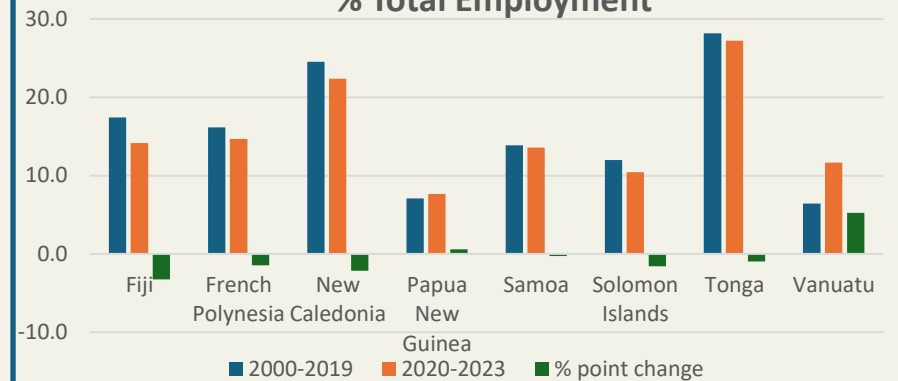
Sector Employment Trends: Pre- and Post Covid

Employment in agricultural & industry has declined as % of total
 Employment in services (including government) has increased
 Employment totals have generally not increased

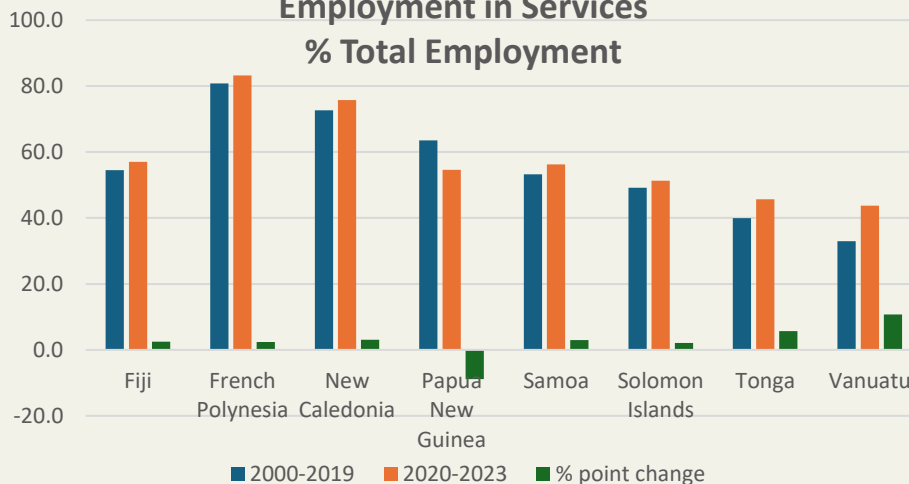
Employment in Agriculture % Total Employment



Employment in Industry % Total Employment



Employment in Services % Total Employment





Implications of Human Mobility

- ❖ Proportion of school age children in the population has decreased in half of the FICs over the past 30 years;
- ❖ The proportion of elderly has increased in more than half the countries;
- ❖ These structural changes in demographics pose the long-term prospect that with continued trends in migration and fertility rates; then the size and proportion of the labour force in many FICs is unlikely to increase; this means
- ❖ Low rates of population growth will continue to be a constraint to broadening and deepening economic prospects for higher rates of economic growth;
- ❖ High levels of remittances do not seem to be boosting economic growth beyond consumption;
- ❖ Lack of economic growth means fewer domestic employment opportunities for those remaining in their home countries; potentially creating a vicious circle and increasing inequality;
- ❖ Hardship and poverty are likely to increase if economic growth rates remain low;
- ❖ Encouraging more people to migrate, therefore potentially further limiting population and economic growth prospects; unless
- ❖ Investment, especially in the private sector, and/or productivity enhancing measures become the principal drivers of domestic employment and economic growth.
- ❖ What are the policy options



Implications of Human Mobility

- ❖ A key issue is **education-for-employment (or migration)**;
 - > analysis of household surveys over many years has shown that those with less education are more likely to be poor;
 - > better educational attainment enables anyone to “walk out of poverty”;
 - > raising education standards and skills is essential on the labour supply-side; while
 - > opening freer movement of skills within the region from countries with surplus labour to those with a labour scarcity would assist in alleviating constraints on economic growth on the labour demand side;
- ❖ **Measures for structural & institutional enhancement** to stimulate investment and economic growth are also needed:
 - > to **encourage more remittances & government components of Net Foreign Income to be used for investment in national economies**;
 - > to **promote inclusive employment creation**; and
 - > the **generation of economic & employment opportunities** for future generations.
- ❖ The next stage in the PIFS research on Human Mobility will focus on the transmission channels of remittances and the drivers of economic performance in FICs.

Thank you



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM



BLUE PACIFIC 2050



Nature of Human Mobility

The principal avenues for Human Mobility are:

- **Labour mobility: RSE & PALM Schemes**
 - > Short-term/seasonal work (RSE & PALM)
 - > Longer term work (PALM)
- **Long-term &/or permanent migration**
 - > *Pacific Engagement Visa (Aus)
 - > *Pacific Access Category (NZ)
 - > *Samoa Quota Scheme (NZ)
 - > *Tuvalu Falepili Union Scheme (Aus)
 - > Compacts of Free Association (USA)
 - > Skilled Worker Visa (Aus & NZ)
 - > Family/relationship visas(All)
 - > Free access for NZ Realm countries and French Territories

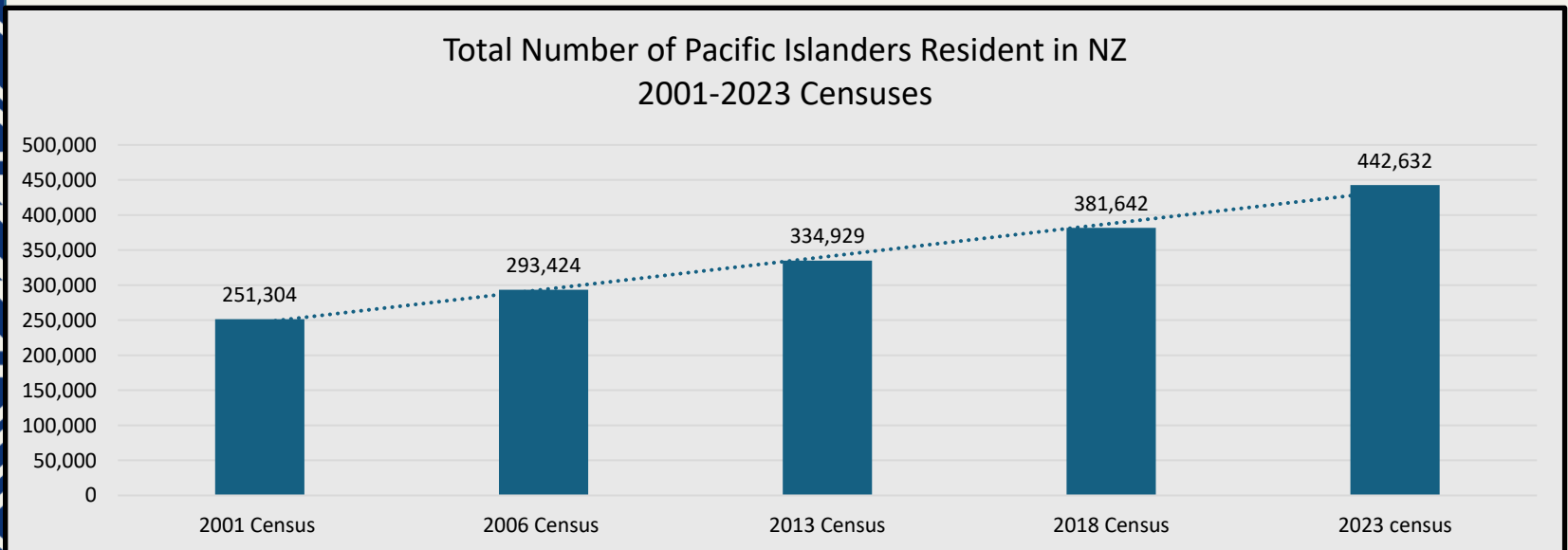
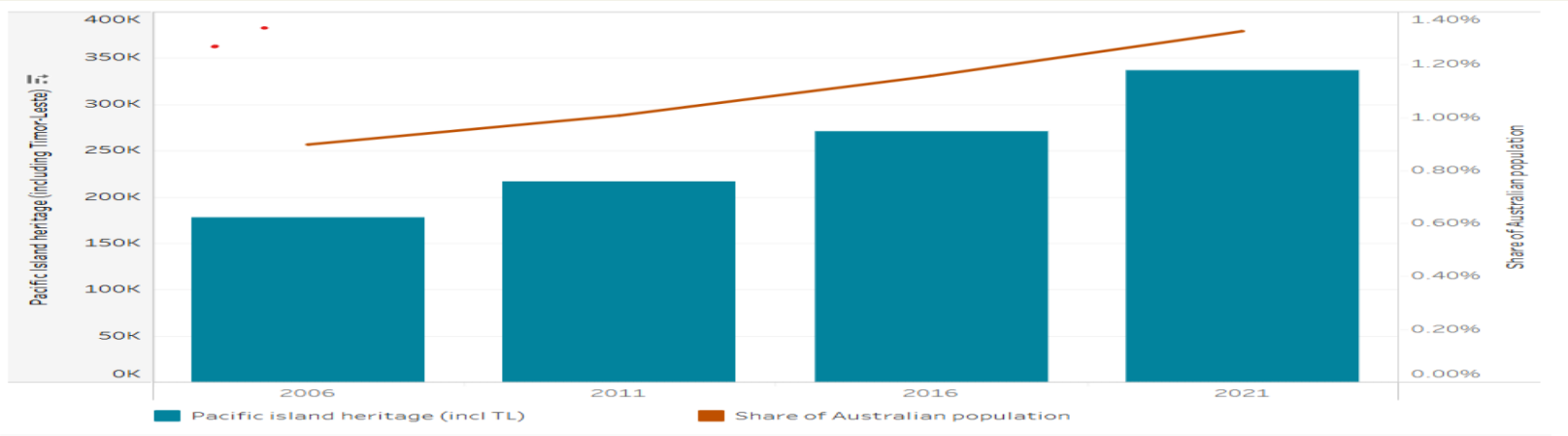
***Formal targeted schemes for Pacific islanders**

Human Mobility: Formal Permanent & Long-Term Migration Opportunities

Annual Permanent Migration Opportunities for Pacific Islanders					
Forum Member Country	NZ-Samoa Quota (2024)	NZ-Pacific Access Category (2024)	Australia-Tuvalu Falepili (Annual)	Australia Pacific Engagement (2024)	Open Access
Cook Islands					NZ Realm
Fiji		500		300	
French Polynesia					French Territory
Kiribati		75			
Marshall Islands					US Compact
Micronesia (FSM)				24	US Compact
Nauru				150	
New Caledonia					French Territory
Niue					NZ realm
Palau				11	US Compact
PNG				1515	
Samoa	1650				
Solomon Islands				150	
Tonga		250		300	
Tuvalu		75	280	100	
Vanuatu				150	
Total	1650	900	280	2700	5530

A Snapshot of Human Mobility

Number of Pacific Islanders Resident in Australia



Human Mobility: Migration

Over the last three decades there has been a quite massive migration from many FICs

Selected FICs: Estimates of Human Mobility (Migration) From Census Data

Country	Census Start & End and Period			Census 0-14 year age-group population at start	Expected end year age-group population without migration	Actual end year census age-group population	Estimated Population Loss from Migration	Estimated age group population loss due to migration %
	Start	End	Period years					
	A	B	C					
	D	E	F					
RMI	1999	2022	23	21,783	19,478	8,648	10,830	55.6
Tonga	1997	2021	24	38,361	37,120	16,671	20,449	55.1
FSM	1994	2022	28	45,753	41,649	20,396	1,253	51.0
Samoa	1991	2021	30	65,773	62,718	32,470	30,248	48.2
Tuvalu	1997	2022	25	3,585	3,403	2,092	1,311	38.5
Fiji	1997	2017	30	293,656	282,978	187,482	95,496	33.7
Total				468,911	447,346	267,759	179,587	38.3
Vanuatu	1989	2020	31	62,200	57,288	53,014	4,274	7.5
Kiribati	1991	2021	30	29,158	24,974	23,244	1,730	6.9
Solomon Islands	1989	2019	30	143,313	132,671	133,240	- 569	-0.4

Source: National Population Census, WHO Life Tables & PIFS estimates