



## INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE TO THE PRIORITIES OF PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES AND THE PACIFIC REGION

The [International Organisation for Migration \(IOM\)](#) is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. It does so by providing support to migrants across the world, developing effective responses to the shifting dynamics of migration and providing advice on migration policy and practice. As an intergovernmental organisation, IOM collaborates with governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental partners to improve the resilience of people on the move, particularly those in situations of vulnerability. It also works closely with governments to manage all forms of mobility, and their impacts. IOM has a strong presence in the Pacific region, which includes 12 member states and is guided by the [IOM Pacific Strategy \(2022 – 2026\)](#). IOM has a unique capacity to facilitate cooperation between stakeholders, prioritizing integrated operations and intervention that can be effectively scaled across countries.

IOM commends Australia's emphasis on consultation, considering evidence and diverse perspectives. IOM provides the following recommendations based on its global expertise, regional experience, and continuously developing evidence base relating to migration and human mobility. IOM recommends Australia to **continue harmonization and coordination efforts with the development partner community**, including New Zealand.

### Recommendations:



**Climate Change Adaptation:** Given the endorsement of the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility and the identification of this as a key priority for the region, support implementation at regional and national levels through enhanced climate investment and funding mechanisms that specifically address climate mobility.



**People-to-People Links and Partnerships:** Invest in skills partnerships, strong mobility governance, and reintegration to maximise local and community development outcomes.

IOM commends Australia's commitment and support to Pacific regionalism. IOM strongly values its relationships with Pacific regional organizations to deliver of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific, contributing to regional development, stability and safe, regular and orderly human mobility.

- **Pacific Islands Forum (PIF):** As the apex regional organization, the PIF is a key partner. The [Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility](#) was endorsed by Leaders at the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum guiding stakeholders to ensure rights based and people-centred movement in the context of climate change.<sup>1</sup> [IOM continues to support Pacific Island countries](#) in the participatory, inclusive, and transparent implementation of the framework.
- **Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC):** Provides a forum for fostering multilateral co-operation and assistance for Pacific immigration agencies aimed at strengthening members' territorial borders and the integrity of their entry systems. IOM has a longstanding relationship with the PIDC and is currently working with PIDC to strengthen information sharing in the Pacific.
- **Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA):** Established to support its members to effectively manage and utilise their offshore fishery resources. IOM is implementing programming with FFA, ILO and UNODC to strengthen labour standards on fishing vessels and address vulnerabilities to human trafficking on fishing vessels.
- **Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus:** An effective forum for discussion contributing to open and transparent labour migration policies, and wider regional relationships. IOM regularly collaborates with PACER Plus and co-funded the 2023 Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> including staying in place, planned relocation, migration, and displacement through a proactive, inclusive and collaborative regional approach that reflects common Pacific interests in a culturally appropriate manner, while respecting national sovereignty and diversity.



## Climate Change Adaptation

**Recommendation: Given the endorsement of the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility and its identification as a key priority for the region, support implementation at regional and national levels through sustained and enhanced climate investment and funding mechanisms that specifically address climate mobility.**

In November 2023, Pacific Islands Forum Member States endorsed the [Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility](#). The agreement marked a **commitment to proactively address the challenges associated with climate change and human mobility**, supporting the resilience of the Pacific region and its future generations. The endorsement of the Framework recognizes the desire of the Pacific people to continue to live in their own countries where possible and people's deep ancestral connections to land and sea. The Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility is designed to guide Pacific Islands Forum governments, communities, non-state actors and partners in ensuring rights based and people-centred movement in the context of climate change, to stay in place, planned relocation, migration, and displacement (as a last resort) through an inclusive and collaborative regional approach that reflects common Pacific interests in a culturally appropriate manner, while respecting national sovereignty and diversity. The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent recognises that climate change is the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security, and wellbeing of Pacific peoples.

Following its endorsement, it is important to ensure the **immediate and sustainable implementation of the Framework** at the **regional and national level**. This can be achieved through climate investment and funding mechanisms that support Pacific Governments to cooperate at the regional and sub-regional level to manage climate mobility through dialogue, increased coordination and peer-to-peer exchange on migration, displacement and planned relocation; assist Pacific Governments to develop and implement national policies to address climate mobility; as well as ensure that Pacific civil society actors, worker and employer organizations, and communities actively engage in national, regional and global processes. **Active engagement in the Pacific Resilience Partnership Technical Working Group on Human Mobility and the Joint Working Group on Climate Mobility** is also highly valued.

IOM recognises that Australia has taken important steps to respond to the priorities of Pacific Island countries and the Pacific region regarding climate change. Additionally, **the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty offers an exemplary and practical model for cooperation**. The treaty reflects the Government of Tuvalu's proactive stance towards planned, dignified, and voluntary migration for Tuvaluans due to the impacts of climate change. It also exemplifies the cooperation, leadership and collective resilience of Pacific countries.

**It is of critical importance to operationalize existing human mobility pathways and frameworks**, like the Falepili Union Treaty and the Pacific Regional Climate Mobility Framework to provide increased access to regular pathways for vulnerable populations. Continued acknowledgment should be provided to recognize the desire of Pacific people to stay in place. There should be **greater measures to support policy at the national level** that complements but also extends beyond traditional community-based disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation projects. Examples of this include the development and implementation of the Papua New Guinea Planned Relocation and National Internally Displaced Persons Policy, the Tonga National Spatial Planning and Management Act, the Solomon Islands Standard Operating Procedures on Planned Relocation and the Vanuatu Durable Solutions Guidelines including considerations of relocation.

Given the vulnerability of Pacific countries to climate change and natural hazards, **investment in projects that protect and sustain resilience should continue to be prioritized in harmonization with regional, national, and community level resilience approaches**. Disaster risk reduction and emergency response programming that supports institutional and local capacities should be prioritized. Examples of this include IOM's emergency response activities, including surge support to Governments, such as the Government of Tonga in early 2022 and the Government of Vanuatu in 2023. Additionally, IOM is working closely with governments in the region on innovative pilot projects which aim to strengthen understanding of future risks of climate induced displacement as well as new programmes and measures which catalyse local action to avert, minimise or address climate displacement. IOM is also investing in more climate resilient infrastructure such as building Evacuation Centres and implementing measures to support local capacity to improve the overall management and coordination of Evacuation Centres.

Continued prioritization should be given to capacitating existing national coordination mechanisms in emergencies, such as national cluster coordination systems. Support to Pacific Governments, who are primarily responsible for providing humanitarian assistance to people under their jurisdiction, requires special consideration of the specific needs of the country and the context. This is particularly important when it comes to coordination and information sharing to address gaps and increase the effectiveness of humanitarian response including in the distribution of humanitarian assistance after disasters. Furthermore, **drawing upon social and cultural networks and knowledge to inform culturally appropriate options** should be at the forefront of programming. For example, Vanuatu's exploration of the use of traditional knowledge and social and cultural systems in displacement management.



## People-to-People Links and Partnerships

**Recommendation: Invest in skills partnerships, strong mobility governance and reintegration to maximise local and community development outcomes.**

To harness labour mobility not only to address labour shortages but to bridge cross-regional skills gaps, IOM has developed a global approach to skills development and labour mobility – captured in the model of [Skills Mobility Partnerships \(SMPs\)](#). Strategic investment in SMPs can be transformational, aiming to share the benefits of skills development and skills-based mobility between all parties and can contribute to development outcomes. This is achieved in one way, through a **whole-of-government and whole of-society approach**, that involves all parties in the SMP design and implementation process. Pacific stakeholders regularly report concerns regarding labour mobility schemes resulting in brain drain to small island countries. SMPs aim to not only **limit the brain drain** effect of labour migration on countries of origin, but to **contribute actively to their socioeconomic development** through skills development in priority sectors for the countries involved. SMPs also aim to bring benefit to migrant workers themselves, by providing them with opportunities to reskill and upskill, presenting them with employment opportunities to match their skill level, and encouraging better cost-sharing between all parties to mitigate large costs being borne by migrants themselves.

In helping to develop and strengthen partnerships on migration, **IOM provides substantive, expert and organizational assistance to governments and other institutions**. SMPs promote a skills-focused approach to labour mobility that is grounded in labour market and skills data and centred around skills development, recognition and matching to the benefit of labour markets, employers, communities and migrants. Globally, the governance of skilled migration has not always protected the interests of all parties involved in an equitable manner, that is, destination and origin country governments, migrants themselves, the private sector, training institutions and communities.

The Australian government should invest in **pre-departure** initiatives to ensure transformational outcomes, thus benefitting cross-national social stability and relationships for a more resilient future. Quality pre-departure training also provides critical protection purposes. Training can promote understanding of Australia's laws, expectations, and support systems relating to family violence, workplace exploitation, and public health and hygiene. It can promote greater inclusion and gender equality by improving opportunities for traditionally excluded people to take up important roles in income generation or household financial management. This has been implemented in the [Famili I Redi](#) initiative in the Pacific, which should be further expanded.

Within the Pacific region it is crucial to appreciate the **circular nature of labour migration**, with many migrants returning to mobility pathways on multiple occasions. Programmes and services aimed at **reintegration** in the Pacific should clearly recognize the circular nature of labour mobility and should approach pre-departure and reintegration less as discrete phases, but as **opportunities to consolidate targeted learning and support over longer periods of time**. In the Pacific, reintegration is increasingly understood to include not only the migrants themselves, but also their families, their communities, and the broader social, economic, and governance environment. The reintegration service environment in some Pacific countries is poorly resourced. Investment in reintegration throughout all phases of the

migration cycle provides an opportunity to strengthen migrants' ability to leverage gains more effectively and in a more iterative way. IOM's integrated approach to reintegration includes key considerations outlined in the [IOM Reintegration Handbook - Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance](#).

**Enhancing relevant skills and educational partnerships between Australia and Pacific Island countries** can contribute to **economic and social development outcomes for all**. The Australian government should strengthen partnerships in industries, jobs and skills that are relevant for both Australia and the Pacific, promoting genuine community development, social cohesion and capacity building for partners in the region.

**Immigration and border management** is of critical important to Australia and the Pacific. Ensuring well-managed and secure borders is priority for many Pacific governments. Examples of this include the recent Migration Information Data Analysis System (MIDAS) and E-Visa Launch in Vanuatu. Partnerships to build government capacity to collect, analyse and use migration data to improve the policy, legislation, operational systems, human resources and administrative and technical structures should be explored further. The Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC) also constitutes an essential regional body to ensure a cohesive regional approach, ownership of interventions and sustainability of multi-country programme results.

Support to Pacific Island countries to **strengthen mechanisms to prevent and combat trafficking in persons** need to be prioritized. According to the U.S. Department of State TIP Report, 2024, FSM, Palau, Tonga have been classified as Tier 2, while RMI, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu are on the Tier 2 Watchlist, and PNG on Tier 3. In recent years, Pacific Island governments have taken important steps to improve efforts and capacity to respond to human trafficking. Examples of this include IOM's support to develop the National Action Plan on Countering Trafficking in Vanuatu, and Tonga, Standard Operating Procedures and National Referral Mechanism Identification and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking in Persons in Fiji, and conduct TIP Country Capacity Assessments in FSM, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. However, additional resources are required to support Pacific Island countries to identify victims of trafficking, investigating trafficking cases, prosecute traffickers, and protect and reintegrate victims.