



Answer to question:

PARLIAMENTARY JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

MIGRATION, PATHWAY TO NATION BUILDING INQUIRY

QUESTION:

CHAIR: Yes. They're called guest workers elsewhere, and that's what we're trying to avoid. That's what my personal view is. So you're right. What do you call it—

Prof. Damousi: We need a new language for this.

CHAIR: so that it's not framed as something that's not pleasant?

Prof. Damousi: That's correct.

CHAIR: Then that's a good point.

Prof. Damousi: It has those connotations that we all know. We conjure up slave conditions and so on. I think we need a new language across the board, to be honest—a new term.

CHAIR: That would be a modern approach, wouldn't it, that you might need to pick up on some of these.

Prof. Damousi: Absolutely. It's a 21st-century Australia approach. We're using language of the 20th century.

CHAIR: Why? Have you got language? Do you want to come back to us with language?

Prof. Damousi: Yes, we can. Put it on notice.

ANSWER:

We propose: Regional Essential Migrant Worker Program.

1. We make this suggestion based on the following assumptions:
 - a. The term 'guest worker' is outdated.
 - b. 'Temporary migration' is politically unpopular with the Albanese Government.
 - c. 'Seasonal' does not accurately reflect the nature of the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, which runs year-round.
2. Our proposed new language includes carefully considered keywords:
 - a. *Regional*: The PALM scheme should not be restricted to the Pacific. It already includes East Timor (not a Pacific nation), and wrongly ignores other countries with excess human capital and whose population has a high demand to secure well-paying jobs abroad (most notably, South Asian countries). To expand the pool of eligible countries, we propose extending the PALM scheme to all in Australia's Indo-Pacific region.
 - b. *Essential*: We argue that PALM workers are currently filling crucial gaps in the labour market in the agriculture, hospitality, and aged care sectors. Given the historical trajectory of the PALM scheme and its antecedents, we anticipate that Australia will become increasingly dependent on PALM workers to fill labour shortages and in a greater number of sectors. We argue that the inclusion of 'essential' (or something similar) will emphasise the vital role that these workers play in Australian society, and hopefully contribute to greater respect, and improved conditions and wages from employers. As noted in the Parkinson Report (2023: 11-20),

Australia faces significant social, economic and demographic challenges in the coming decades and a carefully tailored immigration program can help alleviate these problems.

- c. *Migrant and worker*: We deliberately include both terms for their connotations of rights.
3. In preparing this answer, we examined how comparable countries label their guest workers. In each case, we found these overseas examples unsatisfactory. For example:
 - a. US: H-2 program (named after the visa); historically, the Bracero program, which is Spanish for 'manual labour'.
 - b. Canada: Temporary Foreign Worker program (TFW); Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP).
 - c. UK: Seasonal Agricultural Workers (SAWs).
 - d. Japan: Technical Intern Training Program (TITP).
 - e. South Korea: Industrial Training Program (ITP); Korea International Training Cooperation Corp (KITCO); Visit and Employment Program (VEP); Employment and Permit System (EPS).
4. We note that in the overseas examples listed above:
 - a. The term 'migrant' is never used. This is problematic as it denies the migrant worker rights, such as the opportunity to settle long-term if they wish.
 - b. The term 'foreigner' is sometimes used. This is problematic as it labels these migrant workers as permanent outsiders in society.
 - c. Japan and South Korea label their guest worker programs as training schemes. Such euphemistic language is reflective of the refusal of these countries to identify as nations of immigrants despite the presence of millions of immigrants living in both South Korea and Japan (OECD 2022: 248, 250). We argue that in the Australian case, it would be disingenuous to claim that a guest worker program offers training benefits to participants. It is debatable whether a migrant working in Australia would acquire valuable transferrable skills that are in demand in their homeland.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Joy Damousi AM
FASSA FAHA, Director IHSS

Dr Rachel Stevens
Research Fellow, IHSS

Dr Mary Tomsic
Research Fellow, IHSS

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