

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

The 2023-24 Budget further expands and improves the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme in line with Australian and Pacific aspirations.

The PALM scheme currently provides jobs to more than 30,000 Pacific and Timor-Leste workers (as at 31 March 2024). The 2023-24 budget will expand the scheme responsibly so that it can continue to meet unskilled, low-skilled and semi-skilled labour shortages, especially in regional Australia.

The Government will strengthen its oversight of the PALM scheme by bringing domestic delivery of the scheme into the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). This will enhance conditions and better protect and support workers to improve their experience in Australia, increase the scheme's regional footprint and ensure sufficient support for smaller growers. It recognises that the Australian Public Service is a trusted, efficient and effective partner to deliver the scheme's domestic operations.

For the first time, the Government will fund the scheme on a sustainable basis. This will ensure that agencies responsible for the scheme's domestic operations - DEWR, the Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO), the Department of Home Affairs and the Australian Border Force (ABF) - have the resources they need to effectively manage the scheme's integrity as it grows.

The number of country liaison officers (CLOs) - representatives of Pacific and Timor-Leste Governments who support the welfare of workers while in Australia - will also grow with worker numbers.

The Government is committed to strengthening the scheme so that it delivers for employers and workers and their families and communities. To this end, the Government will increase resources for participating countries to mobilise more workers, embed skills development by providing additional training places for PALM scheme workers and increase support to make it easier for PALM scheme workers to access their superannuation savings when they return home.

The Government will also provide access to Medicare for an initial 200 families who will participate in the PALM scheme family accompaniment pilot, alongside the Child Care Subsidy and Family Tax Benefit B (announced in October 2022).

Broader reforms to Australia's migration program will complement the Government's efforts to increase the number of PALM scheme workers in Australia and ensure the primacy of our relationship with the Pacific and Timor-Leste family is preserved.

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

Strengthening domestic operations to better protect and support workers

The Australian Government will provide an additional \$168.1 million over 4 years to consolidate and insource domestic operations to DEWR. The FWO and ABF will also be funded to ensure they can deploy resources and act in a timely manner against unscrupulous operators, who breach the Fair Work and Migration Acts respectively.

This reflects the Government's 'zero tolerance' stance on worker mistreatment and will increase protections to improve the experience of workers in Australia.

Funding for additional country liaison officers

CLOs are participating-country representatives based in Australia. They provide an avenue for workers to raise concerns related to their deployment, in their own language and play a critical role in helping workers and employers resolve issues in the workplace before they escalate.

Funding for additional CLOs will support more workers to bring forward issues by providing a culturally safe avenue for them to do so.

2. Better support PALM scheme employers and participating countries

More support for small growers

Additional resources to DEWR will strengthen the Australian Government's PALM scheme regional footprint to better support PALM scheme employers across Australia, including small growers.

Additional resources to participating countries to mobilise more workers

Participating countries will receive additional resources including personnel to increase the number of workers taking up job opportunities in Australia.

This will ensure each participating country can meet the challenges of a growing scheme on the terms they judge best meet their development objectives, while enabling Australian businesses to access a pool of productive and reliable workers.

3. Delivering a skills dividend for workers and employers

The Government will support more than 1,000 PALM scheme workers to attain formal qualifications over 4 years. These places will be linked to priority sectors for growth in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, where there are worker shortages in Australia.

This measure will embed formal skills development as a feature of the scheme to deliver a skills dividend across the region and build upon current skills development activities in the PALM scheme, especially the aged care pilots.

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.

4. Improving access to superannuation savings

The Australian Government will increase support to make it easier for PALM scheme workers to access their superannuation savings when they return home.

Additional resources for the Australian Tax Office (ATO) will supplement existing tax clinics to support workers prepare their Departing Australia Superannuation Payment (DASP) claim while still in Australia, making it easier to lodge their DASP claim when they return home.

5. Medicare access for workers with families

The Government will provide access to Medicare for an initial 200 families who will participate in the PALM scheme family accompaniment pilot. Medicare access will support families to receive the health care they need during their time in Australia.

For more information on these reforms please visit (www.palmscheme.gov.au).