

The Significance of Higher Education in Facilitating Labour Market and Student Migration in Fiji

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SUBMITTED: 9 October 2024; REVISED: 31 October 2024; ACCEPTED: 2 November 2024

Abstract: In Fiji, labour shortages have significantly increased over the past decade. As the education system improved, many individuals opted to migrate in search of better educational opportunities and job prospects abroad. The policy brief focuses on the impact of migration on individuals seeking adequate education and training. It is evident that a growing number of people chose to pursue further education by moving abroad. As highlighted in the National Economic Summit, migration abroad for educational, employment, or permanent purposes is a significant factor. This poses a considerable challenge to Fiji's economic progress, as the country faces a shortage of skilled and educated workers to meet the demands of the labour market. As Fiji advances in its development, these shortages could have serious implications for the nation's future. It is crucial for all stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, economists, and other professionals, to play their part in addressing these issues. Without enough skilled and educated workers, Fiji may struggle to maintain its position. Over time, the country may have fewer local individuals contributing innovative and creative ideas, leading to a decline in human capital formation, which could persist as a long-term issue. The present study constitutes an analytical research paper that investigates the effects of student and labour migration on economic development and labour market dynamics. Special attention is given to the role and contributions of higher education in shaping these impacts.

Keywords: Education; labour; migration; Fiji; shortages

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of brain drain is not new, and it is prevalent not only in Fiji but also in other Pacific Island Countries and regions such as the Caribbean. Fiji has been grappling with a long-standing shortage of skilled labour, which has been impeding its economic growth for decades. The issue of skilled labour migration has worsened over time, significantly hindering economic progress. If this trend continues, the prospects for economic advancement in the future appear bleak. According to reports from the media and official sources, over the past 18 months, approximately 10% of the formal labour force has migrated to neighbouring countries that offer better opportunities. In addition to the formal labour force, many individuals have left the nation with aspirations to pursue further education or seek temporary employment to improve their financial situation. The higher wage rates in countries like Australia and New Zealand

provide migrants with better prospects for personal and professional advancement compared to Fiji [1–2].

In Fiji, a significant number of students opt for higher education for several reasons. These include gaining the experience necessary for career advancement, increasing earning potential, and acquiring expertise in handling work-related tasks. Additionally, many students aim to migrate after enhancing their education and skills. It can be said that education and skills are key factors contributing to migration and labour shortages in Fiji [2]. The research investigates the significant impact of migration on education. It examines how migration contributes to the decline of Fiji's educational cohort and perpetuates further migration. According to [1], migration has had adverse effects on Fiji's population. Migration has played a significant role in economic progress, despite the differing philosophies and arguments surrounding it. Various studies have been conducted, each with its own set of critics. In their 2023 discussion, Gosai and Deo highlighted the financial impact of migration on families in Fiji, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many families faced severe hardship and financial instability but found crucial support in the form of remittances. According to Gosai's 2023 survey, many families received financial assistance from relatives who had migrated, with most remittances originating from Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. These migrant relatives had left Fiji for reasons such as study visas, work permits, or skilled migration, and were typically well-established, educated, and earning above-average incomes. This underscores the fact that individuals, even when already established and well-off, may still choose to migrate when presented with the opportunity [2].

The correlation between education, skills, migration, and remittance has been a topic of significant importance. Whether it pertains to skilled labour or white-collar professions, migration has become an inevitable phenomenon. The extent to which individuals are willing to migrate has long been a perplexing question. Will the government intervene with regulations and policies to deter the emigration of skilled and educated citizens? The government has been actively reviewing migration policies, prompting the need for a reassessment to safeguard the remaining skilled population (cf) [3]. This paper looked into the training programs that has been implemented by the Fijian government to enhance the skills of the informal labour market, as well as examine migration and remittance trends. Additionally, it explored the trend of students migrating abroad for further education, the potential to address educational gaps, and the decision-making process behind seeking employment in foreign countries for improved financial prospects, often leading to a permanent relocation [1, 3].

The research dedicates the topic of labour migration, specifically focusing on the skilled labour force that has emigrated from Fiji to the top five destination countries. Additionally, it explored the remittances sent back to Fiji and their impact on reducing debt, supporting families, and other financial purposes. The paper also discussed potential government policies aimed at mitigating the outflow of skilled labour. The government's current emphasis on training and investment in labour aims to retain skilled workers and uplift individuals from the unskilled labour market. Lastly, the paper analysed statistics related to migration opportunities through student visas.

Furthermore, the ideal framework is to find specific ways in which education directly influences migration patterns, without delving into any potential indirect effects through migration. The primary aim of the study is to elucidate the multifaceted role of education and its direct impact on migration. The study relies heavily on desk research, drawing from a

diverse array of data sources and information to effectively showcase the intricate relationship between education and migration.

This paper examined various perspectives on the migration of educated students and labour migration, both of which have significantly impacted our society. The phenomenon of rural-urban migration has contributed to considerable demographic shifts, leading to an influx of urban populations into neighbouring countries. This trend has exacerbated issues related to informal settlements, which have emerged as a critical challenge in urban areas. Politicians often leverage these informal settlements as platforms for political discourse and electoral strategy [3].

The research conducted is primarily desktop-based, drawing on a range of sources including newspaper articles and relevant published journals. This approach aims to elucidate the arguments surrounding this topic and provide impactful recommendations. Each section addressed the specific challenges faced by Fiji because of the migration of skilled, innovative, and educated individuals, highlighting the multifaceted effects of this demographic shift on societal structures.

2. Literature Analysis

Migration remains a significant challenge for many developing countries, with opportunities depending on location and relocation costs, as well as the returns to human capital. The correlation between migration and education is generally understood to have a positive impact, with many educated individuals choosing to migrate for better human capital returns [2, 4]. A recent study by [1] found that educated groups often migrate to support their families through remittances. In Fiji, despite government efforts to alleviate poverty, many families continue to live in impoverished conditions. Those with family connections abroad often opt to move overseas, leading to increased remittances for Fiji [1]. [5] conducted a statistical analysis using data to examine the impact of education on migration patterns and returns. They found that education and training are significant motivators for migration, as individuals seek to improve their income and standard of living. Similarly, [4] highlighted the role of education in local migration, particularly from rural to urban areas, as individuals pursue better opportunities. This trend contributes to informal settlement growth and has a substantial impact on poverty. The movement doesn't end there; it continues until individuals achieve their desired standards of living. As a result, domestic migration serves as a precursor to international migration, with individuals ultimately seeking better opportunities in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, or Canada [1, 2, 4, 5].

The annual budget in Fiji often fails to address the needs of all its citizens. Many people in Fiji continue to experience poverty [1]. The government's persistent focus on fiscal expansion has led to ongoing budget deficits. If these pressing issues are not addressed, Fiji may struggle to recover from the resulting disaster. Additionally, poverty remains a significant concern and has contributed to a rise in labour migration [6]. In recent years, many individuals have migrated in search of better opportunities and a more promising future. A study conducted by [7] has identified the challenges faced by first-year university students. The findings suggest that many students aspire to pursue further education at international universities, where their qualifications are more widely recognized, and there are greater opportunities for higher income. It is widely acknowledged that there is a strong correlation between education and migration. A survey conducted by [8] on young adults in Peru revealed that many individuals

aged 18-20 are more likely to consider migrating when they have completed their education. The study found that in households where children have higher levels of education, there is an increased likelihood of migration. This is often driven by the desire to pursue further education or seek better employment opportunities abroad. Ultimately, these individuals often send money back to their families to support their needs, including consumption, infrastructure, and education for younger siblings [8].

The comparison between formal and informal education is significant as it is closely linked to migration. Informal education has been instrumental in shaping Fiji's educational systems. It served as the foundation for primary education, paving the way for formal education. Informal education laid the groundwork for educational platforms, leading to the establishment of formal education, which provides children with the opportunity to receive quality education in classrooms with appropriate learning materials [2]. The emigration of educated individuals from developing nations has had adverse effects on their economies, resulting in a lack of innovative ideas to drive progress. However, migration has also brought about significant returns in the form of remittances. Nevertheless, it has negatively impacted the society's knowledge and education base. As a nation, reaping the benefits of migration often requires making sacrifices [9, 10]. The challenge of educated labour migration has long been a concern for many Pacific Island Countries. It began with the Pacific's connection to developed nations through the seasonal worker program. This program initially provided an ambitious platform, enabling numerous Pacific workers to fill significant labour shortages in countries such as Australia and New Zealand. Workers from Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and other PICs took part in this program [11]. However, the programs were frequently criticized for exploiting the labour force of Pacific Islands and violating workers' rights [12].

Labor demands are increasing daily, and technological advancements have created a demand for unique labour skills, leading to shortages in countries with these skill sets c.f. [13]. Nevertheless, there are positive impacts of such labour mobility. Inexperienced, young, talented, innovative, and educated workers have the opportunity to participate in labour migration, allowing them to enhance and upskill their unique skills c.f. [14]. Additionally, labour shortages in Australia and New Zealand have persisted. Therefore, temporary movements may become permanent if the shortages continue [15]. Migration from Fiji to neighbouring countries is not a new phenomenon. Historically, individuals moving abroad for work often had the intention to stay. This trend has been ongoing for many decades, with larger migration flows increasing significantly after the 1987 coup [4].

3. Labour and Investments

The scarcity of labour can significantly affect investments. Fiji is currently grappling with this scarcity, leading to a decline in both domestic and foreign investments. Investors are postponing their investment plans, and some are even pulling out due to the lack of available labour. Despite Fiji's efforts to gradually increase the minimum wage to incentivize workers, the labour pool continues to shrink. In the past two years following the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous industries in Fiji have experienced significant challenges [6]. Recently, the Bus Association has expressed concerns about the shortage of qualified and experienced bus drivers. Many have left Fiji to pursue employment opportunities in Australia and New Zealand, attracted by better pay and lower stress levels [16]. In March 2023, it was reported that 60 bus

drivers left Fiji to join New Zealand in just one week [17]. When asked about their reasons for leaving, a driver in New Zealand mentioned that working there is far more rewarding and less stressful due to better road conditions and well-maintained vehicles. They expressed regret about the time spent working in Fiji, emphasizing the significant disparity in hourly wages. Urban bus drivers in New Zealand reportedly earn approximately \$41 FJD, while regional drivers earn \$35 FJD, a notable difference from their earnings in Fiji. The drivers highlighted that earning \$4.10 FJD per hour in Fiji was insufficient given their financial responsibilities (On-call interviews were conducted with a few bus drivers who recently moved to New Zealand, working, and living in Auckland). Following New Zealand's announcement of an NZD 61 million initiative to address the shortage of bus drivers, Fiji experienced a significant impact as it contributed to alleviating the shortage. Initially, 100 qualified and experienced drivers migrated, with an additional 60 following suit see [18]. However, this seemingly positive statistic belies a more complex reality. Regrettably, Fiji's contribution ultimately backfired, resulting in a shortage of experienced drivers and substantial repercussions for the country's vital transportation industry.

The ongoing issue of bus driver migration persists. In October 2023, the Land Transport Authority of Fiji (LTA) released a statement stating that there are 8,188 eligible registered Class 5 bus driver license holders in Fiji. However, the accuracy of this figure is uncertain. The precise number of Class 5 drivers remaining in Fiji and those who have migrated is still unknown [19]. The tourism sector, a rapidly growing and significant contributor to economic progress, has recently encountered similar challenges [20, 21]. The construction sector and agriculture are also facing similar issues. Currently, there continues to be a significant emigration of Fijians. Over 10,000 Fijians have left Fiji for employment purposes. By mid-2023, 8,514 Fijians had departed for work overseas, with approximately 50% expected to stay abroad for more than 2 years. In addition to work-related emigration, a total of 1,304 Fijians has emigrated [22]. In December 2023 alone, 1,114 Fijians left Fiji, with 681 leaving for 1-5 years and 433 departing for more than 5 years or permanently. Further breaking down the numbers, 222 Fijians emigrated to various destinations, including 59 to Australia, 112 to New Zealand, 48 to the United States, and 3 to Canada. Additionally, in December 2023, 885 Fijians left Fiji to work overseas, with 405 going to Australia, 292 to New Zealand, 15 to the United States, 4 to Canada, 2 to Europe, 3 to Japan, 6 to China, 38 to other Asian countries, and 119 to Pacific countries, according to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics c.f. [23]. Fiji and numerous other Pacific Island nations are currently facing significant shortages. The pressing question is how these countries will manage these shortages. According to [2], Fiji is considering the option of bringing in foreign workers as a means to address the labour shortages. However, it remains to be seen whether this served as a lasting solution. [24] also raises the question of whether this strategy provided a sustainable fix for the issue at hand.

4. Training and More Training

One possible solution is to expand training opportunities. By investing in more Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs and providing grants, individuals can acquire the necessary skills through education to fill the existing gaps [25]. Despite previous government investment in institutions like Pacific Polytech and FNU's TVET programs, Fiji still experiences a loss of trained individuals [26]. Consequently, unskilled labour from the informal sector is currently filling these gaps. The Fiji National University has set a goal to

train at least 100,000 people in TVET programs by 2027 [27]. Businesses often bear the brunt of low productivity. To address this, the government aims to focus more on competency-based training. The question remains whether competency-based training can swiftly address labour shortages and uplift the workforce's skills. In the second quarter of this year, the National Economic Summit noted that approximately 22,000 people had left Fiji in the previous 12 months, with 16,000 workers holding work permits. These figures do not include individuals granted student visas who have also moved abroad. For instance, Australia now permits students to work 48 hours per fortnight c.f. [28, 29], contributing significantly to the skilled labour force Fiji is losing. As outward mobility continues to rise, the migrant stock graph shows a continuous increase. The pressing question is how Fiji and other Pacific Island Countries (PICs) managed this escalating migration trend.

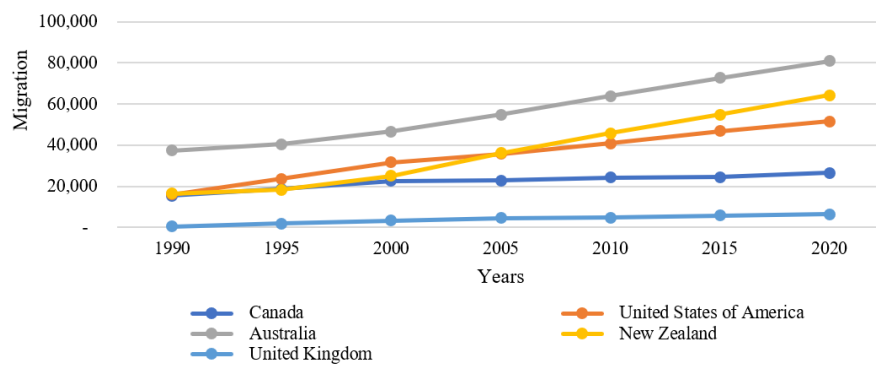


Figure 1. Fiji's migration to the top five destinations.

The graph (Figure 1) indicates that the migration numbers have been steadily increasing. It is estimated that by the end of 2025, over 90,000 individuals have migrated to Australia, with an average of over 10,000 per year. Similarly, in New Zealand, it is projected that around 75,000 individuals have migrated by the end of 2025, with an average of 10,000 per year. On average, approximately 2,000 individuals migrate to either Australia or New Zealand annually, either for permanent residency or work permits. Additionally, an average of 1,000 individuals move to the United States each year. With migration on the rise, Fiji is likely to continue experiencing shortages in skilled labour. The recent surge in migration prompts a crucial question: is this uptick in migration linked to political stability in Fiji? Migration in Fiji has historically been tied to political and social issues, with families of Fijians living abroad, particularly in Australia and New Zealand, being a significant driving force. This trend not only depletes the country of much-needed skills but also diminishes the prospects of remittances. If families relocate abroad, the incentive for remittances is likely to decrease, with potentially serious repercussions for Fiji and other Pacific Island Countries. This could result in a significant generational gap in the labour force [30]. The government initially believed that investing in the education of its citizens would address labour shortages and bridge the gap in skilled labour demand [31]. However, this approach proved unsustainable as the outflow of labour migration outweighed the anticipated benefits. Currently, the government is implementing measures to retain skilled workers by reintroducing technical education and training [32]. The extent to which the government gone to address this complex challenge remains uncertain.

5. Is there a Brighter Side to Migration?

The inevitability of migration is well known, and it often brings positive outcomes for individuals. Many Fijians who relocate abroad experience economic gains and regularly send remittances to support their families back home. Consequently, Fiji has historically benefited from this trend and continues to do so as the number of personal remittances received increases annually, reaching nearly a billion Fijian dollars in 2022. The data provided covers the period from 1979 to 2022 and includes information on personal remittances received in current USD and remittances received as a percentage of GDP (shown on the right-hand side axis) (Figure 1).

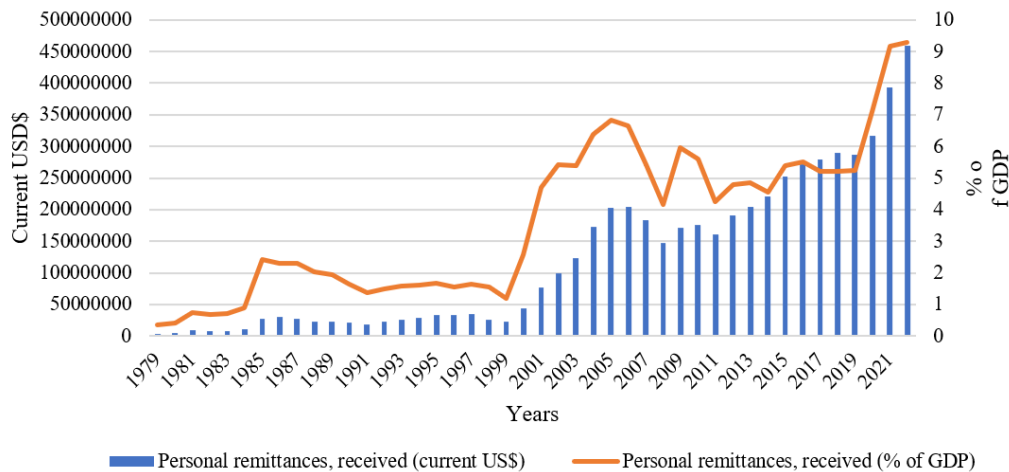


Figure 2. Personal remittance received.

The surge in remittances during the COVID-19 pandemic marked a record high for Fiji. Overseas families consistently sent money back home to assist their loved ones during challenging times. According to the World Bank, remittances received totalled USD 317 million in 2020, and USD 394 million in 2021, primarily from Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. By the conclusion of 2022, remittances received had risen to USD 459 million, and it is projected that by the end of 2023, remittances could reach an astonishing USD 500 million (exceeding one billion FJD). The increase in remittances has had a significant impact on the nation's GDP. The rate has risen from 7.1% in 2020 to 9.2% in 2021 and is projected to reach 9.3% in 2022. Currently, there are no statistics available regarding the specific types of remittance consumption. However, it is widely observed that the majority of cash received through remittances is either consumed or invested in household development. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these remittances served as a lifeline for thousands of families in Fiji, especially amid economic hardships and financial constraints caused by the complete lockdown. They proved to be essential for the people, independent of government assistance. This experience provides reassurance that Fiji can rely on remittances as a crucial support mechanism during difficult times. As a result, governments in Pacific Island Countries (PICs) may be incentivized to formulate policies that promote and attract remittances. Regrettably, it remains unclear what specific measures and policy strategies PICs are considering sustaining remittances while minimizing economic costs, particularly those associated with labour migration. It is also worth noting that remittances are channelled into housing and education by families in their home countries, a highly valuable benefit. However,

it is important to recognize that family remittances tend to decrease over time as family ties weaken, necessitating the continued migration of workers to ensure the flow of remittances.

6. Government's Skill Development Policies and Foreign Aid

It is important to note that while losing surplus labour may not have a significant impact on the economy, losing essential labour can be detrimental. The migration of labour from developing countries to developed ones greatly benefits the latter, but it inadvertently harms the former by reducing productivity. Therefore, developing countries need to focus on replenishing their skilled workforce to maintain their economic output. While foreign aid can partially compensate for this loss, it must be effectively utilized to enhance productivity and output. It is crucial for the government to develop strategies to minimize labour migration and simultaneously enhance labour productivity through technological advancements and improved infrastructure. Implementing structural policies that facilitate collaboration with other nations to establish standards for aid utilization in infrastructure development is essential. Additionally, Fiji could benefit from the skilled labour market through a reverse flow of labour and technology. Currently, Fiji requires approximately 10,000 additional workers in the construction, agriculture, and tourism sectors. The persistent issue of labour shortages calls for proactive policy adjustments by the Immigration Department to streamline the process of importing skilled labour, enabling businesses to operate more efficiently. Ultimately, the economy relies on the contribution of people, necessitating investment and job creation. It's imperative for the government to expedite this process. Furthermore, the government should reassess its policies and procedures to foster a more favourable business environment in Fiji. This is essential for attracting foreign investments and encouraging domestic investors to engage in the market. Without a fresh and assertive approach, Fiji and other Pacific Island Countries are at risk of facing an economic downturn within the next three years.

7. Rural to urban drift – what happens to the urban population?

The dynamics of rural-urban drift in Fiji have been a subject of significant academic inquiry. Research by [2, 4] has highlighted the challenges posed by Fiji's large, labour-intensive market, which has historically contributed to rural-urban drift. This migration trend has resulted in the establishment of numerous informal settlements in urban areas, leading to strains on urban infrastructure and services. As a consequence, urban sanitation has deteriorated, and the cost of living has increased, impacting housing, education, and other essential services. Moreover, this shift has also led to a rise in crime rates and poverty, placing additional pressure on the government to address these societal challenges. The correlation between rural-urban drift and employment opportunities has been a central focus of academic discourse in Fiji. [1] have investigated the impact of this migration on income growth and employment, emphasising the qualitative nature of the migration process and its relationship to available job opportunities, cultural preferences, and economic determinants. Similarly, [33] has underlined the direct association between income growth and employment, demonstrating the nuanced nature of the drift based on individual choices and preferences.

Furthermore, the implications of rural-urban drift extend beyond economic factors, encompassing broader socio-economic and cultural dimensions. The pursuit of quality education, access to goods and services, and the desire for diverse job opportunities have been identified as critical drivers of this migration pattern. This underscores the complex interplay

of personal choice, economic incentives, and cultural influences in shaping the rural-urban migration dynamics in Fiji. Considering these academic insights, rural-urban drift in Fiji is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by economic, social, and cultural factors. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers and stakeholders to develop sustainable strategies that address Fiji's challenges and opportunities associated with rural-urban migration. After experiencing a significant surge in urban population, poverty has become a pressing issue in Fiji. According to [1], over 30% of the population in Fiji is living below the poverty line. The 2017 census report revealed that 24% of Fiji's urban population resides in informal housing [34]. The household income and expenditure survey for 2019/2020 showed that nearly 20.4% of Fijians live in poverty, marking a slight decrease from the 2017 census [35].

However, a recent survey conducted by academics from the Fiji National University in 2021-2022, as cited by [1], suggests that urban poverty statistics do not adequately represent semi-urban areas that significantly contribute to urban income growth. This oversight may be attributed to the previous government's biased policies and discriminatory practices [1]. Despite the government's substantial financial allocation to address poverty in Fiji, the results are still marred by inaccuracies and exaggeration [36]. As the urban population continues to swell, informal settlements and job scarcity have become prevalent. This has led to an oversupply of labour in both the formal and informal sectors, driving down wages and forcing skilled workers to seek opportunities elsewhere [1, 2, 4]. Many individuals with unique skills opt to migrate overseas in pursuit of better prospects. Despite these challenges, the urban population in Fiji is projected to keep growing, as illustrated in Figure 3, which depicts the urban population growth in Fiji using World Bank data.

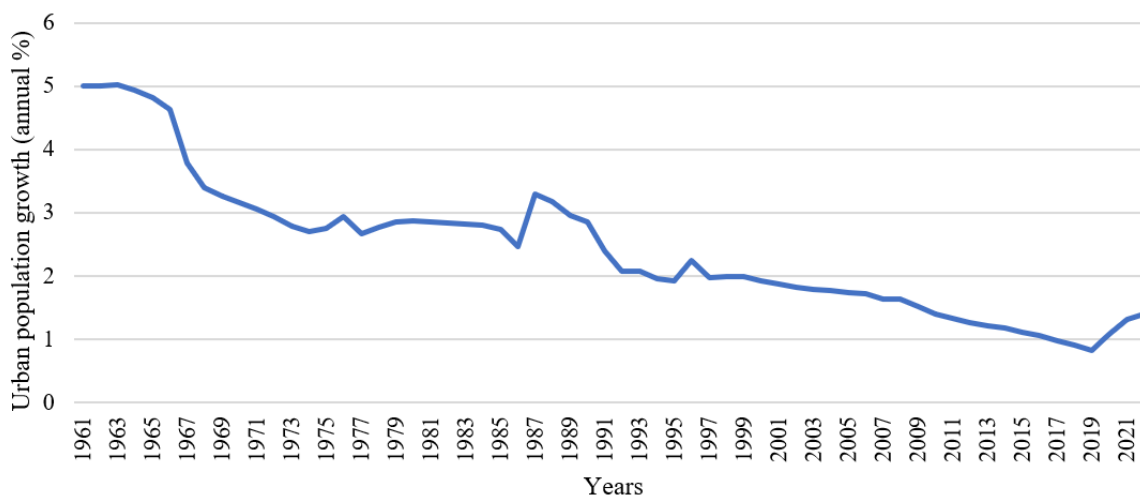


Figure 3. Fiji - % Growth in urban population.

The urban population in Fiji has seen a notable decline in recent years. From 1961 to 2019, urban population growth reached a low of 0.8%. Although there has been a slight uptick in urban population growth post-2019, it remains minimal, prompting a substantial migration of urban residents to rural areas. Notably, an average of 50,000 Fijians migrated with various types of visas from January 2022 to October 2023. This has led to a significant decrease in Fiji's population and has had a notable impact on migration trends. Specifically, 16,967 individuals left in 2022 on work permits, while 13,626 departed in 2023 (January – October 2023) [31]. Moreover, research by [1] sheds light on the reasons for emigration from Fiji, emphasising the pursuit of better opportunities, educational pursuits, and obtaining work

permits abroad. The reliance of many Fijian families on remittances is evident, with Figure 2 illustrating the remittances received by Fiji and their impact on economic development. However, the heavy reliance on remittance income may adversely affect sectoral development and growth. The [37] has underscored the potential economic consequences of migration and remittances, particularly in sectors such as agricultural production. Consequently, the shortage of agricultural workers in Fiji is noticeable, as many opt for opportunities abroad through seasonal worker programs or other emigration schemes, leaving the sector in a vulnerable state [9, 38].

7.1. Contributing factors: migration.

There are several factors contributing to the increase in informal settlers in urban areas, with one of the most significant being the need to address labour shortages resulting from domestic migration and rural-urban drift. In recent years, Fiji has experienced a decline in its labour market due to significant emigration, with many individuals seeking better opportunities abroad. This has led to shortages in various sectors, such as a lack of bus drivers, as reported in a recent article in the Fiji Times [2]. In a recent article indicated that an estimated 25,627 Fijians migrated between 2022 and 2023, with a substantial number relocating to neighbouring developed countries like Australia and New Zealand. The trend shows an increase in migration over the years, with numbers rising from 8,302 in 2022 to 19,196 in 2023 [39]. The impact of this mass exodus on labour markets and urban settlement patterns is undeniable and severe.

7.2. Why migration hurts economic emotionally.

In recent years, rural migration has helped alleviate many labour shortages in the urban sector. Despite the lack of a high-quality lifestyle, proper housing, and essential services, many workers who migrated to urban areas in search of better opportunities had to make do with whatever they had. Acquiring valuable experience and honing a set of work skills became their greatest assets. Their unique and distinguished skills enabled them to choose the best alternative for higher returns. Currently, Fiji is grappling with the significant impact of migration on sectors such as agriculture, the transportation industry (e.g., bus sector), and construction (including heavy machinery operators, builders, and plumbers) [2]. Migration has a dual impact. On one hand, it can result in financial gains through remittances. On the other hand, it can deplete skilled labour in our societies. Many individuals who leave to work in foreign countries under labour programs also face the emotional strain of prolonged separation from their families. This can significantly impact the emotional well-being of the family, especially when parents are absent for extended periods and are unable to spend quality time with younger generations. Over time, this separation can strain the family's emotional bonds [2]. A migration graph depicting Fijians residing in neighbouring countries (Australia and New Zealand) with permanent residency is worth examining.

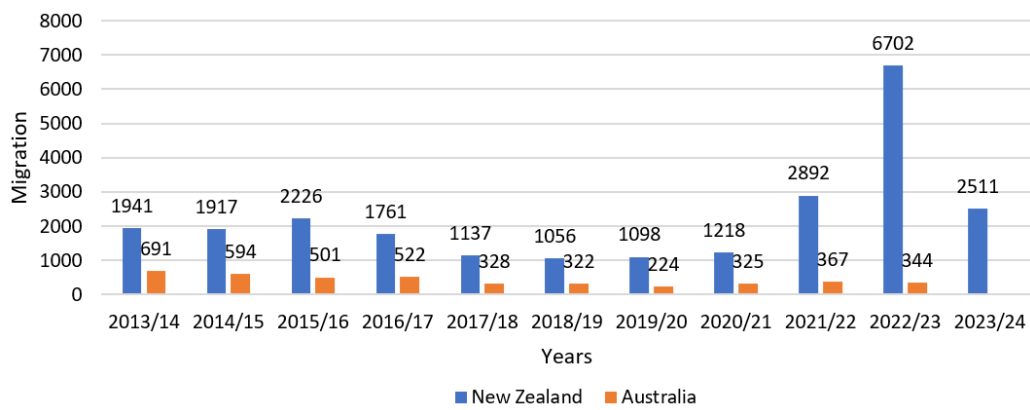


Figure 4. Fijians holding residency in Australia and New Zealand.

The migration by years axis (Figure 4) illustrates the increasing number of Fijians gaining residency each year is a notable trend. This data provides a broad overview of the various pathways through which Fijians migrate and settle to gain permanent residence. As a result, our society is experiencing growth. However, this migration has led to a shortage of skilled workers, prompting us to recruit individuals from rural areas to fill these gaps. Additionally, the high political tension in our economy has resulted in many students and workers obtaining temporary migration, raising concerns about their intentions to return. Understanding the impact of student and temporary migration is crucial for assessing the contributions to our future economic progress, skilled labour force, innovation, and creativity [40].

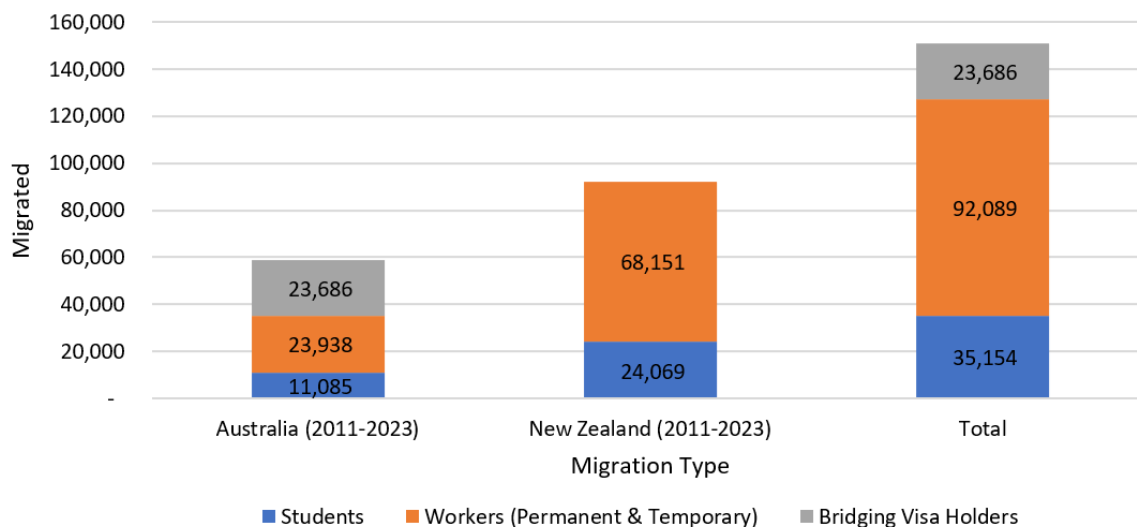


Figure 5. Temporary/full-time student, work, bridging-visa.

The following points should be noted from the migration and migration type axis graph (Figure 5): The aim is to provide a general overview of the number of students and various categories of workers holding temporary migration work or study visas. The student population on visas has been increasing each year. Those on bridging visas are individuals who remain in Australia while awaiting the resolution of their previous visa status. The workers' section encompasses temporary workers, participants in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) program, and those under the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme. Upon analysing the data, it is hypothetically estimated that the total number of workers who left Fiji between 2011 and 2023 amounts to 92,089 individuals, which represents almost 10% of our current population. Within this 10%, a considerable number of migrants, whether permanent

or temporary, possess skills and experience in various fields that could potentially impact different sectors of the economy. It is estimated that over 150,000 individuals reside in Australia and New Zealand, whether on bridging visas, student visas, temporary work visas, or holding permanent residency status. Comparing these numbers against the current population, it can be inferred that there has been a 17% reduction in the available human capital [40].

7.3. Bridging lacuna: urban labour shortages.

To address the labour shortage of an estimated 25,000 workers who have left, individuals with valuable skills are relocating from rural to urban areas. While in the past, this movement may have been driven by the pursuit of better opportunities and improved lifestyles, it is now apparent that it is also motivated by the urgent need to fill the labour gap as the nation seeks to address domestic migration and overcome these shortages. Currently, over 50% of Fiji's population resides in urban areas, with a significant portion living in informal settlements [4]. Where do individuals who are on the move go to find shelter? Housing shortages, lack of affordable housing initiatives, land use policies, and insufficient government support for housing seekers lead many to seek out better options, such as purchasing a house at a very low price in informal settlements or staking out a small piece of land to build their own. Additionally, there are many who cannot afford and never be able to afford a house, leaving informal settlement as their only, and often easier, option. In certain scenarios, informal settlements are inhabited by a significant number of individuals who pay rent. The rental income derived from these informal properties is challenging to include in national economic assessments due to its cash-based nature, similar to the informal sector employment [4]. Concerns such as poverty and poor housing sanitation have become a surplus and are debatable concepts for politicians when it comes to informal housing. The Ministry of Housing has issued a statement cautioning Fijians against purchasing houses in informal settlements due to the serious risk of eviction and financial loss. Additionally, the ministry highlighted the lack of access to basic services such as electricity, water, sanitation, and other essential residential needs in informal settlements [4].

8. Fiji's informal settlements a continuing issue when migration has left a huge gap in the working population.

Informal settlements in Fiji have seen a significant surge in the last decade. Over the years, successive governments have pledged to tackle this problem by helping the residents transition to formal living arrangements. These promises, often made during election periods, have raised hopes and expectations among the residents but without many outcomes. Largely these promises remain unfulfilled due to the involvement of multiple agencies within the government pushing blames from one to the other for not doing the right things to resolve the pertaining issues. This has left the residents in a state of profound disappointment and uncertainty [3, 4, 6]. All these attempts at solving the squatter issues have continued thousand moons ago but only intensified since 2014 elections which points to the fact that the promises made to solve the problems have been the political strategies of the parties. It seems like there has never been any sincerity to solve the problems. The attitude of the current government, which is a coalition of NFP, PAP and SODELPA is no different. Hardly any effort has been made recently to address the issue. Even more stark has been the silence of NFP on this issue, which has been most vocal about informal housing in the country. Of recent the leader of NFP said “I don't

want to promise today that the issues would be solved tomorrow.” We want to understand the situation well, which has happened in the last 25 years” [2, 4, 6, 21, 41]. Since the restoration of democracy in 2014, nearly a decade has passed without significant growth. Poverty, migration, informal settlements, and crime rates continue to rise, while political promises multiply without tangible progress in support and development. It is high time for the government to take decisive action and fulfil its promises. It appears that the increase in minimum wage was merely a symbolic gesture, leaving much-needed development languishing in the pipeline.

9. Will Democracy, the peoples’ power makes any difference.

The question is, do governments in Fiji win or lose elections on the issue of housing. Well, the past election results do not suggest so. It did not matter much during the 1990s when the focus of politicians and political parties was mostly ethnocentric power issues. In the 1980s there were other more important issues such as sugar industry, government scholarships, roads, crime rates, coups, and historical contributions of individuals during the colonial struggles [3]. However, the issue of informal settlements in Fiji has been steadily rising due to several reasons. One of these is often expressed in the media that people build houses on squatter land and rent them out to earn income. There is no specific data on this, but people do rent out in squatter settlements. Some squatter settlers also sell their houses for a price even when they are not the legal owners of the property [4]. So, for many squatter settlers it is an economic choice, and the issue is not objectivized as social or economic evil. However, many people believe that democracy through political pressure would tend to resolve the issues for the people. However, the interim government, post 2006 coup took some (drastic) steps to solve the land problems. Some unconventional protocols were put in place by the coup leader Frank Bainimarama to address the housing needs of the people [3, 4]. Democracy status allows nations to engage internationally and participate in foreign aid funding programs. Despite these benefits, the number of informal settlements has continued to rise and is now estimated to be over 300. Hypothetically, with an average of 100 houses in each settlement, this amounts to 30,000 households, almost 18% of the nation's total households. The increase in informal settlements each year suggests that democracy alone is not effectively addressing this issue. Nonetheless, it is advantageous for politicians to focus on these areas to gain political support [3, 4]. The government bears the responsibility of addressing the escalating land concerns by ensuring fair land distribution and providing appropriate land titles to all. Failure to resolve property rights issues will perpetuate high rates of informal settlement, leading to increased urban poverty, migration, and labour shortages. This is a situation that demands immediate attention and action.

10. Student Migration for Higher Education

In recent years, student migration has significantly increased, particularly among young scholars seeking higher institutional qualifications. This trend can be attributed to the relaxed student visa policies in countries such as Australia and New Zealand, which have attracted a substantial number of international students. As a result, there has been a surge in foreign visa applications, and these countries have witnessed a notable rise in the number of students entering their education systems. Australia, for instance, initially relaxed its student visa rules, thereby encouraging international students to pursue education and potentially settle in the

country. However, in response to the skyrocketing migration, the Australian government has recently tightened its student visa regulations [42]. This includes increasing the English language proficiency requirement for international students, implementing stricter measures against education providers, and recruiting agencies that repeatedly violate the rules [43]. Similarly, New Zealand has also experienced a rapid increase in foreign visa applications, leading to changes in the work rights of student visa holders. Consequently, there are now specific conditions and requirements that students must meet to work and continue their studies in New Zealand. Furthermore, the impact of COVID-19 has led to a surge in job opportunities in the Australian and New Zealand markets, making these countries even more attractive to international students. Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED) from 2013 to 2021 reveals that a significant number of Fijian students have pursued education abroad, with a notable portion enrolling in programs in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Japan. However, this data does not specify the number of students who remained in these countries or returned to Fiji after completing their studies.

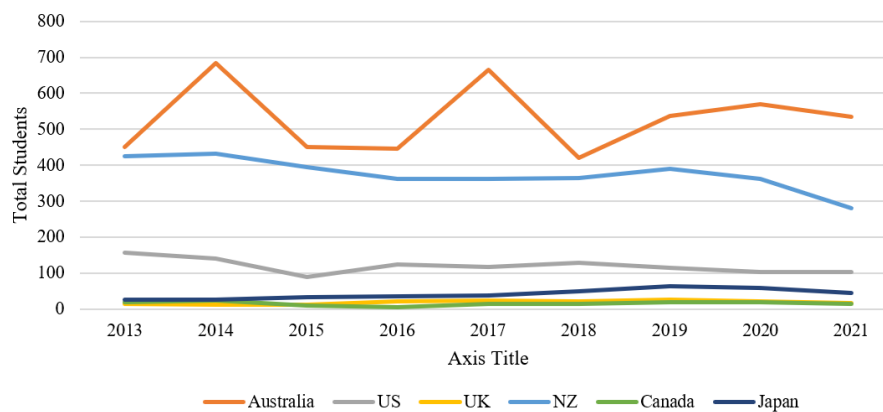


Figure 6. Student Enrolment by Country.

The data on Fiji's student enrolment (Figure 6) on tertiary education encompasses four main components: doctoral or equivalent level, master's or equivalent level, bachelor's or equivalent level, and short-cycle tertiary education. The primary destinations for most students from Fiji enrolled in various programs are Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. In annual data, the highest international student enrolment was recorded in 2014, followed by 2017, 2019, and 2020. Looking ahead to 2022 and 2023, the number of student visas is expected to increase significantly. In 2022, Australia saw a total of 586 student visas, and this number rose to 1,921 in 2023. Additionally, Australia projects that the number of international students from Fiji entering the country will reach 4,610 by the end of 2024. It is anticipated that the highest data record in many years will continue to rise in the future [44, 45]. New Zealand also experienced a significant increase in numbers, with a total of 1,116 Fiji-based international students across all levels of study in 2022, which rose to 3,171 in 2023. New Zealand Immigration sees potential for young scholars to fill the gaps in specialized job markets, offering a promising future for Fiji students [31, 46, 47]. In 2022, there were 72 registered students from Fiji in the United States [47].

Fiji has been significantly affected by the outflow of students migrating abroad for education. In 2022, 6,202 Fijians left the country for educational purposes. This number increased substantially in 2023. Within just 10 months (from January to October), a total of

9,670 individuals left Fiji for educational opportunities [48]. The substantial increase in the number of students seeking education abroad is resulting in a decline in local enrolments, posing a significant challenge for the local education system. This significant outflow has the potential to stifle economic progress and impede growth (In 2023, Pacific Updated was hosted by Fiji. In the event, Fiji shared disappointment about how many young scholars left Fiji to study abroad) [49–52].

11. Conclusion

Education and migration are important issues that significantly impact national development. The Fijian government has invested in the education and training of unskilled workers, but this has not completely stopped people from leaving the country for better opportunities abroad. This trend creates challenges in keeping skilled workers, especially educated individuals who tend to seek jobs overseas. This study looks at the different ways investment relates to migration, focusing on students studying internationally and individuals migrating for work. In just one-and-a-half years, from 2022 to October 2023, around 50,000 people left Fiji, including many skilled professionals. If this trend continues, economic forecasts indicate that it might take up to 23 years to double the economic growth rate, assuming it stays stagnant at 3%. However, if the growth rate increases, it would shorten the time needed to reach this economic goal. The government needs to quickly create policies to manage the loss of skilled workers. A rise in outflow under a 19% growth rate would increase the workforce loss, prompting the government to reconsider its policies regarding work and student visas. Fiji has strong potential to excel in global trade, but some political leaders seem to prioritize their own interests over the nation's economic growth. The government should take strong action to limit the number of informal settlements. Additionally, strengthening the rural economy is crucial to tackle the reasons behind rural-urban migration, such as revitalizing Fiji's sugar industry. The decline of land value due to informal settlements, the departure of skilled workers, and the risk of losing innovative talent due to more students going abroad are urgent issues that need the government's attention. Taking proactive steps now can lead to long-term benefits and sustainable impacts. Fiji is rich in natural resources, has a talented population, a strong academic community, and hardworking labourers. The nation has overcome many challenges in the past through dedication and skill-building. To address these challenges, the government must focus on developing its own talent instead of relying too much on foreign support. Ultimately, the elected government should act in the best interests of its citizens, prioritizing the needs of the nation over personal gain. Politicians need to reassess their goals and focus on serving the public to meet the community's needs. A shared vision for Fiji's growth and success is a common goal among its people.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to express gratitude to Prof. Sunil Kumar for his valuable insights and feedback on the initial article, which Sharnit initially published in the local newspaper, The Fiji Times. The paper underwent editing and revisions by Prof. Kumar, and his original ideas significantly contributed to the overall development of the article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The paper is entirely original and does not include external sources or references within the main body. A few select references are provided in the reference section. The original paper, titled "Labour Migration is Inevitable," was published in the local newspaper Fiji Times on October 20, 2023, and is accessible at <https://www.pressreader.com/fiji/the-fiji-times/20231020/281938842588048>.

Funding

There is no external funding involved at the current stage.

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