



ANALYSIS

Unregulated population migration and other future drivers of instability in the Pacific

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LOWY INSTITUTE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Unregulated population migration within the Pacific has serious security and stability implications for the region, including Australia and New Zealand. Drivers of unregulated population migration include non-traditional security challenges such as changing environmental and climatic conditions, disaster management, food and water scarcity, and pandemics. Other drivers include man-made stresses such as civil conflict and fragile and unstable governments, growing interest from external actors, and organised crime. When several factors converge, they act as a multiplier causing instability among nation states as affected populations seek other sources of food, resources, stability or safety. Unregulated population migration in the context of an interrelated system can lead to instability in the Pacific. This Analysis argues there is a need for an integrated and strategic perspective to achieve comprehensive and cohesive policymaking and implementation to enhance the security and stability of the Pacific as a strategic priority for Australia.

Movement between Pacific nations is part of the history and culture of the region. Pacific Islanders have moved around the region for exploration, trade, and social reasons, as well as for economic reasons.¹ Across the Pacific, young people have moved from rural to urban settings, between Pacific Island countries, and from island countries to Pacific Rim countries seeking employment, reliable income, and improved livelihoods. In the 2016 Australian census, those claiming Pacific Islands ancestry rose from 112 133 in 2006 to 150 068 in 2011 to 206 673 in 2016. The population of those claiming Pacific Islands ancestry grew by 33.8 per cent between 2006 and 2011, and by 37.7 per cent between 2011 and 2016.² A degree of human movement is accepted and encouraged for economic and social benefits — such as between PNG's Western Province and Australia's Torres Strait Islands for cultural and trade purposes. However, an increased frequency of movement, or a sudden or mass movement of people would be detrimental to the region and would increase the risk to existing national and human security.

The developing geopolitical challenges in the Pacific Islands region require Australian policymakers to be focused on the drivers of instability and actions by powers outside the Pacific, and the potential impact these might have on unregulated population migration³ within the region.

There are a number of possible drivers of unregulated population migration in the Pacific: political or economic uncertainty, natural disasters, pandemics, climatic or environmental change, food or water scarcity, civil conflict or organised crime.⁴ When two or more of these factors converge they act as a multiplier causing instability among nation states as affected populations seek other sources of food, resources, stability or safety. Significant increases in unregulated migration can therefore have serious implications for regional security and stability. There are also implications for Australia, including on its capacity to provide support and aid during times of duress for its Pacific neighbours. Increasing levels of displaced people and movement of large numbers of people will affect Australia's economic and social policies as well as its border security and migration policies.

In regional policy considerations, unregulated population migration tends to be considered as an outlier issue or a potential challenge that is remote enough not to demand the immediate attention of policymakers. However, non-traditional security challenges do not occur in isolation and many are closely related to unregulated population migration. Issues such as illegal fishing and organised crime are interconnected and transnational in nature, while other drivers of instability such as food and water security, or environmental and climate issues are domestic issues that become transnational. These types of issues often have implications for more than one nation state and civil society. In a region such as the

Pacific, where the balance of security and domestic stability is finely poised, a lack of understanding of the interrelationships and the broader implications of specific drivers of instability can lead to poorly constructed policy responses and wasted resources.

The 2016 Australian Defence White Paper states that “geography, shared history, business and interpersonal links tie Australia’s interests closely to stability and prosperity in our immediate neighbourhood spanning Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Pacific Island countries in the South Pacific”.⁵ This perspective was reinforced in the 2017 Australia Foreign Policy White Paper which underscored the importance of “strong partnerships to help advance a secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific and strengthen the rules-based international order”.⁶ New Zealand has articulated a similar point of view. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern noted in her first foreign policy speech in February 2018 that New Zealand has “long and well-established ties” with the Pacific and that it is “one of the most significant contributors to the region”. She added that planned discussions with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull would include how both countries could “work with the region’s external partners to ensure we are all contributing to a shared goal of a resilient, prosperous, secure Pacific”.⁷ Australia’s future and ongoing security is tied to that of the Pacific region and demands sound relationships with its Pacific neighbours. Those relationships, however, are potentially at risk unless a number of drivers of instability are monitored and mitigated.

The changing geopolitical environment in the Pacific is affecting island countries and territories in ways unique to their geographic situation, historic legacies, and their disparate and diverse populations. Unregulated population migration and other drivers of instability increasingly require attention from Australia to maintain ongoing stability, prosperity and security and to enhance regional resilience.

This Analysis examines drivers of unregulated population migration in the context of an interrelated system that can lead to instability in the Pacific. It identifies issues that affect the security and stability of the Pacific region and Australia. It argues there is a need for an integrated and strategic perspective to achieve comprehensive and cohesive policymaking and implementation to enhance the security and stability of the Pacific as a strategic priority for Australia.

DRIVERS OF UNREGULATED POPULATION MIGRATION IN THE PACIFIC

CLIMATE CHANGE

Among the major causes of unregulated population movement in the Pacific are environmental factors. As noted in a submission by the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law to the Senate Inquiry into Implications of Climate Change for Australia’s National Security, “the

links between climate change, disasters and other causes of displacement are now undisputed”.⁸

The link between climate change and population migration was recognised in the 1990 First Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The Report estimated that by 2050, 150 million people globally could be displaced by climate change-related phenomena.⁹ A United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) report in 2010 stated that the impact of climate change in the Pacific and Asia region will result in mortality and injury from extreme weather events; increased risk of water scarcity; changes in the transmission, incidence, and distribution of water-, food-, and vector-borne diseases; heightened risk of food insecurity and child malnutrition; and declining livelihoods and consequent human migration.¹⁰ The chance of more than one of these occurring at the same time increases the risk to security in the region.

Climate change has been linked to rising sea levels, increased global surface temperatures, greater variability in rainfall patterns, and more intense tropical cyclones.¹¹ It is also responsible for environmental migration. Following reports in 2005 that the Carteret islands had progressively become uninhabitable due to rising sea levels, with their total submersion anticipated by 2015, the Papua New Guinea government began relocating the population to Bougainville.¹² Residents of low-lying islands such as Tuvalu and Kiribati have considered migration or relocation after being affected by extreme weather events, tectonic land shifts and climatic change that damage food security and water supply.¹³ As Pacific islanders are affected by sea-level rise, coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion and more frequent and intense droughts, increased migration is forecast both within Pacific Island communities as well as to other countries including Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Further predictions suggest that migration from Kiribati and Tuvalu will increase dramatically by 2055.¹⁴

Pacific Island governments including Kiribati, Tokelau, and Niue have openly discussed climate change-driven relocation and resettlement for the past decade. In July 2007, a joint statement from Pacific environment ministers to the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting noted:

“The potential for some Pacific islands to become uninhabitable due to climate change is a very real one. Consequently, some in our region have raised the issue of their citizens becoming environmental refugees ... Potential evacuation of island populations raises grave concerns over sovereign rights as well as the unthinkable possibility of entire cultures being damaged or obliterated.”¹⁵

In August 2009, the Premier of Niue and outgoing chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, Toke Talagi, said it may be time for the regional organisation formally to consider the issue of resettlement of people affected by climate change. Speaking at the official opening of the 2009

Forum leaders meeting in Cairns, Talagi stated: “While all of us are affected, the situation for small island states is quite worrisome. For them, choices such as resettlement must be considered seriously.”¹⁶ So serious is the issue in Kiribati, it has taken the precautionary step of purchasing land in Fiji, over 1600 kilometres away, for the future relocation of its citizens.¹⁷ Such decisions hold significant sovereign, cultural, political and economic as well as security implications that have yet to be resolved and could contribute to instability in the future — in any new community based in Fiji and in Kiribati itself.

The importance of climate and environmental issues to Pacific Island nation states continues to be a matter of concern and this was reflected in the theme of the 2017 Pacific Islands Forum — The Blue Pacific: Our Sea of Islands, Our Security through Sustainable Development, Management and Conservation. The theme highlighted the importance of the challenges for Pacific Island nation states associated with their security, not least being climate change and its effect on member states. Although climate change was a prominent issue at the Forum, the Prime Minister of Tuvalu expressed frustration because of the Forum’s failure to endorse Tuvalu’s proposal for climate change insurance.¹⁸

Globally, 2016 was the warmest year on record with the six warmest years occurring since 2010, with no year since 1985 having a below-average global mean temperature.¹⁹ The implications of these increased temperatures for low-lying Pacific Island nation states are profound: rising water levels and changing weather patterns have a severe impact leading to fresh water scarcity and crop failure affecting food levels. Shoreline recession has increased the susceptibility of islands to coastal erosion and in some instances, islands have disappeared.

When population relocation results in movement to other islands, pressures increase on receiving nation states and can add to tensions between state actors and their societies, potentially leading to conflict and wider security implications. It is highly possible that Australia will see more people seeking to relocate to its shores from the Pacific Islands and territories in the near to medium-term future. This has implications not only for Australia’s border control and management policies but for domestic policies too. The way these are managed is of vital importance for future relationships between Australia and its Pacific neighbours.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Natural disasters do not inevitably lead to the movement of people. Yet, the combined effect of increasing frequency of natural disasters in the Pacific Islands, together with disruption of agriculture by climate change and the prospect of even modest sea-level rises, have the potential to displace vast numbers of people.

Accurate and timely information is essential to assist Pacific Islands not only to be prepared for climatic and environmental changes, but also to

assist in capability development and capacity building, and to support the development of measures to address the associated social and economic challenges. The Pacific Sea Level Monitoring Project, which operates under the Australian Government's Climate and Oceans Support Program in the Pacific (COSPPac) and disaster prevention measures, provides information about the processes, scale, and implications of sea-level rise and variability of extreme events on Pacific communities. Of the 14 Pacific Island countries participating in the monitoring project, 12 countries host a permanent tide gauge facility which provides information on sea levels and tides.²⁰

Sea-level rise poses an existential risk when saltwater intrusion results in a decline in available potable water, unusable agricultural land and a decrease in food production, leading to forced population displacement and subsequent migration. In Solomon Islands, for example, five reef islands have already been lost completely due to sea-level rise and six islands have seen severe coastal erosion, leading to the relocation of communities.²¹ Australia has assisted the National Meteorological Services of 14 Pacific Island countries to provide data and advice to help the governments and communities of those countries plan for and adapt to climate change. Nonetheless, there is potential for Australia to extend its support more widely to other Pacific nation states.

The seriousness of climate and environmental issues for the Pacific Islands region is reflected in the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP), and a new Pacific Resilience Partnership. These were endorsed in 2016 by Pacific leaders at the 47th Pacific Island Forum meeting in the Federated States of Micronesia.²² The FRDP is closely aligned to implementing global agreements such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction,²³ and the Sustainable Development Goals to help build a more sustainable and safer region. The FRDP states that climate change and disasters are development challenges, and it advocates for more integrated approaches to address the risks from climate change and disasters. Not least among those issues is the destructive impact on communities.

However, climate change and disasters are also security challenges, particularly for human security.²⁴ The aim of the Pacific Resilience Partnership is to coordinate cooperation on implementing the FRDP across governments, the private sector, civil society, communities, regional organisations, and development partners. While the FRDP advocates cooperation and support across all levels, these have previously been difficult to sustain in the Pacific region. If strong cooperation is not established and actively supported, individual island states will be unable to deal with disasters or the associated displacement and necessary relocation of large numbers of people. If island states do not have adequate disaster-coping capabilities, they risk

unwanted interference and intervention from nation states outside the region through potentially detrimental tied or untied aid and support.

The adverse impact of increasingly frequent natural disasters has had serious consequences for the Pacific region. Australia has an established record of timely and significant support in times of disaster, including supporting Vanuatu in the aftermath of the devastating Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015,²⁵ and Fiji following the severe Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2016. While immediate assistance can be provided to large numbers of people affected by natural disasters, longer-term consideration is needed regarding the impact on communities and the relocation of large numbers of people following a disaster. The geographic proximity and existing social networks within and between Pacific Islands means that if a disaster such as a tsunami or tidal wave necessitated the sudden and quick movement of large numbers of people, pressures would be felt first by neighbouring island nations. This would challenge the receiving islands' existing resources and infrastructure, and their already fragile levels of environmental and societal resilience. In September 2017 Vanuatu's Prime Minister Charlot Salwai announced the compulsory evacuation of the entire population of 11 000 people on Ambae island in the face of the Manaro volcano eruption.²⁶ Described as "Vanuatu's own version of the Dunkirk evacuation",²⁷ residents were moved onto nearby small islands including Espiritu Santo and Pentecost Island 30 kilometres away. In July 2018, the Vanuatu Government again ordered the full evacuation of Ambae island after the Manaro volcano blanketed the island in thick ash.²⁸

Australia has established expertise in disaster management and recovery and recognises the importance of disaster risk reduction as a precondition for making development efforts sustainable. While Australia has an established record of capacity building in the Pacific, there are opportunities for Australia to build on its existing efforts. One area requiring attention is the protection and maintenance of essential infrastructure that might be affected by a natural or other disaster. For example, in Fiji and Vanuatu, shortwave radio was the only form of communication functioning after cyclones. This form of communication is inexpensive, stable and essential when regular radio, landline and mobile phones are not working. However, following a decision by the ABC's Executive, all Australian shortwave radio broadcasts have been terminated. At a minimum, the Australian Government should provide guaranteed and specific funding to the ABC to restore shortwave services to the Pacific region.

Small Pacific developing states also face unique challenges in expanding access to electricity. Populations are spread across tens of thousands of islands and an estimated 70 per cent of Pacific Islander households do not have access to electricity.²⁹ Australia could extend its expertise by drawing on and transferring existing decision support tools, training systems, and online resources to assist Pacific decision-makers

to assess the resilience of critical and other infrastructure when disasters strike, and to assess the implications for disaster-affected transitory populations. Cooperation between sovereign Pacific Island nations, non-government organisations and local communities is imperative. Australia can play a role supporting island governments to develop relevant policies and strategies within the broader context of drivers affecting unregulated and sudden population movement. It can do this by facilitating clarity around the issues to be addressed, by recognising and incorporating existing and effective traditional Pacific disaster management measures, and by focusing on culturally sensitive consultative approaches. Australia can also strengthen its partnership with Pacific Island governments by continued and enhanced provision of assets and resources including military and policing assets, aerial and maritime surveillance, engineering skills, and technological support.

FOOD AND WATER SECURITY

The environmental concerns of the Pacific Islands region are mostly maritime in nature, including overfishing, marine pollution, destruction of marine habitats, sea-level rise, and maritime natural hazards such as cyclones and tsunamis.³⁰ Food and water security arising from climatic factors are also of key concern. The scarcity or inadequate supply of food and water can lead to communities seeking other more reliable sources and can have far-reaching implications beyond those communities directly affected.

Many Pacific Island states and territories are dependent on climate-sensitive sources of income, notably fishing. When such sources of livelihood are disrupted, or no longer available, dependent communities must seek other sources to survive. In some instances these may belong to, or be claimed by, other communities or nations, leading to tensions and potential conflict within the region. One cause of tension is illegal foreign fishing. This threatens natural fish stocks and the marine environment in terms of pollution, quarantine risks, and overfishing. The marine environment also holds cultural significance and the way of life of communities is intrinsically linked to the ocean. Illegal foreign fishers are therefore a risk not only to the fragile environment, economy, and livelihoods of many Pacific communities, but to their cultural integrity and values.

Healthy oceans are essential for food security, livelihoods, and economic growth and are a key source of food in the Pacific. The Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) control the world's largest sustainable tuna purse seine fishery. The eight PNA members are the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu, with a combined exclusive economic zone of 14.8 million square kilometres. The tuna catches within waters of the PNA are about 1.1 million tons or around 25 per cent of all tuna species

combined. Yet overfishing and weak management are serious risks to the long-term sustainability of fish stocks and resources in the region.³¹

Traditional fisheries management approaches can be politically contentious, especially when they require consensus from numerous countries with conflicting interests. The situation is further exacerbated by foreign fishers at a time when developing Pacific Island states depend significantly on fisheries, with few other development and resource options available to them. Stable and sustainable fishing is essential for the resilience of stable communities, so they do not need to seek their livelihoods elsewhere.

Australia is a member of the Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices Including Combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing in the Region (RPOA-IUU). Eleven countries have joined the RPOA-IUU although only one, Papua New Guinea, is in the Pacific.³²

Australia could play a role to encourage and influence the extension of the membership of the RPOA-IUU to other Pacific nations. While fisheries management in the region has improved, Australia can assist island states further develop and implement necessary institutional reforms to reduce open access to ocean resources. It can also provide incentives to users to take a long-term strategic view regarding fishing and other maritime resources to protect fish stocks. This would help protect food security, nutrition, and community livelihoods. Actively engaging organisations such as the PNA would be essential to ensure any conservation measures and fisheries management strategies to sustain the sector are not burdensome on island nations.

Potable water is an important resource for the survival of Pacific communities. Water sanitation and hygiene remains an ongoing challenge within informal settlements and rural communities of many Pacific nations, particularly Melanesian countries. Climate-exacerbated water insecurities could add to pressure on island communities to relocate to other areas. Saltwater intrusion, as already has occurred in Kiribati, puts at risk long-term food and water security by contaminating the potable water supply, hindering crop growth, and contaminating arable land and water sources. Low-lying land crops and groundwater resources are particularly vulnerable to the intrusion of saltwater onset by rising sea levels or the over-exploitation of groundwater resources.³³ Such issues add to the vulnerability of Pacific Island nations and act as drivers for the movement of individuals, families, and whole Island populations to seek other places to live.

MAN-MADE STRESSES

In addition to environmental and climatic issues, natural disasters, and food and water security there are several man-made factors that can influence the movement of people and act as drivers of instability in the Pacific.

Man-made stresses occur in many forms — corruption, fraud, and exploitation are sometimes endemic in governments and business. In turn, these contribute to instability, discontent, and disenfranchisement among populations particularly when governance structures and quality vary across the region. Corruption around the exploitation of forests, minerals, and fish resources has been a common problem across the Pacific. The recurring violence in Bougainville and New Caledonia in the 1990s, the four *coups d'état* and the 2009 constitutional crisis in Fiji, and the constitutional crisis in Papua New Guinea in 2011–12³⁴ have contributed to ongoing instability in politically, environmentally, and economically vulnerable areas in the Pacific. The lead-up to the referendum in New Caledonia on independence from France in 2018 has already drawn renewed attention to the situation of indigenous Kanaks.³⁵

These volatile situations together with the future impact of increasing populations, slow economic growth, declining per capita income and standards of living, and poor policy decisions contribute to uncertainty and instability. This is further compounded when there is civil unrest, including between indigenous and non-indigenous groups. Both Solomon Islands and Fiji have seen problems erupt between ethnic groups in recent years. Although Fiji is a plural ethnic state comprising indigenous Fijians and Indian Fijians,³⁶ the ethnic divide at the time of the 2000 government coup³⁷ created numerous tensions. While such tensions are now less obvious, they have the potential to become destabilising elements.

Internal migration from the island of Malaita to the island of Guadalcanal within the Solomon Islands led to escalating tensions and armed factions seeking to control the capital Honiara in 1998. Although the RAMSI intervention in 2003 served to restore law and order in Solomon Islands and visible ethnic tensions have largely disappeared, there are indications that the social, mental and emotional impacts experienced during the conflict continue to affect the people of Solomon Islands.³⁸ Vanuatu has also experienced problems. The Government of Vanuatu declared a state of emergency in 2007 to restore public order in Port Vila because of a dispute between the residents of two of the archipelago's 83 islands. Papua New Guinea experiences regular violent tribal disputes that are underreported and often are beyond the capabilities of the law and justice sector.

Tensions between different ethnic groups can also arise with the influx of foreign workers particularly in the mining and extractive industries, infrastructure and building sectors.

GROWING EXTERNAL INTEREST

The Pacific Islands are one of the most aid-dependent regions in the world.³⁹ Australia has long been the dominant provider of official development assistance in the Pacific Islands, with New Zealand, the United States, France, the European Union, and Japan also providing

high levels of aid. Australia is also the region's largest trading partner. Over the past decade, other nation states have sought influence in the region and this has security implications for Australia and its Pacific neighbours.

Although Australia remains the dominant player in delivering aid, Pacific states recognise they now have more choice regarding engaging with external powers. China, in particular, has a strong and growing presence and level of influence in the region with its noticeable increase in aid to many Pacific Island countries. China has been actively developing relationships in the region through increased trade, aid, and investment particularly in infrastructure projects. Aid from China now exceeds that from traditional players such as New Zealand, Japan, and the European Union, and China is set to become the third-largest donor to the region. However, Australia provided more than four times the amount of bilateral official development assistance to the region than China did between 2006 and 2016.⁴⁰ China's aid to the region has often been portrayed as unconditional but this perception is changing as Beijing puts more pressure on Pacific Island nations to support its position in the South China Sea.

In addition to China, a number of other sovereign states outside the Pacific region, such as India, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore have been establishing more diplomatic links with Pacific states. For example, since the 2014 election India has sustained a focus on strengthening diplomatic and other ties in the Asia-Pacific region. India explicitly sought to garner support for its bid for a seat on the UN Security Council and, in return, supported the Pacific Island nations at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in 2015.⁴¹ This explicit offer of support, although hardly unusual, may have resonated more because of concerns expressed by the Pacific Island nations about Australia's climate inaction.

Russia has also sought to extend its influence in the Pacific. Since 2012 it has steadily built relationships in the region and held meetings with the Pacific Island countries of Vanuatu, Tonga, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu, Fiji, Cook Islands, Samoa, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau. In January 2016 Russia announced a significant grant of equipment and ordnance to Fiji to support Fiji's peacekeeping operations on the Golan Heights.⁴² And in September 2017, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with high representatives of South Pacific island states on the sidelines of the 72nd UN General Assembly session in New York. According to the Press Release by the Russian Foreign Minister, "the participants reaffirmed their intention to develop cooperation between Russia and its partners in the South Pacific on a broad range of issues of mutual interest in accordance with the joint communique of September 28, 2012".⁴³

These examples illustrate how China and other external powers are increasingly operating in the Pacific across a range of areas including

infrastructure, resource mining and extraction, military aid, disaster relief, and capability development. Pacific countries in turn take advantage of this increased attention from external sovereign states to access aid, concessional loans, military support, and international influence.

TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

An influx of aid investment and influence from non-traditional external powers may destabilise recipient states. These external actors may also influence other activities, such as transnational crime (for example, illegal fishing).

The systemic vulnerabilities that enable corruption, fraud, and exploitation in the Pacific are being utilised by organised crime groups. Most notably, differences in governance and inconsistent general law enforcement capacity throughout the Pacific and the region in general combined with extensive and porous jurisdictional boundaries, enable organised criminal activity. There are strong indications that Pacific Island states and territories are increasingly targeted by transnational organised crime groups due to their susceptibility to illicit flows driven by the geographical location of the islands and territories located between major sources and destinations of illicit commodities.⁴⁴

Nonetheless, there are Pacific-wide responses to organised crime. These entail several regional organisations and networks including the Oceania Customs Organisation, Pacific Island Law Officers Network, and the Pacific Chiefs of Police Conference.⁴⁵

Reports, such as by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime,⁴⁶ indicate that the region is a source, transit point, and destination for human trafficking. Although this is currently reported to be on a relatively small scale, there are indications that it may increase. In particular, human trafficking in the Pacific is often undertaken for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Trafficking for sexual exploitation has been associated with certain vulnerable groups across Pacific Island communities, including in Kiribati ports, where crews from foreign fishing vessels allegedly exploit Kiribati girls and women who engage in sex work on board vessels or in local hotels and bars.⁴⁷ Human trafficking has also been associated with the provision of labour for local and regional commercial and extractive industries, including fishing, logging, and mining.⁴⁸

THE IMPACT OF UNREGULATED MIGRATION

One of the most significant risks of unregulated migration in the Pacific is that it will reduce productivity. This would affect all population groups whether they were migratory or not. Loss of productivity would have a major impact on the economies of all Pacific Island nation states both directly and indirectly. The capacity of farmers, including subsistence farmers, to produce sufficient food would be impeded, national sources

of income to import necessities such as pharmaceuticals, fuel and other essential stocks would also be affected. Industries such as tourism, which a number of Pacific Islands depend on for generating employment and revenue, would be affected.

Unregulated migration also affects living conditions and creates human insecurity for many displaced people. Receiving island nations do not have adequate resources or infrastructure to accept or cope with large numbers of displaced and migratory people. This may result in significant numbers populating refugee camps, urban slums, or makeshift living quarters. These are usually characterised by poor sanitation, inadequate supply of clean water or access to sufficient food, and the lack of civic amenities and services.⁴⁹ These environments are conducive to the spread of disease, the development of epidemics, increased malnutrition, and high mortality levels. They are also ripe for exploitation by organised crime gangs and sexual predators especially when people are unable to make a living to support themselves or their families. The long-term implications are even more severe when those displaced are unable to return to their home environment because their places of origin have been destroyed or in the case of low-lying islands, rendered unliveable. As seen in other parts of the world, deterioration can quickly be exploited by external actors seeking to foment instability for their own purposes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN AND REGIONAL SECURITY

There are a number of potential drivers of unregulated migration in the Pacific Islands that require attention from regional governments including Australia. Environmental pressures arising from climate change are probably of highest concern, with sea-level rises, food insecurity, and water scarcity and quality already at issue. Other drivers include natural disasters, pandemics, political or civil instability, and organised crime.

If any of these factors, or a combination of them, provokes a rise in unregulated migration, a number of serious consequences flow. At the lower end of the risk spectrum there is the pressure on already scarce resources such as food (including fishing stocks), water, and productive agricultural land, and pressure on existing infrastructure and utilities. Moving up the risk spectrum, an influx of migrants would add to existing levels of unemployment in the formal sector, and increase the economic burdens on already vulnerable Pacific nation states.

While Pacific Islanders are generally accepting of migration by others from within the region — with some past exceptions such as the ethnic tensions within Solomon Islands — there have been tensions and a different response to Asian migrants in some parts of the region. Increased Asian migration to Pacific Island countries and territories has, at times, been controversial and caused concern such as in Vanuatu in

2012 over increasing numbers of Chinese retailers, riots in Lae in Papua New Guinea in 2011 against Asian shopkeepers,⁵⁰ reports of Papua New Guinea's Governor of Oro Province clamping down on foreign-owned shops in 2016,⁵¹ and anti-Chinese riots in Solomon Islands and Tonga in 2006. Where Pacific communities are not prepared for, or willing to accept, high levels of migrants particularly non-Pacific migrants, this could lead to the rise of anti-migrant sentiment, and the rise of populist leaders prepared to exploit such sentiment. This has the potential to increase instability within communities and conceivably increase tensions with non-Pacific nation states such as China if its migrant populations continue to be targeted.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The Pacific Islands region has become increasingly complex and Australia can no longer expect to engage in the same way that it has in the past with its island neighbours. Several of Australia's relationships are now strained, including with Timor-Leste over disagreements about the division of resources in the Timor Sea; with Papua New Guinea over tensions related to the Manus Island regional processing centre and management of asylum seekers and refugees; and with Fiji over diminished political and defence relationships.

There is a pressing need to recognise and adapt to the shifting regional geopolitical dynamics and issues that affect the well-being, security, and livelihoods of people in Pacific Island countries and territories. To maintain and preferably enhance its standing and relationships with its Pacific neighbours there is an imperative for Australia to act in a holistic, comprehensive, and cohesive way across areas of environment, governance, economy, health, defence, and population movement. This Analysis has focused on population movement, which holds significant policy implications across all policy areas and which cannot be viewed in isolation from overall security and stability. Targeted policy interventions have the capacity to reduce significantly the risk and extent of future displacement of people thereby increasing stability in the region.

Actions by external actors are increasingly influencing decision-makers in Pacific nation states both directly and indirectly. Increased foreign activity is resulting in more foreign nationals working and living in the region, adding to pressure on Pacific Island governments and local communities, and leading to changing social and cultural norms as well as to increased tensions and conflict.

Any future policies relating to the Pacific Islands must understand these changing geopolitical circumstances and recognise that while there are several defining shared features that have shaped their development, each of the Pacific Islands and territories is different in some cultural, historic, and economic respects. These differences have been shaped by exogenous factors including geography, remoteness, and physical

distance of the Pacific region. This means that while there are some important similarities between all the Pacific Island countries, the region is not homogenous. Recognition of differences between Melanesia (Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu), Polynesia (Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu), and Micronesia (Kiribati, Nauru, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau), and beyond this between each country, must inform any future policies and regional approach. Therefore, while any future policies could be considered within a regional framework, they must also include country-specific objectives and issues that can be more specifically defined to ensure appropriate implementation.

The changing geopolitical environment, the increasing role of external powers in the region, Australia and New Zealand's changing relationships with their Pacific neighbours, together with the shifting regional dynamics of an increasingly assertive Pacific regionalism are all critical factors that need to be considered to inform any policy framework of action in the Pacific. Such a policy framework must take account and reflect better the needs of Pacific Island nation states particularly regarding drivers of instability that cause or are attributed to unregulated or irregular movement of people.

It is important to bring the issue of unregulated population migration, whether caused by climatic, environmental, or conflict conditions or because of organised crime, into policy discourse. There is a further imperative to incorporate such issues into and across mainstream policy development and practices, and not just within a separate policy area such as border control. While unregulated migration holds obvious implications for border security policies, appropriate policy responses encompass a vast range of sociopolitical and economic considerations as well as those of national security and sovereignty. In turn, each of these issues influences Australia's ability to manage and control its borders so that the physical security of people moving across borders does not diminish the imperative of maintaining Australia's sovereignty, or damage the important relationships with Pacific neighbours which may permit external powers to extend their influence in the region against Australia's interests.

An opportunity exists for Australia to facilitate alternative migration arrangements, including the potential relocation of populations at risk of rising sea levels or flood-prone areas before climate-induced disasters strike within the Pacific. Environmental migration policy in Australia has been a recurring but unsuccessful topic to date. In 2006, the Labor Party proposed a Pacific Rim coalition to accept climate change 'refugees', while in 2007, Greens Senator Kerry Nettle proposed the Migration (Climate Refugees) Amendment Bill 2007. In 2009, an enquiry by an Australian Senate Committee recommended a review of the legal and policy framework for communities forced to resettle as a result of environmental change.⁵² More strategic and comprehensive policy

measures are needed. For example, there is potential for Australia to collaborate with New Zealand regarding development of its experimental humanitarian visa category for Pacific Ocean islanders who find themselves displaced by rising sea levels.⁵³ Australia also has the capacity to increase its labour migration program by extending the Seasonal Workers Programme,⁵⁴ and by expanding its multi-year visa pilot program for semi-skilled workers. These approaches would empower those affected by climate change by presenting them with tangible options other than staying and accepting lower living conditions with even fewer prospects.

While Australia has been successful with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the Pacific Islands region, there is a growing requirement for it to increase its capacity to assist in relocating Pacific Islanders affected by climate change or natural disaster who can no longer live in their home environment. Such people do not readily fit within existing frameworks, such as the UN Convention for Refugees. They are not 'refugees' in the legal sense, because under the Convention refugees are persons who are outside their countries of origin because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group and who cannot, or do not want to, return to their home country. In consultation with its Pacific neighbours, Australia could take the lead in establishing a legitimate framework for populations of people forced to migrate due to climatic, environmental or other conditions. Given Australia's existing role in the region, notwithstanding current tensions with some Pacific neighbours, it has a credible basis for taking the lead and potentially mitigating the influence of other nations seeking to gain traction in the region and whose interests could be harmful to Australia.

Unregulated migration can occur because of a range of drivers that contribute to instability in the Pacific region thus putting at risk the security of island states, and Australia. Environmental and climatic conditions, food and water scarcity, civil conflict, pandemics, fragile and unstable governments, and organised crime are pressing factors affecting the daily lives of Pacific communities. They need reliable access to food, resources, and infrastructure that will minimise the need for them to seek these elsewhere. In turn, assistance by Australia to alleviate these issues will lead to increased stability and resilience, and enhanced security in the region. Actions by Australia in these policy areas must be based on a holistic, comprehensive, and cohesive integrated policy approach that facilitates the overall security and stability of the Pacific as an area of importance to Australia and its future security.

NOTES

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³ There is no clear or universally accepted definition of unregulated or irregular migration. However, for the purposes of this Analysis the term unregulated population migration has been adopted from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to mean movement of people that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit, and receiving countries. From the perspective of destination countries it is entry, stay or work in a country without the necessary authorisation or documents required under immigration regulations. From the perspective of the sending country, the irregularity is, for example, seen in cases in which a person crosses an international boundary without a valid passport or travel document or does not fulfil the administrative requirements for leaving the country. There is, however, a tendency to restrict the use of the term 'illegal migration' to cases of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons. For further definitions associated with different forms of migration, see IOM, "Key Migration Terms", <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>.

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