



# Evaluation of the Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility Programme (2017-2022)

Final Report

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## CONTENTS

<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Introduction.....	6
Evaluation Objectives.....	6
Key Findings.....	6
<b>1.0 Introduction.....</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1 About the Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility Programme .....	10
<b>2.0 Information about this evaluation.....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Purpose .....	12
2.2 Principles and approach.....	12
2.3 Scope .....	13
2.4 Key Evaluation Questions .....	13
2.5 Methodology .....	14
2.6 Strengths and limitations.....	17
<b>3.0 Findings.....</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1 Effectiveness .....	18
3.2 Efficiency .....	29
3.3 Relevance.....	36
3.4 Future design and support .....	47
<b>4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Appendix A: Documents reviewed.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Appendix B: Interview Schedule .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Appendix C: Summary of the Programme output delivery 2017 - 2021 .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Appendix D: Case Study Report.....</b>	<b>67</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility Programme (the Programme) supports nine Pacific Island Countries (PICs) to gain economic and social benefits from remittances and skills by building labour mobility capacity.

*Allen + Clarke* was commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) to independently evaluate the efficacy and efficiency of the Programme for the period 2017-2022 to understand the impacts of the Programme and inform the future design.

The evaluation aimed to generate findings that are utility-focussed, credible, timely and relevant, and adopted a holistic, culturally responsive approach. The evaluation consisted of a desk-based review of strategic documents, stakeholder interviews and three in-depth case studies. Stakeholders included representatives from MFAT (including at Posts), MBIE, MPI, employers, Labour Sending Units (LSUs), Pacific government ministries, financial institutions, and NGOs, RSE agents, workers and families, regional organisations, and community leaders. Case studies included countries with different scales and lengths of participation in the Programme: Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Kiribati.

## Evaluation Objectives

The evaluation explored the following objectives:

1. Effectiveness: What progress has been made in achieving the SPLM Programme's intended outcomes and strategic objectives between 2017 and 2022?
2. Efficiency: What level of performance has been achieved in terms of input costs and processes versus outputs and outcomes?
3. Relevance: To what extent does the SPLM Programme address the overarching objectives and policy drivers for Pacific labour mobility activities, both for New Zealand and Pacific Island countries?
4. Future design and support: What changes could be made to New Zealand's support for strengthening Pacific labour mobility capacity?

## Key Findings

### Effectiveness

The evaluation found agreement across all stakeholder groups who interacted directly with the Programme that it is an important facilitator for the RSE scheme. The Programme supports the movement of thousands of workers each year and provides support to LSUs to build effective systems and processes.

LSUs emphasised the importance of capacity building through the Programme, and variation across LSUs reflected the need for more tailored support. Secondments of Pacific Island officials to Aotearoa New Zealand were seen as valuable and effective, as were the new sector pilots (fisheries and construction). Interviewees highlighted the significance of worker skill



recognition and training opportunities. Pre-departure training for workers was seen as an essential service offered by the Programme, but some stakeholders felt that more detailed information could be provided. The breadth and scope of outcomes under the Programme increased over the five-year period, which was compounded by COVID-19 and impacted on the ability of TVOM to deliver on all outcomes.

Post-2020, TVOM were able to pivot effectively to support the changes to the Programme required as part of the COVID-19 response and provide support for workers stranded in Aotearoa New Zealand. LSUs reported that support during COVID-19 was critical to ensuring systems and processes supported workers. Programme activities during this period also raised visibility and increased awareness of the Programme.

## Efficiency

Overall findings show that output delivery over the five-year period demonstrates clear alignment with the outputs' intended purposes. In addition findings demonstrated the agility of the Programme when the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated alternative approaches to support workers in Aotearoa New Zealand and deal with repatriation to the extent possible. A number of activities were put on hold, resulting in a total underspend of \$1.5m, or 20% of the total budget.

**Output 1: Core capacity-building:** The evaluation found that the Programme achieved efficiency in capacity building initiatives pre-COVID-19 through maximising face-to-face engagement and strengthening relationships with LSUs. From 2020 onwards capacity building was focused on assessing and supporting changing PIC capacity in response to COVID-19.

**Output 2: Initiatives in new sectors:** There were positive assessments of the Programme's support for two pilots initiated during the 2017-2019 period (Fisheries and construction) suggesting that there is potential to extend the pilots in the future and look at expanding to additional sectors.

**Output 3: Relationships & collaboration:** The relationships TVOM developed with stakeholders were identified as a strength of the Programme, both pre- and post-2020.

**Output 4: Knowledge management:** The Programme has commissioned several studies which have built in-depth knowledge of the social and economic impacts of labour mobility and provide important data for consideration in developing the next phase.

**Output 5: Support to maximise benefits of labour mobility:** The Programme provided a range of support to maximise positive outcomes and minimise adverse outcomes. The breadth of activities within scope has implications for Programme efficiencies.

## Relevance

**Alignment with MFAT's strategic intentions:** LSU capacity building is core to meeting MFAT's strategic intentions to promote a prosperous and resilient Pacific. There is clear alignment of the Programme with MFAT's development priorities.

The Programme's support for New Zealand's broader suite of labour mobility activities also contributes to strengthening the New Zealand-Pacific relationship and is perceived as central

to New Zealand and Pacific Island Country strategies. However, there are challenges for labour mobility capacity support to meet long-term resilience goals.

### **Key successes of the Programme**

- Timely and effective support for LSUs built on the strength of relationships between the TVOM team and participating PICs,
- The Programme's role in supporting the labour migration process for Pacific Island Countries,
- The Programme's role in facilitating a sustainable Pacific workforce for employers in Aotearoa New Zealand,
- The new sector pilots were both highly valued by PICs and employers,
- The Programme adaptations to respond to COVID-19 also highlighted worker wellbeing as a critical element of pastoral care and were included as an additional and separate outcome at that time.

### **Key areas for improvement**

- Addressing sustainability challenges to the capacity building element of the Programme,
- The need for additional support for LSUs for recruitment and reintegration, including pathways to upskill workers,
- Additional support to enable worker understanding of contracts and the employment context in New Zealand,
- Consideration of how to help mitigate negative social impacts in participating PICs, including impacts on families, loss of skilled workers from Pacific countries, social imbalances between and within villages, and unequal distribution of benefits within countries,
- Increased focus on worker wellbeing, including a framework for the delivery of pastoral care,
- Greater clarity is needed between the roles, drivers, and responsibilities of MFAT and MBIE in the Programme, requiring a whole-of-government approach and agreed strategy for the next phase.

### **Future Design and Support**

There are fundamental considerations that need to be taken into account before any potential changes to New Zealand's support for strengthening labour mobility capacity can be undertaken. These include clarification of MFAT's (alongside the broader whole of Government) objectives for labour mobility, clarification of Pacific Island country priorities/needs, and consideration of the changing labour mobility context.

### **Recommendations**

1. Redefine the purpose, outcomes, and focus of the Programme to respond to current strategic and operational needs, recognising the need for a whole-of-government approach.



2. Recalibrate the relationship between MFAT and MBIE, including clarification of roles and responsibilities with respect to the Programme.
3. Develop a collaborative approach to the design of the next phase of the Programme through a process of early and meaningful consultation with participating PICs.
4. Consider how best to enable ongoing Pacific ownership of the programme.
5. Elevate reintegration support for LSUs to enable circular labour mobility, and align with individual, sector, and country demand.
6. Identify where there are opportunities to collaborate with Australia (and other regional players) and ways to most effectively allocate resources and support LSU capacity.
7. Align outcomes with Pacific country priorities, including consideration of the changing labour context and the need for tailored support to meet individual country needs.
8. Learn from what the last phase has highlighted about worker welfare and wellbeing needs and identify the best modes and entities to deliver this support.
9. Identify opportunities to build capacity remotely, for example through Pacific-based personnel.
10. Recognise the need for focussed support for employers, including collaborative and co-design options, and identify the best delivery modes and entities to provide this support.

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 About the Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility Programme

Allen + Clarke was commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) to evaluate the Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility Programme (SPLM; hereafter referred to as the Programme) for the period of 2017-2022.<sup>1</sup> The Programme is funded by MFAT and delivered by the Toso-Vaka-o-Manū team (TVOM), which is comprised of 5FTE and located within the Immigration arm of MBIE.

This evaluation aims to understand the impacts of the Programme to date and identify potential improvements to inform the future design of the Programme.

Labour mobility is an important part of Aotearoa New Zealand's relationship and engagement with the Pacific. Labour mobility is intended to support sustainable economic development outcomes in the Pacific region. This support is materialised through offering opportunities for Pacific peoples to engage in seasonal work in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is intended to generate economic and social benefits for Pacific Island countries (PICs) through the remittances and skills gained, benefitting the workers, their families, and communities.

As part of MFAT's Strategic Framework (2020-2024) and the PACER Plus Labour Mobility Arrangement (2017),<sup>2</sup> labour mobility is an integral part of promoting prosperity and resilience, strengthening relationships, and sharing economic benefits across the Pacific region. Aotearoa New Zealand participates in labour mobility activities within the Pacific region alongside other donor countries, notably Australia, which has expanded its labour mobility scheme in recent years.<sup>3</sup> The recent MFAT *Reset to Resilience* Cabinet Paper (2021) identifies the potential for labour mobility to give effect to New Zealand's 'resilience' model for the Pacific through a true partnership approach.<sup>4</sup>

Following the Strengthening Pacific Partnerships Programme (SPP) which started in 2011, the SPLM Programme was initiated in 2017 through a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between MFAT and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE). The MOU outlines the key goal of the Programme as:

*To support Pacific Island countries to gain economic and social benefits from remittances and skills by building labour mobility capacity.*

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<sup>1</sup> The Programme dates were subsequently varied to end in March 2023.

<sup>2</sup> PACER Plus Labour Mobility Arrangement, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2017) <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/trade/free-trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements-in-force/pacer-plus/labour-mobility/>

<sup>3</sup> For details about the Australian Government's Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, please refer to the following webpage: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/engagement/pacific-labour-mobility>

<sup>4</sup> New Zealand's Pacific Engagement: From Reset to Resilience, 11 November 2021. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/OIA/Cab-Paper-NZ-Pacific-Engagement-From-Reset-to-Resilience.pdf>

The Programme supports nine Pacific Island countries (Fiji, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea). The key outputs of the Programme include core capacity building in the Labour Sending Units (LSUs), supporting initiatives in new sectors (e.g., pilots in fisheries and construction), establishing and building relationships with key stakeholders, building knowledge in Pacific states about labour mobility in New Zealand, and supporting LSUs to maximise the benefits of labour mobility for their respective countries.

Two variations to the original MOU were completed (in September 2020 and November 2020) to recognise the changing needs of the Programme in the context of COVID-19.

## 2.0 INFORMATION ABOUT THIS EVALUATION

### 2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to independently assess the efficacy and efficiency of the current framework and delivery modalities of the Programme to inform the development of the next phase of activity. This includes the identification of opportunities for improvement of the Programme, including funding, activities covered, and methods of delivery.

### 2.2 Principles and approach

The approach was guided by the evaluation's purpose, objectives, and key evaluation questions; the approach outlined in the evaluation's Terms of Reference (TOR); and MFAT's expectation for a culturally responsive methodological approach.

The evaluation adopted a Utilisation Focused Evaluation (UFE)<sup>5</sup> approach to generate findings that are utility-focused, credible, timely and relevant. The approach does not advocate any particular method, theory or use; instead, it is an interactive, responsive process for helping the evaluation team select the most appropriate methods, theory and uses for the particular evaluation context. The general approach to this evaluation was founded on the principles of impartiality and independence, credibility, usefulness, partnership and participation. Further, the approach was guided by MFAT's evaluation principles, which were embedded as follows:

- Utilising independent evaluators (i.e. *Allen + Clarke*) for the collection of data, data analysis, and drafting.
- Distinguishing between stakeholders' perspectives and evaluative judgements, and maintaining a clear line of sight from evidence to findings, to conclusions and recommendations.
- The UFE approach ensures that usefulness is the guiding principle in the evaluation and that it generates relevant, timely, and valuable findings and recommendations.
- Regular and strong engagement with MFAT and MBIE partners ensures ownership of the final product and its recommendations.
- In making future-focused recommendations, the evaluation addresses the forward-planning principle.

Our approach is also responsive to MFAT's expectation for a culturally responsive methodological approach that acknowledges local contexts. We have adopted a holistic approach that respects the importance of local and traditional knowledge, and recognises the significance of cultural, social and economic issues in the Pacific Islands. Three members of our team have Pacific Island heritage, from the Solomon Islands, Samoa and Kiribati.

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<sup>5</sup> Patton, Michael Quinn (2008) *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*: 4th edition. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage Publications.

We are guided by the Health Research Council's Pacific Health Research Guidelines 2014<sup>6</sup>:

- meaningful and reciprocal engagement
- cultural sensitivity and respect
- respect for the significance of Pacific peoples' knowledge
- linking health research to a social protection framework
- non-maleficence: protecting Pacific communities
- consideration of the balance between research aims and human dignity.

We ensured methods were relevant to the cultural context of each interview and provided a small koha to acknowledge the contribution of non-government interviewees based in the three case study locations.

## 2.3 Scope

As specified by the Terms of Reference, the scope of this evaluation included the following:

- the five-year period from 2017 to 2022 (the second phase of the Programme)
- countries that are currently receiving labour mobility support from New Zealand (Fiji, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea).

The scope of the evaluation excludes:

- the time period prior to 2017
- PICs not involved in the Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme (RSE Scheme)
- evaluation of the two pilot programmes (construction and fisheries); however, the pilots are still included as one of the five Programme outputs.

## 2.4 Key Evaluation Questions

This evaluation seeks to answer the following key evaluation questions (KEQs), situated under their respective objectives, as detailed in Table 1.

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<sup>6</sup> Health Research Council of New Zealand (2014). Pacific Health Research Guidelines. HRCNZ.

**Table 1: Key Evaluation Questions and Objectives**

<b>Objective 1: Effectiveness – What progress has been made in achieving the SPLM Programme’s intended outcomes and strategic objectives between 2017 and 2022?</b>
KEQ 1: How well have the Programme’s outputs been delivered (taking into account the environmental constraints from 2020)?
KEQ 2: In what ways and to what extent have the Programme’s outputs contributed to the achievement of desired Short and Medium-Term Outcomes? <i>(NB: These outcomes are included in Tables 2 and 3, Section 3.1)</i>
<b>Objective 2: Efficiency – What level of performance has been achieved in terms of input costs and processes versus outputs and outcomes?</b>
KEQ 3: How much has been spent annually on output-specific and non-output specific costs to date?
KEQ 4: How do the results from KEQ 3 compare to the results achieved against the Outputs, Short and Medium-Term Outcomes (taking into account the environmental constraints from 2020)?
<b>Objective 3: Relevance – To what extent does the SPLM Programme address the overarching objectives and policy drivers for Pacific labour mobility activities, both for New Zealand and Pacific Island countries?</b>
KEQ 5: To what extent and in what ways is the SPLM Programme aligned with MFAT’s strategic intentions and development priorities?
KEQ 6: What do stakeholders consider to be the key highlights and key issues associated with the Programme (taking into account the environmental constraints from 2020)?
<b>Objective 4: Future design and support – What changes could be made to New Zealand’s support for strengthening Pacific labour mobility capacity?</b>
KEQ 7: What other donors are involved in strengthening labour mobility capacity in the Pacific – currently and over next 5 years? In what areas and to what amount?
KEQ 8: What insights do the evaluation findings provide to inform the SPLM Programme’s future design?

## 2.5 Methodology

This evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, undertaking stakeholder interviews, case studies and a review of documents and data.

### Document review: 1 June – 30 June

The evaluation team conducted a desk-based document review to obtain an in-depth understanding of the environment and strategic context in which the Programme has operated, including the activities, their results, and expenditure by output and activity. Documents were provided by MFAT, with additional documentation sourced by the team and provided by



interview participants. The review included relevant documents, data and literature (including grey literature):

- MFAT and MBIE strategic documents
- MOU and Letters of Variation, including their respective attachments (2017-2022)
- MBIE's Toso-Vaka-o-Manū Annual Reports
- Relevant qualitative and quantitative information held by agencies (e.g. New Zealand and PIC government agencies)
- Country Plans.

A full list of documents reviewed is provided in Appendix A.

### **Stakeholder interviews: 1 June – 15 July**

Stakeholder interviews provided a critical source of perspectives on different aspects of the design, delivery, results, and value of the Programme. Interviews took a semi-structured approach utilising the interview schedule included in Appendix B of this report. The interview schedule was translated into Samoan for the Samoan case study. Taking a semi-structured approach to interviews allowed us to obtain the necessary information relating to the KEQs while also providing the ability to dig deeper on specific topics raised during interviews. The interview schedule was slightly adapted to reflect the different stakeholders interviewed.

Contact details for interviewees were provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), and included the following groups:

- MFAT Pacific bilateral team/other MFAT staff (n= 3)
- MFAT staff at posts (n= 16)
- RSE Liaison Officers (n = 4)
- MBIE (n= 3)
- MPI (n= 1)
- Employer representatives (n= 7)
- Labour Sending Units/Labour Mobility Units (LSU/LMU) (n=5)
- Pacific government ministries (n=4)
- Pacific financial institutions (n=4)
- RSE agents, workers and families (n= 25)
- Pacific NGOs (n= 4)
- Regional organisations (n=2)
- Community leaders/council members (n=20)
- Other (private sector, medical professionals, industry, academics, researchers) (n=8)

Participants were contacted by email and were provided with an information sheet and consent form that described the evaluation process, detailed how privacy and anonymity would be protected and explained how the data would be stored. Interviews were conducted via an online videoconferencing platform and recorded. Notes were also taken during the interview and checked against the recording afterwards (where necessary) and shared with participants if requested.

### **Case studies: 1 June – 11 August**

Our team included three partners based in, or strongly connected to, the Solomon Islands, Samoa and Kiribati, who undertook case studies in their respective countries. The case study locations were confirmed in discussion with MFAT and allowed the collection of more in-depth perspectives (including from LSU representatives, returned workers and families) and were intended to provide a more detailed picture of the impact of the Programme and the RSE scheme more broadly in three Pacific Island countries.

For the three countries selected: Samoa was identified as a significant labour mobility participant (with 2,315 RSE workers arriving in New Zealand in 2018/19), the Solomon Islands as a newer, smaller scale participant (with 696 workers arriving in 2018/19), and Kiribati as a small labour sending country with a proportionately high number of female RSE workers (and 263 workers arriving in 2018/19).<sup>7</sup> These factors make Kiribati a good comparison country for a case study compared to Samoa and the Solomon Islands. Reflecting the difference in scale of the RSE scheme and consequently the role of the Programme in the three case study countries, the scope of the case studies also differed. The case study for Samoa was the most extensive and drew on a larger number of stakeholders than the other case studies. The case study for Kiribati had the smallest scope with a limited number of interviews undertaken to supplement stakeholder interviews for the overall evaluation.

The interview schedule was adapted to reflect the cultural context and the participants interviewed. For example, the talanoa approach was used in Samoa and maroro in Kiribati. Interviews were either recorded or notes were taken. Where interviews were not in English, summaries in English were written after the interview. Each case study was written up into a case study report. Case study findings were triangulated with interview and document findings and the case study reports are also included in Appendix D.

### **Analysis and Drafting: 1 July – 28 July**

Interview notes were checked against audio recordings (where needed), and then uploaded to NVivo Pro Software for thematic analysis. This allowed the coding of content against relevant themes and sub-themes to group the information for further analysis. Following this the data was thematically analysed, summarised, and synthesised under each of the evaluation questions (in combination with information from the document review). This thematic analysis process facilitated the identification of commonalities/themes across what different interviewees had said, and identification of any areas of difference. Responses were

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<sup>7</sup> MBIE (2021). The Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility: Toso-Vaka-o-Manū Annual Report 2020-2021.

grouped thematically against the evaluation objectives and synthesised into the corresponding findings sections of the draft report.

Due to amendments to Programme outputs and expected outcomes during the five-year period covered by this evaluation, it was not possible to develop an evaluative rubric on which to base evaluative judgements. However, findings from the document review, stakeholder interviews and case studies were triangulated to arrive at an evaluative assessment of Programme effectiveness, efficiency and relevance. Based on these findings, draft recommendations for the next phase of the Programme have been made.

A sense-making session with MFAT and MBIE representatives reviewed the draft findings and recommendations and informed final revisions to the report.

## 2.6 Strengths and limitations

Key strengths of this evaluation and its approach include:

- Our team included a sector expert in labour mobility as well as Pacific country expertise from the Solomon Islands, Samoa, and Kiribati. Having a broad range of perspectives from different stakeholder groups contributing to the data collection and analysis supports the credibility and validity of the findings.
- There was strong engagement from stakeholders during the data collection period, which allowed us to undertake interviews with the majority of stakeholders suggested to us by MFAT. A range of additional stakeholders were subsequently identified as part of the case studies.
- The evaluation used data collected via a variety of sources, including document review, semi-structured interviews, and in-depth case studies. This mixed-method approach allows triangulation of findings to provide evidence-based conclusions.
- The review focused on ‘explanation building’ to allow for investigation of not only ‘the what’, but also ‘the how’ and ‘the why’. Further, the semi-structured style of interviewing enabled the review team to respond fluidly as interviews progressed to build explanations for the findings.

Limitations of this evaluation include:

- End-users of the Programme (workers and families) and LSU representatives were included within the scope of the three case study countries only.
- Many of the interviewees lacked understanding regarding the differentiation between the Programme and the RSE scheme.
- Attribution of impacts is a significant methodological challenge for the evaluation, given that Programme activities have occurred alongside similar DFAT-funded capacity building inputs.
- There is no baseline from which to measure improvements against all Programme outputs (e.g. capacity building, relationships and collaborations).
- This was a rapid evaluation with data collection conducted over a period of eight weeks. This constrained our ability to gather in-depth evidence relating to some of the KEQs.

## 3.0 FINDINGS

The following sections detail the main evaluation findings from interview data and document review. The findings are arranged according to the objectives of the evaluation.

### 3.1 Effectiveness

This section examines the progress made in achieving the Programme's intended outcomes and strategic objectives between 2017 and 2022. It addresses the following KEQs:

- KEQ 1: How well have the Programme's outputs been delivered (taking into account the environmental constraints from 2020)?
- KEQ 2: In what ways and to what extent have the Programme's outputs contributed to the achievement of desired Short and Medium-Term Outcomes?

**The evaluation found agreement across all stakeholder groups who interacted directly with the Programme that it is an important facilitator for the RSE scheme. The Programme supports the movement of thousands of workers each year and provides support to LSUs to build effective systems and processes. The Programme has faced a number of challenges during this period.**

Findings regarding the effectiveness of activities in meeting outcomes need to be considered in the context of changes to the Programme made in response to COVID-19. The key changes are summarised below.

**The Programme's role from 2017-2020:** Before COVID-19 TVOM were primarily Pacific-facing, i.e., support was directed principally towards LSUs. The team was the government's 'face' for labour mobility for Pacific governments. They built relationships with Pacific labour mobility officials and provided day-to-day contact for LSUs. The team acted as a connector between Pacific governments and New Zealand industry, which included hosting Pacific officials who travelled to New Zealand to discuss RSE opportunities with industry.

**2020-2022:** Two variations to the MOU changed the scope of the Programme's role between 2020-2022 through alterations to long and medium-term outcomes, and significant changes to short-term outcomes. These are shown in red in tables 2 and 3 below. Changes included support for workers stranded due to COVID-19, a focus on worker wellbeing, skills and training opportunities for workers,<sup>8</sup> facilitation of relationships between key stakeholders (including employers), and support for inclusive circular labour migration. This was a key change that responded to the needs of workers unable to return home and ensured that the New Zealand government could fulfil its duty of care responsibilities to Pacific governments for their RSE workers in New Zealand. From 2020, when Pacific Island borders closed, 9,700 RSE workers

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<sup>8</sup> A separate MFAT-funded programme provides skills training for RSE workers, Vakameasina.

(as of June 2020) were unable to return home at the end of their contracts.<sup>9</sup> TVOM acted as a worker advocate, dealing with a range of welfare issues including illness and health insurance claims. The team also played a key role in subsequent repatriation efforts. Other activities included setting up regular communications with workers via Facebook, regular contact with RSE employers who had stranded workers to monitor worker wellbeing, supporting arrangements for some workers to move sectors, and providing updated border and visa information to LSUs. Key findings are summarised below and are mapped against short- and medium-term outcomes in Tables 2 and 3.

### **From 2017-2020 the Programme effectively progressed activities to provide support to LSUs**

Evaluation findings demonstrate the **effectiveness of tailored support to LSUs**. TVOM built and maintained key relationships with LSUs, which was important in ensuring individual LSUs received the support they needed. These relationships could then be drawn on to support LSUs through subsequent COVID-19 changes. It will be important to ensure there is sufficient resource to customise support for the needs of diverse LSUs in future.

*Pre-COVID we were probably focusing on what was important – recruitment, getting our numbers, competing with the other countries....those were our priorities. We would meet with the TVOM representative, we had trainings and ministerial visits to see what was going on ‘on the ground’, we had consultants who could help with policy review, we had training, resources provided to us to improve the recruitment space. [RSE Liaison Officer]*

**LSUs emphasised the importance of capacity building through the Programme.** Responses from the LSU in Samoa indicated that the Programme contributed significantly to the development of the Samoa Country Action Plan 2018-2023. However, it was also noted that it was difficult to determine the extent of the Programme’s impact because many activities were put on hold due to COVID-19. The LMU in the Solomon Islands indicated that resources have been provided by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for the PALM programme, and a similar investment in increased capacity building is now needed with respect to the RSE scheme.

**Variation across LSUs reflected the need for more tailored support.** Some interviewees noted that smaller countries and more recent participants in the Programme have different priorities and needs for support around labour mobility, for example support to scale up or to focus on particular sectors, which was reinforced by a comment from MFAT:

s6(a)

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9 Bailey Rochelle and Bedford, Charlotte (2020). COVID-19: RSE responses, challenges and logistics. Devpolicy Blog, April 15. [https://devpolicy.org/covid-19-rse-responses-challenges-and-logistics-20200415/?utm\\_source=Devpolicy&utm\\_campaign=dd75826a4c-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_04\\_19\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_082b498f84-dd75826a4c-312083237](https://devpolicy.org/covid-19-rse-responses-challenges-and-logistics-20200415/?utm_source=Devpolicy&utm_campaign=dd75826a4c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_04_19_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_082b498f84-dd75826a4c-312083237)

s6(a) *So how do we determine a bespoke model/support model for countries when this is a regional programme? [MFAT]*

**Secondments were effective.** LSU officials in Samoa reported that providing staff with the opportunity to travel to Aotearoa New Zealand to learn about how the Programme is managed was highly effective and allowed for much needed support and contribution to enhancing Samoa's capacity to better manage the Programme. This aligns with positive reports of Ministerial visits and secondments reported in the 2018-2019 TVOM Annual Report.<sup>10</sup>

*A lot of the benefit of TVOM is in upgrading of the skills of staff. When the Programme was available to [LSU staff] greater numbers of staff were able to participate [referencing the Ministerial secondments] [LSU, Samoa]*

The **new sector pilots were very effective and highly valued** (an outcome reinforced by separate evaluation findings<sup>11</sup>), suggesting that there is potential to extend the pilots in the future and look at expanding to additional sectors.

*Kiribati really valued that engagement [with the Fisheries Employment Initiative] and for their skilled fisherfolk to be employed in New Zealand. Kiribati is really keen to see that Pilot expand to a fully-fledged programme. The Kiribati workers have a lot of value to bring... Fisheries is an opportunity to match up a natural skillset with what is valued by the employer. [MFAT Post]*

*There was a lot of optimism and hope about the pilot for Tuvalu. The resident population are in the moderate to high skilled bracket and fisheries is one of those sectors...along with construction. This is important as it is a shift away from horticultural input, lower skilled seasonal work to more of a career focus. [MFAT Post]*

**Pre-departure training for workers was seen as being an essential service offered by the Programme, but some stakeholders felt that more detailed information could be provided.** There is an opportunity to build up the pre-departure offering to ensure workers understand the health care package and policies available to them before they arrive and increase financial literacy.

*In the pre-departure training the workers gain some awareness but when they get here [to New Zealand], they need some mentoring around health policies, employment, pay, holiday pay, deductions – they are discussed in*

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10 MBIE (2019). The Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility: Toso-Vaka-o-Manū Annual Report 2018-2019.

11 Malatest International (2020). Final report: Review of the Fisheries Employment Initiative.



*pre-departure, but they still ask questions around these areas [Liaison Officer]*

An interviewee from Kiribati emphasised that this should also cover family violence to ensure that workers are informed about rights and services.

**The breadth and scope of outcomes under the Programme increased over the five-year period.** Subsequent changes to MOUs across the evaluation period resulted in an expansion of TVOM's roles and responsibilities from a focus on Pacific LSUs to include a focus on RSE workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. This included worker welfare, skills and training opportunities, and health needs. Output activities were ambitious and wide-ranging relative to the team's FTE. This impacted on TVOM's ability to deliver on all the outcomes indicating the need to review the scope and delivery modalities of the programme outputs.

**Other challenges to the Programme** in this period include a restructure of the programme and staff changes. Plans made in this period to address other short- and medium-term outcomes were also subsequently put on hold due to COVID-19.

### **From 2020 onwards the Programme pivoted to focus support on workers in Aotearoa New Zealand**

The evaluation findings show that **TVOM were able to pivot effectively** to support the changes to the Programme during this period.

TVOM's support for workers stranded in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2020-2022 **highlighted the importance of worker wellbeing** as an aspect of the pastoral care provided to seasonal workers. The team effectively supported collaboration between stakeholders involved in supporting workers, including provision of up-to-date information to LSUs on worker welfare and repatriation, and financial and logistical support for country Liaison Officers to support workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. The scale of worker wellbeing highlighted during this period has implications for consideration of how this support can be provided in future, and who is best placed to provide it.

**LSUs reported that support during COVID-19 was critical to ensuring systems and processes supported workers.** LSU representatives noted the importance of the ongoing dialogue between the LSU, MFAT, employers, and TVOM. This ensured workers in Aotearoa New Zealand were taken care of, and the systems and processes for rehiring workers once border restrictions eased were in place. Samoa was one of three countries able to respond to a request for 700 employment opportunities once re-entry of workers was permitted. Similarly, the Programme's support to facilitate 112 RSE workers from the Solomon Islands in July 2022 was seen as an excellent example of the effectiveness of the Programme.

The pivot to focus support on workers also **raised visibility and increased awareness of the Programme in Aotearoa New Zealand**, particularly among employers who noted that they had limited connection to TVOM until COVID-19, but also at MFAT Posts. Stakeholder perspectives showed that instances of cross-sectoral collaboration between TVOM and other stakeholders were seen to be effective and valuable, demonstrating a benefit in enabling cross-sectoral collaboration in future. For example, the Hawke's Bay stakeholder group

included multiple players including TVOM, MSD, MBIE, liaison officers, employers and service providers who met weekly to ensure workers were safe and supported:

*COVID has also painted a positive picture where lots of stakeholders have come together. That's been amazing in the past two years. We've had industry, employers, key partners such as service providers, Pasifika health. All these key agents have come together to sit down and discuss how we would support our workers and make sure they were safe. That's an example of bringing everybody in. [RSE Liaison Officer]*

Interviewees highlighted the **significance of worker skill recognition and training opportunities** to contribute to circular labour migration outcomes. In addition to on-the-job training, a number of workers were able to complete training programmes while they were stranded in Aotearoa New Zealand during COVID-19 border closures. This included fishing workers with Sealord who were supported to gain seafaring ticket licenses and horticultural workers who participated in agricultural training at Taratahi Agricultural School. Training and upskilling opportunities were regarded as valuable by LSUs; however, employers in particular drew attention to the limitations of visa settings which constrain training opportunities. This is an important element for consideration in future planning for the Programme.

*We have frustrations when RSE workers come to New Zealand around the visas they hold and what they can do on those visas – so there's some policy change needed around this area. There's a need for them to also be able to gain New Zealand qualification training in New Zealand. There is a need to move to offering credits for courses [Employer Representative]*

*I would like to see the cap at primary level 3 ITO lifted – we can't upskill beyond that. It's about professional and personal advancement and it would encourage skill building. [Employer Representative]*

Workers reported that they had obtained new soft skills including improved English, social and communication skills, and networking with people from different backgrounds. One group of workers learnt how to propagate different species of apples and are now using this method on Samoan horticultural crops such as breadfruit trees. An NGO in Kiribati also noted an increase in the confidence and assertiveness of female workers, and indicated that the resilience and adaptation skills attained by workers are likely to assist in future needs for climate migration.

The extent to which new skills are being obtained is unknown. There is a need to connect future skills development with training offered through Vakameasina, noting that challenges include workers' time and energy to engage in skills development:

*I was not able to attend any after-hours training even though they were offered for free. I was exhausted and too tired that all I wanted to do was rest. But I wish I could do some of these courses to help build my skills*

*especially because I didn't finish high school. I am hoping that I get another chance to return and that if I do I hope I can attend some of these training. Not only to get some useful skills but to get a piece of paper that says I completed the training [RSE worker]*

**Challenges to the Programme** during this period were shaped by the COVID-19 context. This meant that recruitment was put on hold and in-person meetings between Programme staff and Pacific Island officials did not occur.

MFAT and MBIE interviewees both reported a lack of clarity between the roles and responsibilities across the two ministries, specifically in respect of the role of Posts. For the future phase it is critical to arrive at a shared understanding of the purpose and goals of the programme and the respective roles of MFAT and MBIE in achieving these.

Tables 2 and 3 provide a summary of the ways and extent to which the Programme's outputs contributed to the delivery and achievement of short and medium-term outcomes. More detailed discussion of the findings is included in the subsequent sections of this report.

**Table 2: Contribution to Short and Medium-Term Outcomes of the SPLM Programme 2017-2019**

Outputs August 2017	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Core capacity building for LSUs delivered</li> <li>2. Employment opportunities facilitated in industries beyond RSE</li> <li>3. Knowledge-building and information management</li> <li>4. Relationships, networks and collaborations built and maintained</li> <li>5. Support to PICs to maximise benefits and minimise adverse impacts of labour mobility</li> </ol>	
Outcomes in August 2017	Evaluation findings
<b>Short-term Outcomes</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pacific island countries have enhanced capacity from receiving prioritised and customised support.</li> <li>• New areas of Pacific labour sending units' capacity is strengthened in response to identified need.</li> <li>• Good practice for Pacific labour mobility is promoted to New Zealand employers, Pacific Island countries and other stakeholders.</li> <li>• Relationships and arrangements established between New Zealand employers and Pacific labour sending units.</li> <li>• Pacific labour sending units have skills, knowledge and in-country relationships to attract and process suitable workers for new industries.</li> <li>• Pacific ministers and officials have enhanced understanding of work opportunities in New Zealand.</li> <li>• A fit for purpose labour mobility database is used by Pacific labour sending units.</li> <li>• Intelligence gathering and communication enables potential risks to be managed promptly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NZ and Pacific stakeholders identified strong relationships between TVOM and Pacific LSUs as one of the critical success factors of the programme enabling continued 'in the moment' support.</li> <li>• The new sector pilots, particularly the fisheries pilot, were highly valued by NZ and participating Pacific countries, a finding supported by an earlier evaluation.<sup>12</sup> Pacific stakeholders were keen to see the continuation of these schemes.</li> <li>• There is a lack of awareness of the Programme at MFAT posts in the Pacific and among NZ employers (both MFAT Posts and NZ employers became more aware of the Programme post-2020).</li> <li>• The RSE database and website developed as part of the Programme was evaluated independently and found to be ineffective.<sup>13</sup></li> <li>• Constraints associated with the Programme being delivered by a government agency were perceived as impacting on responsiveness and timeliness, for example, fixed pay bands affecting recruitment, and one month lead-in for travel approval which means staff are unable to travel at short notice to respond to an issue or conversely take advantage of opportunities.</li> </ul>

<sup>12</sup> Malatest International (2020). Final report: Review of the Fisheries Employment Initiative.

<sup>13</sup> Immigration New Zealand (2020) Pacific Island Countries RSE Database and Website Review.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Zealand's wide range of support for labour mobility (including through other programmes) is coordinated.</li> <li>• New Zealand's support for Pacific labour mobility is coordinated with other donors, including Australia's Labour Mobility Assistance Program.</li> <li>• Pacific women have access to more employment opportunities in New Zealand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plans for collaboration with the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Program (PALM) made during this period were put on hold due to COVID-19 limitations.</li> <li>• Initiatives to support women to maximise benefits of labour mobility planned in this period were put on hold due to COVID-19</li> </ul>
<p><b>Medium-term Outcomes</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pacific labour sending units' skills, knowledge and systems are maintained over time.</li> <li>• Pacific labour sending units successfully manage work opportunities in multiple industries and increased worker numbers.</li> <li>• Pacific island countries receive coordinated and synergistic labour mobility support from New Zealand and other donors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was agreement across all stakeholders who interacted directly with TVOM that the Programme is an important facilitator of the RSE scheme. The team supported the movement of thousands of workers each year and provided support to LSUs to build systems and processes that could then largely function without a Programme representative on the ground.</li> <li>• The effectiveness of capacity building for LSUs varied across the participating countries. Some MFAT Posts provided very positive feedback on the support that TVOM provided, whereas others detailed communication issues and expressed the need for more tailored support (see Section 3.3 Relevance for further details).</li> <li>• The restructuring of the RSE team in late 2018 divided the team into two parts. This was reported to fragment operations and affect cohesiveness of support while the Programme was in the process of re-establishing in the new structure.</li> <li>• TVOM was reported as being insufficiently resourced in terms of staffing to effectively achieve the planned programme of work described in the 2017 design (which proposed 6FTEs)<sup>14</sup>. Staff turnover in the team has also created some challenges, with additional effort needed to maintain relationships with LSUs.</li> </ul>

14 Nunns, Heather, Quirk, Brendan, Bedford, Charlotte and Bedford, Richard. (2017). Activity Design Document: Strengthening Pacific Partnerships Phase 2 (June).



**Table 3: Contribution to Short and Medium-Term Outcomes of the SPLM Programme 2020-2022**

Outputs September 2020		Outputs proposed in November 2020	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Core capacity building for LSUs delivered</li> <li>2. Employment opportunities facilitated in industries beyond RSE</li> <li>3. Knowledge-building and information management</li> <li>4. Relationships, networks and collaborations built and maintained</li> <li>5. Support to PICs to maximise benefits and minimise adverse impacts of labour mobility</li> </ol>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Skill and knowledge-building products delivered to Pacific stakeholders and partners, including the Pacific Labour Facility.</li> <li>2. Circular labour mobility opportunities in sectors outside horticulture and viticulture delivered.</li> <li>3. Relationships with and between key stakeholders fostered and facilitated, including between workers, employers, and Pacific governments.</li> <li>4. Data and issue management products delivered to stakeholders.</li> <li>5. Worker wellbeing initiatives delivered, including through community engagement.</li> </ol>	
Outcomes in September 2020	Outcomes proposed in November 2020	Evaluation findings	
<i>Short-term Outcomes</i>	<i>Short-term Outcomes</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pacific and RSE workers, including those stranded due to COVID-19, are supported to make the most of their time in New Zealand, including through initiatives that support workers welfare and well-being.</li> <li>• Pacific island countries have enhanced capacity from receiving prioritised and customised support.</li> <li>• New areas of Pacific labour sending units' capacity is strengthened in response to identified need.</li> <li>• Good practice for Pacific labour mobility is promoted to New Zealand employers, Pacific Island countries and other stakeholders.</li> <li>• Relationships and arrangements established between New Zealand employers and Pacific labour sending units.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pacific government representatives in New Zealand are supported to enhance worker well-being and increase labour mobility opportunities.</li> <li>• Pacific labour sending units have the skills, knowledge and relationships to facilitate New Zealand labour market opportunities.</li> <li>• Data, visa, and labour market information is available to Pacific labour sending units workers, and employers.</li> <li>• Increased Pacific island citizens participating temporarily in the New Zealand labour market.</li> <li>• Skills recognition and training opportunities support workers' job experience and prospects in New Zealand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worker wellbeing support was critical from 2020 onwards and was generally perceived to be effective by employers and liaison officers. However, worker wellbeing issues remain.</li> <li>• Pacific workers received critical pastoral care support from liaison officers, but liaisons report that this was stretched thinly to meet demand.</li> <li>• The Programme's role in the COVID-19 response increased the visibility of the Programme for New Zealand stakeholders and MFAT Posts.</li> <li>• TVOM acted as connectors, communicators and facilitators during COVID-19. For many evaluation participants this was the context in which they engaged with the team and it was highly valued.</li> <li>• Coordination with Australia's Pacific Labour Facility was put on hold, but the growing strength of the Pacific Labour Facility was acknowledged.</li> </ul>	



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pacific labour sending units have skills, knowledge and in-country relationships to attract and process suitable workers for new industries.</li> <li>Pacific ministers and officials have enhanced understanding of work opportunities in New Zealand.</li> <li>A fit for purpose labour mobility database is used by Pacific labour sending units.</li> <li>Intelligence gathering and communication enables potential risks to be managed promptly.</li> <li>New Zealand's wide range of support for labour mobility (including through other programmes) is coordinated.</li> <li>New Zealand's support for Pacific labour mobility is coordinated with other donors, including Australia's Labour Mobility Assistance Program.</li> <li>Issue-specific initiatives (such as health) address identified needs.</li> <li>Pacific women have access to more employment opportunities in New Zealand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New Zealand initiatives are coordinated with the Pacific Labour Facility.</li> <li>Stakeholders are supported to be more inclusive in labour mobility opportunities.</li> <li>Best practice labour migration lessons are identified and shared with stakeholders, including Pacific labour sending units, employers and workers.</li> <li>Pacific workers' access services that support their well-being while in New Zealand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Programme supported relationship-building between employers and other stakeholder organisations, for example through the Fa'apasifika Talanoa. Interviews with Liaison Officers and employers show that the relationships between workers and employers varied, with different levels of cross-cultural understanding and competence. Some employers have built strong and lasting relationships with workers and worker villages and there are opportunities for greater sharing of knowledge and collaboration between employers.</li> <li>Examples of effective mechanisms to support cross-sector collaboration include the Hawke's Bay Stakeholder Group, which involved TVOM and brought together diverse stakeholders to respond to worker wellbeing needs.</li> <li>The need for more comprehensive pre-departure training was emphasised by country liaison officers/MFAT Posts, with employers also keen to see further opportunities for skills development for workers in New Zealand.</li> <li>Some LSUs redirected attention and resource to Australia whilst recruitment for New Zealand was on hold with implications for future NZ recruitment.</li> <li>Some women working in New Zealand across the COVID-19 period faced challenges in accessing health support through their pregnancy/while giving birth in New Zealand, with TVOM providing additional assistance to facilitate access to health care where they were able.</li> </ul>
<b>Medium-term Outcomes</b>	<b>Medium-term Outcomes</b>	<b>Evaluation findings</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pacific labour sending units' skills, knowledge and systems are maintained over time.</li> <li>Pacific labour sending units successfully manage work opportunities in multiple industries and increased worker numbers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New Zealand and Pacific labour sending units have shared priorities that enhance Pacific workers' participation in New Zealand labour market opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post-2020, the achievement of short- and medium-term outcomes was significantly impacted by COVID-19. This was affected by the hold on recruitment and the inability to travel during the COVID-19 period.</li> <li>LSUs were supported to undertake the significant work associated with repatriation during this period. MFAT</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pacific island countries receive coordinated and synergistic labour mobility support from New Zealand and other donors.</li> <li>• Pacific workers participating in labour mobility schemes in New Zealand are supported to make the most of their time in New Zealand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pacific countries have ownership over their labour mobility participation.</li> <li>• Pacific workers maximise the opportunities available while in New Zealand (including skills training, qualifications).</li> <li>• Pacific island countries, with the assistance of partners, effectively leverage the economic and skill transfer benefits of returning workers.</li> <li>• New Zealand works collaboratively with other partners, specifically Australia, to facilitate a joint approach to Pacific labour mobility.</li> <li>• New Zealand government agencies, employers, and PICs adopt best practice behaviours, policies and operations that support inclusive circular labour migration.</li> </ul>	<p>Posts reported positive interactions between LSUs and TVOM.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The relationships between TVOM and Pacific LSUs underpinned the success of the COVID-19 response due to the timely exchange of information supporting workers and repatriation.</li> <li>• A lack of clarity around the Programme's and MFAT's roles and responsibilities impacted on the coordination of labour mobility support. There was some ambiguity between the functions and responsibilities of MFAT and MBIE and a blurring of lines between immigration and development functions which constrained effectiveness.</li> <li>• Challenges to achieving the objective of inclusive circular labour migration were identified, including the need for upskilling, skills transfer, effective reintegration of returning workers, and responding to country-specific needs.</li> </ul>
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## 3.2 Efficiency

This section examines the progress made in terms of input costs and processes versus outputs and outcomes. It addresses the following KEQs:

- KEQ 3: How much has been spent annually on Output-Specific and Non-Output Specific costs to date?
- KEQ 4: How do the results from KEQ 3 compare to the results achieved against the Outputs, Short and Medium-Term Outcomes (taking into account the environmental constraints from 2020)?

**Overall findings show that output delivery over the five-year period demonstrates clear alignment with the outputs' intended purposes as well as agility when the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated alternative approaches. The breadth of activities which are part of the Programme has implications for delivery efficiencies.**

**The Programme has reported transparently and diligently against the outcomes framework.** Annual reports for the four-year period from the 2017-2018 financial year through to the end of the 2020-2021 financial year<sup>15</sup> report on outcomes as agreed in the original 2017 MOU between MFAT and MBIE, as well as in the revised version of 2020. These annual reports articulate with clear evidence and commentary how the delivered outputs have been contributing to the achievement of short-term and medium-term outcomes. Each annual report also explains challenges associated with the attainment and the monitoring of outcomes and, on that basis, presents possible enhancements for the Programme's delivery in the following financial year.

**The Programme responded effectively and with agility to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially with regard to worker wellbeing.** The focus of worker welfare and wellbeing aligns with the Programme's long-term outcome of ensuring New Zealand maintains a world-class reputation as a labour-receiving country. As at the end of the 2020-2021 financial year, the impacts of COVID-19 signalled a need to redefine the Programme's purpose and design of the next phase of the Programme in close collaboration with Pacific Island Countries.

**The Programme's overall expenditure represents a total underspend of \$1.5m, or 20% of the total budget,** as compared with the annual costed workplans for the four financial years from 2017/2018 until 2020/2021, and shown in Table 4 below.<sup>16</sup> While the underspend as of 2019-2020 can be attributed to the impacts of COVID-19, a range of other contributing causes are cited in the annual reports; relating to staff fluctuation, telecommunication difficulties in the Pacific, delays, and the necessity to defer certain activities into the following year. No non-output specific costs can be identified in available documents: all costs are reported in relation

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<sup>15</sup> At the time of preparing this report the Annual Report for 2021-2022 was not yet available.

<sup>16</sup> The information in this table is drawn from the Programme's annual reports and the MOU between MFAT and MBIE. The figures would need to be compared with the general ledger for accuracy.

to specific Programme outputs. Information relating to outputs in the 2021-2022 financial year is still in the process of being gathered and finalised in preparation for the annual report.

**Table 4: Expenditure by year**

Financial year	Agreed working budget	Total spend	% Annual underspend
2017-2018	\$2,086,000	\$2,035,992	2%
2018-2019	\$1,882,000	\$1,380,449	27%
2019-2020	\$1,873,854	\$1,460,485	22%
2020-2021	\$1,436,628	\$899,699	37%

Findings related to each output are reported below, drawing from annual reports and stakeholder interviews, with detailed output summaries in Appendix C.

### Output 1: Core capacity-building

Core capacity-building centres on supporting Labour Sending Units to have the required skills, knowledge and systems to appropriately manage labour mobility opportunities.

**The evaluation found that the Programme achieved efficiency in capacity building initiatives pre-COVID-19 through maximising face-to-face engagement and strengthening relationships with LSUs.** This included hosting Pacific ministers and providing a pre-departure toolkit and training for Pacific officials. These activities and resources strengthened relationships and increased LSU knowledge of the New Zealand environment, the needs of RSE employers and the RSE scheme.

**From 2020 onwards capacity building was focused on assessing and supporting changing PIC capacity in response to COVID-19.** Efficiencies were achieved through supporting and upskilling LSUs to respond to process requirements based on the Border Exemption changes (November 2020 and May 2021), for example facilitating repatriation pathways and visa process changes. Engagements were almost entirely moved to virtual fora. This presented challenges to capacity building remotely, with MFAT interviewees highlighting the difficulty facing the Programme to be able to build capacity remotely and effectively. However, efficiency levels of this output were supported by the existing relationships established between the Programme and LSUs.

*What was being supplied and supported was the ability for LSUs to ring up and ask questions in the moment ... [the TVOM team's] names and numbers were known and they were there for support. [MFAT]*

The customised support from the Programme provided to liaison officers (e.g. induction, provision of information) was also critical in supporting workers during this period, which contributed to achieving short-term outcomes related to this output.



Challenges to delivering on this output included a **lack of accurate data** provided by MBIE to LSUs on workers in Aotearoa New Zealand over this period. The growing Australian programme was reported by some interviewees as **putting pressure on the resources of LSUs available for the New Zealand Programme**. The next phase of the Programme will need to review labour mobility needs in the current changing context, including LSU needs and resources, and Australian labour mobility activities, as well as other regional developments.

*There is a double whammy of NZ holding back on recruitment for a long time and ready to recruit now, and a lot of [LSU] work direction has gone to Australia which means the remaining capacity to build up for NZ is less [MFAT Post]*

### Output 2: Initiatives in new sectors

Initiatives in new sectors focused on expanding labour mobility opportunities into sectors beyond the RSE scheme. This is directly linked to New Zealand's commitments under the Labour Mobility Arrangement, which sits alongside PACER Plus.

**There were positive assessments of the Programme's support for two pilots** initiated during the 2017-2019 period: the Canterbury Reconstruction pilot and the Fisheries Employment Initiative (FEI). The Programme provided a range of support facilitating the management of the pilot programmes, and these were universally reported as successful by stakeholders (see key highlights section) and confirm evaluation findings undertaken separately.<sup>17</sup> TVOM began to explore opportunities in other sectors; however, these efforts had to be put on hold due to COVID-19.

*Anecdotally the fisheries pilot is always cited as good. It is a focussed, right-sized, skills development opportunity for Tuvaluans. It doesn't need to be big to be good- making sure people can make the most of the opportunities [MFAT Post]*

*The two pilots (construction and fishing) had tangible benefits for all stakeholders, the workers, our relationship with those countries, the LSUs back home and the communities. They are still referred to by Pacific government representatives. [MFAT]*

Interviewees suggested that the Programme could in future focus on additional sectors, for example hospitality, care work, and office work, and include work opportunities for disabled people.

**From 2020 onwards, the Programme provided support to workers from Tuvalu and Kiribati participating in the pilot initiatives who were significantly affected by the**

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<sup>17</sup> Malatest International (2020). Final report: Review of the Fisheries Employment Initiative.

**COVID-19 border restrictions**, impacting on their ability to return home. The workers who remained in Aotearoa New Zealand faced a number of challenges to health and wellbeing due to visa restrictions preventing rest periods or transfer to other employment. However, fisheries workers who remained had the opportunity to extend skills by completing skills training and certificates relevant to their profession. This aligns with outcomes to support workers to make the most of their time in New Zealand.

Stakeholder perspectives reinforced the positive assessment of the pilot studies, emphasising the value in extending the pilots in the next phase of the Programme, and incorporating learnings from these initiatives into the labour mobility programme more broadly.

### Output 3: Relationships & collaboration

This output focuses on utilising and leveraging key actors in labour mobility to effectively and efficiently drive outcomes.

**The relationships TVOM developed with stakeholders were identified as a strength of the Programme, both pre-2020 and post-2020.** Between 2017 and 2019 the Programme's engagement with a number of Australian and Pacific stakeholders advanced the achievement of this output, through sharing of information, knowledge, and opportunities to collaborate. This included the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Department of Jobs and Small Businesses (DJSB), the Labour Mobility Assistance Programme (LMAP) in Australia, and MFAT posts in the Pacific. Meetings with LSU representatives benefited from significant input from MBIE on labour mobility and the impacts of labour mobility on local capacity. Further activities to expand collaboration with Australia were then put on hold, limiting further achievement of the outcome to facilitate a joint approach to labour mobility with Australia. Given that travel is now resuming in the Pacific region, there is an opportunity to revisit this.

Stakeholders in Samoa and the Solomon Islands reported that there are good working relationships and communication between MBIE and the LSUs which has been critical for successful mobilisation and management of RSE workers going to New Zealand.

*There is good value for money from TVOM's support to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of RSE worker mobilisations.... whose coordination improved the efficiency of the process. (MFAT Post).*

*There has been improvement in the relationship with key partners in New Zealand such as MBIE, MFAT and the industry...the steep increase in number of workers sent on the RSE has meant that staff have had more exposure in terms of coordination and in work areas such as working towards certain timelines. There have also been weekly meetings where updates are provided from New Zealand Immigration in Samoa given the importance of their roles. [LSU Samoa]*

**From 2020 onwards, the Programme efficiently pivoted towards supporting workers in New Zealand.** The Programme increased collaboration with New Zealand-based agencies to support worker wellbeing, responding to the intended outcomes to enhance worker wellbeing



and ensure workers can access services required. For example, the Programme supported the Department of Internal Affairs in the implementation of the Visitor Care Manaaki Manuhiri Fund which supported RSE workers facing hardship. The Programme also facilitated a Talanoa Fa'apasifika in Blenheim on Pacific worker welfare and wellbeing, demonstrating effective collaboration between the Programme, government representatives from Pacific countries, industry representatives, New Zealand government officials, and community representatives. Other initiatives to support worker wellbeing included collaboration with New Zealand Apple and Pears Incorporated (NZAPI), and agricultural training at Taratahi Agricultural School. These initiatives supported skills development for workers to utilise in their work in New Zealand and when they return home, aligning to the outcome to support workers' job experience and prospects in New Zealand.

**All stakeholder groups identified New Zealand-facing support as critical to supporting workers during COVID-19.** The Programme provided a range of relevant activities to support worker welfare during 2020-2021. This included ensuring Pacific workers' welfare was looked after through adequate accommodation, pay, clothing etc. to meet New Zealand's responsibility and duty of care for Pacific workers in New Zealand.

*The more we can support workers while they are away so they have a good experience and don't come back with mental health, gambling, addiction problems, the easier they will be able to more easily reintegrate into communities, and the more positive job we'll be doing and the more positive impact this will have. [MFAT Post]*

*TVOM was also able to pivot its focus to support RSE worker well-being during the pandemic; this is an important agility that reflects value for money. (MFAT Post).*

COVID-19 highlighted the importance of worker wellbeing and the role the Programme played in facilitating pastoral care. TVOM's adaptation of their role was an appropriate response to COVID-19, resulting in positive change. The response strengthened relationships between TVOM and Pacific officials and included a much greater focus on worker wellbeing and pastoral care. An RSE Liaison Officer reported that the quality of employer support for worker welfare was variable.

Some interviewees indicated that communication issues negatively affected the relationship between TVOM, the LSU and Post. For example, some participants reported issues of a lack of feedback from worker visits, and variable engagement and communication with some LSUs. Others suggested that capacity needs were not always met; however, it is not clear how much this can be attributed to the COVID-19 context where limited to no travel was occurring. The Programme staff reported that some capacity-building initiatives were put on hold because they could not be undertaken remotely, and there was also a concern not to duplicate activities that Australia was undertaking. Variability of communications with different LSUs affected capacity.

TVOM's communications with workers in Aotearoa New Zealand and families and communities in the Pacific was effective in maintaining communication channels in an uncertain time. This included communication channels through the TVOM Facebook page and in collaboration with Pacific Migration and NZAPI for workers to send messages to their families and communities back home.

The post-2020 context and activities have shone a spotlight on the importance of worker welfare. The next phase of the Programme will need to consider how this outcome is best incorporated and delivered.

#### Output 4: Knowledge management

Knowledge management is designed to build knowledge within Pacific countries about labour mobility in New Zealand and information management support to LSUs.

**The Programme has commissioned several studies which have built in-depth knowledge of the social and economic impacts of labour mobility.** These include the RSE Impacts Study, the RSE Health Study, and support for external research undertaken by the World Bank on the development impacts of Pacific labour mobility.<sup>18</sup> Knowledge products included scoping an RSE Worker App to increase worker voice in the scheme and develop a better understanding of the worker experience.

**The labour mobility database was found to be ineffective** through an independent evaluation which found that it did not meet Pacific country needs and was not used by stakeholders. It was withdrawn in 2019. The TVOM Annual Report concluded that 'MBIE and MFAT should consider appropriate governance arrangements for projects over \$200,000 to ensure programme spending delivers on programme priorities.'<sup>19</sup>

**From 2020 onwards, TVOM were agile in shifting the focus of knowledge management to the impact of COVID-19 on worker experiences:** monthly surveys on worker wellbeing provided an important role in identifying worker eligibility for support and promoting awareness of assistance available.

Results from these studies and scoping activities provide important data for consideration in developing the next phase of the Programme, including a review of contracting and delivery of knowledge management projects.

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18 Nunns, Heather & Bedford, Charlotte & Bedford, Richard. (2020). rse-impact-study-synthesis-report. 10.13140/RG.2.2.29023.07841; Bedford, Charlotte & Bedford, Richard & Nunns, Heather. (2020). RSE Impact Study: Pacific stream report.

19 The Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility: Toso-Vaka-o-Manū Annual Report 2019-2020 (01 July 2019 - 30 June 2020), pp26-27.

## Output 5: Support to maximise benefits of labour mobility

This output is intended to contribute to achieving positive outcomes for Pacific governments, LSUs, and regional initiatives while also minimising the unintended and adverse outcomes that can eventuate from labour mobility.

**The Programme provided a range of support to maximise positive outcomes and minimise adverse outcomes**, which supported this output through recognition of the diverse forms of support needed for LSUs and workers in Aotearoa New Zealand to promote positive outcomes. Support provided included workshops on cross-cultural understanding and effective leadership, a mobile doctor programme in Port Vila relieving pressure on the health system, and a driver training programme for construction workers arriving under the Pacific Trades Partnership. Stakeholders reported positively on the cultural support, including employers and workers. Samoan workers who participated in the training noted its importance in preparing them for their stay in New Zealand stating that “it would be nice if those trainings were done in Samoa with a refresher upon arrival.”

*A key skill of the TVOM team was managing the very delicate cultural relationships, which I definitely do not have yet and that’s what I’ve been quite grateful for. [Employer Representative]*

**From the 2019/20 year onwards the Programme quickly and efficiently moved to support workers who became stranded in Aotearoa New Zealand.** This output focused on the wellbeing of workers in Aotearoa New Zealand with support including:

- webinars with Pacific-based LSUs and RSE employers to provide briefings which allowed for the exchange of information, processes, and opportunities to raise any issues, and provide worker wellbeing updates.
- funded sports activities through New Zealand Apples and Pears Incorporated (NZAPI).
- support for women who became pregnant and were not able to return home.
- regional visits with PIC High Commissions and Liaison Officers. These visits had a broad reach (approx. 6500 workers), providing an efficient and effective way to connect with workers and address challenges they were facing.

**The breadth of activities within scope has implications for Programme efficiencies.** TVOM is small (5 FTE), limiting the possibilities to efficiently achieve across all of these outcomes. There is an opportunity to look at the Programme holistically to identify how the different aspects of support are best delivered and by whom. This is reinforced by MBIE’s assessment of the future potential of the Programme. The 2020-2021 annual report recognises the changing landscape of Pacific labour mobility, including significant changes to capacity, capability, benefits, and risks for Pacific Island countries. The recommendation in the 2020/2021 TVOM Annual Report is “that the redesign is undertaken with a partnership

approach through meaningful consultation with Pacific countries on what we actually want to achieve out of Pacific labour mobility.”<sup>20</sup>

### 3.3 Relevance

This section presents findings and analysis from interview data of the extent that the Programme addresses the overarching objectives and policy drivers for Pacific labour mobility activities, both for New Zealand and for participating Pacific Island countries. It addresses the following KEQs:

- KEQ 5: To what extent and in what ways is the SPLM Programme aligned with MFAT’s Strategic Intentions and Development priorities?
- KEQ 6: What do stakeholders consider to be the key highlights and key issues associated with the Programme (taking into account the environmental constraints from 2020)?

**LSU capacity building is core to meeting MFAT’s strategic intentions to promote a prosperous and resilient Pacific and contributes to strengthening Aotearoa New Zealand – Pacific relationships. The pivot of the Programme activities to supporting workers during COVID was highly appropriate to need. However, challenges remain for labour mobility capacity support to meet long-term resilience goals.**

#### Alignment of the Programme with MFAT’s Strategic Intentions and Development priorities

The overarching goal of the Programme is:

*to support Pacific Island countries to gain economic and social benefits from remittances and skills by building labour mobility capacity.*

Associated policy drivers include MFAT’s Strategic Intentions 2021-2025, the Reset to Resilience 2021 cabinet paper, and the PACER Plus Agreement.

MFAT’s **Strategic Intentions 2021-2025**<sup>21</sup> outlines MFAT’s strategic goal for the Pacific: “to promote a peaceful, prosperous and resilient Pacific in which Aotearoa New Zealand’s interests and influence are safeguarded” (p.13). Of relevance to Pacific labour mobility, related outcomes include: “ensuring that Pacific economies continue to function to support livelihoods despite COVID-19 impacts, and that they benefit from ongoing trade, labour mobility and other safe people movement” (p.22).

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20 MBIE (2021). TVOM Strengthening Labour Mobility in the Pacific Annual Report 2020-2021, pg. 3-4

21 New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs Manatū Aorere. Strategic Intentions 2021-2025 <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/About-us-Corporate/MFAT-strategies-and-frameworks/MFAT-Strategic-Intentions-2021-2025.pdf>

The Cabinet Paper **New Zealand's Pacific Engagement: From Reset to Resilience** (November 2021)<sup>22</sup> outlines New Zealand's role as "a true partner, collaborating with others in the shared stewardship of our Blue Ocean Continent – Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa" (para.4). With reference to labour mobility, cooperation is expected to support long-term resilience through exploring "next generation labour mobility arrangements" learning from current experience (para. 46). Commitment is also made to support the priority area of labour mobility for Melanesian countries (para 29).

The 2017 **PACER Plus Labour Mobility Arrangement** forms part of the PACER Plus Trade Agreement. The following clauses relating to the objectives of the arrangement are especially relevant to the Programme:<sup>23</sup>

- Clause 1(a): "Provide assistance to the sending country participants to improve processes of worker selection and recruitment and related administrative tasks in the sending countries". This refers to capacity building of the Labour Sending Units (LSUs).
- Clause 1(g): "Support efforts to build the labour supply capacity of the developing country and participants through the provision of relevant education and training opportunities for their nationals."

### **LSU capacity building is core to meeting strategic intentions to promote a prosperous and resilient Pacific**

Building the capacity of LSUs is critical to supporting a smooth, equitable labour mobility process from the Pacific side. This ultimately contributes to MFAT's strategic intentions to promote a prosperous and resilient Pacific by meeting long-term programme outcomes of economic and social benefits for Pacific workers, their families, and communities. This support also addresses the aims of Clause 1(a) of the PACER Plus Labour Mobility Arrangement.

Programme support for LSUs involves guidance in managing the process that leads to worker readiness, selection, deployment, flow of remittances, and worker return; ensuring that at each step the process is facilitated and any negative effects minimised. As outlined in the previous section, there is evidence from participants at MFAT Post that this is a core function that is relevant to the needs of LSUs.

The support is also highly relevant to MFAT's strategic objective to ensure that Pacific economies can continue to support livelihoods despite COVID-19 impacts. Evidence shows that the availability and knowledge of the Programme in addressing queries or issues was particularly important during the COVID-19 response.

s6(a)

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22 <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/OIA/Cab-Paper-NZ-Pacific-Engagement-From-Reset-to-Resilience.pdf>

23 PACER Plus Labour Mobility Arrangement, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2017) <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/trade/free-trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements-in-force/pacer-plus/labour-mobility/>

s6(a) *NZ has a very strong reputation and TVOM's role in upholding that is quite crucial. [MFAT post]*

### **The Programme's support for the broader labour mobility framework contributes to strengthening the New Zealand – Pacific relationship.**

Positive perceptions of the RSE scheme from LSUs and workers contributes to the positive bilateral relationship between New Zealand and the Pacific. This in turn contributes to long-term outcomes of maintaining Aotearoa New Zealand's world class reputation as a labour-receiving country. New Zealand is seen to have a strong reputation for RSE workers, and the Programme's role in facilitating that is an integral component. Participants from all stakeholder groups referred to the significance of the relationships built with TVOM which positively support the experience of LSUs, employers, and workers. Specific support for initiatives including cultural training for employers also assists in building cross-cultural knowledge and understanding.

*For the bilateral relationship it really is massive; it's hard to understate how important it is. For political reasons and people to people links... It's pretty powerful in terms of building those relationships. [MFAT Post]*

There is an opportunity to further strengthen these connections and ensure that future development of the Programme is built on a collaborative approach with participating Pacific Island Countries. Some participants (MFAT and Liaison Officers) highlighted differences in priorities across the participating Pacific countries, highlighting the need for tailored support to meet country priorities. Some participants commented that support does not always respond to the specific requirements of different countries with different needs (due to size, distance from New Zealand, priority industries etc), and suggested that there is a need to 'right-size' to fit. For example, a database and website project was intended to provide shared information across participating countries, but was not well used due to its lack of detail on specific country needs.

*The whole idea of the shared websites and databases, pan-Pacific focus rather than bespoke. I think that was the key downfall of why it didn't work for us – didn't drill into the needs for each team and how to support them [MFAT]*

Stakeholders emphasised that there is potential to enhance the support that the Programme provides through greater attention to offering bespoke approaches based on country needs.

*It is important to take a regional approach but there is a need to look at the needs of specific countries. [MFAT post]*

### **The Programme is perceived as relevant to Pacific Island Country strategies.**



For example, the Programme has a clear alignment to Samoan Government strategic outcomes and aligns to the Government of Samoa's vision of 'Fostering social harmony, safety and freedom for all'.<sup>24</sup> Government officials from Samoa acknowledged the Programme's importance to 'empowering communities, building resilience and inspiring growth'.

**The Programme's pivot to supporting welfare and repatriation was a relevant and appropriate response to the changing needs.**

The Programme's approach to the changing context post-2020 responded appropriately to MFAT's intention to ensure that Pacific economies continued to be supported during COVID-19. It also met Aotearoa New Zealand's responsibilities to workers here by facilitating repatriation processes and ensuring the wellbeing needs of workers remaining in New Zealand were met.

*It is in New Zealand's interest to ensure that Pacific workers who have come to New Zealand under a government sponsored scheme are looked after.*  
[MFAT]

TVOM responded well in challenging circumstances: processes were evolving and complex, and the range of wellbeing needs of stranded workers was broad and difficult to plan for. The knowledge gained during this period should be drawn on to inform planning of the next phase. The Reset to Resilience Cabinet Paper also notes the opportunity for next generation labour mobility arrangements to learn from the current experience.

**There are challenges for labour mobility capacity support to meet long-term resilience goals.**

Evidence suggests that the Programme's purpose and activities are aligned with New Zealand's Pacific Engagement Reset aims to build a resilient and prosperous Pacific where local economies support the health and wellbeing of their people. Whilst remittances continue to be significant for the Pacific, particularly during the COVID-19 period, stakeholder perspectives indicated that there are a number of challenges to achieving long-term resilience. TVOM are aware of these challenges which provide an indication of future planning considerations for the Programme and of capacity needs for LSUs. Factors impacting long-term resilience include unequal distribution of opportunities within and between countries creating economic divisions, more support needed for effective reintegration pathways, gaps in skill development, and loss of skilled workers from Pacific Island countries.

*[Inequality of opportunities] is creating division in some villages.* s6(a)

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<sup>24</sup> Government of Samoa. Pathway for the Development of Samoa (PDS) 2021 – 2026.



Participants also identified challenges in meeting the medium-term outcome of supporting inclusive circular labour migration. Reintegration and effective skill development are critical components to building long-term resilience; however, the focus of the Programme is on facilitating employment.<sup>25</sup> Further, Pacific stakeholders in LSUs and MFAT posts identified a number of social and economic issues impacting on labour migration systems (see key challenges section below) which have implications for Programme support, particularly given the more recent prioritisation of worker wellbeing.

### Relevance to Programme Stakeholders

Participants in the evaluation shared their key highlights of the Programme and key challenges to be addressed. This provides supportive evidence for the relevance of the Programme and factors for consideration in the next phase of planning to increase Programme relevance to stakeholders.

### Key successes of the Programme

#### **The Programme plays a key role in supporting the labour migration process.**

All stakeholder groups acknowledged the significance of the Programme's role in facilitating the labour migration process which generates economic benefits for workers, families, and their villages and communities more broadly. The Programme supported the movement of thousands of workers each year. It provided support to LSUs to build effective systems and processes. All three case studies emphasised the importance of the RSE scheme to improving livelihoods, including the economic value of remittances.

*The LMU can confirm that the overall labour mobility programme is a success as shown by the increasing remittances to the country since 2019, as workers remitted their earned incomes to their families here at home. There is evidence that workers have started building homes for their families, pay school fees for their children and relatives even up to tertiary level. (LMU, Solomon Islands)*

TVOM is seen as having good will, clear ambition, and cultural competency. They are seen as operating in difficult conditions with limited personnel resources. The relationships established between TVOM, Pacific stakeholders and employers are seen as a critical success factor.

*Relationships are at the heart of the programme – working with Pacific officials in NZ and offshore, maintaining really strong lines of communication, building confidence in the NZ programme and providing reassurance that worker wellbeing was being prioritised. The mana they hold and the respect*

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<sup>25</sup> Training opportunities through the separate MFAT-funded programme, Vakameasina, were also put on hold due to COVID-19.

*from Pacific partners is fundamental to the success of the programme.  
[MFAT]*

*The change in relationships has a big impact. The contract managers have been fantastic and the changes have been seamless which is a positive  
[Employer Representative]*

The Programme played a critical role in the COVID-19 response. Repatriation was a primary task for MBIE and LSUs during this period and the strength of the relationships between TVOM and Pacific stakeholders was key to supporting the COVID-19 response. TVOM was a critical conduit for information and a direct contact point for LSUs during this period, enabling timely sharing of information and advice.

*TVOM had a big forum (talanoa) to bring together lots of stakeholders – Pacific organisations, MoH, employers etc. It was about the worker having a voice, using the Fonofale model with the four areas of wellbeing. So that had a good impact of bringing wellbeing to the forefront – with the understanding that a happy worker is a productive worker. It was a good start to the conversation. [MBIE]*

### **Worker wellbeing was highlighted as a critical element of pastoral care.**

The COVID response expanded the pastoral care needs and offerings for workers. Pre-COVID the Programme did not have a focus on wellbeing, which was considered the responsibility of RSE employers. However, subsequent variations to the MOU emphasised the provision of increased pastoral care to Pacific workers that remained in New Zealand during the pandemic. This included assistance with visas, accommodation, insurance, repatriation, ease of remitting, cultural support, support to move to employment in different sectors when required, and health care (including mental health). The importance of these aspects of worker welfare were emphasised by MBIE, liaison officers, LSU representatives and MFAT posts. Cross-sector collaboration to respond to worker wellbeing demonstrated the potential for diverse stakeholders to support the worker experience in New Zealand. For example, the Hawke's Bay stakeholder group collaborated effectively to address worker support needs.

*TVOM really identified there was a critical component in pastoral care, and that is the wellbeing component [RSE Liaison Officer]*

*Over COVID we acted as advocates – we sent out people to check out people and their mental health. I think us being there and playing the connector role and advocating for the workers [was a highlight] [MBIE].*

The support TVOM provided to RSE Liaison Officers was critical to supporting worker wellbeing. This included financial support for travel and logistics and provision of up-to-date

information during the COVID-19 response. Liaison Officers identified scope for greater resource to meet need. This could involve greater numbers of liaison officers, which falls outside the Programme's scope, but there is also potential for TVOM to discuss support needs with liaison officers to identify where additional support could be provided.

*I think when the TVOM programme came it helped elevate the [RSE] scheme to a higher level. It's helped in every way – financially, or when we need some assistance, they always provide. [Liaison Officer]*

### **The fisheries and construction pilots were highly valued by New Zealand and the participating Pacific countries.**

Both New Zealand and Pacific stakeholders referred positively to the pilot programmes. Stakeholders considered that the Programme played an important role in enabling their success. A high level of planning, management and support from TVOM was required throughout the process. The value of the pilots to Samoa, Tuvalu, and Kiribati was clear, both economically and through recognition of the high level of Pacific skills and expertise in participating workers. A Samoan woman worker who joined the Pacific Trades Partnership (PTP) programme in 2017 was offered a scholarship to study at university as a result of her performance on the Programme and has since been offered long-term employment contracts. This is consistent with highlights of the PTP in annual reporting.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, a high level of cooperation between TVOM and employers was required, and this increased during COVID-19. The benefits to employers were very positive and there was enthusiasm for the PTP (and the Programme's role supporting it) to continue.

These findings corroborate the independent evaluation of the Fisheries Initiative undertaken and reinforce the benefit in extending the pilot. There is also potential for success factors from the Programme's role managing the pilots to be transferred to other sectors, drawing on findings from the Fisheries Review.

### **The Programme provides behind-the-scenes support to ensure a sustainable Pacific workforce for employers.**

Employer representatives reported that the RSE scheme provides a sustainable and hard-working workforce for New Zealand industries. The support provided by TVOM contributes to the likelihood of workers returning for subsequent seasons, which benefits employers. This includes support provided to LSUs, employers, liaison officers and the workers themselves.

There is also evidence of strong connections between employers, workers, and their wider communities, independent of the Programme, which has implications for the design of the next phase. For example, employer representatives highlighted the importance of cultural bridging between workers and employers. The Programme offers support for employers in this area, and there is further opportunity to build on and share the experience of employers who already do this well. Employer interviews highlighted a layer of support provided to workers which is

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<sup>26</sup> The Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility: Toso-Vaka-o-Manū Annual Report 2019-2020, p.8

beyond the Programme/RSE scheme requirements and largely invisible to the Aotearoa New Zealand government. This included examples of employer-led approaches to fundraising, direct support to villages and communities and (pre-COVID) in-person visits to the villages. One employer also suggested that there is an opportunity to work with strong diaspora communities and build relationships that support workers while in Aotearoa New Zealand.

*There are a number of employers who have deep roots to the countries. Employers have photos with the families, they have invested in businesses, helped people repair homes and villages, and they help put together funds, equipment, boxes [Employer Representative]*

*Every six months leaders from villages come with a list and money goes back to province leaders; for example for schools, churches [Employer Representative]*

*There are lots of opportunities to find out what the [employers] are doing and if they're doing some good things, then tell us about them... we [employers] hold a lot of information, we hold a lot of data, we hold a lot of analytics. [Employer Representative]*

## Key challenges for the Programme

**The capacity building element of the Programme faces challenges to sustainability.**

Effective and sustainable capacity building relies on personal relationships built over time and these have been difficult to maintain across the COVID-19 period. Building effective support remotely is a challenge: COVID-19 prevented travel, making it harder to maintain relationships. Staff turnover within TVOM also meant that people had not visited the countries they were engaging with. Limited numbers of staff in the LSUs familiar with the Programme also has implications for sustainability. Related issues are training, upskilling and reintegration, which are discussed below.

*Support to LMU has been good, but the long-term sustainability of the LMU is still a risk. For example, who will SPLM work with if some key people in the LMU move onto other roles? This will cause a loss to RSE-related experience in the LMU team. (MFAT Post).*

The RSE database and website (developed as a means to share information) was evaluated by MBIE and was found to be ineffective, resulting in the Programme withdrawing support for this activity.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Immigration New Zealand (2020) Pacific Island Countries RSE Database and Website Review.

Stakeholders identified constraints related to government processes which meant it was difficult to respond to opportunities and challenges in a nimble way, for example lengthy processes required to approve travel and fixed pay bands impacting recruitment. From MFAT perspectives this led to delays in recruitment and limitations to responding quickly to approve travel for relationship-building opportunities. One employer representative described an issue trying to facilitate employer-funded travel to the Pacific to assist in recruitment, which faced lengthy delays, and they saw an opportunity for TVOM to help facilitate this process.

### **Opportunities to build upskilling into the Programme are limited.**

Opportunities for workers to upskill are limited. COVID-19 hindered the progress of the Programme training initiatives, and much of the training normally available via Vakameasina was also put on hold. There are opportunities to consider how MFAT/MBIE can best support upskilling for workers going forward.

*MPI could play a bigger role for skills training, and we fund it to grow our primary sector workforce. I think there is real opportunity to realise that. I'm a big fan of it being circular and also the workers have pay and career progression because of the training opportunities we can provide [MPI]*

Pacific-based stakeholders (MFAT Posts and LSUs) emphasise that there is a gap in successfully integrating workers on their return. Greater support for reintegration initiatives with LSUs would increase the relevance of the Programme to Pacific stakeholders. This could include enabling in-country providers and private sector employers to take advantage of skills of returning workers and assisting workers to re-establish into and contribute to the labour market of their home country.

*I think what [Pacific Island] countries will want is that they are able to retain a good portion of the skilled people in the country so they use them for their own development as well. We need to be careful in that sense. [MFAT Post]*

### **Additional support is required to mitigate negative social impacts in participating Pacific Island countries.**

Some participants, including those involved in all three case studies, thought the relevance of the Programme could be increased by providing additional support for LSU capacity to address the negative social impacts of labour mobility. For example, this includes impacts on families, workers departing and taking key skills from Pacific countries ('brain drain'), social imbalances between and within villages, and instances of unequal distribution of benefits within countries. In Samoa, for example, unequal access to the RSE scheme has led to unequal distribution of benefits, particularly impacting on those who are poorer and disadvantaged, including those who have not completed education, are unemployed or are from rural areas. This is seen to be particularly true if approved employers have preference for experienced workers over new ones and if information on registration and eligibility is not widely disseminated. An increased loss of skilled workers to the RSE scheme has had a negative impact on sectors such as tourism, transportation, and education. In Kiribati,



inequalities in development outcomes were particularly highlighted for young people who are not participating in the RSE scheme. In the Solomon Islands, private sector representatives suggested that there is room for improvement in the recruitment process in order to better target those who are unemployed and semi-skilled to mitigate skilled workers leaving the country. Additional support could cover assistance to further develop recruitment, pre-departure screening, skills training, and reintegration support.

**The Programme could do more to support worker understanding of the employment context in New Zealand.** RSE workers reported that they were not clear on the terms and conditions of their employment and health insurance requirements when signing contracts. This is consistent with findings from the ILO Summary Report 2021 which states that “many workers do not fully understand the offers of employment and contracts”.<sup>28</sup>

*I didn't fully understand the contract. Especially on all the deductions. I was not given the contract to take home so that I can read it and ask someone to help me understand. We were required to sign it on the day we had the meeting and I just signed it because I did not want to lose out on the opportunity to go [RSE worker]*

*We are 15 years down the track and have not figured out how to acknowledge these workers...we are treating them like a separate group of people that service a need without us being reciprocal in the true sense of the word. How can we have people coming here for 14 years who still can't read their contracts? That's a massive failing. [Employer Representative]*

### **Wellbeing for workers continues to be an issue.**

The pastoral care and worker welfare support facilitated by the Programme also plays a role in mitigating health and wellbeing issues by supporting LSUs in providing pre-departure training, and by supporting worker wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand. Wellbeing issues include variance in quality of accommodation, visa issues (complications and delays including receiving or not receiving the visa on the day of departure) and the increase in the cost of health insurance. Some workers reported instances of bullying, and others had limited access to health services (for example workers giving birth in New Zealand because they were unable to return home due to border closures). There is considerable pressure on Liaison Officers to address issues and they would like to see greater communication between TVOM, workers, and employers regarding terms and conditions for the workers.

*If the pay is looked after appropriately, the workers can concentrate on their work and productivity. [RSE Liaison Officer]*

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<sup>28</sup> International Labour Organization (2021). Seasonal worker schemes in the Pacific through the lens of international human rights and labour standards: A summary report.

*There were some cases where women [having babies] had a high cost of hospitalisation that isn't covered by insurance. I was trying to think who I should ask for help – I went to my government and [MBIE] and neither could help the workers meet those costs to pay the hospital costs. [RSE Liaison Officer]*

There is increasing pressure on RSE Liaison Officers, who fulfil multiple roles in pastoral care in what is often demanding work. Liaison officers' perspectives emphasised that the pressure to address welfare issues increased during COVID-19 and the support from TVOM was crucial during this period, for example communicating up-to-date information, support with logistics to meet workers and assisting with cultural barriers to communication.

*I play the mother role, the sister role, the boss, the church minister role when I deal with relationship matters... it's quite exhausting. It's meant to just be full time, but the reality is that it's a 24/7 job. Especially during COVID, it was crazy. 9 to 5 is BAU but workers contact out of these hours because that's when they're not working. You have to be open to calls late at night and early in the morning. [RSE Liaison Officer]*

*I am aware of other issues these workers have faced whilst working abroad. When they have a problem, they kept it to themselves for almost three months until they met other I-Kiribati who speak good English and could talk on their behalf. [NGO Representative]*

### **There is a need for clarity between the roles and drivers for MFAT and MBIE.**

The varying interests of MFAT, MBIE and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), and interagency politics, all impact on the Programme's role and direction.

MFAT and MBIE/Immigration New Zealand (INZ) have different policy drivers, which has resulted in lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities, including in terms of the interface with RSE employers. Other government departments with an interest in the Programme include the Ministry of Primary Industries and Ministry of Health, suggesting a need for a whole-of-government approach in future planning for the Programme. Interviewees highlighted uncertainty with respect to relationships and roles, stating that this has resulted in challenges with the MFAT/MBIE interface, and differences in expectations of what should be achieved and how outcomes will be delivered.

*There are different drivers. MFAT wants more remittances, INZ wants to keep things strict and clear, MPI wants more workers. [MPI]*

*MFAT fund this programme but seem to have diametrically opposed outcomes [to MBIE]. This is a major problem. We cannot afford to have both the right and left hand with opposing views. [Employer Representative]*

*Confusion around whose role is whose and who's making the call – how ministers fit together in the same frame. Who has the primary role in these situations? [MBIE]*

The global context includes changes in dynamics due to COVID-19, Australia's involvement in labour mobility, and the geopolitical situation. Participants questioned the relevance of continuing to work to the 2007 RSE policy settings. The Programme will need to plan for these changes in the labour mobility space to ensure it remains relevant in a post-COVID environment.

*We're not moving fast enough. The region is changing at pace... As soon as we got the house in order the Australians changed the dynamics. We're going to end up in a situation in six months' time when we rejoin the world in labour mobility, that the whole environment has changed – Pacific government expectations, processes, labour pools and their expectations – and we have not moved. We're still struggling with a 2007 model, trying to retrofit it to new dynamics. [MFAT]*

### 3.4 Future design and support

This section provides an overview of the current Pacific labour mobility context and presents stakeholder perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for New Zealand's support for strengthening Pacific Labour mobility capacity. It addresses the following KEQs:

- KEQ 7: What other donors are involved in strengthening labour mobility capacity in the Pacific – currently and over next 5 years? In what areas and to what amount?
- KEQ 8: What insights do the evaluation findings provide to inform the SPLM Programme's future design?

**The rapidly changing context of Pacific labour mobility will need to be a key consideration during the next iteration of the Programme. There was a high level of consistency in stakeholder responses regarding the need to clarify the different drivers and priorities of relevant government agencies in designing the next phase of the Programme. It was also widely stated that Pacific Island countries' collective as well as individual needs and priorities will need to be front and centre and taken into meaningful account throughout the redesign process. There was a shared understanding that there is an opportunity to build on the Programme's strengths identified from the current phase, including the centrality of relationships, and increased cognisance and recognition of the importance of worker welfare.**

#### Pacific Labour Mobility Context

Any potential changes to New Zealand's support for strengthening Pacific labour mobility capacity must take account of changes in the Pacific labour mobility space. Changes that have occurred since 2017 are listed below.

- Australia has overtaken New Zealand in demand for Pacific workers for its PALM programme (formally known as the Seasonal Worker Program, and the Pacific Labour Scheme), including for new sectors such as meat processing, aged care and hospitality. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is currently exploring other sectors suitable for Pacific labour mobility workers.
- Since 2017/18 DFAT has directed significant financial resources through the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF) (its labour mobility managing contractor) for building the capacity of LSUs. This includes locating PLF staff in LSUs to mentor Pacific staff.
- Individual Pacific Governments are expressing a stronger voice about labour mobility arrangements and what they are wanting from labour mobility. For example, the Samoan Government is currently investigating ways to mitigate some of the negative impacts of labour mobility, including depletion of skilled professionals in the Samoan workforce to work on the RSE scheme.<sup>29</sup>
- There is a more coordinated labour mobility voice of Pacific Governments via the Pacific Labour Mobility Annual meetings (PALM), established under the PACER Plus framework.
- There is research-based knowledge about the negative economic and social impacts of labour mobility for village-based labour supply, local employers, and families left at home (from the MFAT-funded, MBIE-commissioned RSE Impact Study completed in 2020).

### Contextual changes that the Programme needs to plan for

There are fundamental considerations that need to be taken into account before any potential changes to New Zealand's support for strengthening labour mobility capacity can be considered.

- **Clarification of MFAT's objectives for labour mobility going forward:** s6(a)

Given these developments, it is timely for the New Zealand Government to refresh its articulation of the role of labour mobility in its Pacific foreign policy and commitment to labour mobility capacity support.

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<sup>29</sup> Hawke's Bay Today (2022) Hawke's Bay visit: Samoa PM looks to 'raise the quality' of RSE programme, 17 June. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/hawkes-bay-visit-samoa-pm-looks-to-raise-the-quality-of-rse-programme/YHJFQ6ACTINFYQC7UYUQL6TCWI/#:~:text=Samoa%20%27s%20Prime%20Minister%20Fiam%C4%93%20Naomi%20Mata%27afa%20has%20confirmed,why%20there%27s%20a%20review%20of%20the%20recruitment%20process>

<sup>30</sup> Aingimea, Lionel Rouwen (2022). The Pacific is not a geostrategic chessboard, an edited version of the first sections of the opening address given at the 2022 Pacific Update by His Excellency Lionel Rouwen Aingimea, President of Nauru. DevPolicy Blog, 1 July. [https://devpolicy.org/pacific-is-not-a-geostrategic-chessboard-20220701/?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=pacific-is-not-a-geostrategic-chessboard-20220701](https://devpolicy.org/pacific-is-not-a-geostrategic-chessboard-20220701/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=pacific-is-not-a-geostrategic-chessboard-20220701)

<sup>31</sup> Fry, Greg, Kabutaulaka Tarcisius, and Wesley-Smith, Terence (2022). 'Partners in the Blue Pacific' initiative rides roughshod over established regional processes, DevPolicy Blog, 5 July [https://devpolicy.org/pbp-initiative-rides-roughshod-over-regional-processes-20220705/?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=pbp-initiative-rides-roughshod-over-regional-processes-20220705](https://devpolicy.org/pbp-initiative-rides-roughshod-over-regional-processes-20220705/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=pbp-initiative-rides-roughshod-over-regional-processes-20220705)

- **Clarification of what Pacific Island countries want with regards to labour mobility capacity support from New Zealand:** The process for identifying changes to New Zealand's labour mobility support must be driven by Pacific Island countries themselves in respect of their future priorities and needs. This would speak to New Zealand's intent to have a deeper collaboration with Pacific Island countries.<sup>32</sup>
- **Clarification of the roles of MFAT Posts and the Programme:** An issue raised by MFAT and MBIE (through interviews and in the most recent TVOM Annual Report) is the need to clarify the respective roles of MFAT Posts and TVOM in-country. The dynamic between Posts and the role of TVOM in country in-country (for example, one party not knowing what the other is planning/doing) is confusing for Pacific officials and risks undermining the *NZ Inc* approach that the New Zealand government is striving for. The 2017 Programme design recommended increased alignment between bilateral programmes and Programme funding, but it is not clear from the interviews whether this has occurred.
- **Clarification of NZ's labour mobility support contribution vis-à-vis Australia's contribution:**
  - While acknowledging that labour mobility demand is market driven, it may be possible to change the current discourse. For example, future collaboration could shift from a situation in which the two countries are regarded as competing with each other for Pacific labour, to one which promotes an "ANZAC" regional approach to labour mobility (i.e. Australia and NZ) while maintaining country-based differences. This would require greater collaboration and coordination between MFAT and DFAT.
  - New Zealand's activities must add value rather than duplicate the work of other development partners, notably the Australian government, World Bank and development NGOs operating in the Pacific. Consequently, New Zealand needs to determine where and what its in-country labour mobility support "niche" will be. For example, a decision could be made to leave DFAT to undertake LSU capacity building and focus instead on identified areas of risk associated with labour mobility as identified in the RSE Impact Study, e.g. family support, reintegration.

## Future State

Interview participants were asked to identify ideas for the future design of the Programme. The following list provides suggestions from stakeholders for potential improvements to inform the Programme's future design. Not all of the suggestions fall within the Programme's remit, but may inform a wider conversation about labour mobility support.

- Learn from Australia's approach to labour mobility, identify where there is an opportunity to collaborate and think regionally rather than bilaterally.

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<sup>32</sup> MFAT's 2019 policy statement on New Zealand's policy for International Cooperation for Effective Sustainable Development describes a deeper collaboration with Pacific partner countries. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/Aid-Programs/Policy/Policy-Statement-New-Zealands-International-Cooperation-for-Effective-Sustainable-Development-ICESD.pdf>



- Clarify roles and relationships of key NZ agencies involved in the Programme and recalibrate the MFAT-MBIE relationship in terms of its delivery. Identify units/teams best-placed to deliver on Programme objectives and outputs, drawing on the key strengths and resource capabilities of each agency.
- Offer a hybrid model with different pockets of support:
  - Access to job opportunities for Pacific people in NZ
  - MFAT development focussed work in the Pacific
  - Onshore domestic-focussed support.
- In cooperation with relevant PIC ministries, review the structure of LSUs to ensure a holistic approach to managing labour mobility programmes.
- Improve policy settings for workers, including visa structure and conditions, raising the cap on RSE numbers, options for pathway to residency, family accompaniment options, pay and employment conditions, and monitor/audit accommodation.
- Extend pilots and expand to other sectors (for example forestry, food processing, seafood processing, and care work) to take advantage of specific skills and experience in the Pacific and increase scope of employment opportunities, particularly for women.
- Elevate reintegration support to enable circular labour mobility, enhance private sector understanding of returning worker capabilities, and invest in skills development to align with individual, sector, and country demand.
- Identify modes to offer skills development and qualification opportunities, including NZQA, ITO, opportunities for younger workers, and recognising skill levels for returning workers.
- Increase capacity development support for the LSUs, including communication, customer service, negotiation skills, and advocacy for employment conditions.
- Appoint a Programme-supported staff member embedded in each LSU to help address sustainability risks associated with staff turnover.
- Consider establishing a new PIC-based agency to deliver the services of the LSU with specialised training in recruitment and visa requirements, to address challenges of dispersed populations.
- Strengthen the recruitment process to avoid: i) the loss of skilled and already employed workers and; ii) the disproportionate distribution of opportunities. This could include support for LSUs to increase awareness campaigns, establish local criteria, prioritise the unemployed and build collaborations with local councils and community organisations.
- Improve the pre-departure process so that workers and families fully understand their rights and responsibilities under their employment arrangements, covering medical and visa requirements, addressing family violence, including rights and support, provision of financial literacy training and cultural awareness training. The training could engage local NGOs to include additional communication methods such as sign language, and through the use of drama.
- Expand the focussed support for employers, including cultural competency, and look at potential for shared benefit from employer commitment to workers and villages.





- Expand wellbeing support for workers including provision for mental health, eliminating bullying, strengthening support from liaison officers, and utilising diaspora support. This should include revisiting the pastoral care component and developing a framework to guide this service.
- Increase social infrastructure support to provide culturally responsive social support for both workers and family members.
- Enable approved employers to contribute to pension fund deductions.

## 4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on the findings, this section presents conclusions and proposes recommendations.

### Purpose and direction of the Programme

**Greater clarity is needed on the future design and purpose of the Programme to take into account changes in context.** The Programme is critical to facilitating the RSE programme by providing support to LSUs, employers, liaison officials, and workers. The strong relationships between TVOM, LSUs and employers have underpinned the success of the Programme. However, the changing geopolitical, strategic, and socio-economic context means that the original design of the Programme is no longer fit for purpose and there is an opportunity to redevelop it to suit current and future needs for the Pacific as a region. This will require clarifying the roles and responsibilities of MFAT and MBIE and taking a whole-of-government approach to rethink how the Programme is delivered.

Participants in MFAT Posts also lacked awareness of the Programme's purpose and activities. There is an opportunity for the redesign to consider whether there is a need for greater knowledge and awareness of the programme in MFAT Posts and any role they may fulfil in supporting the achievement of outcomes.

Recommendations:

1. Redefine the purpose, outcomes, and focus of the Programme to respond to current strategic and operational needs, recognising the need for a whole-of-government approach.
2. Recalibrate the relationship between MFAT and MBIE including clarification of roles and responsibilities with respect to the Programme.

### Meeting Pacific priorities and development outcomes

**A development focus is the Programme purpose and needs to be a primary consideration in the design of all Programme activities in the next phase.** One focus of the Programme is on building the capacity of LSUs to enable Pacific States to participate effectively in the RSE scheme which will in turn create development benefits:

*To support Pacific Island countries to gain economic and social benefits from remittances and skills by building labour mobility capacity.<sup>33</sup>*

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<sup>33</sup> MFAT–MBIE Memorandum of Understanding 2, November 2020.

In order to meet MFAT's strategic intentions to promote a prosperous and resilient Pacific in future iterations of the Programme it will be important to prioritise participating Pacific Island country needs and development priorities.

Findings from Pacific stakeholder interviews indicate that priorities include not only providing worker opportunities in Aotearoa New Zealand but also considering long-term sustainable development outcomes for their respective countries. Consideration of how best to meet development outcomes encompasses reintegration support, incorporating a focus on worker training and skills development, recognition of skills and expertise from participating countries' workers, mitigating adverse social outcomes, and tailored support to LSUs to enable equitable distribution of opportunities and benefits. These will in turn support achievement of the objective of supporting inclusive circular labour migration.

Recommendations:

3. Develop a collaborative approach to the design of the next phase of the Programme through a process of early and meaningful consultation with participating PICs.
4. Consider how best to enable ongoing Pacific ownership of the Programme.
5. Elevate reintegration support for LSUs to enable circular labour mobility, and align with individual, sector, and country demand.

### Labour Mobility in the Region

**Collaboration with Australia is needed to streamline future labour mobility processes in the region.** Labour mobility in the Pacific region has changed significantly over the last 5-year period, due to Australia's expanding labour mobility programme and COVID-19. The next phase of the Programme will need to be informed by the changing labour mobility context in the Pacific and identify synergies with Australia's labour mobility programme.

Recommendations:

6. Identify where there are opportunities to collaborate with Australia (and other regional players) and ways to most effectively allocate resources and support LSU capacity.
7. Align outcomes with Pacific country priorities, including consideration of the changing labour context and the need for tailored support to meet individual country needs.

### Learnings from the COVID-19 period

**Worker wellbeing is expected to continue to be a priority consideration of the future programme.** The expansion of the proposed short- and medium-term outcomes of the Programme as outlined in the MoU variations of September 2020 and November 2020 mean that the Programme personnel and the country liaison roles are further stretched, limiting their ability to deliver to meet these objectives.

The changing responsibilities of the Programme during this period highlighted the significance of worker wellbeing more acutely than ever before. This is critical to the positive experience of workers in Aotearoa New Zealand and supporting development outcomes in the Pacific Islands.

There is also an opportunity to integrate commitment from employers more effectively into the Programme and allow learning to occur between employers, for example around in-house pastoral care, cultural support initiatives, fundraising efforts, and employer-led travel to the Pacific.

Recommendations:

8. Learn from what the last phase has highlighted about worker welfare and wellbeing needs and identify the best modes and entities to deliver this support.
9. Identify opportunities to build capacity remotely, for example through Pacific-based personnel.
10. Recognise the need for focussed support for employers, including collaborative and co-design options, and identify the best delivery modes and entities to provide this support.

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## Appendix B: Interview Schedule

The below reflects the main interview schedule used for engagement with stakeholders. Customisations were made individually to fit/reflect the stakeholders engaged with.

**Informed consent process** (involves confirming verbal consent if consent sheet has not been previously received; and confirming consent for interview to be recorded for note-taking purposes)

### Section 1: Your connection with the SPLM Programme

1. Tell me about yourself, your role/organisation and your involvement and/or interest in Toso-Vaka-o-Manū (TVOM) / Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility (SPLM) Programme?
2. What was the period of your involvement (e.g. 2017-2020 / 2020-2022)?

### Section 2: Effectiveness

3. What is your understanding of the purpose and outcomes of Toso-Vaka-o-Manū (TVOM) / Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility (SPLM) Programme?
4. Do you think some of the activities/components of TVOM/SPLM Programme are more effective than others? If so, what are they and what makes them more effective?
5. Reflecting on the past five years, what difference has TVOM/SPLM Programme made?
6. How do you know if TVOM/SPLM Programme is making a difference?

### Section 3: Efficiency

7. To what extent does the SPLM Programme represent value for money?
8. To what extent is the SPLM Programme adequately funded?

### Section 4: Relevance

9. How do you think the activities of TVOM/SPLM Programme are contributing to the wellbeing of workers and their families?
10. How do you think the activities of TVOM/SPLM Programme are contributing to NZ's aim of building a prosperous and resilient Pacific?
11. Why do you think workers choose to participate in the TVOM/SPLM Programme (beyond financial gain)?
12. What are for you the key highlights and key issues of TVOM /SPLM Programme?

## **Section 5: Future design and support**

13. What kinds of opportunities/challenges do you think the future holds for TVOM/SPLM Programme?
14. How could TVOM /SPLM Programme be improved?

## **Section 6: Other**

15. Are there any other people you think we should speak to about the TVOM/SPLM Programme? [Specifically for interviews based in Pacific islands: Are there any local workers or local workers' families who we could also speak to?]

## Appendix C: Summary of the Programme output delivery 2017 - 2021

### Output 1: Core capacity building

**2017-2018:** A high level of Pacific ministerial engagement was reported through increased secondments and self-funded visits from the Pacific. Four Ministers and one Prime Minister attended the RSE Conference. Labour mobility action plans were initiated with all participating PICs, and Inter-Agency Understanding (IAU) agreements about current and future industry sectors were developed. A domestic awareness programme served to provide communities with a good understanding of the RSE scheme.

**2018-2019:** The rollout of the Pre-departure Toolkit (which included Police videos tailored for each country) continued in Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu and Nauru. Recruitment agents were included in this training. Secondment visits by Samoa, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Tonga (as well as a self-funded visit by Fiji) built the capacity of new government officials to ensure the effective operation and management of the RSE scheme. It allowed them to gain a better understanding of the New Zealand environment, as well as the needs of RSE employers.

**2019-2020:** A situational analysis of each PIC's capacity was undertaken in May 2020 to gain an understanding of each PIC's capacity at a time when COVID-19 was impacting the Pacific and most countries were going into some level of lockdown over the period. While many countries stated they could work remotely, in reality, this was limited often through lack of internet connectivity and the requirement for staff to use personal devices or data. Lockdowns in the Pacific prevented LSUs from operating effectively. The growing Australian programmes were also impacting on the resources of LSUs. There were no Pacific ministerial visits due to COVID-19 and only one, but very successful, secondment of two officials from Vanuatu. Continued support was also provided to liaison officers.

**2020-2021:** TVOM met online with each LSU in an effort to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on their operations. Some LSUs were able to adapt and had resources to connect remotely, and some experienced connection and resource issues. The main discovery from this series of meetings was that there needed to be better information sharing between INZ and LSUs in terms of the number and location of workers: a challenge as the INZ system struggled to provide accurate data over the period.

**Border Exemption support for LSUs:** In November 2020, New Zealand Cabinet endorsed a border exemption for 2,000 experienced RSE workers to enter and work in New Zealand by March 2021, in time for the RSE peak season. These workers supplemented the 5,500 RSE workers who remained in New Zealand throughout COVID-19 and could not return home while the border was closed.

The border exemption brought about several changes to the process and requirements for participation in RSE for which LSUs needed to be upskilled. These conditions included: regular repatriation pathways for workers, visa process changes, and on arrival all workers entered into 14 days in the New Zealand government's Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) facilities. The policy also stipulated workers were to be paid \$22.10 per hour (higher than the minimum wage) for the duration of their contracts, including being paid the equivalent of a 30-hour work week while in quarantine.



In May 2021, government announced a second border exemption for Pacific seasonal workers under the RSE scheme permitting up to 2,400 workers to enter between June 2021 and March 2022. Employers accessing workers under this exemption were required to pay all their RSE workers \$22.10 per hour, including those that had not returned home since the first lockdown in March 2020. Like for first border exemption, the Programme supported additional staffing to the Vanuatu ESU to meet capacity constraints of the unit.

## Output 2: Initiatives in New Sectors

**2017-2018:** A positive formal assessment of the Canterbury Reconstruction pilot was completed. The pilot saw 24 carpenters from Samoa, Tonga and Fiji spend 12 months working in Christchurch. The scoping of expansion options in the construction industry took place over December and January. I-Kiribati workers began in the fishing industry and the employer (Sealord) committed to a full pilot. Tourism and forestry were scoped as potential sectors for the future.

**2018-2019:** MBIE completed Pacific Trades Partnership (PTP) recruitment over three rounds in Samoa and Tonga with three different employers. Over 80 workers were screened and 42 received job offers. 33 construction workers arrived in New Zealand. The first five Tongan workers arrived in New Zealand on 29 October 2018. The pre-departure programme for the PTP was delivered in Tonga and Samoa and included a New Zealand Building Standards module, Health and Safety and employer specific information. The first female carpenter arrived in New Zealand and was awarded a joint scholarship from Ara Institute of Canterbury and Tradestaff. A new package of insurance was negotiated with Orbit Insurance to cover workers tools at no extra expense. Sealord completed the Kiribati stream of the fisheries pilot, employing eleven i-Kiribati fishers and four Tuvaluan fishers. Waikawa Fishing Company was secured as the second employer for the Fisheries Employment Initiative. A pre-departure course for Tuvalu was developed to support future fisheries recruitment. Support was provided for ongoing discussions with Silver Fern Farms with a view of establishing a partnership approach for the 2020-2021 meat packing and processing season.

**2019-2020:** The Fisheries Employment Initiative (FEI) delivered on its PACER Plus commitment to land ten fishers from Tuvalu and Kiribati in New Zealand with the inclusion of Waikawa Fishing Company. A total of 30 workers have now participated in the FEI; a third successfully returning on subsequent trips. A positive review of the FEI's implementation supported the expansion of the initiative into a wider programme, the Pacific Trades Partnership (PTP).

A celebration was jointly funded by the Programme and Trade Staff in Christchurch in January and was attended by the Samoan Trade Commissioner and a representative from the Samoan High Commission. Other workers in the PTP and the original Canterbury Reconstruction Programme (CRP) were also recognised during the year. A CRP carpenter was also promoted to foreman this year.

**2020-2021:** The workers in FEI were extremely affected by the COVID-19 border restrictions with no direct pathways home for workers from Tuvalu and Kiribati. Ten workers remain in New Zealand following TVOM working with employers and High Commissions to return five workers to Fiji from August 2020 to February 2021. For the remaining workers, it was an immediate challenge to provide for their health and wellbeing within the parameters of their

strict visa settings. Workers' issues over the period included the following: need for time onshore to rest (no parameters within visa settings for this); no provision for repatriating injured or sick workers that are no longer fit for work; ensuring continuous work is available; timing the required visa variations and managing workers' stress and desire to repatriate. There were nine out of ten fishers with Sealord and these workers have been supported by Sealord to gain their necessary seafaring ticket license to advance their skills. All Sealord crew have now completed the ADH-F training and examinations and are in the process of completing their MNZ licence. Twenty four Pacific Trades Partnership (PTP) workers chose to remain in New Zealand and extend their work visas based on further offers of employment. Issues over the period included limited work during the offseason and absconding.

While TVOM held some meetings internally to explore opportunities in other sectors, these efforts had to be kept on hold. Nonetheless, the following sectors/industries indicated an interest in recruiting from the Pacific when borders allow: scaffolding, labour hire, aged care, fisheries, aquaculture, hospitality and forestry. The Programme remains an active member of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority PACER Plus Technical Steering Group which is a useful parallel piece of work to support long-term objectives for the expansion of labour mobility opportunities.

### Output 3: Relationships & collaboration

COVID-19 and the focus on wellbeing has increased the Programme's collaboration with New Zealand based agencies and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs).

**2017-2018:** There was a significant increase in engagement with Australian counterparts including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Department of Jobs and Small Businesses (DJSB) and the Labour Mobility Assistance Programme (LMAP) on important issues relating to joint seasonal worker programmes in Pacific states. MBIE also worked closely with MFAT posts in the Pacific.

**2018-2019:** Through regular engagement with Australia MBIE continued to investigate opportunities to collaborate over the implementation of Pacific website and databases. The 2018 Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting (PLMAM) took place in Honiara in October 2018 with the theme "Shaping our Futures Together." The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Conference was held in Tauranga in August 2018. The New Zealand High Commissions in Tonga and Samoa, along with the LSUs, partnered with the PTP programme to deliver successful radio, newspaper and TV coverage of the PTP recruitment and job offers which gave great publicity to the programmes. The Skills and Investment Manager attended Samoan High Level Consultations in February 2019, shortly followed by the Relationship Manager for the Fisheries and Trades programmes represented attending the Tuvalu High Level consultations in March 2019. Both meetings required significant input from MBIE on labour mobility and the impacts of labour mobility on local capacity.

**2019-2020:** The PLMAM took place in Auckland in October 2019. The Programme supported the Department of Internal Affairs to implement the Assistance for Foreign Migrants Impacted by COVID 19, also known as the *Visitor Care Manaaki Manuhiri Fund*. The process provided a streamlined pathway for RSE employers to access funding on behalf of their RSE workers facing hardship without requiring RSE workers to exhaust their savings.

**2020-2021.** COVID-19 and the increased emphasis on wellbeing has increased the Programme's collaboration with New Zealand based agencies and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs). Collaboration to deliver Visitor Care *Manaaki Manuhiri* during COVID-19: an Assistance Programme for Foreign Nationals Impacted by COVID-19 went live from 1 July 2020. TVOM worked closely with the Red Cross and Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) to ensure the process did not pose barriers to access for RSE workers. The result was a flexible and streamlined process for RSE employers to make applications on behalf of their RSE workers and the ability for RSE workers to be considered in groups, rather than by individual application. The process also avoided RSE workers needing to demonstrate that they had exhausted their savings in order to receive in-kind payments.

The TVOM Facebook page remained the Programme's only direct communication pathway to workers outside of more formal *talanoa* and webinars. Key messages were translated for Facebook posts and other communications channels. The Facebook page was also used as an avenue to share the worker experience. Trends suggest that the membership enjoy this, with a significant rise in membership over the Christmas period when the Programme posted Christmas videos with messages from workers for their families. Statistics on Facebook showed that one of these videos interacted with close to 18,000 people. Following lessons learnt last year around the resource requirements of running the page in June 2021, country-specific pages were deleted and only the main landing page has been continued.

In June 2021 the Programme hosted a delegation of two PLF delegates and a DFAT Trade delegate. The team visited RSE employers and industry representatives in the North and South Islands to learn how New Zealand promotes the wellbeing of RSE workers. The purpose of the visit was to identify connections and share operational and management insights.

In June 2021 the Programme hosted a Talanoa Fa'apasifika in Blenheim on Pacific worker welfare and wellbeing. The objective of the Talanoa was to collectively develop a plan to improve worker wellbeing and support, recognising that all Programme stakeholders have a role and responsibility to improve wellbeing outcomes. Government representatives from eight Pacific countries, industry representatives, New Zealand government officials and key community representatives attended. The Talanoa provided a useful opportunity for the diverse stakeholders of the RSE scheme to come together to focus on worker wellbeing: this is something that has not previously been done.

The Programme also worked in collaboration with New Zealand Apple and Pears Incorporated (NZAPI) to roll out a number of initiatives to support worker wellbeing. Sixteen workers participated in agricultural training at Taratahi Agricultural School while they were out of work. Workers were able to learn skills in stock fencing, electric fencing, small motor servicing, tractor driving, first aid and health and safety. These skills were intended for workers to utilise in their work in New Zealand and when they return home.

The Programme also worked alongside Pacific Migration and NZAPI to organise interviews with RSE workers about their time in New Zealand throughout COVID-19. The interviews were a way for workers to send messages to their families and communities back home.

## Output 4: Knowledge management

Knowledge management is designed to build knowledge within Pacific states about labour mobility in New Zealand and information management support to LSUs. Overtime this output has encapsulated any research or study the Programme has commissioned or supported, along with any knowledge products provided to Pacific states.

**2017-2018:** MBIE delivered a Terms of Reference for an in-depth research project on the impacts of the RSE scheme. Further training on the websites and databases was also delivered with a corresponding increase in PICs' use of these resources.

**2018-2019:** The New Zealand stream RSE Impact Study was completed and the research's Pacific stream was commenced in Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. The RSE Health Study was commenced, focusing on what screening either takes place or should be considered for RSE workers coming to New Zealand, as well as investigating what other health screening is available in the Pacific and the impact of extending health screening. A request for tender to review the database and website project was sent out in June 2019.

**2019-2020:** The findings of the completed RSE Impacts study highlighted the need to bring the worker, family and Pacific community into the centre of the scheme and to rebalance the benefits. Because COVID-19 halted travel and delayed the RSE policy review, the Programme has had additional time to review outputs in line with the key findings and realign work priorities in order to mitigate the unintended negative impacts from participation in RSE identified in the study.

**2020-2021:** Between June and October 2020, the Programme scoped an RSE Worker App to increase worker voice in the scheme and develop a better understanding of the worker experience and identify areas for improvement, while also providing workers with a direct avenue to receive information and give information. A recommendations report in October outlined possible solution options and the indicative cost to develop the next stage. The Programme also supported the World Bank research on the development impacts of Pacific labour mobility. The research seeks to understand how the RSE scheme, Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) and the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) have affected the economic and social wellbeing of participating workers, their households and home communities. Findings from the research will help to inform potential government interventions to support vulnerable workers and their families and strengthen the labour mobility schemes in the future.

NZAPI conducted monthly surveys on worker wellbeing. The survey covered more than 700 RSE workers and was used to determine whether workers were qualified for the Visitor Care *Manaaki Manuhiri* funding by obtaining hours of work and deductions. The Programme used this information to provide targeted visits to regions with Pacific officials onshore to attend to the wellbeing needs of workers and encourage employers to access the Visitor Care *Manaaki Manuhiri* funding.

## Output 5: Support to maximize benefits of labour mobility

This outcome is intended to contribute to achieving positive outcomes for Pacific governments, LSUs, and regional initiatives while also minimising the unintended and adverse outcomes that can eventuate from labour mobility.

From the 2019/20 year onwards this output was focused on the wellbeing of workers. The pandemic limited TVOM's ability to maximise benefits offshore as Pacific countries were not in a position to implement change or consider new initiatives.

**2017-2018:** The pre-departure toolkit was revised to fit the needs of new labour mobility sectors and workshops were held on the topics of cross-cultural understanding and effective leadership. The mobile doctor programme was launched August 2017 and was a success in the first year of implementation, reducing travel costs and time in Port Vila, and relieving pressure on the health system. Other PICs are considering exploring similar models to address their health capacity issues.

**2018-2019:** As part of the PTP roll out and in response to a number of driving-related incidences in the Canterbury Reconstruction Pilot (CRP), a driver training programme was delivered to all construction workers arriving under the PTP. MBIE participated as a member of the Pacific Superannuation Working Group to provide support to MFAT and Pacific National Provident Funds.

**2019-2020:** When New Zealand went into lockdown in March 2020 in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, TVOM quickly moved to support workers who became stranded in Aotearoa New Zealand. A key achievement from this period was the creation of the TVOM RSE Facebook page which provided the programme a useful platform to engage with Pacific workers and communities remotely.

Throughout the year, webinars were held with Pacific-based LSUs and RSE employers to provide briefings on the scheme, including key decisions and changes that were brought on by COVID-19. The meetings provided an opportunity for each LSU to enquire on worker wellbeing and other issues that may impact on the participation of that country in the scheme. Employers had the opportunity to provide LSUs with progress on worker wellbeing and issues that were emerging from across the regions.

**2020-2021:** To support worker morale and provide an outlet for workers who were struggling with being stranded in New Zealand, The Programme funded sports activities through New Zealand Apples and Pears (NZAPI). Over 1,500 workers participated in sporting activities, including a volleyball tournament for over 300 RSE workers every Monday and Tuesday morning in October 2020 at the Pettigrew Green Arena in Taradale. From March 2020, an emerging issue of women becoming pregnant and not being able to return home was brought to the attention of the Programme. The Programme Relationship Managers (RMs) organised more than twenty-five regional visits with both PIC High Commission staff and their respective liaison officers across Northland, Bay of Plenty, Hawke's Bay, Nelson, Marlborough, Central Otago and the Wairarapa. These visits were significant for the following reasons:

- Approximately 6,500 workers from the nine participating countries were reached through the visits.
- PIC High Commission staff and the LOs were able to meet with their workers face-to-face and present issues for discussion in their native languages.
- The visits gave workers greater confidence and a sense of security knowing that their government officials knew of their whereabouts and the challenges they were facing.





- Promoted a more proactive approach to resolving issues between employees and employers.
- Provided a face-to-face forum for updates on repatriation pathways for workers wanting to return home.
- Provided workers with up-to-date information on changing visa settings.
- Provided a welcome opportunity for social interaction with other workers from the same country/countries.



## Appendix D: Case Study Report

Proactively released  
by MFAT

# Evaluation of the Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility Programme (2017-2022)

## Case Study Report: Samoa, Solomon Islands, Kiribati

*29 August 2022*



**ALLEN + CLARKE**

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report outlines findings from stakeholder consultations in Samoa, Solomon Islands and Kiribati to inform the wider Evaluation of the Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility (SPLM) Programme.

The case studies are intended to provide a more detailed picture of the impact of the SPLM programme (hereafter referred to as the Programme) and the support from the Toso-vaka-o-Manū team (TVOM) in three Pacific Island Countries. Three countries were selected: Samoa was identified as a significant labour mobility participant (with 2,315 RSE workers arriving in 2018/19), the Solomon Islands as a newer, smaller scale participant (with 696 workers arriving in 2018/19), and Kiribati as a small labour sending country with a proportionately high number of female RSE workers (with 263 workers arriving in 2018/19)<sup>34</sup>.

The case studies for Samoa and Solomon Islands were undertaken by team members based in their respective countries, while the case study for Kiribati was carried out from Aotearoa New Zealand by a team member with close connections throughout Kiribati.

In-country stakeholder consultation for the case studies was carried out between June and August 2022 and complemented the stakeholder interviews undertaken for the overall study. Individuals consulted included government and Labour Sending Unit (LSU) representatives, returned workers and families, non-government organisations, regional organisations, and private sector representatives.

This case study report should be read in conjunction with the Evaluation of the Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility Programme (2017-2022) Final Report (29 August 2022).

## 1.1 Purpose of the Case Studies

The purpose of the overall evaluation is to provide an independent assessment of the efficacy and efficiency of the current framework, as well as the delivery modalities, of the Programme. It seeks to understand what works, what doesn't, and why to inform the design and development of phase three of the activity for the 2022-2027 period. This will help to ensure New Zealand's strategic priorities in this space, and for each jurisdiction involved, are both clearly defined and more effectively met.

The four objectives of the evaluation are:

- **Objective 1 (Effectiveness):** to examine the progress that has been made in achieving the SPLM Programme's intended outcomes and strategic objectives between 2017 and 2022.
- **Objective 2 (Efficiency):** to review the efficiency and sustainability of the long-term approach employed to deliver results.

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<sup>34</sup> MBIE (2021). The Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility: Toso-Vaka-o-Manū Annual Report 2020-2021.

- **Objective 3 (Relevance):** to assess the extent to which the SPLM Programme addresses the overarching objectives and policy drivers for Pacific labour mobility activities, both for New Zealand and Pacific Island countries.
- **Objective 4 (Future design and support):** to identify changes that could be made to New Zealand's support for strengthening Pacific labour mobility capacity in the future.

The purpose of the case studies is to provide detailed findings on the experience of three participating Pacific Island Countries to inform the wider evaluation, focusing specifically on Objectives 1, 2 and 4.

## 1.2 Scope

As specified in the Terms of Reference, the scope for the evaluation includes:

- the five-year period from 2017 to 2022 (second phase of the Programme)
- countries that are currently receiving labour mobility support from New Zealand.

For Samoa, the Programme includes the construction pilot, otherwise known as the Pacific Trades Partnership (PTP). For Kiribati, the Programme includes the Fisheries Employment Initiative.

Reflecting the difference in scale of the RSE scheme and consequently the role of the Programme in the three case study countries, the scope of the case studies also differed. The case study for Samoa was the most extensive and intended to draw on a larger number of stakeholders than for the other case studies. The case study for Kiribati had the smallest scope with a limited number of interviews undertaken to supplement stakeholder interviews for the overall evaluation.



## 2.0 SAMOA

### 2.1 Context

According to the 2021 Census, Samoa has a population of 200,010 compared to 195,979 in 2016, an average annual growth rate of 0.85 %. This is regarded as a very modest growth rate due to heavy emigration, particularly to Aotearoa New Zealand via the Samoan Quota. Traditionally, Samoa has had a migratory population with some estimates suggesting that there are more Samoans now living overseas than in the country. In the 2018 New Zealand Census, 182,721 people identified as being part of the Samoan ethnic group, making up 3.9% of New Zealand's population. Those who migrate and live overseas continue to maintain strong ties with their families and communities, both within their new country of residence as well as those back in Samoa. A key feature of these strong ties is the remittances sent back to Samoa which continue to play a significant role in Samoa's economy being the main source of foreign exchange.

Samoa economic progress has been marred by the COVID-19 pandemic and it is predicted that Samoa's economy will contract by 8% for this financial year. The nominal GDP in 2021 was SAT2,191.2 which reflects a GDP per capita of about SAT10,734. The minimum wage rose in early 2021 from SAT2.50 to SAT3.00. It is predicted that Samoa's economy will continue to decline for the next 3 months from August 2022 and, with the opening of the borders, it is expected to recover slightly. However, the significant increase in the cost of imported fuel will escalate the cost of living bringing further pressures to household budgets.

Samoa will continue to rely heavily on remittances to offset the loss of income from tourism and lower export revenues. Total remittances currently represent about 27.6% (SAT606.4million) of the GDP but will continue to increase as more workers are engaged in labour mobility programmes. Although it is unknown exactly how much of current remittances is from seasonal workers; it has been estimated to be about 16% (SAT97million) of total remittances. The March 2022 Employment Report produced by the Samoa Bureau of Statistics reports that the employment index has experienced fluctuations over the 2017 – 2022 period due to unemployment and job losses in some sectors such as Accommodation, Construction, Other Services and Transport with respective growths of -29.7%, -7.9%, -4.6% and -3.7%. On the other hand, the wage index has consistently grown positively over the same period, with wage growth in the April 2021 – March 2022 period increasing by 1.1%. The economic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 is predicted to be slow and Samoa is at risk of losing its skilled workforce to overseas employment through the labour mobility programmes which offer much higher wages and other benefits.

The 2018 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) identified 45,511 people living below the basic needs poverty line (BNPL). This is an increase of 9,500 compared to 2013/14 HIES which represents about 25% of the total population. The most affected areas are in the Apia Urban Area and Northwest Upolu with 23.7% and 38% of the population respectively living below the BNPL.

The findings also reveal that a fall in income levels results in increased vulnerability with people falling below the BNPL and this trend is apparent across the country. A 20% fall in income levels could result in about 9 to 10% of people falling under the BNPL, which is significant for

such a small country. Such situations could trigger adverse social issues related to poverty. This situation will have a more serious impact on children and highlights the importance of having labour mobility programmes that provide alternative means of employment, particularly for the unemployed.

## **2.1.1 Labour Mobility Framework**

The following provides the policy framework within which labour mobility operates in Samoa.

### **PACER Plus**

With 10 other Pacific Island Countries, Samoa is a signatory to the PACER Plus Agreement which aims to create jobs, raise standards of living and encourage sustainable economic development in the Pacific region. The Agreement recognises that labour mobility is an important trade initiative between Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island Countries, delivering shared economic benefits across the Pacific. In addition, Samoa has ratified 10 International Labour Organisation Conventions which have relevance for remuneration and protection at work.

### **Arrangement on Labour Mobility**

Alongside the PACER Plus Agreement, Samoa is party to the Arrangement on Labour Mobility with the Governments of Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Independent and Sovereign Republic of Kiribati, Republic of Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Solomon Islands, the Kingdom of Tonga, Tuvalu, the Republic of Vanuatu. The purpose of the Arrangement is to “strengthen Pacific labour mobility cooperation between the Participants” (paragraph 2).

### **Bilateral Labour Mobility Agreement**

The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme is established by the signed Bilateral Labour Agreement in the form of an Inter-Agency Understanding (IAU) between New Zealand and Samoa. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour is Samoa’s signatory to this Agreement. Key aspects of the implementation and operation of the RSE are included in an appendix to the IAU entitled “Facilitative Arrangements”. Unlike the Australian Seasonal Workers Program (SWP) there is very limited engagement or involvement from Samoa Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in monitoring the implementation of this Agreement.

### **Samoa Country Action Plan 2018-2023**

The Samoa Country Action Plan 2018 – 2023 was developed in collaboration with the Samoa Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour. This document forms the basis of New Zealand’s support for Samoa to manage, operate and deliver labour mobility opportunities off-shore. The Plan articulates the following three strategic focus areas or core objectives for which agreed key priorities or activities were to directly contribute to:

1. Core Objective One: Technical Assistance: Support PICs to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of labour mobility;

2. Core Objective Two: New Sectors: Investigate and initiate the participation of workers in new industries, and support the LSU to develop capabilities for working in sectors requiring industry specific skills and qualifications;

3. Core Objective Three: Capacity Building: Build the core capacity of LSUs (including agents where these entities substitute for LSU functions) in Pacific Island Countries that is maintained over time.

## **Samoa Labour Mobility Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Samoa labour migration (emigration and immigration) is managed in the best interests of Samoa's people and economy.

## **Official Labour Sending Unit**

The Labour Employment and Export Division (LEEP), housed under the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (MCIL), is responsible for the following labour mobility schemes:

1. New Zealand's Recognized Seasonal Employer Scheme (RSE)
2. Australia's Seasonal Workers Program (SWP)
3. Canterbury Trade Employment Initiative
4. Approval In Principle (Meat Processing Industry)

### **2.1.2 Recruitment Pathways**

To date, the recruitment of Samoan workers for all seasonal schemes is via the Government of Samoa's Work Ready Pool (WRP). The intention for this is to enable Samoa to easily manage recruitment-related issues as well as mitigate the possible exploitation of workers by local representatives outside of the government. Worker selection is based on requirements set out by an approved employer and confirmation of whether the registered worker satisfies those requirements following a thorough vetting process. The final recruitment decision is made by the approved employer.

## **2.2 Data collection**

Following consultation with the *Allen + Clarke* evaluation team, stakeholders were selected using the following three groups.

- Group 1: Stakeholders suggested by MFAT.
- Group 2: Workers selected in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour who provided names and contact details.
- Group 3: Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers with Portfolios directly related to the Programme.
- Group 4: Others. These included Community, NGOs, Regional/International Organisations, Individual Professionals (medical doctor, researcher, trainer and industry)

**Table 1: Stakeholder interviews Samoa**

Organisation	Number of stakeholders interviewed
Cabinet	4
Government Ministries	
Samoa MCIL (LSU)	2
Samoa MFAT	5
RSE Participants <sup>35</sup>	
Team Leaders	4
Workers	14
Families of RSE Workers	3
NGOs	1
International/Regional Organisations	2
Community	
District Council Members	10 <sup>36</sup>
District Council Office	3
Matai & Community Member	1
Sui Tamaitai	4 <sup>37</sup>
Church Minister	1
Others (Medical Doctor, Industry, Academia, Researchers et al)	5 <sup>38</sup>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59</b>

The information sheet was translated from English to Samoan, and time was allocated for participants to read and ask questions for clarification. The translated information sheet is attached to this Report as Appendix A. Consent forms were signed with interviewees informed of their rights to withdraw their participation should they wish to do and assurance that the information they provided was to be anonymous.

<sup>35</sup> The Author was unable to secure any interviews with participants of the PTP as the majority of them are reported by MCIL still in NZ and those who have returned have changed phone numbers. All RSE Workers interviewed were males.

<sup>36</sup> All Female Council Members are involved in the village Women Committee while Male Council Members are Matai. Both are active community members

<sup>37</sup> Elected representatives of village women's committees who play a similar role to that of the village mayor, recording births and acting as a link between the village and government departments and civil society organizations.

<sup>38</sup> 1 Researcher is currently based overseas but maintains strong ties with her villages. The other 4 reside in Samoa and are active community members.

## 2.2.1 Methods

- Document Review – Programme-related documents made available by the *Allen + Clarke* evaluation team together with published documents sourced from an internet search and provided by key informants were reviewed. A list of all documents reviewed is attached as Appendix B.
- Semi Structured Informant Interviews – interviews were carried out using the Question Guide which was provided to the interviewees when requesting appointments.
- Focus Group Discussions – interviewees within Group 2 were organised into small focus group discussions which were held at their village of residence. This allowed for verification of reported changes or developments as a result of participating in the Programme, observation of the environment and context in which the interviewees lived, as well as ensuring the interviewees did not have to bear any cost for travelling to Apia for the interview.
- The Talanoa approach was used during the interviews to allow the evaluator to have a ‘personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations’ (Vaiotele, 2006) as well as to enable ‘participant-focused, collaborative interviews, consisting of two-way communication, patience, respect, partnership, cultural awareness and sensitivity’ (Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014)

Interview Notes – a summary of interview notes was prepared for each interview and used to inform this report.

## 2.3 Findings

The findings are arranged thematically to align with the Evaluation Objectives.

### 2.3.1 Effectiveness

Interviews examined stakeholder perspectives of the progress made in achieving the Programme’s intended outcomes and strategic objectives between 2017 and 2022.

An important aspect of New Zealand’s policy settings shift from ‘reset’ to ‘resilience’ is a values-based approach under which impact is measured not only in the delivery of strategic priorities, but in how Pacific partners like Samoa refer to New Zealand’s engagement and how well expectations are met on what these partners determine as impactful. Interviewees for this evaluation noted that the Programme is making a difference through increased remittances, which in turn has increased prosperity and improved the standard of living of workers and their families. Workers who were interviewed confirmed that the remittances they sent home while in New Zealand is spent on their family’s basic needs, improvements to housing, children’s education, private medical services (visits to GP and pharmacy), purchase of personal chattels such as vehicles, furniture and household appliances and contributions to church, family and village obligations (fa’alavelave). Officials referred to the importance of the Programme in supporting this.

Interviewees described their understanding of the purpose and impacts of the programme, both in terms of their involvement with TVOM and their experience of the RSE scheme more broadly.

**Stakeholders understood the purpose of the Programme in terms of the purpose of the RSE scheme more broadly; with LSU representatives emphasising the importance of capacity building through TVOM.**

Interviewees of Group 1, 3 and 4 understood the purpose and outcomes of the Programme to be:

1. To meet labour shortages in the New Zealand labour market, particularly the horticulture sector;
2. To provide short term employment opportunities to Pacific Island Countries (PIC) that will contribute to economic development<sup>39</sup> of the individual worker, their families and community as well as the PIC, in this case Samoa;
3. To strengthen capacities of Pacific Island Countries including Samoa through the Labour Sending Units (LSU).

Those from Group 2 understood the purpose and outcomes of the Programme as purely being “to provide employment opportunities for people like them (referred to themselves as “poor” or “disadvantaged”) to earn income that will help improve their standard of living.”

Individuals from Group 3 who had a deeper understanding of what the Programme aimed to achieve (as opposed to the workers for instance) specifically acknowledged the importance of strengthening capacities of the LSU (point 3). This included representatives from the LSU, MFAT Officials, and Cabinet Ministers.

*The purpose of the TVOM is to strengthen the capacity of PICs to build LSUs in all participating countries in terms of setting up appropriate systems, processes as well as the skills needed and expertise so that they can operate efficiently and effectively. [Group 1 Informant]*

*To provide PICs, including Samoa, short term work opportunities where we can send our unemployed, unskilled people to earn money that can be used to improve their standard of living with the expectation that they return to Samoa. [Group 3 Informant]*

Initial findings indicate that the Programme has achieved its purpose/desired results as follows:

**The LSU indicated that the Programme support was significant in developing capacity and identified areas for improvement.**

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<sup>39</sup> For the purpose of this Report, the interpretation of Economic Development is adopted from Perkiss, Stephanie et al. (2021) four dimensions: increases in income and gross domestic product (GDP), improvement in standard of living, job creation and increases in human capital.



- Responses from the LSU (the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour) indicated that there was a significant contribution to the development of the Samoa Country Action Plan 2018 – 2023. This is critical to ensuring relevance and ownership. However, COVID19 greatly impacted the implementation of agreed activities as borders closed and national lock downs were put in place.
- The LSU received significant capacity building support. However, there are potential gaps and areas for further improvement given the increase in workers being sent to both Australia and New Zealand (see Section 2.3.3 Future Design). The LSU noted that it was somewhat difficult to determine the extent to which the Programme has achieved its purpose because of the disruptions from COVID-19 and the need to put a lot of activities on hold.

*Important to note that the Ministry was involved right from the start and were included in the development of the action plan for Samoa [Group 1 Informant]*

- An LSU representative also noted that “there has been improvement in the relationship with key partners in New Zealand such as MBIE, MFAT and the industry. It further noted that “the steep increase in number of workers sent on the RSE has meant that staff have had more exposure in terms of coordination and in work areas such as working towards certain timelines. There have also been weekly meetings where updates are provided from New Zealand Immigration in Samoa given the importance of their roles.” Strengthening this relationship is very important to the success of the Programme. Interviews suggest there may be miscommunication or a breakdown in communication between the LSU and New Zealand MFAT as well as New Zealand Immigration.
- One interview indicated there was a miscommunication with MFAT over the provision of additional human resources from New Zealand on a part time basis to cater for the increasing demands and many changes. According to the LSU this never eventuated.
- Samoa has a Work Ready Pool database which contains key details of individuals already vetted in accordance with criteria set out by the approved employers. Whether the LSU is maximising the use of this database and ensuring linkage to other labour related divisions within the Ministry and to other sectors is unknown. For example, while waiting for placement, workers could be offered short term training in areas identified as needing upgrades.

**Support during COVID-19 was critical to ensuring systems and processes supported workers.**

- Amidst COVID-19, ongoing dialogue and discussion took place between the LSU, MFAT, MBIE and the approved employers to ensure i) workers who were still in New Zealand were safe and well taken care of and ii) appropriate systems and processes (for example visas, MIQ etc) were in place for re-hiring of workers once border restrictions were eased. LSU representatives noted the importance of (i) the dialogue that took place, (ii) the support from employers, (iii) the support from MFAT and MBIE. As a result of this dialogue and close collaboration, Samoa was secured or was offered 700 opportunities. Samoa

was one of three PICs allocated and responded to a request for an initial 700 workers when New Zealand eased border restrictions to allow for the re-enter of RSE workers.

*There was a switch in the Programme, a lot of resources went into planning how workers would be sent over given the closure of borders and who would be responsible when workers arrive in NZ. A lot of the planned activities in the Action Plan were put on hold with priority given to working with New Zealand officials to ensure that the workers who were in New Zealand at the time were safe and well taken care of. [Group 1 Informant]*

**Evidence suggests that recruitment and pre-departure processes can be improved.**

Workers from Savaii Island are disadvantaged by recruitment and pre-departure processes which require travel to Apia on Upolu, sometimes on multiple occasions. Concerns were expressed towards the delayed submission of visa applications by MCIL to New Zealand Immigration with some workers receiving their visas on the day of departure and others not able to travel as visas were not received. Feedback from workers also suggests there is room for the LSU to improve communication and customer service.

**Workers reported that their standard of living had increased as a result of work in New Zealand**

- Since workers understood the purpose of the Programme as providing help to improve their standard of living, their response was that the Programme had achieved its purpose, measuring it against the new homes, new cars, ability to send children to school, and no longer needing credit at the village stores because they have cash on hand to buy basic goods. The increasing number of returning (to New Zealand) workers indicates that approved employers are pleased and satisfied with the performance of Samoan workers.
- Although the exact numbers are not known, it is noted that a large number of workers have significantly improved the standard of living of their families and have greatly contributed to development projects within their communities.
- Total remittance continues to increase with huge spikes during the COVID-19 period, which was crucial particularly during the national lockdowns.
- Although the exact contribution from workers under the Programme is unknown, it is understood that remittances from these workers form a significant portion of the total remittances into Samoa.

**Workers felt that they had enhanced their skills through the RSE opportunities.**

- Workers stated that they had obtained new skills including improved English, budgeting, online financial literacy, leadership and mentoring, problem solving, farming techniques, social networking with people from different backgrounds and basic first aid. For example, one group of workers talked about how they learnt how to propagate different species of apples and are now using this method on Samoan horticultural crops such as breadfruit trees. The extent to which new skills are being obtained is unknown, particularly as workers expressed that there is very little opportunity (time and energy) to engage in broader skills development given their working hours while employed in roles facilitated by the labour mobility programme. Most of them feel exhausted at the end of the day and have no energy or mental stamina to engage in any training.

*I was not able to attend any after-hours training even though they were offered for free. I was exhausted and too tired that all I wanted to do was rest. But I wish I could do some of these courses to help build my skills especially because I didn't finish high school. I am hoping that I get another chance to return and that if I do I hope I can attend some of these training. Not only to get some useful skills but to get a piece of paper that says I completed the training [RSE worker]*

### **Workers see themselves as representing Samoa overseas.**

Workers conveyed that they developed a sense of patriotism as they represented their families, communities and country overseas. Some referenced how they were proud to represent Samoa as “ambassadors” and as such felt the importance of that role and the importance of them having good behaviour that will give their family, village and Samoa a good name. Workers believed that when employers rehire them for the next season, it is an indication that they (employers) are pleased and satisfied with their performance. This was also the view of the LSU.

## **2.3.2 Relevance and broader outcomes**

Stakeholders were asked for their perspectives on the extent that they see the Programme addresses objectives and policy drivers for Pacific labour mobility activities, both for New Zealand and Pacific Island Countries. Interviewees also commented on their view of the key successes and challenges of the programme.

**The Programme is seen as very relevant with a clear alignment to the priorities of the Samoa Government** specifically to Key Strategic Outcome 2: Diversified and Sustainable Economy and Key Priority Area 10: Increased Labour Mobility of the Pathway for the Development of Samoa (PDS). The shift of New Zealand’s Pacific engagement from Resettlement to Resilience also aligns well with the Government of Samoa’s vision of “Fostering social harmony, safety and freedom for all” which is underpinned by the overall theme of “Empowering communities, building resilience and inspiring growth”.

Responses from LSU representatives also indicated that activities currently in the plan were highly relevant. For instance, the following key priorities that are currently classified under Strategic Focus Area 1 - Supporting Samoa to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of labour mobility:

- Review the Samoa Labour Mobility Policy 2015;
- Develop a Reintegration Framework;
- Develop a Remittance Survey Project; Develop a communication and marketing strategy to promote Samoa’s labour mobility workforce programmes;
- Develop a Women in the Workforce Labour Mobility Strategy

- Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the SEU – (combine with Reintegration priority)
- Develop a Qualification Harmonisation Policy Framework to align Samoa's qualifications to New Zealand and Australia standards

Stakeholder perceptions of the relevance of the programme are as follows:

**Government Officials, including Cabinet Ministers, acknowledged the importance of the RSE scheme** and its contribution to “empowering communities, building resilience and inspiring growth”. However, they also noted that certain things needed to be done better to ensure that, for example, Samoa does not lose its skilled workers and that the loss of able-bodied males from communities is minimised. Families and villages are often left with a shortage of physically able men to carry out their responsibilities in Samoa, and there are also instances where alcohol, drugs, and extra marital affairs impact on workers, family, and the community that they will be returning to after their seasonal employment ends.

**Evidence suggests that the RSE scheme as a whole has contributed to improving the wellbeing and prosperity of workers** through financial gain that has allowed them to progress their economic status back home. Evidence from all stakeholders interviewed shows that the primary reason for workers choosing to participate in both the RSE scheme and the Australian SWP is for financial gain. Any other reason such as gaining new skills is secondary to financial gain. It also demonstrates potential areas where TVOM may be able to provide additional support to the LSU to address challenges they are facing. An increased standard of living is evident in improved housing, new vehicles, micro and small businesses in the village, expanded plantations and cattle farms and so forth. Community members also noted a marked improvement in workers' attitudes and mindsets as a result of participating in the RSE scheme, particularly for young people, evidenced through a decrease in crime rates and alcohol consumption and a stronger work ethics visible.

**There was also evidence of economic divisions created in Samoa** with a teacher noting that returning workers are able to buy cars while as a teacher he was not able to do the same. A Community member noted that as young untitled men increase their wealth from participating in the RSE programme, their giving towards church and village activities is higher than others' offerings which can often cause tension.

**LSUs could do more to support worker understanding of the employment context in New Zealand.** One group of workers noted that they were not clear on the terms and conditions of their employment when they signed their contracts.

*“I didn't fully understand the contract. Especially on all the deductions. I was not given the contract to take home so that I can read it and ask someone to help me understand. We were required to sign it on the day we had the meeting and I just signed it because I did not want to lose out on the opportunity to go”. [RSE worker]*

This is consistent with findings from the ILO Summary Report 2021 which states, “many workers do not fully understand the offers of employment and contracts.” According to the ILO

representative interviewed, it is the employer's responsibility to ensure that the worker fully understands the contents of their contract prior signing and if this means translating the contracts, this must be done. Workers were also unclear on both their health insurance and the processes in which their Samoa National Provident Fund (SNPF) deductions were being made. Community members supporting village recruitment confirmed these findings.

**Evidence suggests that the cross-cultural awareness training plays a critical role in worker's ability to adapt to their new living environment away from home; however, it is suggested that training be conducted in-country as part of the pre-departure process.** Workers who participated in the training noted its importance in preparing them for their stay in New Zealand. It increased their awareness of things such as cultural differences. Several workers mentioned that *"it would be nice if those trainings were done in Samoa with a refresher upon arrival"*. Community members also noted the importance of the workers being well prepared for the change in living environment and the importance of sufficient training in Samoa well before departure. It was also suggested that similar sessions be carried out for employers so that they too have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the worker's culture.

### Key successes

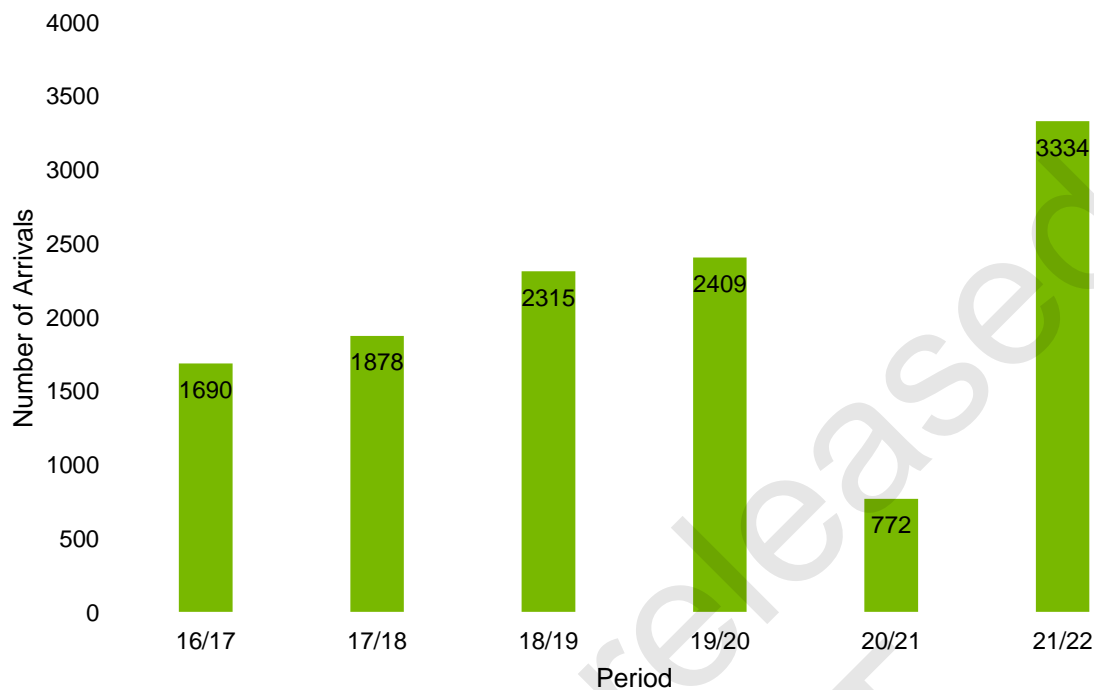
**Secondments were effective.** MCIL staff were provided with the opportunity to go to NZ under the Programme to learn about how the Programme is managed in New Zealand and explore how MCIL can do their preparatory work in Samoa. These secondments were described as highly effective. A Ministerial secondment from Samoa during the 2018/19 period allowed for much needed support and contribution to enhancing Samoa's capacity to better manage the Programme. This aligns with what is reported in the 2018-2019 TVOM Annual Report "There was five Ministerial visits and secondments over the period including Samoa, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Tonga. Fiji also undertook a self-funded visit that the team facilitated. The Samoan, Tonga and Kiribati trips were a particular highlight as they served to increase government awareness of the new sector initiatives and provide workers and employers with a sense of pride."<sup>40</sup>

**Increased Samoan citizens participating temporarily in the New Zealand labour market.** Data shows that there has been an increase in number for RSE Workers from Samoa. This is illustrated below. The low number of RSE arrivals in the 20/21 period can be attributed as a direct result of the COVID pandemic and the closure of borders which impacted the beneficiaries of the Samoan Quota as well as RSE workers. It is also important to note that the RSE scheme has provided steady employment opportunities for the workers with an easy movement in between employers during COVID-19. This has enabled the workers to still remit money to their families.

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<sup>40</sup> MBIE (2019). The Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility: Toso-Vaka-o-Manū Annual Report 2018-2019.

**Figure 1: RSE Arrivals from Samoa**



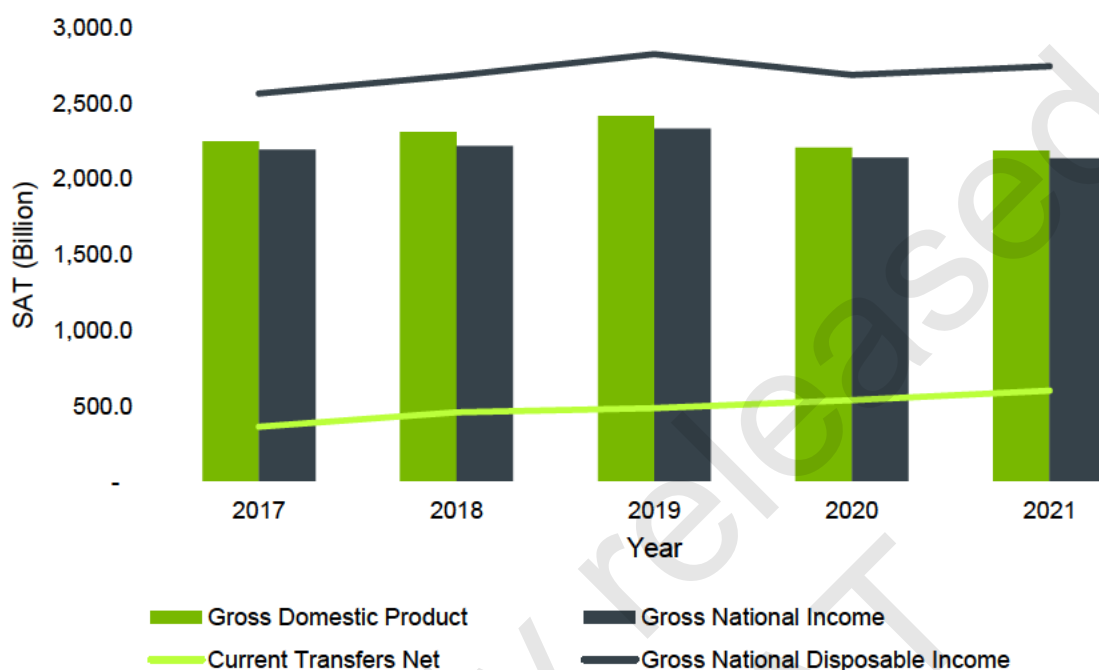
Source: <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/documents/statistics/statistics-rse-arrivals.pdf>

### Increased Remittances to Samoa

Government records indicate increased remittances have contributed positively to sustaining Samoa's economy particularly during the COVID period. Total remittance continues to increase as noted in the following table with huge spikes during the COVID-19 period, which was crucial, particularly during the national lockdowns. According to the Central Bank of Samoa's March 2022 quarterly bulletin issued by the Central Bank of Samoa, total remittances for the first quarter of 2022 "stood at SAT152.3 million, depicting a 14.6% improvement over its comparable quarter from the previous fiscal year." The Central Bank of Samoa also reports that for the period April 2021 – March 2022 remittances increased by 12.7% when compared to the previous 12 months (April 2020 – March 2021). Despite the impacts of COVID-19, data shows that total remittances to Samoa increased over the 2017 – 2022 period as per following figure.



**Figure 2: Comparison of Samoa's GDP and GNI and Impact of Current Transfers on GNDI 2017 - 2021**



Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics - National Accounts Aggregates 2009 - 2021

**Skill development of workers.** LSU representatives reported that a female who joined the PTP in 2017 was offered a scholarship to study at university as a result of her outstanding performance. Following her involvement in the Build Back Better Project and her graduation, she has been offered long term employment contracts.

Part time voluntary training in New Zealand provided to workers offered valuable opportunities to upskill in different subjects. This was seen as a vital part to the overall re-integration strategy when the worker returns to his/her family and community and no longer returns in subsequent seasons. Interviewees were keen for further opportunities like these.

### Key challenges

**An increased loss of skilled workers and able-bodied men from Samoa.** The impacts of COVID-19 on sectors such as tourism, transportation and other services has resulted in the increased loss of Samoa's skilled workers to the RSE programme. In addition, there is anecdotal evidence that teachers, medical workers, and government officials have resigned and taken up seasonal employment opportunities for higher pay. This has had a significant impact on these industries, particularly with the reopening of borders. An increasing withdrawal of able-bodied males from the villages has an impact on village agricultural production and community activities.

**The disproportionate distribution of opportunities or limited access by the poorer and disadvantaged.** There is an indication that those who are poorer and disadvantaged

(uneducated, unemployed, from rural areas, or have no connections with Government Ministries etc) have very limited access to participating in the Programme. This is particularly true if i) approved employers prefer and continue to recruit experienced workers over new ones and ii) information on registration and eligibility is not widely disseminated. At the same time, there is a reliance on the scheme among existing workers who all indicated their expectation of continuing in the scheme.

**Workers who return on multiple seasons noted their concerns regarding their wage rates.** Those workers who have been to New Zealand for more than one or two seasons, have questioned the rationale for them continuing to be paid at the same rate as those new workers. They felt that their experience and good performance is not being considered or rewarded financially. They were very cautious about any criticism of the programme because they had benefitted significantly, but also felt that when they did raise the question with the employer and the Liaison Officer they were not being listened to. Both workers and community members believed that the LSU could do more in advocating for better wage rates for returning workers and that New Zealand consider reviewing their RSE policy.

**NGO representatives raised the increasing incidence of social issues.** For example, family breakups due to extramarital affairs, and the added burden on the spouse given the change in roles and responsibilities with the absence of the other spouse, has raised concerns with regards to actual improvements to the overall wellbeing not only of the workers but of their families. This issue was raised by the Samoa Victim Support Group who support partners in Samoa, the LSU, and workers.

**Interviews with workers raised welfare issues.** Workers indicated that there is varied standards of accommodation and transportation across employers and across locations and ongoing issues with internet connectivity affecting their welfare. One group of workers expressed concerns about bullying by their team leader. While Pastoral Care services exist RSE workers have very limited knowledge of it and they had not met the Liaison Officer, suggesting that there is a need for improved presence and communication with the workers.

### 2.3.3 Future Design and Support

The following are Samoan stakeholder views on how the Programme can be improved.

**Review and update the current Samoa Country Action Plan.** MCIL noted the importance and relevance of the activities in the Plan with the recommendation to maintain them but that this needed to be reviewed in consultation with MFAT and MBIE.

**Review and strengthen the current structure at MCIL to ensure a holistic approach to managing labour mobility programmes.** Stakeholders suggested that i) anything bilateral be left to MFAT ii) recruitment be devolved to the community through the District Councils and village-based entities iii) MCIL, through the LSU to focus on strengthening and regulating labour mobility policies, providing recruitment training and capacity development support to District Councils and Village based entities, facilitate pre-departure processes such as medical clearances and visas, provide quality assurance and strengthen their role to monitor and

advocate for workers employment conditions. It was also suggested that MCIL be restructured to better respond to the needs and demands of both national and international labour issues.

**Strengthen the recruitment process** to avoid i) the loss of skilled and already employed workers and ii) the disproportionate distribution of opportunities. For example, interviewees advocated for:

- Increased awareness campaigns throughout the year, in particular to include rural communities who do not always know where to go to register,
- Utilisation of the newly established District Councils and community-based organisations for the first stage vetting of applicants for interested or registered candidates carried out by MCIL as the LSU. There is value in workers knowing that part of the purpose of them participating in the programme is filling a labour shortage in New Zealand which means that they are making a valuable contribution to the New Zealand economy. This was alluded to by one individual who was involved in the delivery of cross-cultural understanding training for team leaders from Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, PNG and Kiribati over a period of time in 2017-2018.
- The establishment of local criteria to be included in addition to criteria from approved employers (for example a worker must have a specified number of tiapula (taro) to ensure food supply for family members while in New Zealand). The Poutasi Development Trust has a well-established programme and process for recruitment which not only means that final recruits are well-vetted and well-prepared for departure (they are placed on a programme in Samoa and need to satisfy the requirements before qualifying to having their application accepted for lodgement with MCIL), but this also ensures that families of those who get selected have a plantation, some pigs and chickens etc that they can source food from while the worker is in New Zealand.
- Ongoing capacity development of the LSU in areas such as customer service and cultural etiquette, effective communication and ongoing engagement with workers upon arrival into New Zealand, negotiating, monitoring and advocating for workers employment conditions.

**Maintain the focus on prioritising the unemployed and administering a circular process** to ensure that Samoa can respond appropriately in a balanced manner given current human resource constraints. Stakeholders considered this could be achieved by:

- Strengthening the recruitment process as per above with support from TVOM;
- Building the capacity of District Councils and other community-based organisations who can participate in the recruitment process. A staged/phased approach should be considered where selected councils, organisations or Districts, and villages are piloted.

**Improve the pre-departure process** so that workers and their families fully understand their rights and responsibilities under their employment arrangements and are well-prepared before departure. Interviewees suggested:

- Ensuring that workers receive their Letter of Employment and contracts well before departure and that they have sufficient time to read and understand the contents before



signing. This may mean that these documents be translated into Samoan. This was suggested by the workers and is also consistent with the findings of the ILO 2021 Summary Report. This includes Medical (including insurance) and Visa Requirements

- Having in place an extensive Orientation Programme that prepares the workers well before departure. Replicating the programme run by the Poutasi Development Trust could be considered, engaging the District Councils and community-based organisations to lead these Programmes.
- Incorporate cross-cultural awareness training into the pre-departure process.

**Increasing social infrastructure support** to workers and immediate family members so that the posture of “accompaniment” is adopted and that the desired impact and positive changes are realised in both Aotearoa New Zealand and Samoa. Interviewees recommended:

- Extending the Programme to include the engagement of social protection organisations such as the Samoa Victim Support Group to ensure that a culturally responsive social support system is in place for both the worker and family members (particularly the spouse who may be living with the worker’s family while they are in New Zealand).
- Revisiting the Pastoral Care component and how it is being delivered to ensure that workers receive the maximum benefits of this service. Most of the workers interviewed were not aware of this component. The few that seemed to know it existed did not seem to know what it was for. Workers felt that the team leader is able to deal with many issues themselves. For example, one team leader shared that he spent a lot of time counselling a worker who was stressed about issues at home. However, many Samoans, especially males, will not reach out for help and will keep the issue or burden to themselves and try and deal with it alone. For some, turning to alcohol is their way of dealing with it. Interviewees reflected that there was no proper framework to guide this service and there is no line of accountability with specific outcomes and measurements to ensure that the pastoral care provided is of good quality.
- Monitoring conditions of employment including terms and conditions of contracts, accommodation, transport, and wi-fi connectivity to ensure worker wellbeing is taken care of.
- Efforts by all parties to stamp out all forms of bullying.
- Approved employers contributing to workers’ Samoa National Provident Fund deductions being clearer on how contributions are processed. Stakeholders also recommended the Government of Samoa, through the SNPF ensure that returning workers are able to loan against their contributions as is the case with other voluntary contributors.
- Strengthening the presence of the Liaison Officer in New Zealand, as all the workers interviewed had never seen her despite having raised several matters. Some interviewees suggested that there is a need to consider having an additional Liaison Officer and strengthening partnerships with the Samoa Trade Commissioner’s Office in Auckland as well as the Samoa Consulate staff.

**Revitalising the PTP component and including other sectors** to increase scope of employment opportunities and in particular opportunities for females.

## 3.0 SOLOMON ISLANDS

### 3.1 Context

The Solomon Islands Government's Labour Mobility Programme is guided by a policy framework called the Labour Mobility Policy Framework and managed by the Labour Mobility Unit (LMU) that sits within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade.

The main objective and purpose of the policy framework is to outline the governance arrangements for labour mobility and the establishment and make-up of the Labour Mobility Oversight Committee [LMOC].

The labour mobility scheme creates additional jobs and be an important source of income for the Solomon Islands through remittances and earnings made by Solomon Island workers. The remittances from workers in the labour mobility scheme from both Australia and New Zealand has seen a substantial increase since 2019, with a 68% increase to SBD215m in 2021 from 2020 (see details on financial inclusion, 3.3.2 below).

Because of its perceived significance and importance to the Solomon Island economy and development aspirations, "the Solomon Island Government [SIG] adopts a whole of government approach to the oversight of labour mobility" (Labour Mobility Policy Framework). This meant the evaluation in the Solomon Islands needed to ensure participation of the main stakeholders who are also members of the LMOC. There are currently three labour mobility schemes governed and managed by the LMU:

- Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) – Australia
- Pacific Labour Scheme - Australia
- Recognised Seasonal Employment (RSE) – New Zealand

#### 3.1.1 Labour Mobility Policy Framework and strategy

The Labour Mobility Policy Framework was developed in tandem with the Labour Mobility Strategy in 2018 and launched in 2020. The framework lays out the process and procedures for managing labour mobility, providing clarity on the role and responsibilities of the Labour Mobility Unit and key stakeholders. The framework covers key areas such as governance and administration, workers' recruitment, mobilisation, return and reintegration.

These documents outline the SIG's plans for growing labour mobility opportunities over a five-year period (2019 – 2023). Amongst the main objectives of the Labour Mobility Strategy are aligning with other government strategies for the development of the domestic economy, while:

- Developing new employment opportunities for Solomon Islanders;
- Increasing international earnings for investment in the domestic economy; and
- Developing workforce skills for entrepreneurship and the creation of new industry.



The Solomon Islands “here to work” brand has since been promoted and emphasises its key attributes as the following:

- Hardworking
- Honest and reliable
- Fit and healthy
- Friendly and approachable
- Proactive, adaptable and adoptable

### 3.1.2 Recruitment pathways

There are currently 3 methods of recruiting workers who apply to join the Labour Mobility Scheme, either in Australia or in New Zealand. As well as the established methods to respond to the various needs of employers and scheme, this does not cap limitations on any bilateral arrangements that will promote Solomon Islanders for work opportunities abroad in any other labour mobility schemes. The 3 recruitment methods are:

#### **Direct recruitment**

This method is used by international employers (that have been approved to recruit workers from the Solomon Islands by their country’s government or scheme manager) who have decided not to use the SIG’s Labour Mobility Unit Work Ready Pool (WRP) or using any of the approved recruitment agents.

#### **Agent Recruitment Method**

This method is used when an approved international employer, either from New Zealand or Australia, has decided to use any of the approved locally-based and registered agents in the Solomon Islands.

#### **Work Ready Pool**

This method refers to recruitment being carried out by the LMU itself or the Support Services (project supported/funded by the Australian Government to support LMU), on behalf of an approved international employer. This method is being used only for those employers in Australia for its Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) as it is important the recruitment only targets the set of skills and attributes that employers in Australia may require from their workers.

It is important to note that whichever method is being used, the framework emphasises that it is important that the workers selected must meet the employers’ specific workforce needs, the requirements and rules of labour mobility schemes are met, a fair and transparent process is consistently applied to the recruitment of workers, workers are recruited in accordance with LMUs Policy Framework, and the workers exemplify LMU’s values under the ‘Here to Work’ brand.



## 3.2 Data collection

The stakeholders interviewed for this case study were identified using “snowball sampling”, using the Labour Mobility Oversight Committee of the Labour Mobility Unit, under Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade as the starting point. The LMOC members include: RSE Agents and RSE Workers, the Solomon Islands Government key stakeholders, the private sector and education and health institutions. The evaluation data was collected through individual interviews, questionnaires, group interviews and discussions, and emails. A total of 13 individuals were interviewed or requested to fill in a questionnaire, representing 10 key stakeholder groups of the Solomon Islands Labour Mobility Programme. Due to time and other constraints, an estimated 3 key stakeholders that were identified as potential participants could not be included in the case study, and the number of workers included was limited.

Interviewees represented the following sectors: the Government of Solomon Islands (key Ministries of the RSE/labour mobility programme), the financial institutions (Central Bank of Solomon Islands, CBSI, and Solomon Islands National Provident Fund, SINPF), the private sector (SICCI), Recruiting agents/workers, an education/training institution, GPs who perform medical checks on workers, and MFAT (Honiara).

**Table 2: Stakeholder interviews Solomon Islands**

Organisation	Number of stakeholders interviewed
Government Ministries (LMU)	3
Financial Institutions	4
MFAT Post	1
Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry	1
RSE Approved Recruitment Agency and Workers	2
Other (Medical professional, academic)	2
Total	13

The methodology is primarily qualitative to fit the objectives of the evaluation. Included in the report is a brief analysis of the remittances from the Labour Mobility workers from 2010 to 2021 as an illustration of the indicative benefit of the scheme.

## 3.3 Findings

### 3.3.1 Effectiveness

Interviews examined stakeholder perspectives of the impacts of the SPLM programme’s intended outcomes and strategic objectives between 2017 and 2022.

**Overall, the project is seen as successful.** According to the stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation, so far, the overall objectives of the programme have been achieved:

- Recruitment agents noted that the New Zealand employers who are part of the RSE scheme have been satisfied with the workers being supplied from the Solomon Islands;
- The RSE scheme continues to create much needed employment opportunities for unemployed people within the Solomon Islands;
- Income in the form of remittances to workers' families had stimulated the local economy and has increased significantly since 2019; and
- Regarding LMU capacity, an LMU representative stated that the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has provided financial support to the PALM program and the unit needs capacity building with regards to the NZ RSE. NZHC also identifies that capacity is an issue within the LMU and that they are working on resolving it.

Both the LMU and MFAT agree that the overall programme has been successful with opportunity for improvements.

*The LMU can confirm that the overall labour mobility programme is a success as shown by the increasing remittances to the country since 2019, as workers remitted their earned incomes to their families here at home. There is evidence that workers have started building homes for their families, pay school fees for their children and relatives even up to tertiary level. [LMU member]*

From MFAT's perspective, MBIE's support, via TVOM, to the Solomon Islands LMU to deliver 112 RSE workers to NZ in July 2022 was an excellent example of the effectiveness of the programme. The regular MBIE/TVOM facilitated and chaired regular meetings with the LMU here, the RSE employer, and MFAT Honiara helped facilitate the effectiveness of the programme. MBIE helped establish a plan and timeline and worked with all stakeholders to ensure the key milestones were achieved.

**Communication between TVOM and the LMU is critical to the effectiveness of the programme.** As the representative of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the New Zealand High Commission Office in the Solomon Islands plays a critical role in supporting the Labour Mobility Unit in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade in the Solomons to mobilise and send RSE workers to New Zealand. Regular communication, support and pastoral care for RSE workers whilst they are in New Zealand is an important role the High Commission Office fulfils.

In terms of the programme making a difference, it is evident that there are good working relationships and communication between MBIE and the Solomon Islands LMU. This is critical for successful mobilisation and management of RSE workers going to New Zealand. The latest cohort of RSE workers sent to New Zealand in July 2022 (the first since borders reopened), which suggests the LMU remains well-positioned to deliver RSE workers.

*There is good value for money from TVOM's support to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of RSE worker mobilisations.... whose coordination improved the efficiency of the process. (MFAT Post).*

As far as the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI) is concerned, TVOM's purpose and outcomes have been achieved. However, despite being one of the key stakeholders of the Labour Mobility Oversight Committee, SICCI representatives stated that it is not regularly consulted on matters related to the programme that are important to its members. For example, SICCI noted that it does not have the RSE policy document and did not have detailed knowledge of TVOM or the RSE programme. SICCI stakeholders considered that it should have more detailed involvement as a body representing the private sector in the country.

**There are opportunities to consider how to better support reintegration of workers.** Another component critical to SICCI is the return of the RSE workers and their re-engagement in local industries. It is important that those who return fully utilise their skills. It is important that the Solomon Islands Government, in consultation with the New Zealand and Australian governments, work with the private sector to formulate policies that are in line with the Labour Mobility Policy Framework objectives, especially in the areas of job creation and sector investment.

**TVOM has effectively contributed to capacity building of the LMU; however, resources are stretched between the RSE scheme and PALM.** Reflecting on the past five years stakeholders considered that, together with assistance from PALM, TVOM/SPLM has contributed to the building of capacity of the Solomon Islands LMU, despite only a small number of staff within the LMU having detailed knowledge of the RSE scheme. So far, the LMU has effectively mobilised and sent RSE workers to New Zealand with the assistance of MFAT in the Solomon Islands. This has resulted in much needed economic benefits to the Solomon Islands, which was especially important during COVID-19 when the Solomon Islands economy was reliant on remittance inflows. However, interview participants identified challenges with the adjacent Australian PALM Scheme that pull LMU resources and focus away from the RSE scheme.

**Scaling up is a current challenge.** Some stakeholders that were interviewed considered that the challenge now is scaling up the programme for Solomon Islands. A LMU representative reflected that DFAT has provided financial assistance to support the Australian labour mobility programme. This funded an independent contractor to help with recruitment for the Australian programme which supported successful recruitment. As far as the Recruiting Agents are concerned, coverage of the provinces and the rural areas is critical to the overall ongoing success of the Programme and requires additional resources, both financial and otherwise.

### 3.3.2 Relevance and broader impacts

Stakeholders were asked for their perspectives on the extent that they see the Programme addresses objectives and policy drivers for Pacific labour mobility activities, both for New Zealand and Pacific Island Countries. Interviewees commented primarily on the broader impacts of the support for TVOM for the RSE scheme, as an indication of the effectiveness of TVOM.

**The programme provided valuable assistance to workers during the COVID-19 period.**

The workers interviewed, who are also Recruiting Agents, testified that the programme has made significant differences in the lives of workers and their families, particularly during COVID-19 and the support for worker wellbeing during this period was seen as important.

*TVOM was also able to pivot its focus to support RSE worker well-being during the pandemic; this is an important agility that reflects value for money. [MFAT Post].*

**RSE workers, their families, and households, gain material benefit and improved livelihoods through the income gained from the RSE scheme.** The overall benefit is difficult to quantify, but anecdotally there are a lot of success stories reported about individual households who have benefitted. At a macro-level, remittance incomes into the Solomon Islands economy are fundamentally important for the health of the economy long term (see below).

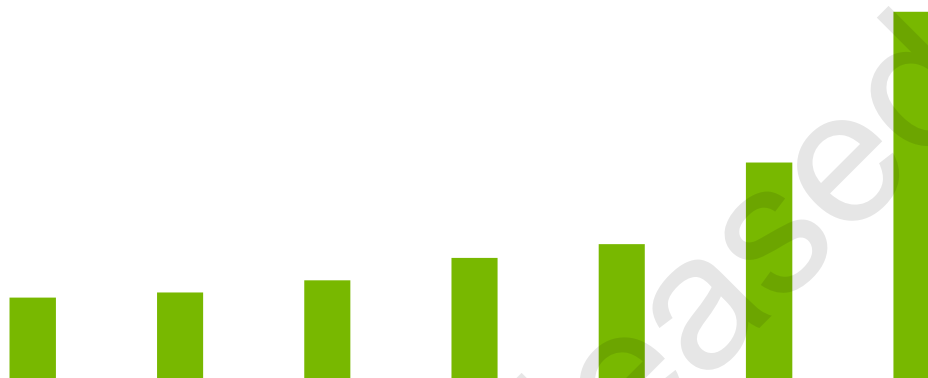
According to the RSE Recruiting Agents interviewed, and who were also former RSE workers, they agreed with all that have been interviewed that the programme has helped individual workers as well as meeting the huge unemployment needs of the country.

Apart from the tangible benefits, RSE Agents and the LMU agreed that the programme also helped workers with the soft skills such as improvement of social skills, communication skills and general attitudinal change, which were gained through working.

**Remittances can enhance financial inclusion.** Remittances have the potential to enhance financial inclusion in the Solomon Islands through inflows of funds. More importantly, it can stimulate the local economy if adequate payment services reach ‘the last mile’ (those in the rural and remote communities). When channelled properly, remittances can generate demand for savings and credits, induce economic activity at the rural level and fend off economic and social imbalances.

Though remittance to the Solomon Islands is quite small when compared to other countries, it is growing at an increasing rate as indicated by graph below.

**Figure 3: Inward remittances Value (SBD) 2015-2021**



Source: CBSI

In 2021, remittance inflows surged by 68%, compared to the 58% increase in 2020. On an annual average, during the period 2015 to 2021, remittances increased by 25% for each subsequent year. This increase could be driven by a high remittance of funds from overseas by Solomon Island seasonal workers in Australia and New Zealand. Although anecdotal evidence from some seasonal workers' testimonies have established that money remitted has improved their livelihoods such as by building a new home and starting a business, there is no available research to affirm the magnitude of economic impact of seasonal worker remittances on the local economy and livelihoods.

### 3.3.3 Future Design and Support

Stakeholder perspectives on key challenges and opportunities for future support are provided below.

#### Key challenges

**The ongoing and long-term sustainability of the LMU.** There are only a small number of individuals who TVOM has worked closely with to develop in depth understanding of the RSE programme within the Solomon Islands LMU.

*Support to LMU has been good, but long-term sustainability of the LMU is still a risk. For example, who will SPLM work with if some key people in the LMU move onto other roles? This will cause a loss to RSE-related experience in the LMU team. [MFAT Post]*





**Improving the targeting of unemployed and semi-skilled workers through the recruitment process.** Private sector representatives suggested that there is room for improvement in the recruitment process in order to ensure the programme recruits its intended target of people who are unemployed and semi-skilled, rather than those that are currently employed and skilled. Considering that availability of skilled human resources is already an issue in the country, having more of the skilled workforce joining the RSE programme will have a notable impact on the country's productivity. For example, there were reported instances in which nurses and teachers who participated in the programme resigned only when they arrived in their country of engagement causing disruptions to their places of work in the Solomons. It is understood that late notice of their resignation was to do more with late arrival of their visas.

**The cost of getting workers to New Zealand is a barrier.** The recent charter flight in July 2022 directly to New Zealand cost an estimated at SBD 1m (NZ\$200k-NZ\$300k). This is a substantial cost to the workers who will have to repay the flight costs over time. With borders opening, it is hoped that this will reduce.

**High costs associated with remittances.** Some RSE workers have raised concerns about foreign exchange losses through remittance transfers from New Zealand to the Solomon Islands.

## Opportunities for maximisation and improvement

Stakeholders presented perspectives on opportunities for improvement for the next phase.

**Increased capacity building for the LMU is needed.** With the borders now opened, the reputation of the NZ RSE programme is one of the key drivers for workers to choose NZ. New Zealand has a good reputation as a country that is trustworthy and friendly for RSE workers. Rival schemes may offer greater economic benefit, but there is a view that the New Zealand RSE scheme has fewer issues and less exploitation and mistreatment of workers compared to other schemes. Interviews conducted also indicated that the reputation of Solomon Islands workers has been good, thereby giving a great opportunity for more RSE workers to be recruited from the country. Suggestions to enhance capacity included:

- The potential for New Zealand to increase access to RSE workers by taking advantage of the target labour mobility workers pool of 17,000 the Solomon Islands government has prepared to join the Labour Mobility schemes in both NZ and Australia. The LMU's understanding is that both New Zealand and Australia remain committed to the Solomon Islands Government labour mobility target of 5,500 by 2023 (the LBSF/strategy aims for over 5,500 Solomon Islanders benefiting from international work experience each year by 2023, amounting to over 17,000 unique work opportunities over the next five years), and 10,000 by 2025.
- There is an opportunity for both the New Zealand and the Solomon Islands governments to consider how to expand the current capacity of Recruitment Agents. The Recruitment Agents interviewed showed they have very good experience and good standing with the LMU and MFAT.
- Appointing a TVOM person or TVOM-supported staff member on the ground in Honiara embedded in the LMU would help to address sustainability risks associated with loss of expertise/experience if key people in the LMU move on.



**Enhancing private sector understanding of returning worker capabilities.** To further improve the Programme, it is proposed that a study needs to be established in the Solomon Islands to investigate the effectiveness of the programmes in key job creation sectors and regularly monitor how the workers are performing so that the private sector can make effective investment decisions as part of their readiness policies to absorb the returning workers. Therefore, accurate data of the workers and the sectors of their employers is critical.

**Reviewing the recruitment process** including the medical checking process. There is a gap with the New Zealand RSE programme medical clearance process as it only involves X-Ray and does not include a medical check by a Registered GP for blood pressure, sugar levels etc. This runs the risk of employing medically unfit workers.

**Increasing and widen the coverage of the recruitment process** to reach the provinces and rural areas.

**Providing remittance support.** The Labour Mobility Oversight Committee (LMOC) includes financial institutions and interviewees reflected on the challenges and opportunities for the LMOC to support workers in making remittances more effective. From a financial inclusion standpoint, payment systems or platforms that are convenient, efficient and cost-effective as well as offering widespread financial access points (bank branches, bank agents, mobile money agents, ATM machines, EFTPOS machines) are crucial to seamlessly facilitate remittances and absorbed through savings, investments and credit. Suggestions from interviewees to enable this included establishing convenient payment corridors, use of established savings and investment platforms, use of the Seasonal Workers Superannuation Administration Services (SWSAS) system to facilitate saving (which has been piloted effectively with Vanuatu seasonal workers) and expanding financial access points to ensure remittances reach rural and remote communities. There is an opportunity for TVOM to work in tandem with any changes, for example by ensuring information is provided through financial literacy training and supporting the LMU to ensure workers are aware of systems in pre-departure training.

## 4.0 KIRIBATI

### 4.1 Context

Situated in the central Pacific; Kiribati consists of 33 islands grouped into the Gilbert Islands, Phoenix Islands and the Line Islands. All 33 islands are low-lying coral atolls, except for Banaba (Ocean Island), a raised atoll island. It has a total land area of 810 square kilometres, and an exclusive economic zone (EEZ), covering an ocean area of 3.5 million squared kilometres.

Kiribati's population of 119,000 is growing, having increased 17% over the last decade. Approximately 50 per cent of the total population live on South Tarawa, the urban area and the headquarters of the Kiribati government, with a land area of just 15.76 square kilometres.

Aotearoa New Zealand and Kiribati have a strong, long-standing relationship based on shared Pacific identity, historical connections, and mutual trust and respect. Aotearoa New Zealand first established its diplomatic presence in Kiribati in 1989. Before the COVID-19 related border closures, Kiribati sent over 250 Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme workers to Aotearoa New Zealand, annually. As reflected in its strategic 4YP, they support a range of important sectors, including health, education, fisheries, economic development, and climate resilience.

Remittances amounted to A\$16 million in 2017 have now been diversified with additional sources from the seasonal worker schemes in New Zealand and Australia, the PAC scheme, and other Kiribati citizens working abroad. Thus, the Strengthening Pacific Labour Mobility contributes to offshore job opportunities and total remittances.

Kiribati is a small labour sending country with a proportionately high number of female RSE workers. Kiribati workers can also stay in New Zealand for up to 9 months during any 11-month period, compared to Samoa and Solomon Islands workers who can stay for 7 months in any 11-month period. These factors make Kiribati a good comparison country for a case study compared to Samoa and the Solomon Islands.

#### 4.1.1 Labour Mobility

The key focus areas of the Toso-Vaka-o-Manū Kiribati Country Action Plan (2019-2023) include:

##### Labour Mobility Policy Framework

The key priorities are to Review the existing Labour Mobility Policy Framework; update and finalise the current Labour Mobility Policy Framework, develop a Reintegration Framework, and develop a Remittance Pilot Project, including a Kiribati Provident Fund (KPF) contribution.

##### Promotion of Kiribati's labour mobility workforce

The key priority is to develop a Marketing strategy, which will: i) engage a consultant/Technical Assistance to develop Kiribati's Marketing Strategy; ii) identify and consult with key stakeholders on priorities; iii) develop marketing policies and templates for marketing plan/s;

iv) seek funding support for participation in Horticulture meetings/trade shows or meeting new employers; and v) invite new Employers to Kiribati.

## PACER Plus Agreement

A future priority is to discuss the signing of the PACER Plus agreement to allow Kiribati's participation in New Zealand and Australia's Labour Mobility programme – particularly new sectors.

## Market access

A further priority is to work with MBIE to identify requirements, including timeframes for Kiribati to participate, awaiting the outcome of Pacific visa arrangements. In addition, Kiribati seeks to develop a construction work ready pool utilising Kiribati's Database KIT to work with MBIE on further support required to get candidates ready.

## 4.2 Data Collection

In line with the TOR and Evaluation Plan, a culturally responsive approach - the maroro engagement approach - was used during the interviews. This is intended to facilitate an open dialogue between the evaluator and the participants. It removed barriers to enable the participants tell their stories based on what they know, or hear, or observe, and what improvements or changes they would like to see in the Programme. The approach integrated the Kiribati maneaba values including respect, partnership, compassion and recognition of individual successes or achievements.

The evaluation information sheet was shared with stakeholders via email prior the maroro (interviews) and explained in Kiribati for stakeholders before the maroro began with enough time for questions. Prior to the maroro the consent forms were sent to the participants and participants were informed of their rights to withdraw their participation and assured the information they provided was to be anonymous. Semi-structured maroro and focus groups were held using the Question Guide and conducted in the Kiribati language. Six individual participants were invited for maroro via Zoom.

**Table 3: Stakeholder interviews Kiribati**

Organisation/Stakeholder	Number of stakeholders interviewed
Non-governmental organisations	3
RSE workers	2
Community Leader/Council member	1
Total	6

A summary of interview notes was prepared for each interview and used to inform this report. A copy of individual notes was also made available to the evaluation team.

## 4.3 Findings

### 4.3.1 Effectiveness

Interviews examined stakeholder perspectives of the progress made in achieving the Programme's intended outcomes and strategic objectives between 2017 and 2022.

The six individual participants representing the views of the workers, families, community, local council, and the NGOs understood the purpose and outcomes of the Programme in relation to the purpose of the RSE scheme. Respondents had less awareness specifically about TVOM, and responses illustrate the impact of Kiribati's participation in the RSE scheme more broadly. These were stated as:

- Providing a reliable source of income for workers and their families;
- Contributing to reducing unemployment especially for Pacific young people in Kiribati;
- Contributing to the national economy through remittances, in-kind contributions in the form of building materials and opening of new businesses such as rest houses and retail shops;
- Providing opportunities for our young people who did not have a chance to progress further to higher education to acquire new skills abroad; and
- Providing an opportunity for people from Kiribati to work in New Zealand under the RSE Scheme and Fisheries pilot.

The positive views of workers and NGO representatives indicate that the Programme has achieved its purpose through supporting the effective workings of the RSE scheme:

- Interviewees reported that there is an increase in the number of people employed under the RSE scheme.
- The standard of living for the workers and their families has improved, including having good homes and, for some, sending their children to Fiji for better education.
- The human rights of women are respected. One of the participants said, "I am aware that in the past, when any female worker became pregnant, she was not given a chance to return to work. But recently, I observed that when any woman becomes pregnant, she still has a chance to return to work."
- There is an increase in the RSE workers' wages. One of the workers said, "Over the past five years since 2017, our piece rate has continued to grow, which is excellent."  
[RSE male worker]

Stakeholders reported that the RSE scheme has made significant changes to the lives of workers and their families:

*This programme brings many benefits to the Kiribati people. By experiencing a new life in another country, workers learn new skills and adapt to good habits, including, for example, a healthy lifestyle and becoming good role models for other family members in Kiribati. The ongoing programme will continue to bring new changes to life in Kiribati. [Community leader/Council member]*

The workers have experienced an increase in their wages over the years.

*I feel that the [RSE] programme has made good progress in ensuring our wages continue to rise. Our salaries do not remain the same, which is why we think the programme has made good progress for us. [RSE male]*

The Programme enabled the workers to earn and remit funds to support the wellbeing of their families in Kiribati. One NGO has observed the changes the opportunity brings about for women in particular, impacting on improved confidence, motivation, and assertiveness, including confidence in applying for work once they have returned to Kiribati. One respondent described the impact on one women worker who travelled overseas with the RSE scheme:

*Before she worked overseas, her parents owed money from different sources. They experienced frequent family violence. Since she participated in the scheme, her family has a small retail shop running. I could feel that they have a happy home. I could also observe that this girl was more confident in herself. [NGO Representative]*

### 4.3.2 Relevance and broader impacts

Stakeholders were asked for their perspectives on the extent that they see the Programme addresses objectives and policy drivers for Pacific labour mobility activities, both for New Zealand and for Kiribati. Interviewees commented primarily on the broader impacts of the support from TVOM for the RSE scheme, as an indication of the effectiveness of TVOM. Interviewees also gave their perspectives of key successes to date and challenges going forward.

**The programme has indirectly contributed to the wellbeing of the workers and their families.** The workers remit funds and goods to their families. The location of New Zealand makes it easy for families to communicate to members working in the scheme to send money or goods when required. To benefit other members of society, one community leader suggested that the RSE workers set up a body and invest their savings in a form of credit union to lend money to other people. According to one RSE worker, the scheme also meets family investment plans contributing to their prosperity and resilience.

*Suppose you have a planned investment in Tarawa, such as building a house to support the prosperity of your family, you could easily achieve your goal because you earn good income under the programme. Another excellent example: if I plan to buy a motorbike for my family to meet their*



*transport needs, I can work hard and earn enough money in two weeks.  
[RSE male worker].*

*One family from Butaritari Island has set up a rest house with the support of income from their two children working under the RSE scheme. [NGO Representative].*

*I have a better home, my children and family have what they need, and we have earned a reasonable amount of income. [RSE female worker]*

**The RSE scheme has contributed to inequalities in Kiribati.** There is evidence that the RSE scheme has contributed to the wellbeing of workers and their families through remittances, affordability to build good homes, opening new businesses, and acquiring new skills on budgeting, planning, and cleanliness. However, one of the participants raised a potential impact of the scheme on young people and their families who are not participating and benefitting from any of the programme activities. This signals the importance for the government to look at other possibilities to manage the programme's impact on an unequal distribution of resources and benefits.

**The scheme empowered the workers to have the ability to be resilient to cope with future climate change impacts.** One NGO representative stated that even though climate change impacts are relatively slow, the programme allows workers to adapt to a different new life which will assist with potential future moves required; otherwise, they will remain in Kiribati.

**Workers seek new life experiences and skill development in addition to financial gain.** Workers, community, and NGOs perspectives referred to reasons the workers choose to participate in the RSE programme beyond the income gained. Some workers choose to experience a new life in another country.

*I chose it for financial gain and to experience a better life - acquire new changes to my personal life and transfer these to my friends and families.  
[RSE female worker]*

Participation in the scheme offers higher pay than opportunities in Kiribati, where there are limited job opportunities for young people. In Kiribati, young people may only earn enough to cover the basics of bags of rice and flour. Under the RSE scheme, they earn more and remit funds to their families. Others have learned to save money to invest in businesses such as a new shop. Others save money to meet the cost of their immigration papers if selected under the Pacific Access Category as a pathway to permanent residency in New Zealand. An NGO representative also emphasised that some workers, especially those who are married and have families remaining behind, experience homesickness and do not necessarily experience the same benefits.



## Key successes

Stakeholder perspectives of the key successes include:

**Increased remittances to Kiribati.** Despite the impacts of COVID-19 resulting in the closure of the borders and RSE workers not able to return home, they worked for more than two years, and contributed to the increase in the total remittances to Kiribati.

**Enhanced capabilities and skills development.** The programme contributes to the workers' capacity and self-sufficiency, so that if they decide to stop returning to work on the RSE scheme, they have the resources and skills to sustain them in Kiribati.

*I learned about cleaning my home, budgeting, saving, the difference between a need and a want, and being better organised. [RSE female worker]*

**Increased confidence of women workers.** As discussed earlier, some stakeholders have observed and admired those changes in the personal lives of other women returning to Kiribati from the scheme. Their ability to communicate in English has improved, along with their confidence levels. These women often needed someone to push them into finding and applying for jobs before they went overseas.

## Key challenges

Challenges for the programme include:

**The unequal distribution of resources and benefits.** There is an expectation that RSE workers and their families will continue to be better off than those who do not have the opportunities to work under the scheme. Therefore, there is an opportunity for New Zealand and participating Pacific Island Countries to start the conversation on ways to ensure equal distribution of resources and benefits for future phases.

**Impact on families.** Most of the participants were concerned about the impact on families, following the separation of spouses, especially if the husband or (wife) works overseas and the wife or (husband) stays in Kiribati. One participant suggested that the possibility for spouses to travel and work together should be investigated. However, they also emphasized that what is critically important is that they return home safely.

**Cultural barriers to communication.** It is commonly experienced that workers are uncomfortable sharing issues with their employer or supervisor, or do not feel that they can articulate needs or frustrations in English, which often leads to further problems. One of the participants shared that,

*I am aware of other issues these workers have faced whilst working abroad. When they have a problem, they kept it to themselves for almost three months until they met other I-Kiribati who speak good English and could talk on their behalf. [NGO Representative]*

### 4.3.3 Future Design and Support

The following recommendations have been put forward by stakeholders on how the SPLM Programme can be improved:

**There is a need to strengthen the training component of the Programme** to support Kiribati workers to become prosperous and resilient. One of the workers shared that she has gained new skills such as planning, budgeting, and saving. The workers could be encouraged and supported to take other courses and qualifications, to help them run their businesses when they go home.

**Consider establishing a new agency to deliver the services of the Labour Sending Unit.** Given the dispersal of islands, which constrains the effectiveness of the Programme especially in the recruitment of the new RSE workers from Christmas Island, a specialised agency could be created and trained to support this. The services would cover the recruitment process, processing visas, supporting workers to complete medical reports and other requirements.

*As we have international flights from Christmas Islands, it would be desirable if there is an agency that extends the services of the Labour sending unit so our workers can fly directly from Christmas to New Zealand, without going via Tarawa. [Community leader/Council member]*

**Solutions are needed to address the social impact on families** that results from the separations of spouses during the employment period. Given the challenges for couples, the Programme could consider that both husband and wife be allowed to work together.

**New sectors would provide greater opportunities for workers.** Some stakeholders are only aware about fruit picking, but during the maroro, they became aware that there are activities including horticulture, viticulture and the fisheries pilot. They suggested further sectors such as hospitality, office work, factory, and jobs suitable for disabled people. These will give more opportunities for an increased number of Kiribati people working in New Zealand. There are young people who have completed their education in Fiji and elsewhere who could potentially take on other roles such as office managers.

**Ensure the inclusion of opportunities for disabled people.** Disabled people need support for themselves and the future development of their children. Opportunities could be explored for caregivers for disabled people and their children as well as people with a disability.

**Cover family violence in pre-departure training.** It is recommended that the Ministry of Employment and Human Resources work in partnership with an NGOs such as AMAK to address family violence. In Kiribati, domestic violence is critical (68% prevalence rate in 2010). If a female worker experiences violence while working abroad she does not know where and how to seek help. Workers could be made aware of the types of services they could access if required while in New Zealand and the women workers need to understand their rights.

**Monitor the mental health of workers.** Some workers were concerned about the mental health of other workers. There is a need for RSE employers to closely monitor workers' mental health to create a good working and home environment for the workers. The RSE female

worker reported that one of the workers suffered from mental illness which became worse during the lockdown and they attacked and harmed another worker.

**Expand pre-departure briefings to ensure workers can cope with the transition to work in New Zealand.** There are issues that need to be addressed to improve the performance of workers. They need to be well briefed before they go overseas on coping with a new life, including how to save their money and live independently.

**Enhance communication methods.** For example, translation services could be provided for each employer to help workers having communication issues and information could be provided in sign language at pre-departure trainings. One suggestion was to include a drama as part of the pre-departure training (that includes sign language) based on the real-life issues workers face overseas. Local NGOs such as Tetoamatoa could be engaged in the programme.

**Increase awareness about the programme.** This could include creating a Facebook page (maneaba) so others can learn from and provide feedback for continuous improvement, and engaging NGOs such as Tetoamatoa to convey this information through different communication methods such as through drama, song or film to promote the Programme to Kiribati people, including disabled people. The Programme needs to be promoted to NGOs including Tetoamatoa (Disability Group) who have not gained from this programme, and discuss ways for how they could be engaged in future.

