

FAQs Budget 2023-24: Expanding and improving the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme

General

What reforms are being announced at Budget 2023-24 for the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme?

On 9 May, the Australian Government delivered the 2023-24 Federal Budget. The Budget further expands and improves the PALM scheme in line with Australian, Pacific and Timor-Leste aspirations.

The Australian Government Budget will:

1. Strengthen oversight of the PALM scheme by:
 - a. bringing domestic delivery of the scheme into the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR).
 - b. providing extra resourcing to the Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO), the Department of Home Affairs and the Australian Border Force (ABF) to preserve the scheme's integrity as it grows.
 - c. supporting additional country liaison officers (CLOs) so that workers have the culturally appropriate support they need as worker numbers increase.
2. Responsibly grow and better support employers and participating countries by:
 - a. providing additional resources to DEWR to increase the Government's PALM scheme regional footprint to better support PALM scheme employers across Australia, including small growers.
 - b. increasing resources for participating countries to mobilise more workers to ensure countries with aspirations to grow their participation in the scheme can do so.
3. Support more than 1,000 PALM scheme workers to attain formal qualifications over 4 years in priority sectors for growth in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, where there are worker shortages in Australia.
4. Increase support to make it easier for PALM scheme workers to access their superannuation savings when they return home.
5. Provide access to Medicare for an initial 200 families who will participate in the PALM scheme family accompaniment pilot.

1. Strengthening oversight of domestic operations as part of improved support for PALM scheme workers

How does insourcing strengthen the PALM scheme?

This investment will support the consolidation of the PALM scheme's domestic operations delivered by DEWR. This will enable DEWR to enhance the checks and balances required to ensure PALM scheme workers are protected, fulfilling the Government's commitment to stamp out migrant worker exploitation.

The Government's investment in insourcing recognises the Australian Public Service as a trusted, efficient and effective partner to deliver the scheme's domestic operations and ensures that the PALM scheme is funded as a sustainable, ongoing program.

Placing the entire suite of domestic operational PALM scheme services into the broader Employment Workplace and Relations Portfolio ensures direct lines of communication between DEWR, PALM scheme employers and workers, unions and the FWO, allowing for a more timely and efficient resolution of worker issues.

We recognise that the majority of employers engage with the scheme responsibly. By improving oversight and monitoring by Government, we can proactively identify non-compliance and protect the interests of good employers as well as workers.

What are country liaison officers (CLOs) and what do they do?

CLOs are participating-country representatives based in Australia. They provide a culturally safe avenue for workers to raise concerns related to their deployment in their own language and play a critical role in strengthening relationships between workers and employers. They work closely with workers and employers to resolve issues in the workplace.

Why does the PALM scheme need more CLOs?

CLOs complement the education, awareness, and compliance functions administered by the FWO, ABF and DEWR in support of the PALM scheme. They are part of the strengthened support measures established in partnership with participating countries to ensure workers have a positive experience in Australia.

As the scheme grows, participating countries need to increase the number of CLOs to meet the demand for support from a larger worker cohort. This investment will ensure that the Pacific and Timor-Leste are properly resourced to manage their engagement with the PALM scheme in Australia.

Which countries have CLOs?

Not all countries have CLOs, but you can find all current CLO contact details on the PALM scheme website contact page (<https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/contact>). Currently, the Australian Government funds CLOs for Kiribati, Vanuatu, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste

and Tonga. We are working closely with the remaining PALM scheme countries to ensure all are supported by CLOs.

Is this the only welfare support available to workers?

No. There are a broad range of measures in place to support workers.

- All PALM scheme workers have the same workplace rights and protections as Australian workers.
- Additional requirements are also imposed on employers as a condition of their participation in the scheme, including welfare support, accommodation standards and providing sufficient hours of work.
- Employers are responsible for worker support and are the first point of contact when issues arise, but there is also a 24/7 worker support line so that workers can raise concerns if they don't feel comfortable discussing them with their employer.
- Community Connections provides a range of pastoral support to PALM scheme workers and helps to build stronger relationships between workers and their local communities.

To find out more, please visit the Worker support page (<https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/worker-support>) on the PALM scheme website.

2. Better assist PALM scheme employers and participating countries

How will the PALM scheme support small growers to participate in the scheme?

A strengthened PALM scheme regional footprint will enable greater collaboration with local organisations, support PALM scheme employer capacity building, provide better support to workers and enable localised PALM scheme representation. It will also enable the PALM scheme to better support employers, including small growers.

3. Delivering a skills dividend for workers and employers

Which sectors will formal training be available to?

Formal training opportunities will be available in priority sectors for growth in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, where there are demonstrated worker shortages in Australia. Sectors will be determined in partnership with stakeholder groups including participating countries, worker advocates (including unions) and approved employers and industry groups. This will ensure a brain gain to the Pacific and Timor-Leste while meeting workforce needs in Australia.

Is this initiative part of the skills development program (SDP)?

No. The skills development program is focused on providing PALM scheme workers with access to training while they are in Australia. It can provide job-related skills up to certificate-level qualifications through to relevant employability and life skills such as English language and health and wellbeing skills.

Formal skills training places will be rolled out in priority sectors of growth in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, and where there are demonstrated labour shortages in Australia. They will build upon current skills development activities in the PALM scheme, especially aged care pilots.

How do workers and employers apply for the formal skills training opportunities?

The Australian Government will provide further details in due course.

What types of skills are considered ‘formal’?

Formal qualifications include Certificate I, II and III training in relevant areas.

4. Improving access to superannuation savings

How will workers be supported to access their superannuation savings?

Additional resources for the Australian Tax Office (ATO) will fund worker outreach clinics and employ additional tax agents to support workers to prepare their Departing Australia Superannuation Payment (DASP) applications. The mobile tax clinics will visit PALM scheme workers across Australia and complement virtual assistance to support PALM scheme workers to make it easier to lodge their DASP claim when they return home.

Why do workers need help with accessing superannuation?

The PALM scheme enables workers to earn income and contribute to the economies of their countries. This income includes savings made under Australia’s mandatory superannuation system. However, workers are only able to access these savings once they have returned home and their visa has ended.

The process for submitting a DASP application can be challenging for some workers so the Australian Government is providing additional support to assist workers to prepare their DASP applications for submission when they return home.

Is this the same as early access to superannuation?

No. Workers are only able to access these savings once they have returned home, are no longer participating in the PALM scheme, and their Australian visa has expired or been cancelled.

5. Medicare access for workers with families

Will all PALM scheme workers have access to Medicare?

Access to Medicare will only be provided for the 200 workers and their families participating in the Government's family accompaniment pilot. Medicare access will support families to receive the health care they need during their time in Australia.

Family members will be required to demonstrate that they are either a spouse or de facto partner of the PALM scheme visa holder, or a dependent child. A dependent child must be the biological child, stepchild or adopted child of the PALM scheme worker.

For further information on family accompaniment, please go to the Family accompaniment factsheet (<https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/resources/family-accompaniment-faqs>) on the PALM scheme website.