



## Pacific Immigration Development Community

27<sup>th</sup> Regular Annual Meeting

17 – 19 June: Nukualofa, Tonga

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### Agenda Item 7:           **Hosting an Immigration Ministers Conference – A Regional Vision for Collective Action**

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Members are invited to **consider** the opportunity of hosting a first ever Immigration Ministers' Conference for the PIDC membership.

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#### **Purpose**

This session provides as opportunity for Members to consider hosting an Immigration Ministerial Conference. The session consequently intends to:

- (a) discuss and understand the benefits of hosting an Immigration Ministers' Conference;
- (b) discuss challenges in Pacific – level Ministerial meetings; and
- (c) discuss the relevant strategic approach to hosting this inaugural Conference.

#### **Background and Rationale**

2. Border security and human mobility is a defining issue for the Pacific region. From irregular people movement, human trafficking, people smuggling, labor migration and diaspora engagement to the growing urgency of climate-induced displacement, immigration intersects directly with the region's economic, environmental, social stability and law and order. Despite its cross-cutting impact, immigration remains an underrepresented policy area in the formal ministerial-level dialogue structures of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

3. Currently, most migration-related engagement occurs at the technical level—primarily through the Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC) and bilateral labor mobility initiatives through the PACERPLUS Secretariat. However, key decisions on migration policy, climate mobility, and regional labor frameworks require political leadership, strategic direction, and coordinated action at the ministerial level.

4. The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent emphasizes **people-centered development, human security, and resilience**—all of which hinge on coherent and collaborative regional migration governance. A dedicated Immigration Ministerial Meeting would provide a formal platform for Pacific Ministers to:

- Shape and align regional policies on border security, labor mobility and climate displacement.
- Consolidate existing initiatives under a common vision for safe, regular, and orderly migration.
- Strengthen advocacy in global migration forums such as the Global Compact on Migration, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change discussions.

5. Hosting the inaugural meeting would allow PIDC to demonstrate leadership on priority regional migration issues, contribute to long-term regional policy coherence, and catalyze a pathway toward an enduring ministerial process.

## Benefits of Hosting

6. Hosting a ministerial meeting offers Pacific Island countries a unique and strategic opportunity to demonstrate leadership, foster regional solidarity, and shape the agenda on key mobility, border security and resilience issues. Such a gathering not only elevates the PIDC's visibility and influence within the Pacific region but also reinforces its commitment to collective action and mutual support. The key benefits of hosting include:

- **Leadership and Visibility:** Positions PIDC as a regional leader in migration and mobility governance, reinforcing its commitment to Pacific values of cooperation, dialogue, and shared responsibility.
- **Border and Security Cooperation:** Encourages harmonization of border management practices and promotes collaboration on counter-trafficking and regional security measures, contributing to safer, more resilient Pacific borders.
- **Policy Coherence:** Enables the PIDC membership to align national migration and resilience policies with broader regional frameworks such as the Pacific Transnational Organised Crime Disruption Strategy, Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.
- **Labor Mobility Enhancement:** Supports coordination on ethical recruitment, worker welfare, and fair access to labor markets, contributing to the sustainable development of Pacific labor mobility schemes.
- **Climate Resilience:** Strengthens regional dialogue on climate-induced mobility and displacement, enhancing shared understanding and collective preparedness to address the increasing impacts of climate change on Pacific communities.

7. In essence, hosting a ministerial meeting underscores PIDC's commitment to Pacific-led solutions and collaborative approaches, while delivering concrete policy and diplomatic gains that resonate across the region.

## Comparison with Other Pacific Ministerial Meetings

8. To ensure relevance, impact, and sustainability, the proposed Pacific Immigration Ministerial Meeting can draw useful lessons from other established ministerial platforms both within and beyond the region. The comparison below highlights how such mechanisms have been institutionalized, their thematic focus, policy influence, and secretariat support. It also includes the **Bali Process Ministerial Meetings**, which, although broader in geographic scope, offer valuable insights into coordinating regional action on complex migration and border issues.

### (e) Comparison of Ministerial Meetings

Aspect	Forum Foreign Ministers' Meeting	Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting (FEMM)	Bali Process Ministerial Meetings	Proposed: Pacific Immigration Ministerial Meeting
Focus	Diplomacy, security, strategy	Economic policy, finance, aid	Irregular migration, trafficking, border management	Migration, labor mobility, displacement
Institutionalization	Established	Established	Established (since 2002)	To be developed
Frequency	Annual	Annual	Biennial	Proposed: biennial
Policy Impact	High – informs Forum Leaders' decisions	High – drives regional economic priorities	Moderate to High – non-binding, but shapes cooperation	High potential – can shape Pacific mobility frameworks

<b>Secretariat Support</b>	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)	Regional Support Office (RSO), co-chaired by Australia & Indonesia	PIDC and PIFS (proposed)
<b>Participation</b>	Forum Member States	Forum Member States	45+ governments and international agencies	Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs)

## Analysis

9 The comparative analysis illustrates the **value of formalizing a ministerial-level platform** focused specifically on migration and human mobility in the Pacific. While foreign and economic ministers' meetings effectively address high-level diplomatic and fiscal issues, they do not provide sufficient space to discuss the nuanced and urgent challenges associated with labor mobility, climate-related displacement, and border governance—issues that are rapidly gaining prominence across the region.

10. The Bali Process, though globally significant, often centers around security-focused migration concerns such as trafficking and irregular movement specifically in the Asian region. It involves a wide array of members and observers, which can limit region-specific prioritization and responsiveness. In contrast, a **Pacific Immigration Ministerial Meeting would be uniquely positioned to reflect the shared values, priorities, and vulnerabilities of Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs)**. It would allow for focused discussion on ethical labor recruitment, the impacts of climate change on human mobility, and the development of a regional migration framework rooted in Pacific realities.

11. Furthermore, aligning the meeting with existing Pacific regional mechanisms (e.g., the PIF calendar) and leveraging established institutions such as PIDC and PIFS for secretariat support would provide institutional coherence and operational efficiency. This model supports Pacific-led decision-making while also allowing structured engagement with partners and international agencies.

12. The establishment of a **dedicated, Pacific-focused ministerial platform** on migration would not only fill a critical gap in the regional architecture but also enhance policy alignment, regional solidarity, and collective resilience in the face of ongoing and emerging mobility challenges.

## Potential Thematic Issues for Ministerial Level Discussion

13. Aligned with the 2050 Strategy, the following high-level issues could shape the meeting agenda:

- (i) **Border Security and Identity Management**
  - Harmonization of visa, biometric, and border protocols.
- (ii) **Regional Migration Governance**
  - Building toward a unified Pacific Migration Framework.
- (iii) **Climate Mobility and Displacement**
  - Regional coordination on relocation, humanitarian protection, and legal pathways.
- (iv) **Diaspora Engagement and Citizenship**
  - Strengthening ties with diaspora communities; promoting dual citizenship frameworks.
- (v) **Labor Mobility and Development**
  - Improving protections in Pacific labor schemes.

## Proposed Meeting Modality

14. To ensure sustained regional collaboration and strategic direction on mobility and migration issues, it is proposed that a dedicated ministerial meeting be established as a standing regional mechanism. This forum would provide Pacific leaders with a regular opportunity to engage in high-level dialogue, endorse coordinated actions, and guide the implementation of shared priorities. Grounded in Pacific values of partnership, resilience, and mutual respect, the meeting would serve as a platform for collective decision-making and technical cooperation. The proposed modality for convening this regional ministerial meeting is outlined below:

- **Frequency:** The meeting would be held on an annual or biennial basis depending on its funding modality, coordinated with the existing Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) calendar to maximize participation and ensure alignment with broader regional priorities.
- **Participants:** The core participants would include Ministers and senior officials responsible for immigration and mobility from Pacific Island countries and territories, ensuring high-level policy engagement and national ownership.
- **Observers:** Invitations would be extended to key development partners, relevant UN agencies, allowing for inclusive dialogue while maintaining a Pacific-led process.
- **Secretariat Support:** The meeting would be supported by a dedicated secretariat function, led by the Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC), with coordination support from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) to ensure coordination and continuity.
- **Outputs:** The meeting would aim to produce tangible outcomes, such as:
  - A Ministerial Declaration on Pacific Mobility, reaffirming shared commitments;
  - A regional action plan or migration framework to guide collective implementation;
  - A series of policy briefs and the establishment of technical working groups to facilitate ongoing cooperation and follow-up at the operational level.

15. This structured and inclusive modality will help anchor migration governance within the regional architecture, enabling Pacific nations to respond proactively to shared challenges and opportunities in mobility and resilience.

### **Key Challenges to Hosting a Ministerial Immigration Meeting in the Pacific**

16. While the proposal to establish a dedicated Ministerial Immigration Meeting in the Pacific presents significant opportunities for regional leadership, cooperation, and policy coherence, several structural and operational challenges must be carefully considered to ensure its successful implementation and sustainability. These challenges are not insurmountable but require proactive planning, institutional alignment, and sustained commitment from PIDC Members and regional partners.

17. Firstly, **resource constraints** remain a central issue. Many Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) operate with limited fiscal and human resources, which can make it difficult to allocate funding and personnel for high-level ministerial events. This includes costs related to travel, logistics, coordination, and technical support.

18. Secondly, our **geographic dispersion** across the vast Pacific Ocean distances poses logistical complexities. Ensuring equitable participation—especially for smaller or more remote island states—requires careful planning, adequate travel support, and consideration of virtual or hybrid formats to maximize accessibility and inclusion.

19. Thirdly, **institutional coordination** may present challenges, particularly in aligning the roles of regional bodies such as the Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). Clear mandates and sustained political support will be essential to avoid overlap and ensure efficient delivery.

20. Additionally, **varying national priorities and policy capacities** at the domestic level across the PIDC membership could affect consensus-building. Countries face diverse migration contexts—ranging from labor mobility to climate displacement—which may require tailored approaches within a unified regional framework.

21. Finally, **securing political commitment** for the purposes of sustaining political commitment and regional alignment for long-term institutionalization can be difficult, especially in a crowded regional agenda. Securing ongoing political support for a new ministerial process in an already crowded regional calendar is a key challenge. Without clear integration into the Pacific’s broader strategic frameworks—such as the **2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent** or the **Boe Declaration on Regional Security**—the risk exists that the platform may be seen as a stand-alone initiative, lacking long-term relevance or traction with leaders. Anchoring the meeting within established regional processes will be essential to maintain momentum and ensure outcomes are translated into action.

22. Despite these challenges, with inclusive planning, partner support, and strong regional leadership, these hurdles can be addressed, paving the way for a sustainable and impactful ministerial dialogue on mobility in the Pacific.

## Conclusion

23. While the identified challenges are significant, the strategic rationale for establishing a **Pacific Immigration Ministerial Meeting** remains compellingly strong—particularly in light of the region’s evolving mobility dynamics and increasing global focus on transnational organized crime and border security, labor migration, climate-induced displacement, and human security. A dedicated platform would provide the political visibility and regional coordination needed to shape proactive, Pacific-led responses to these complex issues.

24. However, to ensure its success and longevity, several enabling conditions must be met. Notably, **securing sustainable funding** will be a central challenge. Without a reliable source of financial support—either through dedicated national contributions, regional allocations, or development partner assistance—the capacity to convene regular meetings and maintain a functional secretariat will remain limited.

25. To move forward effectively, it is recommended that:

- A **phased and flexible approach** be adopted, beginning with a pilot or inaugural meeting to test modalities and build momentum;
- **Clear institutional leadership and division of responsibilities** be agreed upon, with formalized roles for the Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS);
- **Development partners be engaged early** to support core costs, technical assistance, and capacity-building;
- The proposed regional ministerial platform be **firmly embedded within existing regional frameworks**, including the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and the Boe Declaration, to ensure alignment with broader regional priorities;
- A **medium- to long-term financing strategy** be developed, potentially exploring pooled funding mechanisms or budget lines within existing regional cooperation programs.

26. With careful planning, regional ownership, and strategic support, the proposed ministerial meeting can evolve into a credible, inclusive, and action-oriented mechanism—delivering real value for Pacific Island Countries and Territories in the area of migration governance and regional resilience.

## Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. **Consider** the concept of hosting a Pacific Immigration Ministerial Meeting as a priority regional initiative aligned with the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy.
2. **Task** the Secretariat to:
  - Initiate stakeholder consultations with relevant regional institutions including the PIFS, and regional technical bodies to refine the scope and objectives of this proposed ministerial meeting.
  - Engage in donor discussions with potential development partners to assess funding and technical support options.
  - Assess the viability of hosting the meeting in either the coming year or in two or three or more years, considering national capacity, regional calendar alignment, funding and donor availability.
3. **Develop** a formal concept note and proposal following consultations, for endorsement by Members and subsequent presentation to PIFS and regional partners.