



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Efficient and safe recruitment of foreign workers critical**

*Monday 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2026*

The recently launched National Skills Gap Assessment (NSGA) Survey has indicated that efficient and safe recruitment of foreign workers is critical to keep enterprises operational.

While the report identifies about 95 different jobs that employers are finding difficult to fill with locals, when compared to the proportion of growth against local employment, the survey results indicate that the proportion of foreign workers grew by 79%. Since 2022, Bangladesh then India remains the largest source market for foreign workers. From our region, Solomons, Papua New Guinea and Tonga make up the largest proportion of foreign workers.

“While supply side issues of the labour market will take time to fix and a decision needs to be made for employers to access all of their 1% FNU levy, companies still need to continue operations. The only option, while companies move towards digitalization and Artificial Intelligence, is foreign labour”, said Mr Edward Bernard, the CEO of the Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation (FCEF).

Fiji is a growing labour receiving country and therefore bilateral agreements need to be established with Bangladesh and India. Fiji has already established the bilateral arrangements and the infrastructure to send workers to New Zealand & Australia. Therefore, having an efficient and safe infrastructure in place to hire foreign workers will ease the burden on employers.

Mr Bernard highlighted that improving the efficiency of work permit processing by the Ministry of Immigration is critical to reduce lead time in the recruitment of foreign workers. Work permit processing can sometimes take up to 6 months.

While the number of infringing employers is relatively low, the majority of the good employers are put through the same tedious vetting and approval process. A system that was working, called “Qualified Employer List” negotiated by the private sector with the Ministry of

Immigration has been cancelled. Fiji Revenue & Customs Service (FRSC) has a gold card system for employers – why not use the same existing national system?

There are also low hanging fruits that can buffer the skills gaps. These include allow spouses of expatriates (who are qualified) to work, allow regional students certain hours to work and allow all Fijians registered at NEC to work temporarily.

This survey was led by FCEF in partnership with the Fiji Human Resource Institute (FHRI) and the Higher Education Commission Fiji and funded by the Ministry of Finance. This is Fiji's first labour demand survey that has been published.

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