



PACIFIC LABOUR SCHEME

The **Pacific Labour Scheme** (the Scheme) officially commenced on 1 July 2018. The Scheme, which was announced by then Prime Minister Turnbull at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting on 8 September 2017, is an exciting new chapter in Australia's engagement with Pacific island countries.

The Scheme enables citizens of select Pacific island countries (PICs) to take up low and semi-skilled work opportunities in rural and regional Australia for up to three years. Through these opportunities Pacific island workers will earn income and develop skills which will benefit their families and communities. The Pacific Labour Scheme will help fill labour gaps in Australia's towns and on our farms, boosting economic activity and competitiveness in rural and regional Australia. The Scheme:

- includes an initial cap of up to 2,000 workers in 2018-19;
- focuses on sectors with projected employment growth in Australia and which match Pacific island skill sets;
- is employer-sponsored and requires labour market testing to ensure Australians have priority for local jobs; and
- contains protections to safeguard against worker exploitation.

Workers from Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu can participate in the Scheme. Access will be extended to other PICs based on need, impact and progress on the PACER Plus regional trade agreement.

How does it work in practice?

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) will support programs that will connect Australian employers with Pacific workers and support the administration of the Scheme. From October 2018, a Pacific Labour Facility will provide these services.

Prospective employers can apply and be assessed and approved for participation in the Scheme by DFAT. Employers are also required to apply for 'Temporary Activities Sponsorship' approval by the Department of Home Affairs.

We will work with approved employers and sending countries to support the selection and recruitment of suitable Pacific island workers. Once workers have received employment offers, they are required to meet all relevant visa application requirements, including satisfying health and character checks. We will assist Pacific island workers with all relevant pre-departure and on-arrival requirements. This will include ongoing pastoral care and support services in Australia.

What industries and occupations does it cover?

The Scheme focuses on sectors and industries that generally match employment projections in Australia and Pacific skills sets:

- accommodation and food services industry (e.g. hospitality and tourism), where employment levels are projected to grow by around 100,000 for the five years to May 2022;
- health care and social assistance industry (e.g. aged care, disability care); where employment levels are projected to grow by around 250,000 for the five years to May 2022; and

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- non-seasonal agriculture, forestry and fishing industries where employer demand remains high but employment levels are projected to decrease by 2,400 workers or 2.4 per cent for the five years to May 2022.

It focuses on low and semi-skilled occupations, i.e. Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations levels 3 to 5, requiring Australian Qualifications Framework Certificate Levels 1 to 4 or relevant work experience. The Australia Pacific Training Coalition, an Australian Government initiative, will provide many participants with Australian-standard vocational qualifications that will prepare them for work in Australia.

How will the Australian Government protect Australian jobs?

The Scheme is consistent with recent changes to Australia's skilled and temporary migration programs.

In line with 'Australian job seeker first' approach, approved employers are required to advertise for workers in Australia with jobactive¹ providers (in their locality) to ensure that any jobs offered to Pacific workers cannot be filled by Australian job seekers.

The Scheme is open to all sectors and industries where there is a genuine shortage of Australian workers and is employer-demand driven where an employer has demonstrated they cannot fill positions from the Australian labour market.

After the initial cap of up to 2,000 workers in 2018-19, the Australian Government will set annual caps for the Scheme to mitigate against displacing Australian job seekers. The process will take into account relevant considerations including youth unemployment rates by region, industries and skill levels.

How will the Australian Government protect Pacific workers?

The Australian Government does not tolerate the exploitation of any workers, including foreign workers. All workers under the Scheme are protected by Australian workplace laws, in the same manner as Australian workers.

Employers are assessed and approved for participation in the Scheme by DFAT. Employers are also required to apply for a 'Temporary Activities Sponsorship' by the Department of Home Affairs and comply with the relevant sponsorship obligations, including monitoring by the Australian Border Force.

The Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) undertakes compliance, education and outreach activities with Scheme workers to ensure they and their employers are aware of their workplace rights and obligations.

Comprehensive pre-departure briefings and in-country support are provided to workers to ensure they are informed of work rights and protections. This information covers topics related to living and working in Australia, such as workplace laws, Australian culture, the role of the FWO, the role of unions, and taxation and superannuation arrangements.

Once in Australia, workers are encouraged to discuss any concerns they may have with their employer, DFAT's supporting programs or directly with the FWO. A dedicated 24/7 information and assistance hotline will be established and provided to the workers prior to their arrival in Australia.

Please direct any queries on the Scheme to PacificLabourMobility@dfat.gov.au

¹ For further information, please visit <https://www.jobs.gov.au/jobactive>

