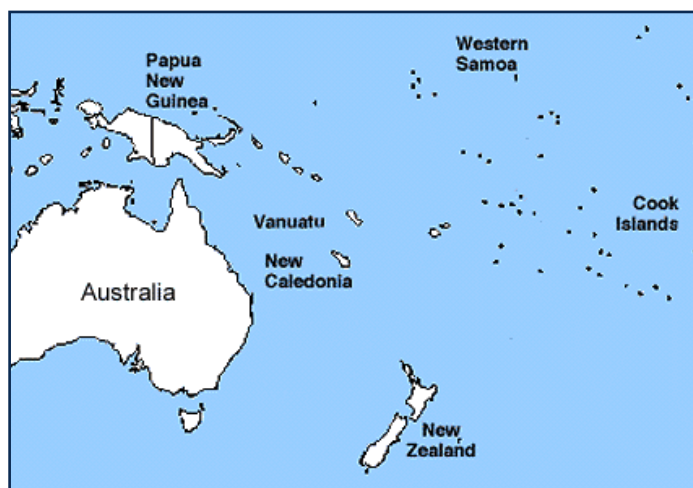


*IMI Policy Briefing 12, December 2012*

### Exploring the future of migration in the Pacific: survey insights



**What impact on migration flows might we see should Pacific Island countries favour pursuing political and economic alliances in East Asia? Will Fiji’s general election in 2014 mark the beginning of a series of political reforms and potential political instability in Melanesia? What role will Papua New Guinea, a country with one of the largest and youngest populations in the region, play in shaping the labour market in the future? How and from where will New Zealand attract both higher and lower skilled workers in the future?**

These are some questions raised by more than 50 migration experts and stakeholders working within civil society, governments, the private sector, religious institutions, and international organisations in their responses to an online survey disseminated by the International Migration Institute as part of its study of future migration in the Pacific. Through this survey the research team sought to gather their insights on the relatively certain and uncertain factors and trends that

may significantly affect Pacific migration in the future, either by driving, constraining, or shaping the changing patterns of migration. Additionally, the research team sought to understand what experts and stakeholders perceive as being likely and unlikely future scenarios for migration in the Pacific. This brief report synthesises their insights, questions, and perceptions, and highlights some common assumptions and ideas that require further investigation.

The research team hopes this material prompts readers to question the factors that respondents reported as important and to interrogate their expectations for the future of international migration in the Pacific.

### Key future trends (or ‘relative certainties’) impacting migration

Survey respondents identified the trends overleaf as playing an important role in impacting future migration drivers and patterns in the Pacific. Based on the knowledge and data that exist about these trends and on the fact that each of these trends has already begun to take shape in the region, they are relatively certain to continue and to affect migration over the next 20 years. Identifying relative certainties is an important preliminary step in the scenario-building process, for it prompts the interrogation of factors assumed to be true for the future. Participants in the process often find that fewer factors than were initially perceived are relatively certain.

In reviewing the trends suggested in the table overleaf, readers might consider how they may affect migration and what other factors and trends they may interact with to produce various migration outcomes. Additionally, readers might question how the impact of relative certainties over the longer term may affect their institutions and which changes their institutions might require to be prepared. This report explores the strategic implications of one of these relative certainties, relating to Pacific urbanisation, and its impact on migration.

Professional background of respondents* (n=53)	
Academia	66%
International organisation	13%
Religious institution	4%
Policy/government	23%
Civil society	15%
Private sector/business	19%
Other	13%

Source regions of respondents* (n=53)	
New Zealand	43%
Australia	28%
Micronesia	23%
Melanesia	34%
Polynesia	40%
Other	11%

\* Some respondents held more than one occupation and held expertise in multiple areas.

# What we know

## Relative Certainties in the Pacific over the next 20 years

Technological	Demographic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advancements in ICT</li> <li>• Advancements in transport</li> <li>• Increased connectivity with diaspora</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population increase</li> <li>• Urbanisation</li> <li>• Population ageing</li> <li>• Youth bulge</li> </ul>
Environmental	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rising sea levels, water acidification</li> <li>• Rising occurrence and intensity of severe weather events</li> </ul>	

*Is it possible to envision situations in which these trends may not continue in the future?*

*Are there certain trends that are missing from or do not belong on this list?*

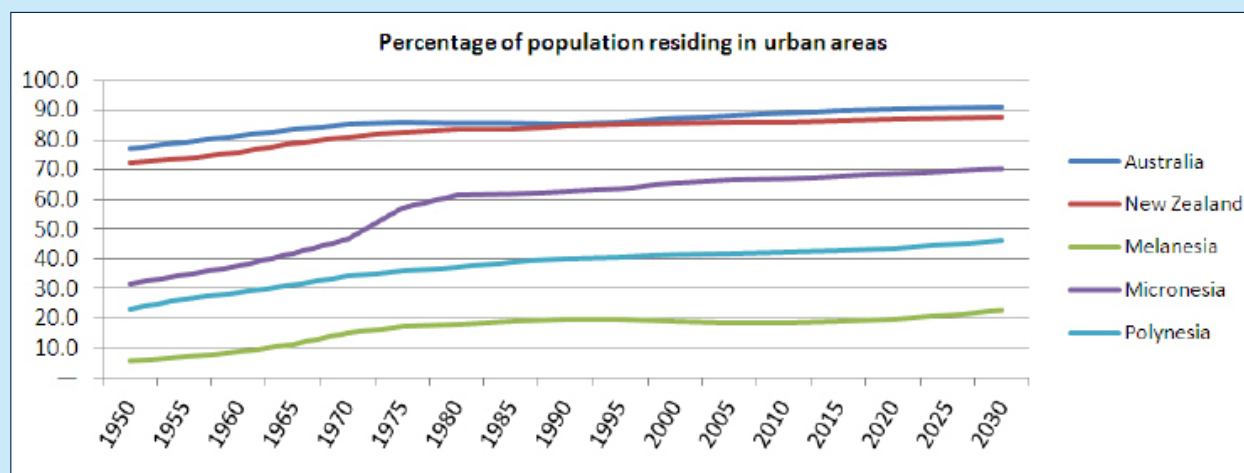
### Pacific urbanisation

In the next 20 years Pacific urbanisation is expected to increase as fertility levels remain above replacement levels, the working age population peaks in Pacific Island countries and territories, and education rates increase. Based on the very low levels of urbanisation observable today in the region, this may have significant consequences for sending and receiving societies in the future, despite the fact that overall sizes of urban populations are likely to remain small relative to the rest of the world. Also driving continued urbanisation trends in the Pacific are issues surrounding customary land rights and ownership in island countries, which make it increasingly difficult for some people to participate in agricultural economies. In the Pacific, migration is believed to be a primary driver of urban growth.<sup>1</sup> Urban growth, in turn, can promote rural-

urban migration as well as onward, international migration. This two-way relationship is mediated by factors such as political stability, economic growth, and developments in labour markets in rural origin communities and destination cities, to name a few.

Understanding how urbanisation may interact with more uncertain factors, such as labour market developments or land redistribution, to produce different migration outcomes might prompt policy makers to think strategically about urban infrastructural planning, environmental degradation, tertiary education development, welfare planning, skills training, and political stability.

<sup>1</sup> Connell, J. (2011) 'Elephants in the Pacific? Pacific urbanisation and its discontents', *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 52(2): 121-35.



### Key future uncertainties impacting migration

Survey respondents identified the factors in the table on the next page as having the potential to play an important role in impacting future migration drivers and patterns in the Pacific; however, they are relatively 'uncertain' in terms of their future outlook, given the lack of knowledge and data about them. Identifying and analysing uncertainties is a crucial component of planning for the future, for relative uncertainties far outnumber relative certainties and they tend to be the factors that are overlooked and least prepared for. Forecasts and predictions often fall short in helping institutions plan for the long-term because they

only integrate relative certainties into their analyses and assume that relatively uncertain factors will mimic the status quo. Thus, given the certainty that the political, economic, social, technological, or environmental climate will undoubtedly change in the next 20 years, forecasts may be constrained in their ability to inform long-term planning.

Examining the factors that are the most uncertain and have a high potential to impact migration is the advantage offered by the scenario methodology. In reviewing the relative uncertainties listed in the table, readers might

consider how they may affect migration and what other factors and trends they may interact with to produce various migration outcomes. Additionally, readers might question how their institutions may reposition themselves in the coming years to be prepared for the impact of

relative uncertainties over the longer term. This report explores the strategic implications of one of these relative uncertainties, relating to Pacific diaspora, and its impact on migration.

**What we don't know**

<b>Relative Uncertainties in the Pacific over the next 20 years</b>	
<b>Social</b>	<b>Political</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education attainment and up-skilling</li> <li>• Aspirations and expectations for a better life</li> <li>• Aspirations for children's education</li> <li>• Social globalisation, shifts in Pacific Island cultures, and cultural hybridisation</li> <li>• Public perceptions of migrants and refugees</li> <li>• Gender and social equality</li> <li>• Role of diaspora</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migration policies</li> <li>• Growing presence of China (and Asian states)</li> <li>• Possible challenges to US presence in region</li> <li>• Political/social/economic/demographic influence of PNG</li> <li>• Customary land tenure/inheritance structures</li> <li>• Political instability and unrest</li> <li>• Political restructuring and governance in Pacific Island countries and territories</li> </ul>
<b>Economic</b>	<b>Environmental</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trade agreements</li> <li>• Labour market (at destination and origin)</li> <li>• Economic inequality within and between Australia &amp; New Zealand and Pacific Island countries and territories</li> <li>• Economic growth in Australia &amp; New Zealand and Pacific Island countries and territories</li> <li>• Mining industries</li> <li>• Urban infrastructural development</li> <li>• Dependence on and future of remittances</li> <li>• Foreign aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green technologies and industries</li> <li>• Rising sea levels and temperatures</li> <li>• Rising occurrence and intensity of severe weather events</li> <li>• Water acidification, water availability</li> <li>• Arable land</li> <li>• Food production</li> <li>• Fisheries</li> <li>• Urban and rural environmental degradation</li> </ul>

*What are the various ways in which these factors may develop in the future?*

*Are there factors that are missing from this list?*

**Role of the Pacific diaspora communities**

The Pacific region is home to several island countries and territories which have diaspora communities that are as large as or exceed the number of citizens living in their home countries (see, for instance, Niueans, Tokelauans, and Cook Islanders).<sup>1</sup> At present, the largest diaspora communities for Pacific Island countries reside in New Zealand, Australia and the United States. It is highly uncertain what the future role of the diaspora will be in both origin and destination societies, as the generational gap between members of the diaspora and kin living in home countries increases and as ideas about identity and belonging transform over time. It is also uncertain whether monetary remittances will remain a dominant linking feature, connecting and supporting specific individuals and families, or whether members of the diaspora will leverage remittances and use them more widely to participate in the social, political, and economic spheres of their origin countries.

The future role of diaspora communities has divergent implications for future migration patterns in the Pacific. It is possible that the continued presence of large, co-national groups abroad may facilitate and promote further migration, spreading information about opportunities in destination societies and alleviating many of the costs associated with journeys over longer distances. Alternatively, diaspora communities may dissuade people from permanent and longer-term forms of migration and promote more transnational lifestyles. Understanding how diaspora communities in the Pacific may react to changing conditions – e.g. future education opportunities and labour market developments – to produce different migration outcomes might prompt policy makers to think strategically about issues such as infrastructural development for information and communication technologies, diaspora engagement initiatives, and supporting transnational modes of life.

<sup>1</sup> Spoonley, P. (2000) 'Reinventing Polynesia: The Cultural Politics of Transnational Pacific Communities', Working Paper No 14, Transnational Communities Programme, University of Oxford.

## Perceived LIKELY futures of migration in the Pacific in 2030

Based on their expertise and observations about the present migration drivers and patterns in the Pacific, survey respondents were asked to describe what they

believed was the most likely migration future for the region in the next 20 years. The following are three stories that emerged from the responses.

### 1 Pacific Renaissance

Significant return migration to the Pacific is the result of unsuccessful migration experiences abroad and a strong emergence of employment opportunities in island countries and territories both directly and indirectly connected to resource extraction industries. There is also a resurgence and strengthening of Pacific identities and traditions. Increasing Pacific Island populations are putting pressure on the health and care sectors to develop and become more self-sustaining. Governments are gaining leverage in regional and international political affairs as multinational companies and foreign governments attempt to gain access to less accessible natural resources, and as foreign militaries, particularly Chinese and American, vie for influential spaces in Pacific waters. The rise of extraction industries is threatening the sustainability of certain ecosystems and there is significant environmental degradation.



### 2 Deserted Islands

Increasing urbanisation trends have led to the depopulation of some rural and small island states. In other Pacific Island countries, rising sea levels combined with unsustainable social services and declining labour markets have caused widespread and nearly complete emigration, mainly to New Zealand, but also Australia and the United States. Island peoples now living in these countries have decided not to discard their nationalities and are promoting identities not tied to the land. These societies are increasingly incorporating members of the diaspora in the United States and elsewhere into their conceptions of nationhood.



### 3 Asian Hegemony

Bilateral agreements between Pacific countries and countries in South and East Asia are on the rise. For instance, New Zealand and India have further developed their trade agreements, and new labour migration agreements as well as student and teacher exchanges have emerged. For Pacific Island countries and territories, China, Japan, and India have become the main aid donors and private investors in the region, shifting centres of regional power from Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, eastwards. Migration patterns over the last 10 years have reflected this shift and workers of all skill levels are increasingly migrating to Asia. New Zealand and Australia are seeing further increases in the proportion of their Asian populations.



## Perceived UNLIKELY futures of migration in the Pacific in 2030

Based on their expertise and observations about the present migration drivers, patterns, and outcomes in the Pacific, survey respondents were asked to describe what

they believed was the most unlikely migration future for the region in the next 20 years.

### 1 Migration Managed

Regional mobility as we knew it in the 2010s has ceased, as migration policies introduced by Australia and New Zealand have become more targeted and restrictive. At the same time, the Australian and New Zealand governments have introduced monitoring and enforcement mechanisms that ensure policies not only achieve their aims, but also generate no unintended substitution effects. This means there has been no rise in unauthorised migration. Migration among Pacific Island countries and territories has also declined, as people lose their aspirations to move and prefer to remain at home.



### 2 Smooth Sailing

Open borders and free movement characterise the Pacific region. Workers from the Pacific Islands have become highly mobile, moving between labour markets in New Zealand, Australia, and their home countries. Although to a lesser extent, workers and families from New Zealand and Australia are choosing to move to island states to work in tourism and resource extraction industries or to retire or buy holiday homes.



### 3 From Hinterlands to Hubs

In a rapid reversal of social, economic, political, and demographic trends, former 'hinterland' Pacific Islands have transformed into bustling metropolitan 'hubs'. These hubs are attracting the majority of regional and international migrants, putting Australia and New Zealand in last place in the competition for higher and lower skilled workers.



## Conclusion

Interestingly, futures in which Pacific Islands would either become all but deserted or would witness the large-scale return of their emigrant populations were described in different survey responses as both likely and unlikely for the Pacific in 2030. This dissonance may be the result of the high degree of diversity in the region and the expertise among the respondents, which is typically concentrated in one of the sub-regions.

The above narratives show what migration stakeholders and experts working in the Pacific perceive as being likely and unlikely futures for migration. These stories are in no way predictions of how the future of the region will look. It is interesting to note that many respondents perceive 'no migration' as the least likely future and perceive Papua New Guinea and Fiji as playing a major role in the region's future migration patterns. In reviewing these stories, readers might consider whether any elements resonate with their own perceptions about future migration in the region. Additionally, they might

question whether there are any important possible future developments absent from these futures, which are crucial to recognise in thinking strategically about, and planning for, the next 20 years.

While the objective of the Global Migration Futures project in the Pacific is not to uncover what are likely and unlikely futures – rather it is to become aware of what futures are possible – asking respondents about their perceptions of the future is an important preliminary step of this project. This step reveals the perceptions and assumptions that experts and stakeholders work with, and provides discussion points to push experts and stakeholders to think innovatively and strategically about the future. The final scenarios of this project are generated by an iterative process of scenario-building and data and literature analysis and should be treated as tools to promote on-going discussions and to challenge our knowledge of international migration in the region.



**Ministry of Business,  
Innovation & Employment**



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration  
and Citizenship**



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

**New Zealand National  
Commission for UNESCO**  
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The International Migration Institute (IMI) is committed to developing a long-term and forward-looking perspective on international migration. IMI analyses migration as an intrinsic part of broader global processes of development and change, rather than as a problem to be solved.

Migration has always played a central role in global processes of social, economic and political change. But recent shifts in international migration raise new intellectual and practical challenges for humanity in the twenty-first century.

Most countries are now experiencing both immigration and emigration. Improvements in transport and communications further encourage migrants to lead

transnational lives. This challenges existing models of identity and the nation-state. IMI's aim is to advance understanding of the multilevel forces driving current and future migration processes. This can provide the basis for policies designed to realise the potential benefits of migration.

IMI was established at the University of Oxford in 2006. It is a member of the Oxford Martin School and also forms part of the Oxford Department of International Development, where it is based. We collaborate with other research centres at the University of Oxford: the Refugee Studies Centre and the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society. See [www.migration.ox.ac.uk](http://www.migration.ox.ac.uk)