

Beyond the RSE: Systems of Pacific Labour Migration to New Zealand

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Abstract

The Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme (RSE) has brought almost 70,000 Pacific workers to New Zealand since its launch in 2007, mainly to work in agricultural sectors such as horticulture and viticulture. Despite the prominence of the RSE as an employment option for Pacific workers, greater numbers of workers have arrived over the same period on other kinds of work visas, but these movements have had relatively little academic or media attention paid to them. Fiji, which was excluded from the RSE until recently, is the largest source of non-RSE workers in the Pacific, but for Tonga and Samoa, the non-RSE visas are also important, comprising similar numbers to the RSE visas. Smaller countries, such as Kiribati and Tuvalu, have also contributed both RSE and non-RSE workers to the New Zealand labour force. The conditions of the two work permit options are markedly different, with the RSE visas being highly constrained in terms of occupation, time period, location and employer, while the other permits have a diverse range of occupations and conditions. Furthermore, while the RSE is explicitly constructed by the New Zealand government as part of its Pacific development agenda, the other types of work permits do not generally have this stated objective. This research note considers the history and characteristics of New Zealand's temporary work migration system in relation to Pacific workers, focusing on non-RSE movements, since the RSE is already well documented.

In recent decades, academic literature studying migration has increasingly focused on the acceleration of migration globally, the increased diversity and complexity of mobility types, and the widespread implementation of temporary work migration schemes (Bedford & Hugo 2008; Collins 2012; Castles, Haas, & Miller, 2014). In the 1990s, most attention paid to migration in New Zealand by policymakers, academics, the media and the public was paid to permanent residence and related issues of migrant commitment, adaptation and diversification. Into the 21st century, the focus started to shift towards temporary workers and

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work visa schemes; the numbers of temporary workers rose rapidly, while permanent residence numbers and policy remained relatively static. While a considerable amount of academic, media and policy attention in relation to Pacific work mobility has been paid to the RSE scheme since its implementation in 2007 (see overview in Underhill-Sem and Marsters, 2017), less attention has been paid to the participation of Pacific workers in non-RSE work schemes in New Zealand, which have involved significant numbers of workers from Pacific nations.

The nature and conditions of temporary work schemes in New Zealand generally have been the subject of academic study, and the issues raised have relevance for Pacific workers. The relationship of temporary labour migration to foreign policy goals is considered by Barker (2010) focusing on the RSE, the Working Holiday Visa Scheme, and temporary migration provisions within free trade agreements. The first of these is highly relevant to Pacific workers, but the other two are not, since the working holiday maker programme applies to bilateral agreements with 45 countries but none in the Pacific islands, and Pacific countries are not part of any of the relevant bilateral free trade agreements. Collins (2017a) reviews the move from a permanent (settler) residence (PR) focused immigration system to one emphasising temporary mobility in which the visas of workers are tied to specific employers (as in the RSE, but for other visas as well), and the rights and services available to migrants are less than is the case for PR migrants. The precarity of temporary migrant workers is the subject of several studies in relation to potential abuses related to employer control of visas, excessive working hours, underpayment of wages, physical abuse, and in a more general sense, the exploitation of migrant desire for permanent residency which contrasts with the reality of 'permanent temporariness' for most workers deemed 'less skilled' (Collins 2017a, 2017b; Friesen 2017; Stringer 2016).

This paper presents data and interpretation for non-RSE temporary work migration schemes involving Pacific workers. It focuses on the last two decades, a period in which temporary labour movements from the Pacific to New Zealand, have been accelerating. The paper also shows that these schemes are not totally new, since there were predecessors, with some of the same characteristics, going back more than a half century.

Temporary Pacific–New Zealand labour mobility before 1987

In the first half of the twentieth century, there were small numbers of migrants arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand from the Pacific, some as circular migrants and others with the intention of staying longer term. In the 1945 Census, there were just under 1000 ‘Pacific Polynesians’ enumerated in New Zealand. However, it was not until after World War 2 that the main migration flows from Pacific countries started to accelerate. Initially this movement was from those countries that had access rights as territories of New Zealand, namely (Western) Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau, but from the 1950s onwards, also from Tonga and Fiji. In differentiating labour migration from other types of movement, it is not possible to present data for Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau, since visas for work or residence were not required, and are still not required, since residents of these places are New Zealand citizens.

Many, or even most, of the migrants from Polynesia during the 1950s and 1960s can be considered to be labour migrants, often as a result of the labour demands of an expanding manufacturing sector and shortages in the agricultural sector (Spoonley & Bedford, 2012, pp. 126–129). However, most of these migrants were not initially part of formal temporary labour schemes, with the exception of those from Fiji. Small numbers of Fijian and Indo-Fijian workers came to New Zealand in the 1950s, but this accelerated rapidly in the 1960s, so that by 1966 there were over 10,000 migrants on work permits from Fiji (Spoonley & Bedford, 2012, p. 129). The Fiji Rural Work Permit scheme was initiated in 1969 (Levick & Bedford, 1988, p. 45), and most of those who came on that scheme were employed in jobs in rural New Zealand such as scrub cutting and other agricultural activities. Between 1964–65 and 1973–74, a total of 41,770 persons on temporary work permits were recorded as originating from Fiji, (Western) Samoa and Tonga, comprising about 36 per cent of all temporary workers over that decade, with Australia being included in these data at that time (de Bres & Campbell, 1975, p. 447). Fijian workers comprised the largest group, at 44 per cent of Pacific workers, with Samoans at 38 per cent and Tongans at 18 per cent, with the latter rising significantly towards the end of that period (de Bres & Campbell, 1975, p. 447). These data are considered to be underestimates of the real number of workers coming from the Pacific, since large numbers came as tourists, on business,

and on 'working holidays', and many of these also worked (de Bres & Campbell, 1975, pp. 446–448).

The oil crisis and resulting economic downturn, and election of a new Labour Government in 1974, resulted in significant immigration reforms, including more stringent border regulation of Pacific migrants. In negotiation with the governments of Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, the South Pacific Work Permit Scheme (SPWPS) was established in 1976, replacing individual country schemes existing before that (Levick & Bedford, 1988). The SPWPS actually resulted in the reduction in the number of Tongan workers coming on work permits, apparently because of the bureaucratic requirements, which many bypassed by working on visitors' visas and using their networks to find employment (Levick & Bedford, 1988). Samoans almost totally ignored the SPWPS since they had the options of the quota for residency, and visitors' visas. It was mainly Fijian workers who used the scheme, but even then, numbers were modest. The average annual numbers from each country between 1976 and 1986 were: Fiji, 405; Tonga, 91; and Samoa, 8 (Spoonley & Bedford, 2012, p.132). Some of the conditions of the earlier Fiji Rural Work Scheme were maintained so that those coming under this part of the new scheme were still restricted to rural employment and could undertake a maximum of four months' employment before returning to Fiji for a year (Levick & Bedford, 1988, p. 15). In some ways, this scheme might be seen as a forerunner of the RSE scheme of the twenty-first century. In the 1980s 'urban' employment was also possible under the SPWPS, with demand for halal slaughtermen for the export meat trade being filled by Indo-Fijian Muslims, and work employment in market gardening involving (peripheral) 'urban' work (Levick & Bedford, 1988, p. 16).

The Immigration Act 1987 and after

The year 1987 was a critical year for Fijian migration, including labour migration into New Zealand in two ways. Two essentially anti-democratic coups in that year led by Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka resulted in the New Zealand government imposing sanctions on Fiji, which included restrictions on migration from that country, and this resulted in the cessation of temporary labour migration. Furthermore, the Immigration Act 1987 removed 'preferred country' status as a qualifying criterion for immigration, and Pacific countries that were in this category entered a

new era in which they had to compete with the rest of the world for migration access to New Zealand, with some exceptions. Nevertheless, the coups generated a high level of residence migration from Fiji, especially of skilled Indo-Fijians, some of whom came to New Zealand as refugees or asylum seekers, but most came under the new skill provisions of the new Immigration Act.

For Pacific populations in New Zealand, 1987 was also the year of visa waivers in which many 'overstayers' received permanent residence in that year and the next. In the decade after the immigration reforms of 1987, the acquisition of permanent residence (PR) by Pacific migrants remained significant, although the more notable changes were the increase in PR migration from other countries, especially in Asia. During this period, the number of temporary work permits was relatively low, with the total from all countries being less than 40,000 in the year 1997/98 and for the Pacific, only about 2000.¹

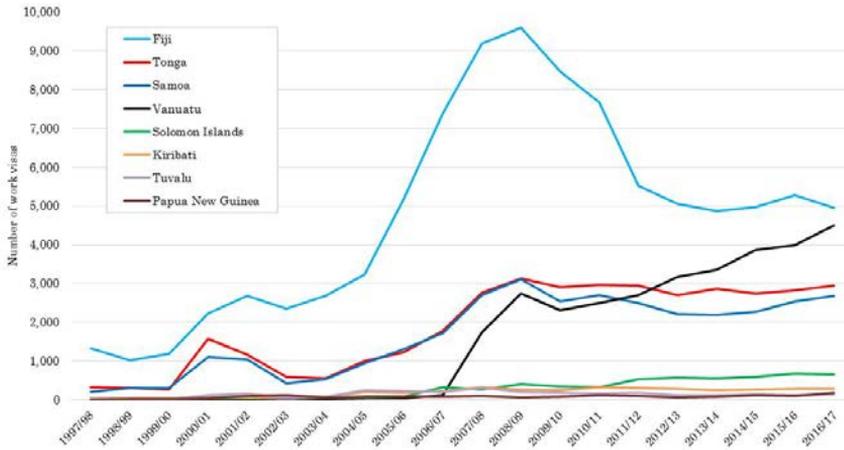
As noted above, the political debates about migration in the 1990s revolved around the degree of commitment of new 'permanent' migrants, the costs and benefits for the host country's economy and society of this migration, and issues of ethnic diversification. From the late 1990s onwards, the targets for PR migration were in the range of 40,000 to 50,000 and these were largely adhered to through to 2018. At the same time, labour force shortages that were not being served by PR migration became apparent in some sectors, and this shifted the focus to temporary work migration possibilities.

Temporary work visas 1997 to 2017

The number of work visas granted over a 20-year period to workers from Pacific nations is shown in Figure 1. For the first half of this period, before the RSE scheme was implemented, Fiji was the dominant source of workers from the Pacific, with Tonga and Samoa also being significant. This was a period when New Zealand immigration policy was increasingly focusing on temporary work visas, with a steady rise each year from 1997/98 into the early twenty-first century (New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004). Fiji became increasingly dominant as a source of temporary Pacific labour from 2003/04 onwards, peaking in 2008/09; the decline after that was partly an outcome of the Global Financial Crisis and a general

decrease in the number of temporary workers arriving in New Zealand, but also may have resulted from the exclusion of Fiji from the RSE scheme as a consequence of the military coup in 2006.

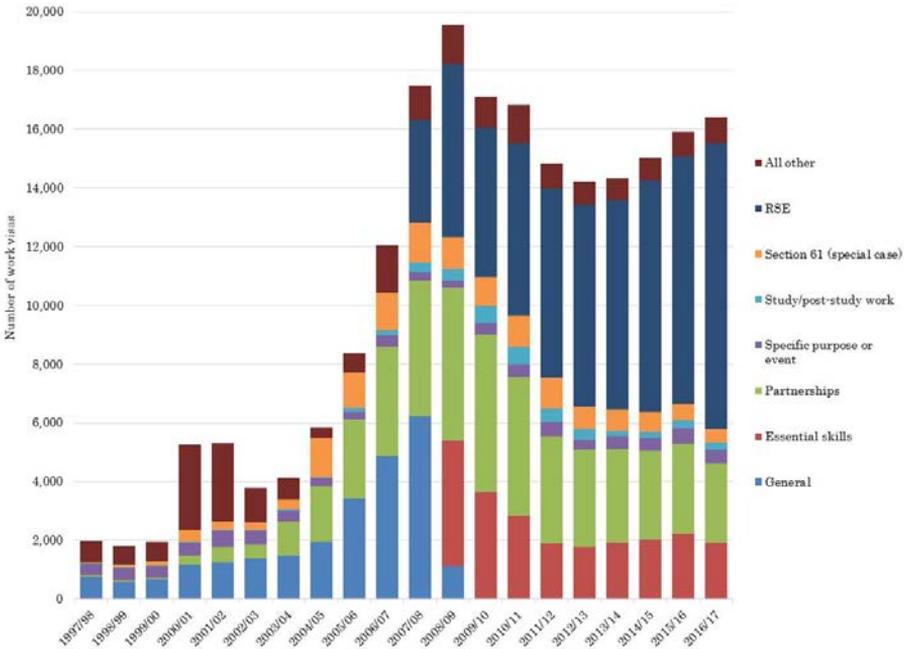
Figure 1: Work visas approved for selected Pacific countries 1998 to 2017 (June years)



Data source: New Zealand Immigration Service database W1

The generalised types of work visas over the same 20-year period is shown in Figure 2. As shown, the largest single category of admission in the earlier period was the ‘general’ category, of which skilled migrants were a significant part. From 2008/09 onwards, ‘essential skills’ became a separate category and the general category was absorbed into this and other categories. Figure 2 shows the importance of the partnership category which allows the partners of primary migrants, mostly in the general and essential skills categories, to work as well.

Figure 2: Temporary work visas approved by type for selected Pacific countries 1997/98 to 2016/17 (June years)



Data source: New Zealand Immigration Service database W1

Figure 2 illustrates the significance of the RSE from 2007/08 onwards, with this type of work visa surpassing all other types combined from 2012/13. The implementation of the RSE accounts for the increase in work visas granted to workers from Samoa and Tonga (shown in Figure 1), as well as the rapid increase in visas granted to ni-Vanuatu, and to a lesser extent to workers from Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Papua New Guinea. RSE workers do not qualify to bring family members into New Zealand with them, and this is reflected in the relative decline in partnership work visas shown in Figure 2.

Some of the types of work visas shown in Figure 2 have been aggregated from a number of more specific types. For example, ‘specific purpose or event’ includes visas specific to an occupation for which criteria do not fit into the ‘essential skills’ category, such as minister/religious worker or halal slaughterman, and workers admitted for an event or series of events, such as performers and sportspeople. The visas classified as ‘study/post-study work’ relate to policies implemented from about 2003 onwards, in which international students may work part time during their

study and full time for a period after study, often as a possible transitional move towards permanent residence. The category 'Section 61' relates to a section in the Immigration Act which gives the Minister of Immigration discretionary authority to grant a visa to a person who may be in New Zealand illegally, often having overstayed an earlier visa, but may have some justification for staying. Not shown in Figure 2 is a work visa category that is important in the general work visa data: working holiday. While about 30 per cent of all New Zealand work visas issued in recent years have been for working holidaymakers, no Pacific countries are part of the bilateral arrangements for this visa type, typically for youth under 30 years of age to stay for a year and take part in a mix of holidaying and work. Originally this scheme was mainly available to young people from Europe, North America and Japan, but in recent years also from many other Asian countries and some South American countries. Considering that there are 45 countries involved in these bilateral schemes in 2018, it is not clear why Pacific youth are excluded.

In the period since the RSE has been operating, there has been great variability between Pacific countries in terms of the numbers and proportions of RSE and non-RSE workers sent to New Zealand over a decade, as shown in Figures 3 and 4. More than 67,000 Pacific workers participated in the RSE scheme between 2008 and 2017 (June years), with Vanuatu dominating these numbers with about 45 per cent of all RSE visas (Figure 3). Tonga (24%) and Samoa (20%) have also been significant participants in the RSE, with Solomon Islands increasing in recent years to represent 6 per cent of workers over the decade. A detailed overview of the trends, conditions and outcomes of the RSE within the 'triple win' paradigm (benefits/costs for source country, destination country and worker) are provided in Underhill-Sem and Marsters (2017).

Over the period since the RSE has been operating, non-RSE work visas have also been important for Pacific workers, with over 93,000 visas granted between 2008 and 2017 (June years) (Figure 4). The predominant source for non-RSE workers has been Fiji, with nearly 70 per cent of all visas in this category. Tonga and Samoa have also had a significant involvement, with about 13 per cent of the total non-RSE visas each. Although proportionately small, the involvement of I-Kiribati and Tuvaluan workers in RSE and non-RSE work should be noted. Between the two work options, nearly 2000 workers have originated from Kiribati

and over 1700 from Tuvalu, numbers that have a notable impact in these countries with relatively small populations and limited international employment options.

Figure 3: RSE work visas by Pacific country 2008 to 2017 (June years)

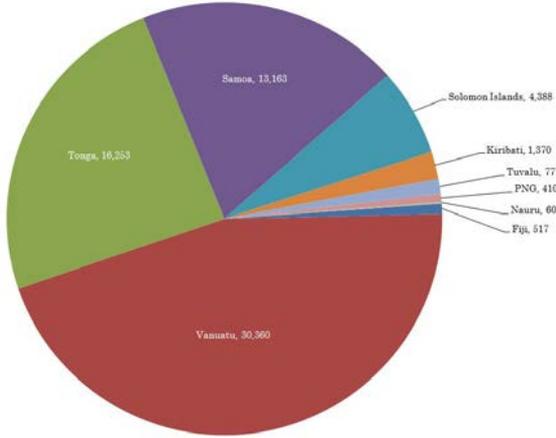
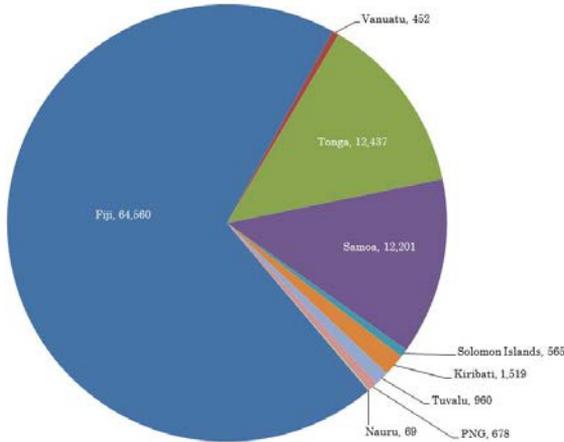


Figure 4: Non-RSE work visas by Pacific country 2008 to 2017 (June years)



Data sources: New Zealand Immigration Service database W1

Non-RSE work visas

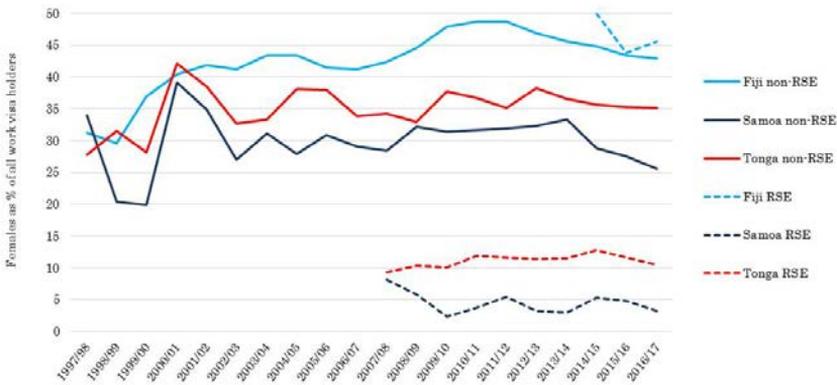
As we have seen, Fiji has been the source of the largest number of temporary workers from the Pacific over the last 20 years (Figure 1). Even after the initiation of the RSE, from which it was initially excluded, Fiji was still the dominant source of temporary workers overall. Tonga and Samoa have consistently been the second and third most important sources of workers both overall and in terms of RSE and non-RSE workers. These three countries together account for about 96 per cent of all Pacific non-RSE visas since 2007/08 (Figure 4) and in the decade before the RSE (1997/98 to 2006/07) for 91 per cent of all Pacific work visas, and so will be the focus of this section.

The New Zealand Immigration Service (NZIS) databases do not contain information on the length of visas granted to workers, and these data are not available even through the Official Information Act.² Visas for RSE workers are strictly limited to seven months for most countries, or nine months in the case of Kiribati and Tuvalu (as a result of cost of transport from those countries). Non-RSE visas may range from one to five years, with the shorter visas tending to be for less-skilled occupations and the five-year visas largely reserved for skilled professionals. Until 2017, visas for less-skilled workers could be renewed indefinitely within New Zealand, so many workers have had multiple renewals of short-term visas and continued in a state of 'permanent temporariness' (Collins, 2012). New regulations in that year mean that less-skilled migrants, measured by occupational status and/or wage level, must leave New Zealand after three years, and not reapply for a work visa for a further year. Other restrictions implemented for the same workers at that time restricted the right to bring dependent family members. The impacts of these visa changes are not shown in the data used in this paper but will affect the future flows and characteristics of Pacific work migrants to New Zealand.

When the age-sex structure of the RSE workers is compared with those of the non-RSE workers, there is a striking difference, especially in relation to the gendered nature of these movements. In its 10 years of existence, less than 10 per cent of RSE scheme visas for Fiji, Tonga and Samoa have been granted to females, with Figure 5 showing that Tonga has averaged a little over 10 per cent but Samoa has had less than half of this proportion.³ In contrast, although still gendered, the non-RSE visa

possibilities do provide more opportunities for women. Fiji has the highest proportion of women, averaging 44 per cent of all non-RSE visas over 20 years, and approaching 50 per cent in some years. Of all Tongan non-RSE work visa holders, about 36 per cent were women, and for Samoa, about 31 per cent. These statistics may reflect gendered expectations in the countries of origins, but also the nature of the occupational labour market in New Zealand, as discussed further below.

Figure 5: Percentage of work visa holders who were female: non-RSE and RSE visas for Fiji, Samoa and Tonga, by year



Data source: New Zealand Immigration Service database W1

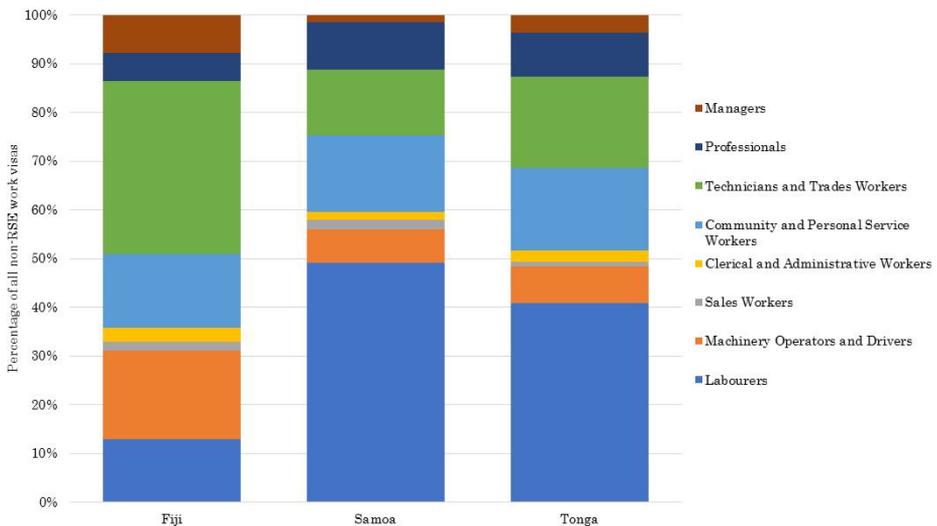
Note: very small numbers for Fiji RSE.

Age distribution data for temporary work visas is relatively limited, with only 10-year age cohorts available. The modal age cohort for non-RSE workers from the three Pacific countries is 20–29, with 40 per cent of those from Fiji, 42 per cent of those from Samoa, and 45 per cent from Tonga in this cohort. The respective proportions aged 30–39 years were 32 per cent, 35 per cent and 34 per cent, with the 40–49-year cohort being 20 per cent, 15 per cent and 13 per cent. These age distributions are quite similar to those for the RSE workers, with the main exception for both Samoa and Tonga being 5 per cent more aged 20–29 among RSE workers, and very few over 50 years, versus about 5 per cent for non-RSE workers.

One of the main variables that differentiates the non-RSE workers between countries and within each national group is occupation.⁴ A

comparison of non-RSE work visa holders from Fiji, Samoa and Tonga shows these occupational differences (Figure 6). For Fiji, the two largest Level 1 occupational groups are Technicians and Trades Workers and Machinery Operators and Drivers, with half of all workers in these skilled/semi-skilled occupational areas. In contrast, nearly 50 per cent of Samoans and over 40 per cent of Tongan workers were classified as labourers. For all three nationalities, Community and Personal Care Service Workers were smaller in number, but still significant.

Figure 6: Occupational categories (Level 1) of New Zealand non-RSE work visa holders from Fiji, Samoa and Tonga 2004–2017 (June years)



Data source: NZ Immigration Service database W3.

Within the national groups, there is considerable bifurcation of the labour force in relation to occupation. The more detailed occupational categories (Level 2) are shown in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 shows the most important occupational categories for men, with many of the largest ones for Fiji being semi-skilled or skilled such as various types of Trades Workers but also some workers with less skills such as Factory Process Workers and Farm, Forestry and Garden Workers. For Samoan and Tongan men, the largest categories tend to be in the less-skilled sectors; for example, Factory Process Workers and various agricultural occupational sectors. For women from all three countries, Carers and Aides was the most important category (Table 2), a category which can be considered as

semi-skilled. However, the healthcare sector in New Zealand is becoming increasingly dependent on migrant labour to staff especially, for example, the growing need for aged or disabled carers, but also more skilled workers such as Health Professionals (Badkar, Callister, & Didham, 2009). For both men and women from these Pacific countries, there is a great range of occupational skill levels manifest within the non-RSE range of work visas, obviously much greater than is the case for successful permanent residence applications.

Table 1 Occupations of male non-RSE work visa holders from Fiji, Samoa and Tonga, 2004 to 2017 (June years) (100+ workers)

Occupation (level 2)	Fiji	Samoa	Tonga	Total 3 countries
Road and Rail Drivers	3466	81	40	3587
Automotive and Engineering Trades Workers	3342	101	68	3511
Factory Process Workers	1274	930	512	2716
Metal and Machinery Trades Workers	1832	59	38	1929
Construction Trades Workers	1464	156	236	1856
Building Trades Workers	1300	126	157	1583
Farm, Forestry and Garden Workers	1166	75	250	1491
Electro-technology and Telecom Trades Workers	1297	16	90	1403
Market Oriented Agricultural and Fishery Workers	347	449	330	1126
Stationary Machine Operators and Assemblers	811	227	201	1239
Food Trades Workers	1092	80	37	1209
Sports and Personal Service Workers	765	164	218	1147
Other Associate Professionals	539	220	300	1059
Other Technicians and Trades Workers	958	38	26	1022
Farmers and Farm Managers	890	7	40	937
Machine and Stationary Plant Operators	598	101	91	790
Drivers and Mobile Machinery Operators	616	53	26	695
Personal and Protective Services Workers	539	71	48	658
Physical Science and Engineering Associate Professionals	557	13	41	611
Other Labourers	186	115	80	381
Labourers and Related Elementary Service Workers	177	197	119	493
Hospitality, Retail and Service Managers	483	15	14	512
Corporate Managers	447	14	24	485
Engineering, ICT and Science Technicians	458	12	13	483

Occupation (level 2)	Fiji	Samoa	Tonga	Total 3 countries
Other Craft and Related Trades Workers	391	24	12	427
Legal, Social and Welfare Professionals	159	150	78	387
Construction and Mining Labourers	185	70	104	359
Carers and Aides	299	11	14	324
Mobile Plant Operators	295	8	43	346
Physical, Mathematical and Engineering Science Professionals	281	12	25	318
Specialist Managers	284	9	21	314
Design, Engineering, Science and Transport Professionals	203	22	41	266
Other Professionals	156	81	26	263
Industrial Plant Operators	179	39	29	247
Protective Service Workers	198	31	17	246
Sales Assistants and Salespersons	177	22	11	210
Cleaners and Laundry Workers	88	83	16	187
Arts and Media Professionals	142	42	8	192
Building and Related Workers	94	22	28	144
ICT Professionals	135	3	8	146
Other Clerical and Administrative Workers	116	15	7	138
Health Professionals	110	6	9	125
Office Clerks	75	29	30	134
Business, Human Resource and Marketing Professionals	123	3	8	134
Education Professionals	86	19	17	122
Salespersons, Demonstrators and Models	80	23	13	116
Hospitality Workers	84	28	2	114
Sales Representatives and Agents	91	11	3	105
Office Managers and Programme Administrators	98	2	2	102

Brain drain, niche occupations, and the future of New Zealand Pacific labour flows

One of the main purposes of this research note has been to present non-RSE data that has been little used in comparison with data and analysis available for RSE work migrant flows. This is just the starting point for further analysis of these data in relation to a greater understanding of these temporary work migration processes and policies, and only some initial linkages to these broader issues are mentioned here.

The explicit objective of New Zealand's RSE scheme is a so-called 'triple win', for the host country, the source country and the migrant. Within this context, the New Zealand government considers the development of source countries to be a major objective of the RSE scheme, and a number of studies have assessed the impacts of remittances, skills return and costs/benefits of this scheme (see summary in Underhill-Sem and Marsters, 2017, pp. 13–38). However, less explicit attention has been paid to the development impacts of non-RSE temporary work migration, with the underlying assumption that these movements are more about fulfilling short-term or longer-term gaps in the labour force in New Zealand; nevertheless, some attention has been paid to the broader impacts on source countries in the Pacific.

In the period after the military coups in Fiji in 1987, a major concern among academics and policymakers was the loss of many professional workers from Fiji (Reddy, Mohanty, & Naidu, 2004), and concern for the brain drain that has been a phenomenon in many Pacific countries (Stahl & Appleyard, 2007). In the case of New Zealand, many of the professionals and semi-professionals who have arrived from the Pacific are likely to have come as permanent residents or transitioned later to this status, and in recent years, temporary work visas are a means of transitioning to permanent residence, an option actively promoted by the New Zealand immigration system for highly skilled migrants.

Concern for longer-term human capital loss (brain drain) from the Pacific has often focused on particular occupations and sectors. Considerable academic focus has been on the movement of medical personnel ranging from doctors to nurses to semi-skilled nurse aides, trained in the Pacific (mainly Fiji) but deployed to more wealthy countries, including Australia and New Zealand (e.g. Brown & Connell, 2004; Connell, 2014). Teachers are another form of brain drain that has especially affected Fiji (Iredale, Voigt-Graf, & Khoo, 2015; Voigt-Graf, 2003). In Tables 1 and 2, more than 300 education professionals from Fiji, Samoa and Tonga are shown to have been granted work visas in New Zealand over a 13-year period.

Table 2: Occupations of female non-RSE work visa holders from Fiji, Samoa and Tonga, 2004 to 2017 (June years) (100+ workers)

Occupation (level 2)	Fiji	Samoa	Tonga	Total 3 countries
Carers and Aides	2037	164	167	2368
Personal and Protective Services Workers	673	81	159	913
Stationary Machine Operators and Assemblers	508	66	40	614
Food Trades Workers	424	23	13	460
Market Oriented Agricultural and Fishery Workers	34	64	102	200
Machine and Stationary Plant Operators	347	19	10	376
Hospitality, Retail and Service Managers	319	10	17	346
Other Associate Professionals	165	70	56	291
Health and Welfare Support Workers	256	15	29	300
Factory Process Workers	98	76	130	304
Health Professionals	255	13	27	295
Life Science and Health Professionals	196	10	47	253
Other Technicians and Trades Workers	278	5	1	284
Cleaners and Laundry Workers	147	90	27	264
Sports and Personal Service Workers	180	36	19	235
Labourers and Related Elementary Service Workers	36	56	61	153
Corporate Managers	163	6	14	183
Education Professionals	134	27	34	195
Hospitality Workers	146	33	12	191
Sales Assistants and Salespersons	154	19	13	186
Office Managers and Programme Administrators	117	3	7	127
Business, Human Resource and Marketing Professionals	108	9	2	119
Office Clerks	93	16	9	118
Engineering, ICT and Science Technicians	109		9	118
Other Clerical and Administrative Workers	86	13	12	111
Response Outside Scope/Not Stated	189	15	31	235

There are particular niche occupations that may not be considered to be highly skilled according to New Zealand or other countries' occupational skills classifications but which have resulted in significant labour emigration from the Pacific. For Fiji, this includes the international employment of contract workers in the military and security, a niche that has been established in the context of the development of a military which

is large by the standards of the Pacific islands region (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017). Most of these military workers are deployed beyond the Pacific region, especially in the Middle East. Another occupational niche for Pacific workers is professional sports people, with players in various sports but especially rugby. This is the case for Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, and while the ‘export’ of these players is a source of pride for these nations, it is also potentially a lost opportunity in relation to the development of professional rugby (and other sports codes) in the Pacific islands (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2012, 2013).

Bedford and Hugo (2012) maintain that “the international migration debate has moved on from concerns about the ‘brain drain’ effect on the source countries” (p. iii). Their thesis is that these countries are now more concerned with rapid population growth, urbanisation, the youth bulge, and opportunities for a wider range of work opportunities within the Pacific Rim, especially in Australia and New Zealand (Bedford & Hugo, 2012, p. iii). A World Bank report on labour mobility in the Pacific praises the fact that New Zealand’s temporary work visa system “has no skill threshold” and admits workers across all skill levels in contrast to Australia’s work visa system which largely allows admission in the top three skill levels (Curtain et al., 2016, 17–22). This allows a wide range of workers into New Zealand, not only those who are considered as relatively less-skilled in the RSE scheme, but also in a number of non-RSE categories of admission. This, of course, may be seen as an advantage for Pacific workers, but also serves New Zealand’s labour force requirements to fill the lesser-skilled gaps in the labour market such as those targeted by the Essential Skills short-term and long-term lists (especially the former).

The increased stratification of New Zealand’s immigration policy and the resulting potential precarity of many temporary migrant workers from the Pacific, both in the RSE scheme and beyond, has been flagged in more general terms by a number of studies (Barker, 2010; Collins, 2017a, 2017b; Friesen, 2017; Stringer, 2016), but has not been adequately considered in this research note. These, and related questions, remain for further interrogation to allow greater understanding of New Zealand’s evolving temporary work visa schemes, and in the development of policy related to these schemes, as well as informing broader development initiatives and trade agreements with Pacific countries.

Notes

- 1 Unreferenced work migration data from 1997/98 onwards originate from the New Zealand Immigration Service's W1 database, and some data from 2003/04 onwards, especially on occupation, from their W3 database. These are/were anonymised unit record databases which were taken offline in January 2018.
- 2 These databases were no longer available online after January 2018, so the databases referred to here, and used throughout this paper, are those that were available in 2017.
- 3 The overall proportion of RSE visas granted to females is about 20 per cent, with higher proportions for Kiribati (47%), Tuvalu (37%), Solomon Islands (34%), and Papua New Guinea (23%). Vanuatu was 14 per cent.
- 4 In the New Zealand Immigration Service's W3 database, occupations for most RSE workers are not specified, presumably on the premise that most of them are 'labourers' but also that their eligibility for a visa does not generally depend on their occupational qualifications.

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