

Family accompaniment pilot - frequently asked questions

19 December 2023

General

What is the family accompaniment pilot?

The Australian Government has committed to allowing PALM scheme workers on long-term placements of between one and four years to bring their families to Australia, with the agreement of their employer.

This policy will commence with a cohort of 200 workers and their families and aims to address the social impacts of long periods of family separation and build deeper connections with the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

Timeline

When will the family accompaniment pilot start?

The first round is open to workers from Kiribati and Timor-Leste and applications will be open from 26 January to 23 February 2024. The start has been delayed to ensure all legislative and administrative arrangements are in place before families arrive in Australia.

What is the timeline for the pilot?

There will be two selection processes to select the 200 workers and families.

Anticipated timeline for first selection process:

- 26 January 2024 - 23 February: Applications open.
- Late February - mid-March: Selection process.
- Mid-March: Applicants notified of outcome.
- Late March - April: Visa application and processing.
- Early May: Pre-Departure briefings delivered in country to participating families.
- Mid-May: first families arrive in Australia.

Preparation

What should PALM scheme workers and their families consider before applying to participate in the family accompaniment pilot?

Before you decide to apply to bring your family to Australia, there are some things you might like to consider.

- There will be costs associated with moving to Australia including passports, visas, travel expenses, health checks, setting up a home and sourcing stationery, laptops and uniforms for children attending school.
- It is expensive to live in many parts of Australia, so families should think about whether they have enough income to support a family in Australia.

The cost-of-living tool available at <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/cost-of-living-tool> can give you an indication of whether you and your family are likely to have enough money to live comfortably in Australia.

- It can be difficult for families to find suitable and affordable accommodation in many parts of Australia right now, so this may limit opportunities for some families seeking to join PALM scheme workers.
- Opportunities for partners and dependents to work in Australia will depend on job vacancy rates where you live, English language and skills requirements (where relevant). In some cases, PALM scheme Approved Employers may have work to offer a spouse or dependent, while in other locations, there may be few job opportunities.

Where can I find out more about what living in Australia will be like?

To be eligible to apply, the PALM scheme worker will have to have been living in Australia for 12 months when you arrive. He/she will be a good source of information about life in Australia.

You can also talk to returned PALM scheme workers in your community to find out what their experience in Australia was like.

The MyAus app, available to download for free from the Apple AppStore or from Google Play contains lots of information about living in Australia.

How do we prepare you for working and living in Australia?

Families selected to participate in the Family Accompaniment pilot will have to attend a Pre-Departure briefing in your home country before leaving for Australia.

This briefing, similar to the one the PALM scheme worker undertook before deploying to Australia, will help prepare you and your family. It will give you all the information you will require to settle into your new community, and to access the services you need.

The MyAus app, available to download for free from the Apple AppStore or from Google Play contains lots of information about living in Australia.

Application and selection process

How does the application process work?

The PALM scheme worker and Approved Employer will each need to complete a form. This form will request details of family members, provide additional information to workers about the parameters of the pilot, and for Approved Employers, will request detail on essential and community services in the area.

Applications will be checked to make sure that worker, families, and Approved Employers meet the eligibility criteria.

Applications will be checked against a range of factors that are considered likely to lead to a positive experience for families in Australia. These will include;

- Whether the location where families will be living has reasonable access to critical services such as childcare, schooling, doctors and hospital and public transport.
- Whether the location where families will be living has a reasonable level of available and affordable suitable housing.
- To facilitate the provision of support to families, consideration will be given to trying to group families geographically.
- Any worker that has caused critical incidents - particularly those involving violence - will be excluded.
- Whether the location where the families will be living has existing an existing Pasifika community and/or community support networks.
- Any family whose salary, industry, location and family size means they are unlikely to have enough money to live comfortably in Australia will be excluded.

The Australian Government will select participants for the pilot. Successful applicants, Approved Employers and home Governments will be notified of the outcome. Unsuccessful applicants will also be notified.

Who decides what families can come to Australia? Who can help me get selected?

The Australian Government will be selecting the families to participate in the family accompaniment pilot.

There are no individuals or agencies that can help you or your family get selected. Anyone who says they can are trying to scam you.

What is the selection process?

1. Application

Applications can be submitted via the [Family accompaniment employers page](#) via the PALM website from 26 January - 23 February 2024. Workers will need to provide a signed worker application form to their employer.

Employers then submit one application and will need to attach all worker application form(s).

2. Assessment against eligibility criteria

All applications will be assessed against the eligibility criteria. Meeting the eligibility criteria does not guarantee selection for the pilot as there are limited places available.

3. Assessment against selection criteria

All eligible applications will be considered against the selection criteria.

The selection criteria may include:

- access to services such as schools, medical facilities and childcare
- availability and affordability of accommodation in the location
- grouping/clustering families to better facilitate support networks
- excluding workers found to have been responsible for a critical incident
- cost of living analysis
- consideration of employer performance in the PALM scheme
- the location has access to community and diaspora support networks
- achieving representation of workers from all participating countries and a mix of industries in the pilot.

4. Approval Worker application form

Employers and workers selected to participate in the pilot will be notified by email in late March 2024.

Applicants that have not been selected will also be notified.

5. Visa process

Selected workers and families will need to provide necessary visa documentation to Employers.

Employers will submit the necessary visa applications on behalf of family members. The worker will be responsible for paying for the cost of the visa(s).

Can I apply for the pilot if I have had a child while in Australia?

If you meet the eligibility criteria, you can apply for the family accompaniment pilot. If your application is successful, eligible family members currently resident in your home country will be able to join you in Australia. A child currently a resident in Australia will not meet the visa requirements and will not be eligible for the benefits provided under the family accompaniment pilot.

Can I bring my parents to Australia under the family accompaniment pilot?

No. Only immediate family members will be able to travel to Australia.

Immediate family being defined as:

Wife/husband

An individual lawfully married to another individual.

De facto partner

A de facto relationship is one where you and your partner are not legally married to each other but:

- you are committed to a shared life excluding all others
- your relationship is genuine and continuing
- you live together or do not live separately and apart on a permanent basis
- you are not related by family.

Dependent children

To be eligible, the child must:

- be a child or a stepchild from a current or previous relationship
- not be married, engaged to be married, or have a de facto partner
- be under 18 years of age; or
 - over 18 but under 23 and be dependent on the PALM scheme worker or partner. A child is considered dependent if wholly or substantially reliant on the PALM scheme worker or partner for their basic needs; or
 - over 23 but unable to earn a living to support themselves due to physical or cognitive limitations and be dependent on the PALM scheme worker or partner. The child will need to meet Australia's visa health requirements;

or be a child of a dependent child.

If my employer does not support me bringing my family to Australia, can I move to a new employer?

No. Worker redeployment will not be possible under the family accompaniment pilot.

If my employer is not eligible to participate in family accompaniment, can I move to a new employer?

No. Worker redeployment will not be possible under the family accompaniment pilot.

If I am not selected to participate in the pilot can I apply again?

If you, your family, and your employer meet the eligibility criteria for the family accompaniment pilot but are not selected in the first round of applications, you will be able to re-apply for the second round.

I am not from Kiribati or Timor-Leste. Can I apply?

For the first selection process of the pilot, only nationals of Kiribati and Timor-Leste are eligible to apply.

I am a long-term worker on a 1 year contract, am I eligible?

No. To be eligible you need to have at least 18 months remaining on your current contract to apply.

Government services and benefits

What benefits will I receive if I am selected to participate in the family accompaniment pilot?

The family accompaniment pilot has been designed to ensure that the families participating are well supported as they adapt to life in Australia.

- Partners (wife, husband, de facto) will be able to work and study in Australia.
- Children will be able to attend public schools and will not be required to pay international student fees.
- Eligible families may be able to access family assistance benefits, namely the Family Tax Benefit and the Child Care Subsidy.
 - The Family Tax Benefit is a payment made to eligible families to assist with the cost of raising children.
 - The Child Care Subsidy is financial assistance to help cover the cost of formal childcare fees. It is paid directly to approved childcare services.
- The Australian Government will provide access to Medicare for workers and families participating in the family accompaniment pilot. Medicare access will support families to receive the health care they need during their time in Australia.

Costs

How much does it cost to apply for the family accompaniment pilot?

Applying for the family accompaniment pilot is free.

If the PALM scheme worker, his/her family, and his/her Approved Employer meet all the eligibility criteria, and the Approved Employer agrees to support the application, the Approved Employer will apply on behalf of the worker and family. There is no cost for applying.

If your family is chosen to participate, the PALM scheme worker and family will need to pay all costs of moving the family to Australia. This includes flights, visas, police and health checks, and for accommodation in Australia.

The cost-of-living tool available <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/cost-of-living-tool> can give you an indication of how much money you will need to participate in the pilot.

What visa will I be on as part of the family accompaniment pilot? How much will it cost?

Participating family members will be on a Temporary Work (International Relations) visa (subclass 403) secondary applicant visa, linked to the visa of the PALM scheme worker. Family member visas will be valid until the expiration of the PALM scheme worker's visa.

Family visas will cost A\$335 for adults and A\$80 for children. The PALM scheme worker will need to pay the cost of all family visas to the Approved Employer when the Approved Employer applies for the visas.

How much will it cost to travel to Australia?

If your family is chosen to participate, the PALM scheme worker and family will need to pay all costs of moving the family to Australia. This includes passport, flights, visas, police and health checks, and for accommodation in Australia.

On average, it will cost around A\$2,600 (US\$1,650) to bring one family member to Australia, but the exact amount will depend on airfare costs between your country and Australia.

You will need to pay all costs of moving your family to Australia, and to return home at the end of your visa. Deductions from a PALM scheme worker's salary cannot be used to pay for the cost of participating in the family accompaniment pilot.

The cost-of-living tool available <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/cost-of-living-tool> can give you an indication of how much money you will need to participate in the pilot, and how much money you will need to save while in Australia to cover the costs of returning home at the end of your visa.

Can I pay the costs of bringing my family to Australia through Approved Employer deductions?

No. You will need to have saved money to cover the costs moving your family to Australia, and to return home at the end of your visa. Deductions from a PALM scheme worker's salary cannot be used to pay for the cost of participating in the Family Accompaniment pilot.

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The cost-of-living tool available <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/cost-of-living-tool> can give you an indication of how much money you will need to participate in the pilot, and how much money you will need to save while in Australia to cover the costs of returning home at the end of your visa.

Childcare and education

How do I enrol my children in school in Australia?

If you are selected to participate in the family accompaniment pilot, a Family Liaison Officer will be available help you settle into your new town and access the services you need. They will be able to help you enrol your children in the local school.

To enrol your children, you will normally need:

- Your visa
- Proof of your child's date of birth
- Any records from their previous education
- Immunisation records
- Proof of your address in Australia

There is lots of information about enrolling children in school in Australia available on the MyAus app, which you can download for free from the Apple AppStore or from Google Play.