



MEDIA RELEASE (17th June 2026)

Department of Labour and Employment Services (DOLES)

In service to its clients and stakeholders, the Department of Labour and Employment Services (DOLES) is issuing this media release to reaffirm the department's latest policy implementations.

COMMITTED MISSION

DOLES is committed to carrying out its roles diligently, without prejudice, and to the fullest extent of its capacity as mandated by governing legislation. To further streamline legislative directives, DOLES' current functions are guided by two main governing policies: the National Employment Policy (2025-2030) and the Labour Migration Mobility Action Plan (2024-2027). Both policies are driven by shared objectives:

- To ensure that Vanuatu's unemployment rate projects a downward trajectory
- To ensure that migrant workers, both in sending and receiving countries, have access to decent jobs
- To ensure all migrant workers and employers, both in sending and receiving countries, are safe and treated fairly
- To promote productive and consistent social dialogue with trade unions and employers

LABOUR MOBILITY

Vanuatu remains the largest sending nation in the region, participating in two labour mobility programmes established by Australia and New Zealand: the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, and the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) programme. This engagement is driven by positive reforms to promote equitable welfare for Ni-Vanuatu workers, maximize their earnings, and ensure decent reintegration opportunities upon return. With the assistance of the Pacific Labour Mobility Support Group, priority functions within the Employment Services Unit overseeing labour mobility reflect strengthening various components in the labour mobility cycle including pre-departure screening, mobilisation and deployment support, and reintegration initiatives.

Emerging Social Issues

DOLES is aware that a growing number of social-related hazards have been detrimental to the rights and wellbeing of individuals, and concerningly, to children. Domestically, there is an increasing trend of family disengagement, domestic abuse, harassment, and child neglect. Internationally, serious incidents involving seasonal workers have been reported: four workers



have been charged with sexual misconduct in New Zealand, and approximately 16 workers are serving sentences in various state prisons across Australia. Of the 29 registered deaths in Australia since 2023, approximately 14% were vehicle accidents involving driving under the influence (DUI). The latest fatal accident in Australia, reported in May 2026, is currently undergoing verification by authorities.

Ongoing Scheme Reviews and Policy Reforms

There is currently no indication from the legislative or executive levels of government that the labour migration schemes will be suspended or terminated. Ongoing reviews of programming linked to the schemes are targeting key impact areas in the pre-departure, deployment, and reintegration phases. New provisions reflected in the revised bill replacing the Seasonal Employment Act are designed to protect worker welfare and mitigate anticipated social issues. Regulated directives have also been issued requiring compliance by workers and agents to ensure better coordination and response to emerging administrative and social issues. Ad-hoc directives have been issued to address the issues of mandatory health checks, offshore contract extensions and mandatory collection of data. The latest directive requires that recruitment under the PALM and RSE schemes be conducted only by authorised agents or the Department of Labour - prohibiting recruitment by any third party such as Team Leaders.

Worker Screening and Safeguarding

Priority is firmly placed on actively addressing emerging social hazards while building on existing fundamental safeguards. DOLES is currently forming a working group to review and strengthen pre-departure screening of workers, comprising representatives from the Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC), the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), and the Ministry of Justice and Community Services.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

DOLES has an obligation to ensure that employer and employee grievances are settled fairly through conciliation services and referral to the Trade Dispute Tribunal. As part of ongoing operational focus, the Santo branch is currently assessing and facilitating mass redundancy proceedings initiated by Unity Store, ensuring that staff compensation and welfare are appropriately addressed.

Social dialogue with trade unions is welcomed and will remain a key feature of DOLES' collaborative approach. Conciliation engagements with the Vanuatu National Workers Union (VNWU) are being remobilised due to disputes regarding the representation of newly elected



union members. To protect the integrity of the conciliation process, DOLES has sought Office of the Attorney General intervention on VNWU representation. Alternate conciliation options have been made available to applicants with pending requests. DOLES urges all trade unions to ensure their governance structures are transparent, robust, and stable.

MINIMUM WAGES

There are currently no predetermined decisions regarding the next minimum wage adjustment. Under the Minimum Wage Act, DOLES is advancing dialogue with key stakeholders, including the Vanuatu Bureau of Statistics, to conduct a nationwide assessment of the conditions prescribed in the Minimum Wage Act. The Tripartite Advisory Council will be informed once the first draft of the assessment is completed.\

LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENTS

ILO Conventions C190 and C191

Led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Vanuatu's Foreign Missions, the ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions C190 and C191 have been approved by Parliament in the latest session.

Convention C190 is significant as it commits Vanuatu to adopt inclusive and gender-responsive laws, policies, and measures to prevent and address violence and harassment in the workplace. **Convention C191** will require Vanuatu to strengthen protections under the Employment Act and the Health and Safety at Work Act, ensuring that workplaces are free from harm and conducive to productivity and wellbeing.

Trade Dispute Act

In response to concerns raised by the trade union community, the Department of Labour will be conducting consultations on the Trade Dispute Act in the following provinces and locations:

- **24th June 2026** - Ramada Resort
- **1st July 2026** - Ports and Harbour Conference Room
- **17th June to 17th July 2026** - Penama (organised in conjunction with Temporary Labour Migration Act consultations)

The principles of the proposed amendments are centred around allowing a reasonable period for mediation and better coordinating strike action. Business owners, investors and members of certified trade unions are urged to fully participate in these consultation sessions.



Note: Locations and dates for Penama consultations are shared with the awareness planned for the Temporary Labour Migration although very much provisional and may change. For further confirmation, please contact the Deputy Commissioner via email: jephraim@vanuatu.gov.vu

West Ambae	Pentecost	Maewo
1. Vilakalaka, Walaha, Halalulu, Vinabulu, Namberukwonge	4. Ahivo (Far North Region): Lavatu/Angoro Arouhbwatatu/Sara	<u>North Maewo</u> 1. Naone: 2. Navitora 3. Hanare
4. Tavala, Apopo, Nataluhangele, Amata	3. Northwest Coast: a. Loltong b. Atavtabangga	<u>South Maewo</u> 1. Nasawa 2. Asanvari 3. Narovorovo 4. Betarara 5. Navenevene
6. Saralokambu, Lolobinanungwa, Saranabuka, Saratangaulu	2. Northeast and Inland Bush (Aute & Aligu Districts): a. Lavatmanggemu	
3. Ambore, Navitora, NduiNdui, Londua, Loone	1. Central Pentecost Erna Melsis Bwatnapni	

Temporary Labour Migration Act

This Bill seeks to establish a robust regulatory framework, drawing from past social and economic challenges affecting workers and their families. Its primary objective extends from the current Seasonal Employment Act to ensure that labour migration opportunities are safe, fair, transparent, and inclusive, while protecting the welfare of participating workers and their families.

Provisions of the Bill include:

- Establishment of a Labour Mobility Council for oversight and governance
- Streamlining of the recruitment process to ensure greater transparency and robustness
- Requirement for workers and carers to develop and implement child support/management plans

Awareness of the bill will commence in Penama from 17th June 2026. The location and dates are



Labour (Work Permit) Act (Cap 187), Employment Act (Cap 160), and Health and Safety at Work Act (Cap 195)

DOLES will be organizing consultations on additional governing legislation, including the Labour (Work Permit) Act (Cap 187), the Employment Act (Cap 160), and the Health and Safety at Work Act (Cap 195). Subject to consensus reached during these consultations, DOLES will prioritise:

1. Revision of work permit fees
2. Review of tripartite representation
3. Clarification of annual business return disclosure conditions

The tentative schedules of the consultations are as follows:

Vila: 25th and 26th June 2026- Ramada Resort

2nd to 3rd July – Ports and Harbour Conference Room

17th to 17th July Penama (organised in conjunction with Trade Dispute and Temporary Labour Migration Act consultations)