

How to access workers through the PALM scheme

Why choose the PALM scheme?

Recruiting Pacific and Timor-Leste workers through the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme (PALM) scheme may be a good solution if you can't find enough local labour.

There are currently 21,300 PALM scheme workers in Australia. It is an uncapped, demand-driven program available to fill workforce shortages in any sector. There are PALM workers in all states and territories in many sectors, including agriculture, meat processing, care/aged care, hospitality, tourism and light manufacturing. Market testing is required to ensure Australian workers are not available and to protect Australian jobs.

PALM employers have reported that Pacific and Timorese workers are reliable, hardworking, kind and professional. An [ABARE survey](#) found the productivity of PALM seasonal workers was, on average 20 per cent higher than that of working holiday makers in the horticulture industry. Many workers participate in local sporting, church and community activities and often return for multiple seasons. Many workers send a portion of the money they earn home to support their families and communities in the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

The PALM visa is a sponsored visa and requires employers to join the program. Should you want to recruit Pacific or Timor-Leste workers you will not be alone. The Australian Government provides support throughout the recruitment, employment and repatriation stages, guiding you through each step along the way.

There are 52,000 Pacific and Timor-Leste workers who have applied to work under the scheme and who have been vetted by Government Labour Sending Units (LSUs) in each participating country. These workers will be drawn on once approved employers (AE) submit recruitment plans. It is mandatory under the program to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

What are the major costs and responsibilities?

Workers are paid in line with Australian workplace relations laws. Accommodation is paid for by workers but organised by employers, but it must meet agreed standards. Some pre-departure costs incurred by employers may be deducted from worker salaries (with worker's written agreement). Employers must provide pastoral care and retain a duty of care for their workers.

*3 years available up to 3 April, 4-year visa available from 4 April.

What is the PALM scheme?

The PALM scheme allows eligible employers in regional and rural areas to recruit workers from nine Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste when there are not enough Australian workers available. Businesses can access two streams of workers:

- **Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP)** for jobs up to 9 months in the horticulture and accommodation sectors (the same workers can return annually under a 4*-year multi-entry visa) -
- **Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS)** for low-skilled or semi-skilled roles between 1 and 4* years in regional Australia in any industry where labour shortages are demonstrated.

DFAT connects Australian employers with PALM workers through the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF), which supports the administration of the PALM scheme.

How do I recruit PALM workers?

Australian businesses can recruit workers directly once they have become an AE. To become an AE, your business must meet [eligibility criteria](#), including evidence that you have been unable to recruit Australian workers (labour market testing), a history of compliance with Australian workplace laws, and proven financial stability. Non-agricultural businesses (such as accommodation) are restricted to rural and regional postcodes. An AE will also need to become a temporary activity sponsor through the Department of Home Affairs to be able to bring workers to Australia. It takes around eight weeks for AE applications to be assessed.

All employers will need to sign up to either or both the SWP or PLS deed. The deed for the SWP is available [here](#) and the PLS is available [here](#). A new PALM scheme deed is expected to take effect from mid-2022.

Click [here](#) to start the process. You will be supported by the PALM scheme (enquiries@pacificlabourfacility.com.au) throughout the entire process.

Other options to recruit PALM Workers

Alternatively, if you require workers more quickly or do not wish to become an AE there are labour hire companies across Australia that are registered as AEs that can be contacted to recruit PALM scheme workers on your behalf. While labour hire companies tend to focus on recruiting larger cohorts they may be able to assist with your recruitment. You will need to negotiate the relevant payment arrangements with the relevant labour hire company.

Click [here](#) for a full list of PALM employers, including [labour hire companies](#).

How long does it take for workers to arrive once I am an approved employer?

Recruitment and mobilisation activities commence after you become an Approved Employer. Similar to employment practices for Australian workers that are moving for work, processes can take 5 to 8 weeks, so we encourage you to start as soon as possible. Key steps are:

- Employer submits recruitment request expressing interest in recruiting Pacific and Timorese workers for endorsement by the Labour Sending Unit (LSU).
- Employer submits recruitment plan to the PLF (outlines how many workers, country preferences, skill requirements, accommodation). We will process within 2 weeks**.
- LSUs identify workers with correct skills and offer opportunities to workers.
- Employers send Letters of Offer/contracts to workers: it is mandatory that employment contracts are signed offshore before the worker arrives. LSUs assist workers to understand in language and sign contracts in English.
- Workers undertake police and health checks to meet visa requirements. Visa applications are then submitted to Australia's Department of Home Affairs.
- Visa applications are assessed and issued by the Department of Home Affairs (who may request more information).
- LSUs provided workers with pre-departure briefings (2 to 3 days) to educate workers on program requirements, Australian workplaces laws, workers' rights, Australian culture and life.
- Workers arrive in Australia by commercial or charter flight (often used for large groups). Workers undertake briefing program on arrival.

**Service charter applies when all information requested is required.