

# PACIFIC LABOUR MOBILITY ANNUAL MEETING

7-9 October | Auckland

## OUTCOME STATEMENT

1. The Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting 2019 was held 7-9 October in Auckland. Under the theme of *He Waka Eke Noa: A canoe we are all in together*, PACER Plus Signatories, observers, industry and civil society representatives, and relevant stakeholders came together to discuss the opportunities, challenges and actions on Pacific labour mobility.

2. **Participants noted** the progress of stakeholders over the last 12 months and identified areas for future priority focus and action.

### ***Creating Intraregional Labour Mobility: Pillars for Sustainability***

3. Visions for circular mobility and intra-regional mobility were heard. These included a call for a greater focus on the 'person' not just the 'labour'. Participants were reminded to consider the experience of the worker, their family and community, and that this experience should be at the centre of labour mobility policy. **Participants acknowledged** the importance of the research currently underway on the social impact of labour mobility. A Pacific Skills Visa was also proposed as a means to encourage greater circular migration in the Pacific. It was reiterated that any new institutional frameworks to support regional labour mobility should build on existing commitments, and be based on a clear understanding of the current regulatory environment.

4. **New Zealand and Australia agreed** to engage with labour sending countries to identify potential sectors and share information to inform future consideration of this topic at future meetings.

### ***Reducing Barriers: Skills and Qualifications***

5. The positive work on skills and qualifications recognition in labour mobility was noted. **Participants recognised** the need to improve their national training institutes to meet the requirements of labour receiving countries. It was also acknowledged that governments should be more connected on skills development and support the recognition of each others' qualifications. The importance of institutional strengthening and the sustainability of processes and systems were also highlighted.

6. Acknowledging past lessons; **Participants recognised** that collaboration between governments, training institutes and industry partners was necessary to achieve improved skills and qualification recognition, and agreed that this should be a focus of attention in the year ahead, with a particular focus on new sectors.

### ***Reducing Barriers: Inclusive Labour Mobility***

7. **Participants recognised** that there are shared challenges to participation in labour mobility schemes. Challenges relating to English language requirements, specific role requirements and recruitment processes were specially noted. Greater qualification recognition, further training, and improved inclusivity of the recruitment processes would unlock increased labour mobility opportunities for all workers, in particular women and persons with disabilities.

8. It was further recognised that specific barriers for women, older peoples and persons with disabilities' participation in labour mobility persisted. **Participants agreed** that this was an important issue on which to make progress.

9. **Participants agreed** that there should be a priority focus on addressing barriers for women's participation in labour mobility schemes. **Participants agreed** to develop a coordinated regional approach to gender inclusivity in labour mobility that took into consideration existing national strategies.

10. **Participants also agreed** to do further work on addressing barriers to inclusive participation including for persons with disabilities and older persons, in collaboration with industry.

### ***Maximising Impact of Labour Mobility: Remittances, Superannuation and Reintegration***

11. It was noted that maximising the impacts of labour mobility, through superannuation and remittances, required cooperation from all stakeholders including industry. There were concerns registered that workers' take home incomes were decreasing due to rising costs, deductions and lack of progression in remuneration. It was also recognised that there were efforts under way to improve the safety and reduce the cost of sending remittances across the Pacific, and more work was required to enable Pacific workers to make contributions to their own superannuation funds and to encourage employers to also contribute.

12. **Participants acknowledged** concerns that workers' incomes were decreasing due to rising accommodation costs, deductions and lack of progression in remuneration.

13. **Participants welcomed** the efforts of key partners to improve the safety and reduce the cost of sending remittances across the Pacific. **Participants also welcomed** the work underway to explore mechanisms to enable Pacific workers to make contributions to their own superannuation funds and/or timely return of contributions to workers or national funds.

14. **Participants agreed** coordination and collective action with PACER Plus signatory governments, New Zealand and Australian industry, Pacific National Provident Funds, and banks were needed to provide a clear pathway for Pacific workers to make contributions to national superannuation schemes.

### ***Labour Mobility Secretariat***

15. The Labour Mobility Governance Working Group reported back on the work done to consider the scope and options for a Labour Mobility Secretariat. The Working Group considered three primary options for a Secretariat:

- A standalone Secretariat;
- As part of the PACER Plus Implementation Unit;
- Housed in the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

16. **Participants expressed** a range of views on the three options scoped and did not converge on one option. Participants acknowledged that resourcing would need to be considered. **Participants also noted** that PLMAM and any Labour Mobility Secretariat are not within the scope of the AU\$ 25.5 million PACER Plus Development Cooperation Commitment allocation, and specific labour mobility resourcing would need to be new and additional, or reprioritised and repurposed.

17. **Participants agreed** that a further six months should be allocated to the working group to refine this work and propose a preferred option for signatories' consideration. Further information was required on the cost implications of the three options discussed to inform this work so that countries had a clear sense of the resourcing requirements.

18. **Participants noted** the relationship between this work and the ongoing PACER Plus Implementation Unit design process by PACER Plus Signatories, as well as decisions due to be made at the forthcoming Forum Trade Ministers Meeting (18-20 February 2020). New Zealand (as Chair) will report back on the PLMAM Outcomes as they relate to the Labour Mobility Secretariat at the PACER Plus Signatories meeting in Port Vila in 29-30 October, as well as reaching out to those yet to sign.

### ***Workers welfare and working conditions***

19. There were a wide range of issues raised relating to contract arrangements and the roles and responsibilities in ensuring that workers' welfare and working conditions, including remuneration, were adequately safeguarded and understood.

20. **Participants agreed** that this package of issues was a key priority focus for the year ahead with respect to New Zealand and Australia's domestic policy settings. Labour sending countries submitted a list of issues requiring priority consideration by New Zealand and Australia (Annex 1), which New Zealand and Australia undertook to work through. It was also agreed that a more formal mechanism for registering concerns and issues with industry representatives was needed. A formal report back from this PLMAM meeting to industry conferences in New Zealand and Australia was agreed as a first step have such concerns heard and addressed.

21. **Participants agreed** mechanisms for feedback on developing policy in labour receiving countries need to be based on principles of partnership and transparency.

***PLMAM 2020***

22. **Participants agreed** that next PLMAM will be held in Samoa with intersessional arrangements to be determined.