

FLUID SECURITY IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

Perceptions of (in)security amongst New Zealanders of Samoan origin living in Australia

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SAMOAN CASE STUDY

This Research Brief reports preliminary findings from interviews conducted in Sydney and Melbourne with 18 New Zealand citizens of Samoan origin who are living in Australia on Special Category Visas (SCVs). A further brief will include additional data from five interviews with NGOs that provide services to Samoan communities, seven interviews with officials in relevant policy areas and fieldwork to be completed in Samoa in October.

The Samoa Case Study is a component of a larger project 'Fluid Security in the Asia Pacific'. That study consists of four empirical case studies relating to mobile populations from Samoa, Tonga, Indonesia and China which examine experiences of human security across four inter-related domains: economic, legal, personal and socio-cultural. The project aims to increase understanding of the dynamics of security and mobility amongst populations present in Australia on temporary visas. The overall methodology for the project is described in Border Crossing [Research Brief No. 6](#).

TRANS TASMAN DENIZENS

Many Samoans enter Australia having previously spent time in New Zealand and acquired New Zealand citizenship. SCVs are issued to New Zealand passport holders on arrival in Australia. Although they have no expiry date, they are nevertheless classified as temporary visas and do not grant the same entitlements that apply to those with Permanent Residence (PR). All but one of the NZ-Samoan citizens interviewed for the study hoped to obtain PR in Australia, and some mistakenly believed they already held this status. However, since SCV holders must qualify for PR via either the skilled migration or family migration pathways, most of those without recognized qualifications will not be able to access a pathway to citizenship.

Opportunities for New Zealand citizens in Australia have not always been this restricted. When the Trans Tasman Travel Agreement came into effect in 1973, it allowed for free movement between Australia and New Zealand without either passports or visas. However a visa requirement was re-introduced by Australia in 1994, then in 2001 significant restrictions were introduced for SCV holders on access to a range of benefits (see table below). New Zealanders arriving in Australia after 2001 are aptly described in Australian immigration law as 'unprotected' SCV holders. We use the term 'Trans Tasman denizens' to reflect the disadvantaged legal position in which this group finds themselves.

UNPROTECTED SCV HOLDERS ELIGIBLE	UNPROTECTED SCV HOLDERS NOT ELIGIBLE
Medicare	Vote in Australian elections
Age Pension +	Join the Australian Defence Force
Disability Support Pension +	Obtain ongoing work for Aus government
Carer Payment +	Social Housing assistance
Family Tax Benefit, Baby Bonus, Child Care	Access Austudy, Student HELP loans ++
Low Income Health Care Card	Carer Allowance
Parental Leave Pay	Mobility Allowance
Newstart Allowance +	Parenting payment
Youth allowance +	Partner allowance
Sickness allowance +	Widow /Bereavement allowance
Cth Supported Place (university)	Special benefit
+ If resident for required period (usually 10 years) and with certain restrictions	
++ May be eligible for student loans under certain conditions from 2015	

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Interviewees consistently reported moving to Australia from New Zealand in search of financial security for themselves and their extended families. Nevertheless, many worked long hours in relatively low paid jobs, while continuing to support relatives and fund local infrastructure in Samoa. Cultural expectations also required that working families assist newly-arrived Samoans who are ineligible for government support. Sharing of houses and financial resources created pressures for both the host family and the newly arrived family amongst those interviewed. Lack of financial support while unemployed impacted on their prospects of securing employment.

CULTURAL SECURITY

New Zealand was described by research participants as part of a Pacific Island culture. The move to multicultural Australia was a significant cultural shift. Some statements from the interviews suggested that in crossing the Tasman in search of financial security, New Zealanders of Samoan origin might knowingly or unknowingly sacrifice their cultural security. This was manifest in the cohort as educational disadvantage for young people and in terms of barriers to employment in a local labour market that was experienced as ethnically segmented. Not speaking English was a barrier that participants found excluded them from feeling socially secure and being confident to access jobs and essential social services.

LEGAL SECURITY

The changes in the law around SCVs generated widespread confusion and insecurity. One participant who arrived before 2001 and held a protected visa was nevertheless fearful of being sent back to New Zealand if s/he could not find work. None of the participants were clear about their entitlements, and access to citizenship was seen as an insurmountable hurdle. Unprotected SCV status was experienced as an exceptional category, whereas before 2001 Samoan New Zealanders were said to be free to apply for citizenship and other entitlements 'just like normal people'. Inability to obtain PR appeared to have a significant effect on trans-generational disadvantage, notably through barriers to accessing university education.

PHYSICAL SECURITY

Lack of legal status, coupled with socio-economic pressures and lack of access to support services clearly affected physical and emotional wellbeing. Only one participant mentioned domestic violence, and took the view that support services in Australia were superior to those in Samoa. The study could not explore this sensitive issue adequately. However concerns about the safety of young people were discussed more openly, including fears expressed about the risk of both criminal offending and victimisation. The main contributing factors were seen to be parent's long working hours, conflict over parental discipline, and lack of access to educational and economic pathways for young people.

FROM SOCIAL EXCLUSION TO ACTUAL EXCLUSION

In extreme cases, criminal offending can lead to deportation of young New Zealanders of Samoan origin. New Zealand citizens feature strongly amongst those whose visas are cancelled on the grounds of criminal offending. In light of the evidence presented here, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that SCV holders are made vulnerable to coercive legal measures such as deportation by virtue of being systematically under-protected by the potentially supportive aspects of Australian law.

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