

Pacific Workers and their Families Share their Stories

The Gains and Pains of Working Away from Home: The Case of Pacific Temporary Migrant Workers in Australia and New Zealand is a joint report by the Development Policy Centre at the Australian National University and the World Bank that documents rich findings from the first wave of the Pacific Labour Mobility Survey. Based on opinions and information reported by those directly involved in the schemes – the workers and their households shed light on the challenges and benefits of these schemes.



Number of people interviewed

2085

workers in the RSE and PALM schemes;

4,241 households accounting for around **25,600** household members in Kiribati, Tonga, and Vanuatu



Period of data collection

**November 2021 to
March 2023**

This is the first comprehensive, large-sample data collection exercise on Pacific labor mobility by an independent third party.

This new data updates earlier evidence, but also provides new evidence that can correct some misconceptions around labor mobility.

» Key Findings

- Overall, labor mobility schemes have brought net positive impacts, both economic and social, to Pacific workers, their households, and communities
- Most workers are very satisfied with their experience in host countries, and the schemes are widely perceived as beneficial by both participating and non-participating households
- Participants earn significantly more than what they would at home – between **three and four times for Tongan workers** and **up to nine to 10 times for ni-Vanuatu**. On average, close to **60 percent of their earnings** can be saved and sent home
- Participation generally strengthens family relationships, empowers women, and shifts gender-related norms. About four **in five surveyed workers report improvements in their relationships with their children**, and **two-thirds report improved marital relationships**

Yet several issues need to be addressed: worker dissatisfaction – often related to earnings not meeting expectations and untransparent salary deductions, workers' demand for portability and flexibility; and pressures on families associated with the absence of workers

This new data updates earlier evidence, but also provides new evidence that can correct some misconceptions around labor mobility.



What we learned

Tongan workers earn
3 to 4 times
what they would back home.

Ni-Vanuatu workers earn
9 to 10 times
what they would in Vanuatu.

4 out of 5
workers reported stronger
family relationships with
their children.



However workers also raised:

- » Wages may not meet expectations
- » Some unexpected salary deductions
- » A desire for more flexible employment
- » Family pressures from absence.

» What Recommendations Can We Draw From These Results?

Expand opportunities, especially to women and under-represented labor-sending countries

- Introduce a scheme in New Zealand that is equivalent to the Pacific Labour Scheme
- Remove/limit the specified work requirements for Working Holiday Maker visas in Australia
- Carefully monitor employer demand
- Diversify participation amongst labor-sending countries
- Encourage labor-sending countries to diversify migration opportunities beyond Australia and New Zealand

Boost worker welfare

- Address dissatisfaction with salary deductions
- Make it easier for workers to change employers
- Improve health insurance arrangements

» Strengthen the evidence base to inform investments in, and improve the design of, labor mobility schemes

- Regularly survey workers and employers
- Make de-identified data publicly available
- Establish a centralized worker contact database