



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

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FORUM ECONOMIC MINISTERS MEETING

21 – 23 July 2025
Suva, Fiji

INFORMATION PAPER 5: PACIFIC REGIONAL LABOUR MOBILITY PRINCIPLES

Purpose and Recommendations

Purpose

This paper provides Members an update on the draft of the Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Principles (PRLMP) as mandated by Leaders at their November 2023 meeting.

Summary

- Forum Trade Ministers (FTMM) welcomed, in principle, the proposed PRLMPs, while emphasising the need for the principles to reflect shared Pacific values while respecting national sovereignty and allowing flexibility for countries to pursue unique approaches and aspirations. There was recognition of the potential for these principles to guide a cohesive and future-focused regional approach, and to provide a benchmark for inclusive, people-centred development that benefits both sending and receiving countries.
- Ministers reiterated the critical importance of labour mobility as a key driver of economic resilience, skills development, and community wellbeing across the region. Labour mobility not only generates income and capacity-building opportunities for Pacific workers but also supports economic productivity in receiving countries. Members expressed gratitude for the ongoing support and engagement of development partners and acknowledged the substantial contribution of Pacific workers to regional economies.
- Ministers further agreed that the FTMM retains oversight of labour mobility and furthermore, continued partnership and inclusive dialogue were encouraged to finalise the PRLMP, with the goal of delivering shared benefits, advancing common values and strengthening regional solidarity.

A. Overview/Summary

Labour mobility is a cornerstone of development in the Pacific, yet it is becoming increasingly complex. New migration corridors, intra-regional flows, and inward labour migration are reshaping the regional labour market. Persistent gender disparities, skills mismatches, and possible fragmented national strategies may limit the potential benefits of labour mobility.

2. This policy paper outlines the key challenges and calls for stronger alignment with the development of the Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Principles (PRLMP). These Principles offer a cohesive, equity-focused framework to promote gender inclusion, skills development, and ethical recruitment, and a balanced outcome. By coordinating efforts and leveraging the PRLMP, Members can unlock greater economic, social, and developmental gains from labour mobility.

B. Discussion

3. In November 2023, the Forum Leaders endorsed a proposal to develop PRLMP, this initiative aims to ensure synergies and prevent unnecessary duplication in the development of these principles. To advance these efforts and building on the earlier comprehensive assessment of labour mobility arrangements report, the regional consultation on the PRLMP was held in September 2024 in Fiji. The consultation identified the gaps and opportunities for the PRLMP to address, the proposed scope including alignment with existing strategies and processes. Labour mobility in the Pacific region is increasingly complex and evolving, requiring coordinated and principled policy responses to maximise its developmental impact. Beyond traditional partnerships with Australia and New Zealand, new labour migration corridors to Canada, the United States, and parts of Europe are emerging. Simultaneously, the rise in intra-Pacific labour movements and growing inward labour migration to Pacific Island Countries—particularly in key sectors such as construction, care, fisheries, and tourism—reflects shifting regional labour market dynamics.

4. These challenges underscore the importance of grounding policy design and implementation in the PRLMP. The PRLMP offers a shared, regionally endorsed framework for ensuring that labour mobility is inclusive, rights-based, demand-driven, and development-oriented. By aligning national strategies with the PRLMP, Forum members can work collectively to:

- Mainstream gender equality in recruitment, training, and worker protections;
- Strengthen skills development systems and align them with both regional and destination-country labour market needs;
- Promote mutual recognition of qualifications and certifications across borders.
- Support the productive use of remittances through financial literacy and enterprise development.
- Ensure that reintegration and upskilling opportunities are available to returnees; and
- Coordinate more effectively on policy coherence, data systems, and ethical recruitment practices.

5. Labour mobility expansion presents a number of policy and operational challenges. Labour mobility now spans a broad range of skills levels, including skilled, semi-skilled, and low-skilled workers, each subject to different regulatory regimes. Persistent gender disparities further limit equitable participation, with women facing systemic barriers to access, training, and support. At the same time, while remittances continue to serve as a vital economic lifeline for many Pacific households, the developmental impact of these inflows remains constrained by limited financial literacy, investment pathways, and reintegration support. National responses—such as standalone labour mobility strategies, skills training initiatives, and reintegration policies—have made important progress, as are the labour mobility schemes to Australia and New Zealand.

6. A key principle consistently reinforced throughout the development of the PRLMP is that labour is not a commodity, and people must remain at the centre of all labour mobility

frameworks. This human-centred approach calls for policies that prioritise dignity, fairness, and empowerment for all workers, regardless of skill level or destination. It explicitly rejects exploitative practices and promotes regional solidarity through shared responsibilities.

7. The PRLMP is explicitly aligned with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, which upholds a vision of inclusive, sustainable, and people-centred development. The principles support efforts to ensure that labour mobility is not merely a transactional arrangement, but one that fosters empowerment, social protection, and long-term development for workers and their families.

8. Furthermore, the principles advance the region's commitment to safe, fair, and development-focused labour mobility. They reflect international best practices and Pacific priorities, offering both opportunities and challenges that require coordinated national and regional action. The principles provide vital foundation for a rights-based, skills-led, development-focused labour mobility system in the Pacific. They address structural barriers, ensure shared prosperity, and position the region as a model for ethical and sustainable migration governance.

9. In undertaking the development and finalisation of the principles, further consideration may also be needed in terms of aligning national labour mobility strategies with PRLMP, mainstreaming gender-responsive policies, developing a regional skills recognition system, supporting further remittance use and worker reintegration, enhancing regional cooperation and data systems, and strengthening partnership with destination countries for capacity-building. In particular too, is the need for enhanced cross-ministerial collaboration (labour, social welfare, education, foreign affairs), regional cooperation, and ongoing engagement with destination countries and employers.

C. Next Steps

10. Forum Trade Ministers commended the Technical Working Group on Labour Mobility for the significant progress in submitting the draft Principles, and directed the Forum Trade Officials through the TWG to finalise the principles and **support** out of session **endorsement** of the draft PRLMP by FTMM, with a view for timely submission of the principles to the 54th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in Honiara, Solomon Islands for consideration.

*Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
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20 July 2025*