



Development and the Pacific Labour Scheme – a longitudinal survey of Timorese applicants and participants

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Speaker

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Registration at

<https://events.devpolicy.org/20211013>

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(Secretary of State for Training and Employment, Timor-Leste)

The Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) allows people from nine Pacific countries and Timor-Leste to work for up to three years for a designated employer in regional Australia. This seminar introduces the first stage of a longitudinal survey designed to understand any difference it makes to Timorese households.

Our sample consists of two groups: 27 Timorese PLS workers at a meat packing plant in Warrnambool, Victoria, and 76 people in Dili who applied for the PLS, but were not selected. We survey their pre-departure characteristics, augmented by long-term ethnographic observation. We find that the PLS recruits from the best educated young people in Timor-Leste who, nonetheless, have limited employment prospects at home. Although overwhelmingly urban, most were born in rural areas. They seek entry into the PLS to mitigate the poverty and insecurity faced by their families, who often remain there. Income sharing is a deeply felt – and in some cases ritualised – imperative, a factor that is likely to diffuse remittances beyond the capital. Participation is also aspirational. Applicants value work in Australia as a learning experience and as a way of funding future educational and business endeavours for themselves and their kin, often (in an interesting point of difference from their Pacific cousins) envisaging these through recourse to Indonesian models of educational and material attainment. Although many respondents would settle permanently in Australia given the chance, this aspiration was often explained in terms of wanting to better fulfil a perceived duty to contribute financially to family and homeland.

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