



Improving Outcomes of Pacific Labor Mobility for Women, Families, and Communities

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AE	Approved Employers	MTO	money transfer operator
ANZ	Australia and New Zealand	NZ	New Zealand
ATM	automated teller machine	NZD	New Zealand Dollar
AUD	Australian Dollar	PALM	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility
BDS	business development services	PICs	Pacific Island Countries
CSOs	civil society organizations	PLF	Pacific Labour Facility
DESE	Department of Education, Skills, and Employment	PLMS	Pacific Labour Mobility Survey
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	PLS	Pacific Labour Scheme (Australia)
EPS	Employment Permit System	PNG	Papua New Guinea
FY	financial year	PPP	purchasing power parity
GBV	Gender-based violence	RSE	Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme (New Zealand)
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion	SAWP	Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program
HUG	Housing & Urban Guarantee Corporation	SEA	sexual exploitation and abuse
IFC	International Finance Corporation	SEAH	Sexual exploitation and harassment
ILO	International Labour Organization	SH	sexual harassment
LSU	Labor Sending Unit	SWP	Seasonal Worker Programme (Australia)
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade	TiE	Indus Entrepreneurs
MFI	microfinance institutions	TSS	Temporary Skills Shortage

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Executive Summary

Pacific Island Countries (PICs) face unique and significant challenges to economic development. These include a combination of extreme geographic dispersion, remoteness, and small populations, which prevent Pacific Island economies from competing in international markets, except in niche areas such as small-scale tourism and natural resource extraction. The smallness also undermines the ability of these countries to create sufficient jobs for their relatively youthful populations. The region is also highly vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change, including cyclones, droughts, and rising sea levels, putting both the livelihoods of their population and their main economic sectors – agriculture, tourism, and fishing – at risk. As a result, formal employment is low in PICs, with a large share of young people out of work and not in education or training.

International labor migration offers a critical tool to support the development of PICs and improve the livelihoods of Pacific Islanders. Temporary labor mobility programs in Australia and New Zealand, in particular, have provided formal employment opportunities for a large and increasing number of Pacific Islanders. New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, established in 2006, was the first of these programs. Australia followed with the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) in 2012 and the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) in 2018, both of which were consolidated into one single program called the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme in 2022. The schemes are designed to address labor shortages in specific sectors in the host countries, as well as broader development and foreign policy objectives.

The economic gains from these schemes, mainly in the form of formal job opportunities, remittances, and increased consumption, have been well documented. The RSE is widely recognized to have brought large benefits to employers, workers, and their families. Yet, as the number of migrant workers increases, sending countries have become more concerned about the social aspects of labor mobility. Concerns have been raised about adverse effects on family relationships and community dynamics, as well as extra burdens on remaining family members. In addition, there is also strong demand from home countries to facilitate and promote the participation of women in labor mobility schemes, who, to date, have been only a small proportion of participants. Yet, data-driven research to support policy-making in this area has been lacking.

This study responds to these analytical needs, eliciting new and extensive insights into the social and gender¹ dimensions of all three labor mobility schemes through a comprehensive examination of urban and rural communities in Tonga, Vanuatu, and Kiribati. The study has two broad objectives. The first objective is to explore the supply- and demand-side enablers and barriers affecting women's participation. On the supply side, the study examines the individual, household, community, and macro factors that enable or deter women from participating in temporary migration programs. On the demand side, the study uncovers gender biases from employers, Labor Sending Units (LSUs), local recruitment officers, and community leaders who are involved in communication outreach and pre-screening of prospective workers, and in the selection criteria of recruitment arrangements that (often unintentionally) disadvantage females. The second objective is to uncover a spectrum of positive and negative impacts at the individual, household, and community levels. At the individual level, it delves into autonomy, income control, skills, self-esteem, networking, aspirations, and life plans for both women and men. At the household level, it examines the distribution of chores, caregiving roles, gender dynamics, decision-making power, marital relations, child welfare, and the burdens borne by other family members. At the community level, it assesses women's status, decision-making authority, representation, caregiving roles, gift exchange, and cultural paradigms.

This pioneering, large-scale, cross-country qualitative study derives insights from 461 in-depth interviews. These include 419 interviews with seasonal workers, their families, and other community members; 25 interviews with key community informants, such as local government officials and church leaders, and 17 interviews with those directly involved in the recruitment process, including officers of LSUs, recruitment agents, and employers. The rich and participant-centric qualitative data are complemented by quantitative insights from the Pacific Labour Mobility Survey, which covers 2085 workers and 4241 households from the same countries (Box 2).

¹ Gender is understood as the different roles men and women assume in a historically and socially determined unequal power structure. Analysis from a gender perspective involves recognition that men and women operate in a historically configured relationship of subordination which influences all aspects of their lives, rendering them differentially vulnerable. Asymmetry between the sexes arises from, among other things, unequal social and economic valuation of productive work (gainful employment) and reproductive work (unpaid work, such as household tasks and caregiving). This sexual division of labor causes men and women to assume different roles and responsibilities (World Bank, 2012). Gender differences occur in all cultures, though they vary in intensity depending on the time and place. They are of fundamental importance in the migratory process. Gender shapes the paths and organization of migration streams, the way states intervene to encourage or discourage migration, the outcomes of migration for areas of emigration and immigration and, finally, immigrants' integration or assimilation, identities and lives (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). Indeed, evidence has accumulated that every point in the migration process is gendered. Thus, it is critically important to understand how migration may change patriarchal relations and whether it serves to reinforce or rupture them.

Why Don't Many Pacific Women Participate in the Region's Labor Mobility Programs?

Every year, thousands of workers from Pacific Island countries travel to Australia and New Zealand to work in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) and Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) schemes. While participation rates have varied between Pacific Island countries, women have accounted for roughly 13 percent of workers in these schemes over time.

On the supply side, a significant barrier for women to participate in Pacific labor migration schemes was the need for more support or approval from husbands or other close family members, particularly parents, which generally meant that a woman was unlikely to participate. Some women chose not to join because they were concerned about family members from their households, especially when young children and aging parents needed care. Complex and sometimes costly recruitment and pre-departure requirements disadvantage prospective female workers. In addition, community attitudes towards female participation in temporary migration programs were unfavorable due to women's traditional homemaker roles and perceptions that immoral conduct and family breakdown would result. Men were less likely than women to face negative moral judgment or gossip due to their decision to participate or their absence overseas.

On the demand side, interviews with employers, recruitment agents, and LSU staff revealed significant institutional-level constraints and gaps. Before the overseas work placement, key limitations included a lack of knowledge by prospective female seasonal work participants about Pacific labor migration programs, as well as a sometimes costly application process which has complex administrative requirements, including obtaining passports, medical clearances, and other documentation. The recruitment process strongly favors men because recruitment agents and employers believe men have the necessary physical capacity to undertake the bulk of their seasonal horticultural labor requirements. Recruiting agents steer away from recommending women, to avoid issues such as infidelity, pregnancy, and family breakdown, for which women are blamed more than men. Employers also said that the lack of sex-segregated accommodation facilities dissuaded them from employing women. Issues raised by seasonal workers during placement included: living conditions and personal safety during their placements, mainly where women and men shared accommodation; problems around the long duration of contracts (mentioned by female seasonal workers); remuneration and deductions that were not well-understood; as well as contractual rigidities and inadequate health care coverage.

The study also found several weaknesses of seasonal work programs in ensuring worker safety, well-being, and good working conditions. These included: shared accommodation between male and female seasonal workers creating discomfort and contributing to the risk of sexual harassment; inadequate access to health care and support services; workplace bullying; racism; insufficient work availability resulting in lost income; low level of knowledge among employers about PICs' cultural and religious practices; and lack of support from governments in Australia, New Zealand, and PICs for employers when complications arise in workers' contracts as a result of drug abuse, crime, pregnancy, childbirth, etc.

How do Pacific Labor Migration Programs Impact Workers, their Families, and their Home Communities?

The study found that Pacific labor mobility programs have brought significant economic benefits to participants, families, and communities. Respondents across all categories and locations recognized and appreciated these benefits, and nearly all favored continued access to the schemes. Many female participants reported increased self-esteem, confidence, and ambitious future aspirations. Women experienced increased access to and control of financial resources, and the acquisition of new knowledge and skills (for example, farming techniques, organizational skills, financial management, and English language proficiency). Women's greater self-confidence and economic independence also helped to strengthen collaborative decision-making between women and their spouses. In addition, Pacific labor migration schemes have enabled female returnees (at least in Vanuatu) to leave unhappy or abusive relationships. Community members also reported that women had gained prominence and visibility in community life and took on more active leadership roles. The overall conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that Pacific Labor migration is helping to change gender norms and attitudes by promoting transformative interventions towards more gender egalitarianism in PICs.

The most widely reported negative aspects of women's absence overseas pertained to increased workload and stress on family members from sending households and adverse outcomes for children, such as neglect and behavioral problems. There were also numerous reports of family breakdown and increases in 'arguments' within the family. Another commonly raised negative issue at the community level was adverse perceptions, moral judgments, and gossip regarding participating women who had recently returned. This was especially marked when only a few women from that community participated in Pacific labor mobility schemes. Other issues of concern were raised regarding male seasonal work, including men sometimes squandering their pay, especially on alcohol, and therefore having lower savings on return compared to more family-focused women. More broadly, men's misuse of alcohol, drugs, and kava during and after work placements was widely seen as a problem for those individuals' health and the well-being of their families and communities.

Pacific labor mobility schemes, though not perfect, have been commended for their clear guiding principles, institutional arrangements, and constant efforts to strengthen implementation. Despite this, there are some significant challenges that require further policy action.

What Can be Done to Increase Pacific Women's Participation in Labor Mobility, Improve Working Conditions, and Maximize the Development Impacts of Pacific Migration Schemes?

The report proposes the following recommendations to increase women's participation in Pacific labor mobility schemes:

- Expanding the range of sectors and work opportunities for women and addressing gender bias in the hiring process
- Encouraging more family-friendly approaches in labor migration, such as couple recruitment with suitable housing, enabling family visits, or accompaniment, especially on more extended placements
- Simplifying and streamlining pre-departure processes and providing precise and targeted gender-specific information on available programs
- Strengthening pre-departure training to inform workers' expectations about living and working conditions in host countries, and raise awareness about relationship management strategies, help lines, and what to do in case of sexual harassment and assault
- Conducting community-level awareness-raising campaigns on the broader benefits of women's participation in labor mobility.

In addition, the report proposes the following measures to improve worker safety and working conditions:

- Providing gender-separate accommodation facilities
- Improving health insurance arrangements
- Strengthening access to grievance and other dispute resolution mechanisms for workers
- Making it easier for workers to change employers
- Addressing workplace harassment and discrimination
- Fostering culture awareness among employers.

Lastly, the report puts forth several policy measures to address the social effects of seasonal migration on sending households and optimize the benefits of labor migration for both the communities of origin and destination, and the migrants themselves:

- Conducting family workshops to help family members to prepare for the challenges of long-term separation
- Institutionalizing and expanding support services for migrants and their families
- Implementing solutions to foster communication of seasonal workers with families in sending countries
- Linking remittances with broader financial services and financial literacy training
- Providing gender-friendly business development services (BDS)
- Working with Pacific diaspora communities to build a sense of belonging away from home and support skill-building among workers.

The report underscores the potential of Pacific labor mobility to fuel inclusive development while recognizing the intricate challenges that need addressing.

By implementing these recommendations and nurturing the transformative potential of labor mobility, the Pacific region can usher in a more prosperous and equitable future for all its residents.



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Introduction

Pacific Island Countries (PICs) face common but unique development challenges.

These include small size and remoteness, geographic dispersion, environmental fragility, and high exposure to a volatile mix of economic shocks, climate change, and natural disasters. For most PICs, potential drivers of economic growth are limited to a few sectors, such as agriculture, tourism, and fishing. As a result, few new jobs are being created and, in some countries, less than half of the working-age population is employed.² In addition, over half of Pacific Islanders are under the age of 24 – the highest youth population of any region in the world (United Nations 2022 Revision of World Population Prospects). Meanwhile, in some PICs, up to 47 percent of young people are estimated to be out of work, and not in education or training³ (World Development Indicators).

Across many of the PICs, a broad sense of hardship prevails. This hardship is experienced as a lack of access to essential services (including quality education), economic opportunities, and cash for meeting basic needs (sometimes including customary obligations to traditional support networks). For example, in Vanuatu and Kiribati, 35 and 20 percent of the population, respectively, lives under the 2017 PPP poverty line of US\$3.65 a day (World Development Indicators, 2021). Many paths can lead households into poverty – the loss of a job, a crop failure, illness, an economic crisis that reduces tourism, or a natural disaster that deprives them of housing and land. Even relatively minor events can push a poor household into extreme poverty. Often the poor come from groups that have specific social disadvantages and economic vulnerabilities, such as the elderly, individuals living with disabilities, children, or female household members. In PICs, many of the poor inhabit the outer islands, where poverty is structural and persistent. As in Kiribati, some inhabited islands are coral atolls where very little subsistence agriculture is possible, and more extreme deprivation is likely, particularly compared to typical levels in rural areas.

² For example, in Samoa and Tonga 47 and 49 percent of the working population was employed in 2019, respectively (World Development Indicators).

³ The share of youth not in education, employment, or training (% of youth population) was 48 percent in Kiribati (2020), 35 percent in Vanuatu (2019), 19 percent in Tonga (2021), 43 percent in the Marshall Islands (2020), 29 percent in Samoa (2017), and 29 percent in FSM (2014). Taken from the World Development Indicators.

Alongside the constraints placed on development, the PICs also experience gender inequality. Gender inequality is reflected in uneven access to economic opportunities and resource endowments, limitations on women's voice and agency, and women's vulnerability to emerging risks. Across the Pacific, there are pronounced gender disparities in labor market participation and wages, occupational segregation by gender, and differences in the types of work that women and men perform. Female participation in the labor force is consistently lower than that of men – 54 percent for women compared to 77 percent for men. In Samoa, women's labor force participation is 41 percent, compared with 66 percent for men. Significant disparities are also seen in Tonga (41 percent participation for females, compared with 65 percent for males) and Fiji (38 percent female, 75 percent male) (World Development Indicators, 2021). Women work predominantly in the informal sector and are frequently home-based, focusing on subsistence agriculture, marketing agricultural products, and petty trading. Within the limited economic opportunities available, women's employment is concentrated to agriculture, tourism, and selected parts of the fisheries sector (Boccuzzi, 2021). Women in PICs also face constraints on their control of assets. They are less likely to have land titles and can be disadvantaged by family, marriage, and inheritance laws and practices.⁴ Women's voice and agency are limited in PICs, as women are underrepresented in parliaments, holding only around 8 percent of seats, compared to an average of about 26 worldwide (World Development Indicators, 2021). Gender-based violence (GBV) is exceptionally high in several countries. In countries where prevalence studies have been undertaken, up to 64 percent of Pacific women have reported experiencing physical or sexual violence by a partner in their lifetime.⁵ GBV has significant traumatic and disempowering effects. It negatively affects women's health, well-being, and children's development, education, and nutrition. Emerging trends in the Pacific present risks and opportunities for women and progress toward gender equality. Women are disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters and climate change, where their socio-economic status is not equal to that of men and have less voice and influence than men in shaping policies (World Bank, 2011).

Increasing employment opportunities, particularly for women and youth, is of utmost importance for ensuring the long-term sustainability of Pacific Island economies. In this regard, labor mobility emerges as a crucial avenue for overcoming geographical limitations on employment and fostering the economic empowerment of female migrant workers. By capitalizing on labor mobility, Pacific Island nations can build skills, unlock potential economic growth, and create a more inclusive and prosperous future.

⁴ According to "Women, Business and the Law 2021", women and men do not have equal ownership rights to immovable property in Kiribati, Marshall Islands, FSM, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu.

⁵ Lifetime physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence was 64 percent in Fiji (2011), 61 percent in Kiribati (2019), 51 percent in the Marshall Islands (2011), 21 percent in Tonga (2019), and 60 percent in Vanuatu (2011). Physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in the last 12 months was 24 percent in Fiji (2011), 43 percent in Kiribati (2019), 18 percent in the Marshall Islands (2011), 13 percent in Tonga (2019), and 44 percent in Vanuatu (2011). Data taken from UN Women, Global Database on Violence against Women: <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en>

Since 2007, Pacific labor mobility schemes to Australia and New Zealand have allowed Pacific Islanders to migrate seasonally to access work opportunities in Australia and New Zealand. The schemes have been designed with development-related objectives in mind. Pacific workers can learn new skills and earn higher incomes through temporary employment in Australia and New Zealand. These earnings support families and communities back home – paying school fees, investing in community projects, building houses, and starting businesses. Pacific labor mobility schemes have also helped businesses in Australia and New Zealand to supplement their seasonal labor needs with a reliable workforce in industries without sufficient local workers.

Currently, two labor migration schemes exist in Australia and New Zealand (Box 1).

New Zealand first established the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme in 2007 to address seasonal labor shortages in horticulture and viticulture. Australia trialed a Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme in the horticulture sector for selected PICs in 2009 and established the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) in 2012. The Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) followed in 2018 (after being piloted in northern Australia), responding to non-seasonal labor shortages in sectors including labor hire, meatworkers, caregiving, hospitality, and tourism. The SWP and PLS were brought together under the Pacific Australia Labor Mobility (PALM) scheme in April 2022, with the former SWP and PLS becoming short- and long-term PALM streams respectively.⁶ All of the Pacific labor mobility schemes are employer (demand) driven. Throughout this report, the term temporary labor migration refers to all three labor mobility schemes, while seasonal labor migration refers only to the SWP and RSE.



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⁶ While the SWP and PLS have now transitioned to the PALM scheme, participants in this study are referred to as SWP and PLS workers, as these are the schemes they were employed through.

BOX 1. Labor migration programs open to PICs in New Zealand and Australia

New Zealand

New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme⁷ began in 2007 and allowed the horticulture and viticulture industries to recruit overseas workers. This scheme is open to PICs (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu) or other countries if the employer can demonstrate a pre-established relationship with the worker.⁸ Workers stay in New Zealand for seven to nine months within an eleven-month period. The RSE was capped at 16,000 workers for 2021/22. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, employment caps increased on a yearly basis, and it is likely that this trend will continue. RSE workers may be re-employed in subsequent years (either with the same or a new employer) provided they receive a recommendation from their current employer. The RSE also provides training courses to seasonal workers via the Vakameasina program. Vakameasina training is funded by the New Zealand Aid program of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). It focuses on topics selected by the learners and their employers that will improve the workers'

Australia

Australia's adoption of Pacific labor mobility schemes came shortly after the RSE was established. After a trial period from 2009, the SWP was formalized in 2012 and helps employers in the agriculture and accommodation sectors to fill employment gaps unmet by the Australian workforce. In practice, horticultural employment has dominated. Nine participating PICs (Kiribati, Nauru, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Fiji) and Timor-Leste can participate in this scheme. Until 2022, SWP workers could work in Australia for six to nine months but were required to spend three months out of every 12 in their home country. The SWP was managed by the Department of Education, Skills, and Employment (DESE) until 2022. Like the RSE, SWP workers were offered 'add-on skills training' financed by the Australian government and administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). This program allowed seasonal workers to access basic training in First Aid, English, and IT skills. These skills were chosen to help seasonal workers while on the job in Australia and when they return to their home country.

⁷ [https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/research-reports/recognised-seasonal-employer-rse-scheme#:~:text=The%20Recognised%20Seasonal%20Employer%20\(RSE,not%20enough%20New%20Zealand%20workers](https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/research-reports/recognised-seasonal-employer-rse-scheme#:~:text=The%20Recognised%20Seasonal%20Employer%20(RSE,not%20enough%20New%20Zealand%20workers)

⁸ <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/research-reports/recognised-seasonal-employer-rse-scheme>

⁹ www.vakameasina.co.nz

The PLS¹⁰ was introduced in 2018 and employs workers from the same countries as the SWP. PLS workers are employed in low- and semi-skilled positions across all sectors in rural and regional Australia, due to a shortage of Australian workers. PLS employment is not seasonal, and until 2022 contracts lasted for one to three years (DFAT, 2019).¹¹ The Pacific Labour Facility and DFAT administered the PLS.

On 23 November 2021, the Australian Government announced the consolidation of the SWP and PLS under a single Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme and implemented program improvements to cut red tape and visa settings while providing stronger worker protections. Key features of the new PALM scheme have been rolled out from 4 April 2022, with additional reforms – including a new employer deed and streamlined processes and administrative efficiencies, specifically:¹² extension of PLS contracts to a maximum of four years; the commitment to a family accompaniment pilot, which will allow long-term PALM workers who have the agreement of their employer to bring their family to Australia; and increased administrative efficiencies for employers, who will benefit from a single Deed of Agreement, program guidelines, an IT platform, and engagement with one department, thereby reducing duplication. All employers and workers will benefit from the services, including welfare and cultural expertise, provided by the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF).



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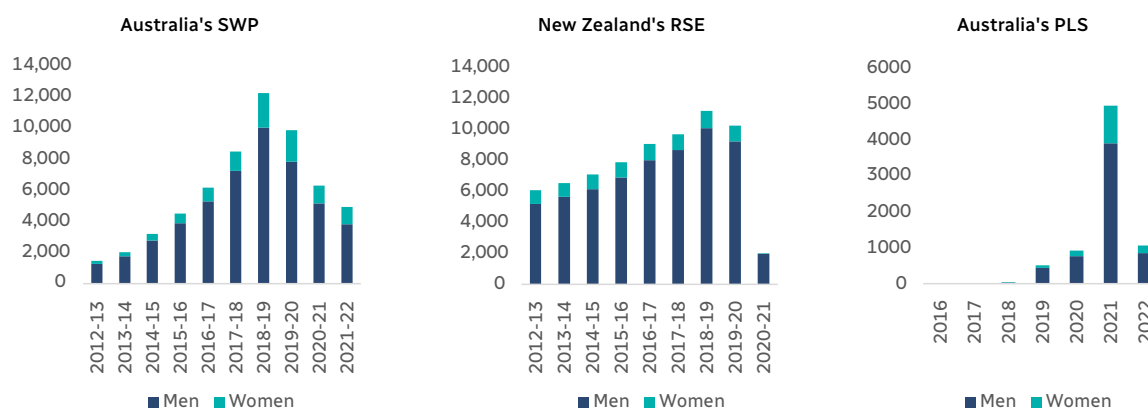
¹⁰ <https://pacificlabourmobility.com.au/>

¹¹ On 4 April 2020, the Australian Government announced temporary changes to visa arrangements that would allow Pacific workers under the SWP and the PLS to continue working in the agriculture sector until the COVID-19 crisis has passed. The new visas will enable the workers to remain in Australia and continue working to support themselves for up to 12 months.

¹² <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/streamlining-and-strengthening-pacific-labour-newera>

While the total worker numbers under these schemes have grown steadily (until disrupted by COVID-19 border restrictions in 2020), a relatively small proportion have been female (13 percent).¹³ Of the 58,971 workers that have participated in the SWP since 2012, women have accounted for 17 percent of total visa grants. In the RSE (69,691 total participating PIC workers), the share is even lower at 11 percent (Figure 1). In the PLS, which started later, the female percentage of seasonal workers has been higher, at 20 percent. Women in the PLS have dominated specific sectors, such as aged care and tourism. However, the strong demand for employment in meatworks and changing recruitment priorities during the COVID-19 pandemic have meant men currently dominate PLS participation rates. Among Tongan and ni-Vanuatu workers, the two largest contributing countries to the seasonal schemes, the share of female participants is 14 and 13 percent, respectively, over the lifetime of the schemes (Figure 2). Kiribati has the highest percentage of female participation (31 percent). The higher share of female seasonal workers from Kiribati is attributed to dedicated seasonal migration units established by the Kiribati Government, which have made a considerable effort to secure new employers for women (ILO, 2019). Nonetheless, women’s participation rates have varied over time. For example, recent efforts by the Tongan LSU to engage with employers and encourage female recruitment saw women accounting for 26 percent of SWP participants in FY 2019/20, as compared to just 12 percent when the scheme began in FY 2012/13.

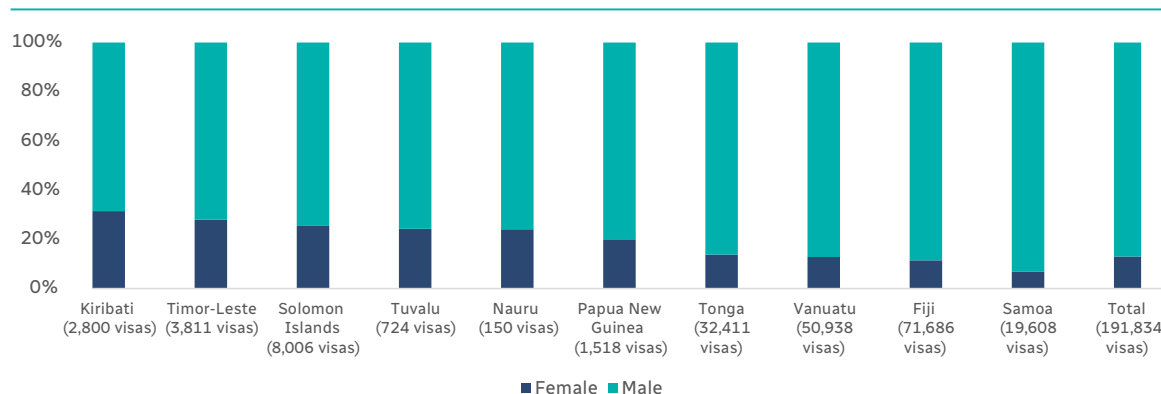
FIGURE 1. Number of visas granted between 2012–2021 by Pacific labor mobility program and by gender



Source: Data for SWP taken from Australia’s Department of Home Affairs. Data for RSE is taken from New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). Data from the PLS is taken from the Pacific Labor Facility (PLF).

¹³ Recent figures show just 11 percent females in RSE; 20 percent in PLS; and 26 percent in SWP.

FIGURE 2. Women’s participation in temporary labor migration by sending country between 2012–2022 (SWP, RSE, and PLS combined)



Source: Data for SWP taken from Australia’s Department of Home Affairs. Data for RSE is taken from New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). Data from the PLS is taken from the Pacific Labor Facility (PLF).

The existing body of research on the development impacts of Pacific labor mobility programs lacks the comprehensive gender-focused data necessary for informed policy interventions. Previous research has predominantly relied on limited focus group discussions or individual interviews within specific communities, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the extent of positive and negative impacts across communities and countries. Additionally, there is a notable demand from both home and host countries to enhance women’s participation in labor mobility schemes and manage the social impacts of participation, but the lack of detailed, policy-relevant research hinders progress in achieving these goals. The current report stands out due to its large-scale, multi-country approach – adding significant value to the existing literature.

This study responds to these analytical needs, specifically to elicit new and geographically extensive insights into the gendered dimensions of the schemes through a more comprehensive examination of urban and rural communities in Tonga, Vanuatu, and Kiribati. Specifically, the research has two broad objectives.

The first research objective is to explore the positive and negative impacts of male and female temporary migration at individual, household, and community level, as follows:

- At the **individual level:** in terms of women’s and men’s autonomy, control of income, skills, self-esteem, networking, aspirations for personal development, and life plans
- At the **household level:** regarding the distribution of household chores and caring responsibilities, gender roles, decision-making power within the household, marital relations, children’s health and educational outcomes, and the childcare burden on other family members

- At the **community level**: in terms of women's position, status, decision-making power, and representation in the community, as well as kinship caregiving, gift exchange, and cultural arrangements.

The second research objective is to explore the enablers and barriers affecting women's participation on the supply and demand side. On the **supply side**, the study examines the individual, household, community, and macro-level factors that enable or deter women from participating in temporary migration programs. On the **demand side**, the study explores the institutional/employer level to uncover gender biases from employers, LSUs, local recruitment officers, community leaders who are involved in communication outreach and pre-screening of prospective workers, and in the selection criteria in the recruitment arrangements that (often unintentionally) disadvantage females, e.g., educational requirements.

The report has six sections. Following the introduction, the second section describes the conceptual framework and the research methodology. The third section presents the constraining and enabling factors for women's participation in these schemes. The fourth explores the effects of women's and men's temporary labor migration on women's agency and autonomy in households and local communities. The fifth section identifies issues of particular concern and discusses possible remediation approaches, while the sixth concludes this report.



Conceptual Framework and Research Methodology

Conceptual Framework

For data collection and analysis, the study adopted a gender-centered¹⁴ ecological framework to help conceptualize, identify, and integrate the different impacts of temporary labor migration on the individual, gender relations, and sending families – including husbands and wives that remain in PICs. Ecological perspectives offer a way to look at the interrelationships between individuals, community, and societal level factors and are used as a conceptual and methodological tool for organizing and evaluating issues such as health promotion interventions, as well as gender-based violence causes and responses (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Heise, 1998). The framework encompasses both the demand side (those involved in worker recruitment) and the supply side (individual, household, community, and broader macro-level factors affecting participation). Gender can affect labor mobility participation and impacts through patterns of individual and collective decision-making, access to and control over resources, labor mobility scheme experiences, gender biases in women's interactions with institutions, and impacts on gender relations and sending families. The framework provides a way of identifying and organizing these multiple dimensions and their interrelationships.

- **Macro level** refers to the economic, environmental, and policy-related factors in PICs that affect decisions to participate in temporary migration programs
- **Institutional level** includes the formal structures, agencies, and selection process that women and men need to navigate to access opportunities to participate in temporary migration programs. For example, the institutional level includes local recruiting agents, LSUs, the Australian and New Zealand private sector employers' selection process, criteria for recruitment, possible institutional gender bias, etc.

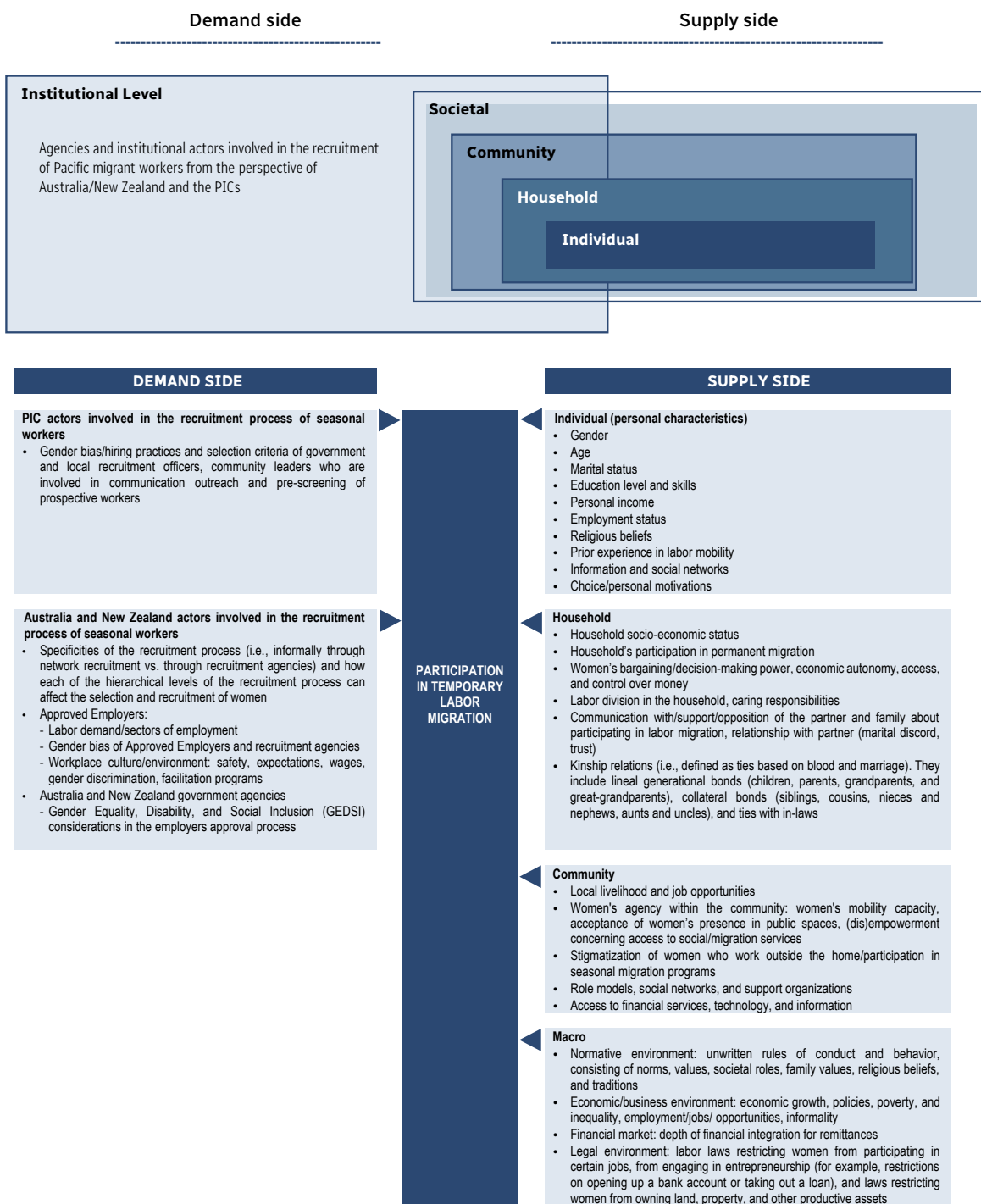
¹⁴ Gender is understood as the different roles men and women assume in a historically and socially determined unequal power structure. Analysis from a gender perspective involves recognition that men and women operate in a historically configured relationship of subordination which influences all aspects of their lives, rendering them differentially vulnerable. Asymmetry between the sexes arises from, among other things, unequal social and economic valuation of productive work (gainful employment) and reproductive work (unpaid work, such as household tasks and caregiving). This sexual division of labor causes men and women to assume different roles and responsibilities (World Bank, 2012). Gender differences occur in all cultures, though they vary in intensity depending on the time and place. They are of fundamental importance in the migratory process. Gender shapes the paths and organization of migration streams, the way states intervene to encourage or discourage migration, the outcomes of migration for areas of emigration and immigration and, finally, immigrants' integration or assimilation, identities, and lives (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). Indeed, evidence has accumulated that every point in the migration process is gendered. Thus, it is critically important to understand how migration may change patriarchal relations and whether it serves to reinforce or rupture them.

- **Meso or local/community level** refers to the enabling environment encompassing livelihoods and job opportunities, community norms, social networks, and support organizations where social relationships and interactions occur
- **Household level** refers to the person's closest social circle – family members and children, peers, partners – that influence their decision to participate in temporary migration programs and contribute to their range of experiences
- **Individual level** refers to personal factors and characteristics that influence an individual's behavior and decisions to participate in temporary migration programs and contribute to their range of experiences.



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FIGURE 3. Gender-centered ecological framework for examining seasonal labor migration programs



Research Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach, using qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data was collected through in-depth, one-on-one interviews with male and female temporary migrants and their families, community members, and key informant interviews with community leaders and others knowledgeable of the issues, as well as employers in Australia and New Zealand. One-on-one interviews allow learning from individuals' experiences and interpretations of their reality, capturing people's beliefs, feelings, and perspectives on intra-household, community-level, and contextual factors. They allow participants and informants to share benefits and difficulties encountered during the experience from a personal perspective in a secure environment.

Three PICs were selected for the qualitative data collection, representing the three Pacific sub-regions: Tonga (Polynesia), Vanuatu (Melanesia), and Kiribati (Micronesia). In addition, Tonga and Vanuatu have contributed the most seasonal workers to the labor mobility schemes, with 41 percent coming from Vanuatu and 27 percent from Tonga across all three schemes (SWP, RSE, PLS) combined. To capture the variety of experiences in each country, several urban and rural locations (including outer islands) were selected.

Table 1 provides details of the research sample by location and respondent category. The qualitative data collection consisted of:

- 195 in-depth individual interviews with male (96) and female (99) seasonal workers and 29 in-depth interviews with male (14) and female (15) PLS workers
- 77 in-depth interviews with close family members of male and female seasonal workers and 11 in-depth interviews with immediate family members of PLS workers
- 91 in-depth interviews with female community members that had not participated in the scheme and their family members
- 25 key community informant interviews such as local government officials and church leaders
- 17 key informant interviews with those involved in the recruitment process, including LSU officers, recruitment agents, as well as Australia and New Zealand employers.

Details about the characteristics of seasonal migrants interviewed in the study are provided in Box 3.

TABLE 1. Research sample by location and respondent category

Respondent categories	Kiribati			Tonga			Vanuatu			Australia (PLS workers)	Employers in Australia and New Zealand	Total
	TOTAL	URBAN	RURAL	TOTAL	URBAN	RURAL	TOTAL	URBAN	RURAL			
Interviews with SWP/RSE women that participated in temporary migration programs	12	9	3	36	12	24	36	17	19	15		99
Interviews with husbands and other family members of women participants	7	7	0	27	11	16	22	10	12	0		56
Interviews with women that did not participate in temporary migration programs	10	7	3	18	6	12	21	10	11	0		49
Interviews with partners/family member of women that did not participate in temporary migration programs	8	5	3	18	6	12	16	6	10	0		42
Interviews with men that participated in temporary migration programs	11	9	2	36	12	24	35	10	25	14		96
Interviews with partners/family members of women that did not participate in temporary migration programs	13	11	2	24	8	16	29	12	17	11		77
Key community informant interviews	4	1	3	9	6	3	12	3	9	0		25
Key informants involved in the recruitment process	0			4			5				8	17
TOTAL	65			172			176			40	8	461

Field teams were recruited in Tonga, Kiribati, and Vanuatu to conduct face-to-face interviews in late 2021. In Tonga and Vanuatu, three communities were selected: one urban and two rural (with at least one rural sample being on an outer island). In Kiribati, three locations, two rural (both outer islands) and one urban, were targeted, given the lower participation in seasonal work schemes and the geography of the country.¹⁵ As shown in Table 1, interviews were undertaken with several categories of

¹⁵ To ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants we did not disclose the name of the communities visited given the small population in each community.

women and men in each community. In addition, a small sample of PLS workers (14) from each country, currently in Australia, were interviewed by telephone by nationals of those countries. A family member back home (11 in total) was also interviewed where possible.¹⁶ Separate (though similar) interview guides were prepared for each category of respondent. Table 1 shows the number of people surveyed.

Each interview was recorded (with permission) and then transcribed and translated into English using a transcription matrix following the conceptual framework and questionnaire structure provided to the field teams. The data sets were analyzed using NVivo qualitative analysis software and a detailed thematic analysis of the Excel sheets for each respondent category based on the analytical framework that guided the research (Figure 3). The themes were compared between men and women in different age groups and locations.

The qualitative analysis was supplemented by quantitative data collected through the PLMS Survey that covers temporary labor migrants and their households from three PICs (Kiribati, Tonga, and Vanuatu). It is part of a broader programmatic analytical work program on Pacific labor mobility. The Pacific Labor Mobility Survey (i.e., the onsite survey and household survey) contains a gender module that includes questions on: perceptions of whether seasonal work is equally suitable for men and women from their home country; perceptions of women that participate in labor mobility; changes in gender norms due to temporary labor migration; changes in work allocation due to temporary labor migration; changes in the intra-household division of labor; educational and health impacts on children (especially girls) of sending families; and perceptions about the discrimination that female migrant workers face from employers in Australia and New Zealand, among others.

BOX 2. The Pacific Labor Mobility Survey

The Pacific Labor Mobility Survey (PLMS) covers Tonga, Kiribati, and Vanuatu households and workers in the SWP, PLS, and RSE (in Australia and New Zealand) from those three countries. As the name suggests, survey questionnaires were designed to be 'omnibus' in nature, able to cover many topics and purposes, and serve as a general resource for migration, labor, and development analysis and research in the Pacific. Two main surveys were undertaken: a worker survey and a household survey.

The first household survey was done face-to-face in Tonga. The remaining surveys were moved to a phone-based study due to the COVID-19 lockdown, mobility restrictions, and public health concerns. For all households surveyed, data was collected on all individuals in each household, including household

¹⁶ One PLS worker requested their family member not be interviewed. Another did not respond using the contact details provided. Several interviews were still outstanding at the time of the Tonga tsunami in January 2022 and were not subsequently approached in view of the impacts of that major disaster.

members working abroad in the three schemes, yielding much larger individual-level datasets (e.g., over 7,000 individuals for the face-to-face household survey).

The non-migrant sample was designed to be representative, and households were selected randomly using probability proportional to size sampling based on the latest census listing. In contrast, the migrant sample was non-random, given that access to migrant workers' contact details was limited due to the lack of a central worker registry.

The complete PLMS baseline survey covers 2085 migrant workers, 1466 worker households, 1626 non-migrant households, and 1160 households from the face-to-face survey. The migrant worker samples include workers currently working in the host countries of Australia and New Zealand, workers whose placements recently ended, and workers who have returned to Kiribati, Tonga, and Vanuatu after their placements. The sample covers a broadly representative number of migrant workers from Tonga, Vanuatu, and Kiribati across the program, and, importantly, the number of respondents by program and nationality is sufficiently large (i.e., more than 300 respondents by program or nationality) to reliably compare across groups.

Ethical Considerations

Field teams were provided training and guidance on standard ethical research practices, including: ensuring privacy during the interview process by protecting the confidentiality of information collected and assuring respondents their details would not be disclosed; obtaining informed consent for participation in the survey, and recording the interview; gender-appropriate interviewers (i.e., women interviewed women, men interviewed men); respectful conduct by field teams; and sensitivity to any signs of distress. In relation to topics of harassment, conflict, and violence, teams were advised to ensure the 'do-no-harm' principle was applied and to provide information on support services available in the location.

Limitations

Samples and the selection of field sites were based initially on worker lists compiled from data collected from LSUs, although all teams then employed 'snowball sampling' once in the chosen communities. Therefore, the resulting data set is not based on random sampling methods and may not be representative within communities or at the country level. Furthermore, the qualitative study primarily focused on SWP and RSE workers, predominantly associated with the horticulture and viticulture sectors. In contrast, the sample size of PLS workers was smaller, consisting of only 15 women and 14 men, who are employed across a broader spectrum of industries. Consequently, the study cannot make conclusive findings regarding

variations between different industries. Another notable limitation is the exclusion of government officials in ANZ, civil society organizations (CSOs), and women's groups from ANZ and PICs as key informants. Their involvement would have provided a broader range of perspectives and observations, enhancing the diversity of the study.

Furthermore, the field teams encountered challenges in identifying, locating, and securing interviews with the targeted number of respondents in each location. This resulted in extending the selected area to neighboring communities (Tonga) and an additional island (Kiribati). The field teams noted that ensuring privacy during the interview was sometimes difficult. This may have affected some respondents' willingness to provide complete and accurate responses. Cultural restraints may also have inhibited disclosing sensitive issues such as sexual harassment and gender-based violence. In Australia, all interviews with current PLS workers were conducted remotely. Workers' concerns over the legitimacy of the survey made it difficult in some instances to make contact and obtain their consent to be interviewed. Employer interviews in Australia and New Zealand were also conducted via telephone or video call.

Enabling and Constraining Factors in Women's Participation in Temporary Migration Schemes

Limited access for women to Pacific labor mobility opportunities has remained a challenge despite significant sub-regional differences. Over the last decade (2012–2022), the share of female labor migrants across all three schemes (SWP, RSE, PLS) was 13 percent. In Kiribati, Tonga, and Vanuatu, female seasonal workers represent 31, 14, and 13 percent of total workers, respectively, since 2012 (Figure 2). To help explain these low numbers, the study looked at supply and demand factors that could affect women's participation in Pacific labor migration schemes. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

The findings reinforce those from previous studies of Pacific labor mobility schemes that identified various cultural and institutional challenges in the supply of, and demand for, female workers in seasonal migration programs. On the supply side, strong patriarchal community attitudes can discourage women from participating equally in labor mobility. For example, Bailey (2014) found that women in Ambrym, Vanuatu, were dissuaded from participating in the RSE because they must stay on the island and take care of things as this 'is their role.' Similarly, the recent RSE assessment by Bedford et al. (2020) found that village chiefs often only endorse women for seasonal work if their children are of school age (over six years old). In Vanuatu and Tonga, the World Bank (2018) also found that women who participated in the SWP or wanted to participate in seasonal work were viewed negatively by male and female community members and were regarded as causing damage to family life. Women's participation in seasonal work was only possible if they were single, had no domestic responsibilities, or were married but had permission from their husbands to participate, and only after shifting their domestic responsibilities to either their husbands or other family members while they were away.

On the demand side, previous studies also found that gender stereotypes and biases of Approved Employers (AEs) and Recognised Seasonal Employers (RSEs)¹⁷ in the recruitment process negatively affect women's recruitment in seasonal programs.¹⁸ For example, the World Bank's (2018) study of the SWP found that the low participation of women in seasonal migration programs was linked to gender biases of AEs in Australia and local contracting agents, women's lack of access to information about the seasonal migration programs, as well as limited connections with local agents and contractors of seasonal work. The recent RSE social impact assessment found that barriers to women's participation in the scheme include stereotypes among employers that work in the field is better suited to men (Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020).

This report's findings are more detailed and specific, highlighting salient gender differences in factors constraining women's and men's participation in Pacific labor mobility schemes. In addition to traditional gender norms and gender biases that constrain women's participation, the findings also indicate practical constraints, such as complex recruitment and pre-departure requirements and costs that disadvantage prospective female workers. In addition, unsuitable accommodation is a primary concern for workers. Pacific migrant workers considered mixed-gender accommodation problematic. The men interviewed felt it was culturally inappropriate to live alongside unaccompanied women, while women cited concerns of feeling unsafe. Employers were also concerned about the suitability of accommodation, so some avoided hiring women.

The results lead to a 'big picture' conclusion based on the interaction between the supply- and demand-side factors: the systemic institutional-level constraints combined with community and household norms and preferences decrease women's participation in seasonal work programs. The result is a negative feedback loop, a vicious cycle that ultimately erodes women's motivation to participate in Pacific labor migration schemes.

¹⁷. Approved Employers (Australia) and Recognised Seasonal Employers (New Zealand) are employers that are officially accredited to participate in the SWP and RSE, respectively. Accreditation is based on evidence that employers are in a sound financial position, have good human resource practices, and are committed to training and employing Australians/New Zealanders.

¹⁸. Appendix 1 describes the different methods used by employers in Australia and New Zealand to recruit seasonal workers.

TABLE 2. At-a-glance: Enablers and barriers to participation in Pacific labor mobility schemes

	Level	Enabling factors	Constraining factors
SUPPLY SIDE	INDIVIDUAL	<p>Salient gender differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Men's marital status and age are not perceived as a barrier Significant difference in men's greater agency in decision making and women's greater reliance on consent, or at least support, from other family members 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal attributes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher education level - Being single (especially for women) - Being young - Good physical health - English proficiency - Prior experience and exposure to other seasonal migrants - Ability to cover up-front costs of the application - Support from community leaders, including formal consent letters mentioned in Tonga and Vanuatu - Free time to dedicate to the application process Personal motivation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Desire to help the family (greater for women) - Individual income-earning and opportunity (especially for men) - Spirit of adventure (especially for men) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal attributes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low/inadequate level of education (especially among Vanuatu participants) - Being too old - Not being able to cope with the heavy physical demands of the work - Language barriers to communication in the workplace and with host communities (especially among Vanuatu participants) - Lack of understanding of the application process and work conditions especially pay and deductions - Cost of the application process and obtaining documents (especially for Kiribati and Vanuatu outer-island participants) - Household responsibilities too great to spend time on the application process - Men's marital status and age are not perceived as a barrier Beliefs that participation is inappropriate for (any) women: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - View their primary responsibility as household (caring and domestic) roles - Concerns over possible 'problems' arising if children are left behind

SUPPLY SIDE	HOUSEHOLD	<p>Salient gender differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male participants are less likely to face opposition and mistrust from family members • Caring responsibilities at home are a significant inhibitor for women but not for men • Men have greater freedom to participate since women are the primary caregivers • Women may not trust spouse and relatives to look after the children 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and encouragement from household members such as husband, parents, and children (a significant enabling factor for women). Male participants are less likely to face opposition and mistrust from family members • Dependents and extended family who need financial support • Availability of alternative caregivers at home (especially mother/parents, or parents-in-law; less often husband alone) • Ability to travel with a family member, i.e., husband, father, sibling, cousin (mentioned in Tonga) • Poor household living standards (strong motivation to improve) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support/approval from household members such as husband, parents, and children (a significant constraining factor for women), including mistrust about fidelity • Unavailability of family members to take on women's caregiving and home responsibilities during their absence (a significant inhibitor for women but not for men). Women may not trust spouse or relatives to look after the children • Concerns over family members from sending households, especially where multiple dependents need care (children, aging parents, etc.) • Inability to travel with immediate family members
	COMMUNITY	<p>Salient gender differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive views on women being more 'responsible' are tempered by norms around the appropriateness of women's seasonal labor migration. Overall, men are more likely to have home and community support before and after participation • Men do not face the same (moral) judgment regarding participation as women • During placements, some women were restricted in their engagement with local communities (or types of venues, e.g., not allowed to go to nightclubs or casinos) • [Some] women required consent letters from husbands and community leaders; men did not [Vanuatu] 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive community perceptions that women are 'responsible' and family-focused and will make good use of the opportunity • Support from community leaders, including formal consent letters • Assistance with application processes • Support from the diaspora and locals in destination communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative community perceptions on appropriateness and effects of women's participation (especially for married women) • Some returning workers cited 'gossip' on return; some felt excluded from their previous networks
	MACRO	<p>Salient gender differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because of COVID-19, some men are motivated to seek seasonal work due to severe economic impacts in their home country 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited employment opportunities and low salaries in home countries • Technology: ability to remain in close contact with family via telephone/ internet calls • Men are motivated to seek seasonal work because of severe economic impacts in their home country stemming from COVID-19 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 border closures, fears/ hesitancy among men and women

DEMAND SIDE	INSTITUTIONAL	<p>Salient gender differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both men and women expressed concerns over the shared accommodation, but from different perspectives, i.e., women felt uncomfortable or insecure, whereas men were more concerned about unwanted 'temptations' • Men were less concerned about the length of contract periods • Men had more options for 'suitable' roles, including more senior positions • Recruitment/pre-departure requirements, e.g., fitness tests, are not a barrier for men
		<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>The recruitment process and pre-departure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to information on available programs and recruitment processes (on radio, social media, from family members, friends, and church) • More straightforward pre-departure requirements than in the past • Upfront costs (airfare) paid by the employer; cash advance provided on arrival • Personal/family ties to recruitment agents or existing participants • Placement as part of a single-country and women-only group • Relatively short contracts • Opportunities in Australia in new (non-agriculture) sectors <p>Issues arising during overseas employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of support services such as welfare hotline (greater awareness in Kiribati than in Tonga and Vanuatu) </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>The recruitment process and pre-departure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to information and recruitment process and arrangements • Costs and complexity of the application process and requirements • Gender bias in the recruitment process <p>Issues arising during overseas employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of accommodation facilities that suited women • Duration of contracts, work conditions, remuneration, and contractual rigidities • Inadequate health insurance • Difficulties in remitting money and high associated costs • Gendered division of work at the workplace; with men allocated more technical tasks and roles compared to women • Concerns over living conditions and personal safety • Bullying, discrimination, or unfair treatment at work </td> </tr> </table>
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BOX 3. Who participates in temporary labor mobility?

Characteristics of female seasonal workers

In **Kiribati**, the 12 female seasonal workers interviewed were aged between 20 and 50 years, and the majority (83 percent) had completed secondary school. All self-reported that they could read and write in Gilbertese, and the majority (75 percent) said that their English comprehension and speaking was good. Two out of the 12 women had previously traveled to Australia/New Zealand for non-work purposes. Most women (10) were married and most (7) had participated in labor mobility more than once (2–3 times). Ten of the women were married, one was single, and one said she was living with her children but did not say her marital status. Most of them worked on farms (mushroom and citrus) and described their type of work as picking, packing, cutting leaves, sorting, pruning, and planting.

In **Tonga**, the 36 female seasonal workers interviewed were aged between 25 and 55 years, and the majority have completed upper secondary Forms 5 or 6 (76 percent). Most (30) were married. All self-reported that they could read and write in Tongan, and the majority (47 percent) said that their English comprehension and speaking was good or very good. Almost half (16) of the women had travelled to Australia or New Zealand previously for non-work purposes and most (30) had participated in labor mobility multiple times (2–6 times). Most of them worked on farms (mushroom and citrus) and described their type of work as picking, packing, cutting leaves, sorting, pruning, and planting.

In **Vanuatu**, the 36 female seasonal workers interviewed were aged between 22 and 59 years. More than half (53 percent) attained upper secondary school (Grades 10–12) and the majority (69 percent) said that their English comprehension and speaking was good. Most women (72 percent) reported they were married or cohabiting with their partners. Just over one-third (36 percent) of women had participated in labor mobility multiple times (2–3 times). Most of them worked on farms (kiwi, citrus, mushroom, tomato) and described their work as picking, packing, cutting leaves, sorting, pruning, and planting.

Characteristics of male seasonal workers

In **Kiribati**, the 11 male seasonal workers interviewed were aged between 20–49 years, and the majority (91 percent) completed various levels of secondary school. All self-reported that they could read and write in Gilbertese, and the majority (75 percent) said that their English comprehension and speaking was fair to good. None of them have previously traveled to Australia/NZ for non-work purposes. Most (9) men were married. The majority (7) of men had participated in labor mobility multiple times (2–3 times). Most of them worked on citrus farms and described their work as picking, clipping, harvesting, pruning, and working in a warehouse packing.

In **Tonga**, the 36 male seasonal workers interviewed were aged between 20–49 years, and all of them except one attended upper secondary school (Form 4 and above). All self-reported that they could read and write in Tongan, and 36 percent said that their English comprehension and speaking was good to very good. Most (34) were married and 39 percent had previously traveled to Australia/NZ for non-work purposes. The majority (83 percent) had participated in labor mobility multiple times (2–10 times). Almost half (44 percent) had worked in both Australia (SWP) and NZ (RSE). They all worked on fruit and vegetable farms and described their work as picking, clipping, harvesting, pruning, and working in a warehouse packing.

In **Vanuatu**, the 35 male seasonal workers interviewed were aged between 25–49 years, and almost two-thirds attended upper secondary or above (Grades 10–12). All self-reported that they could read and write in Bislama, and 74 percent said that their English comprehension and speaking was good to very good. Eighty percent were married or cohabiting with a partner. Twenty-three percent had previously traveled to Australia/NZ for non-work purposes. More than half (69 percent) had participated in labor mobility multiple times (2–14). Most of them worked on fruit and vegetable farms and described their work as picking, clipping, harvesting, pruning, and packing; one worked on a chicken farm.

Characteristics of female PLS workers interviewed in Australia

Fifteen female PLS workers were interviewed in Australia: five from Kiribati, five from Tonga, and five from Vanuatu. They were aged 25–41 years. Seven of them were married or cohabited with a partner and the rest were either single, separated, or widowed. Two-thirds had completed or were enrolled in tertiary studies (studying nursing and information technology), while the rest had achieved upper secondary studies. Thirteen worked in fruit or vegetable farms and described their work as sorting and packing fruit, and two worked in nursing homes. Four PLS seasonal participants had family members in Australia working as seasonal workers.

Characteristics of male PLS workers interviewed in Australia

Fourteen male PLS workers were interviewed in Australia: five from Kiribati, four from Tonga, and five from Vanuatu. They were 21–42 years of age. All were married or cohabiting with a partner. Fifty-seven percent (8) had completed or were enrolled in tertiary studies, while four (4) had achieved upper secondary studies. Twelve of the 14 worked on fruit or vegetable farms, and two worked on an animal farm. They described their work as picking, packing, pruning, and working as a truck driver. Five of the 14 had family members (primarily brothers and cousins) working in Australia at the same time they were working under the PLS.

Supply-Side Factors

Individual Level

Education, Skills, and Personal Attributes

Education and English language skills enabled women to handle application processes, understand terms and conditions, learn new tasks, and adapt to new situations. Previous studies of the SWP indicate that most workers had completed some secondary school, however for some PICs, including Vanuatu, workers tended to have lower levels of education (some had only completed primary school). By contrast, the average Timorese worker held a university degree (World Bank, 2018). Similarly, most Tongan and i-Kiribati labor mobility participants interviewed in this study had completed at least a few years of high school, could read and write in their language, and had reasonable English proficiency. The ni-Vanuatu participants overall had lower education levels. In Vanuatu, female respondents mentioned that support from community leaders, including formal consent letters, was required for them to participate in seasonal work. Tongan government informants also confirmed this is a standard part of their recruitment process. One Tongan woman mentioned that her town officer selected the participants from that village. Other elements of the recruitment process that caused difficulties included complex application forms (challenging for those with lower language or literacy proficiency, especially for ni-

Vanuatu participants who had a lower level of education). For the PLS, participation effectively required a minimum level of educational attainment. For instance, prospective applicants of Australia-based employers had to undertake tests, which were not feasible without a minimum level of formal education. Minimum formal education is, therefore, a significant enabler for participation.

“Women are more challenged to be allowed to participate by their husbands or community leaders and families because of their perspectives on the duties they may leave behind and stories they hear of previous participants involved in marital affairs.”

Community member, rural Vanuatu

“Myself and my husband (decided I will participate). As for consent letters, there was one from my husband, the village chief, and the church pastor.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

Other personal attributes that were pre-requisites for SWP/RSE/PLS participation included good physical health and age. A few respondents who had not participated, or said they would not participate in the future, said this was because of their age (too old) or their expectation that the heavy physical demands of the work would be too much for them. Under the RSE, workers must be at least 18 years of age, while for the PALM scheme, workers must be at least 21 years old. Previously, PLS participation was not available to those aged over 45 years. Ni-Vanuatu agents thus noted an age limit of 21–45 years, at least for the SWP, probably reflecting employer preferences and past practices. Other enablers mentioned by respondents included prior seasonal work experience, having the necessary funds to cover the upfront costs of the application, and having acquaintances with current or previous participants. The importance of personal connections in enabling participation has been noted by previous studies (e.g. World Bank, 2018). Those who were already working or still had savings from previous placements had less difficulty meeting pre-departure costs.

“I was selected based on my fitness level.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

The most common challenge for both men and women participating in seasonal work programs was the monetary costs of pre-departure arrangements and processes. Previous research indicates these costs average \$A 1,474 across the Pacific, with internal travel being significantly more expensive for PICs with highly dispersed populations such as Vanuatu (World Bank, 2017a). While employers contribute to international airfare costs for both RSE and PALM participation, this contribution does not cover domestic travel. Many i-Kiribati, especially from rural locations, do not have the finances to pay for items (passport, documentation, travel to urban areas,

appropriate clothing, etc.). As a result, female seasonal workers relied on spouses and family members to help them pay these costs. Some said that their employers helped by reimbursing their airfares and providing allowances for their meals and daily expenses when they arrived.

For women, being unmarried made participation both more accessible and more socially acceptable. This finding is consistent with previous studies of the seasonal labor mobility schemes (Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020; World Bank, 2018). On the flip side, some women (both non-participants and a few former participants) expressed the belief that participation is inappropriate for women. Many married women felt it would be wrong to participate since they considered their primary responsibilities to lie in their caring and domestic roles within their household. In addition, many were aware of family breakdowns attributed to other women’s participation, which deterred them from joining. Some were also concerned that if they left their children behind, they might not be adequately supervised and cared for. They also worried about homesickness. When asked directly whether men and women should participate in labor mobility in equal numbers, the PLMS worker survey reveals varying levels of support for gender equality in labor migration across the three countries. Vanuatu, with the longest engagement in the labor mobility schemes, emerges with the highest support from both males and females. However, in contrast, male workers from Kiribati and Tonga display significantly lower support for women’s participation in Pacific labor mobility schemes compared to their female counterparts (Figure 4).

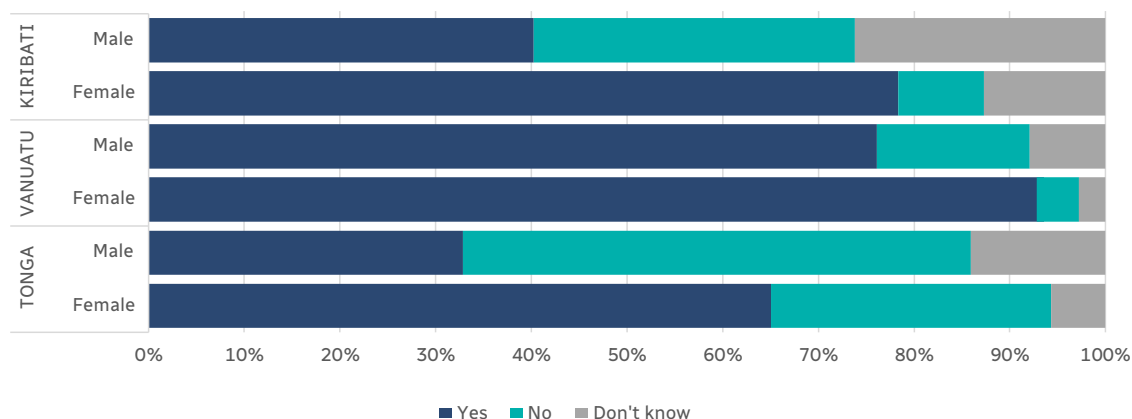
“Yes (women should participate) but the single ones only. Mothers should not participate and take care of their children (instead).”

Female community member, rural Tonga

“I first found out about this work through a cousin who was a seasonal worker. The farm wanted someone to cook for the Tongan workers, so I was told about it, and I asked if I could apply as they know that I could cook and have studied cooking at the technical school in Tonga.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

FIGURE 4. Should men and women participate in labor migration in equal numbers?



Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

Personal Motivation

Men and women described common motivations to participate in seasonal work.

These were consistent with reasons for participation reported in previous studies of Pacific labor mobility (e.g. Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020; Connell and Hammond, 2009; World Bank 2017, 2018) and include the opportunity to earn more income as they heard from family and friends that seasonal work paid well, travel to another country, learn new skills, and explore new opportunities. They noted that the prospective financial returns are much more than what they would be able to achieve through local employment or other income-generating activities. Some aspired to purchase a vehicle, renovate a house, offer support for family needs, provide for the educational needs of children, and meet other financial obligations.

The overwhelming majority of women respondents said their primary motivator for participating in labor mobility schemes was their desire to help their family.

This is the case, particularly for single mothers who attributed their decision to participate solely to their desire to have a better future for their child(ren). A smaller number of women were motivated by a desire for adventure and new experiences when on their first placement, a time when they tended to be younger and single. There was a perception among many female and male respondents that men were more motivated by individual income-earning and the opportunity for adventure. This was less evident in Tonga, where most married men also cited current family motivations, although in some cases noted that their earlier participation as young single men had been driven more by personal needs and interests.

“My daughter motivated me to come here and work. I am the only person taking care of my daughter, and I faced a lot of difficulty in raising her. That is why I strongly have the urge to apply. I was selected, and I am happy.”

Female PLS worker, Vanuatu

“I wanted to join because I wanted to see New Zealand and what it was like and go on an airplane.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Tonga

Household Level

Caring Responsibilities at Home and Availability of Alternative Caregivers at Home

The qualitative and the quantitative data suggests that the strongest constraining (and enabling) factors of women’s participation in labor mobility schemes relate to the household level. This is consistent with findings from previous studies (Bailey, 2014; Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020; World Bank, 2018). The main deterrent to individual women deciding to participate is a perception that a prolonged absence will be detrimental to their family. A common refrain from all respondent categories was that temporary labor migration often resulted in family breakdowns. Many women interviewed identified this as a significant factor in their past and future participation decisions. In addition, most participants had suffered homesickness, often exacerbated by worries about the impact on their children (emotionally and behaviorally). Most female participants interviewed were married (or divorced) with children, but some non-participants appeared to have been constrained by their family obligations. They chose not to participate because they were concerned over family members from sending households, especially where there were both young children and aging parents needing care.

For women with dependents at home (children and elderly), the availability of alternative caregivers to handle these responsibilities during their absence was an essential pre-condition for them to consider applying. Again, this is consistent with findings from previous studies (Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020; World Bank, 2018). Traditional family structures in PICs may enable some women to leave children to take up seasonal work overseas with extended family sharing childcare responsibilities. In most cases, the woman’s mother (or parents, or parents-in-law) took on the bulk of these duties or at least supported the husband. Less frequently, the husband became the primary caregiver.

“My mother and the rest of the family did not like (my participation) due to my kids being left.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

“I made arrangements for my kids to live with my parents but every day to day running from school was to be their father’s role. They would spend weekends with their father.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Vanuatu

“I trusted my parent-in-law to look after our kids.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Kiribati

On the other hand, men had greater freedom to participate in seasonal work and were not held back by caring responsibilities, whereas these were a significant inhibitor for women. This is consistent with previous studies of the SWP (World Bank, 2018). Eighty-one percent of male and 77 percent of female quantitative survey respondents attribute factors that constrain women’s participation to women’s sense of responsibility towards the household (caring and domestic role) that dissuades them from applying (Figure 5). Male participants were also less likely to face opposition and mistrust from family members. Some women expressed a reluctance to leave their children because they did not trust their husbands or other male relatives to care for them properly.

FIGURE 5. Reasons for fewer female workers than male workers in Pacific labor mobility schemes
*In the workplace, there are significantly fewer female workers than male workers.
In your opinion, why is this? Percentages show affirmative responses.*



Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

Support From Household Members

At the household level, another critical enabler of women’s participation was the encouragement and support of their immediate household – particularly their husbands and parents and (in some cases) children. Almost all female participants indicated that at least one family member (e.g., spouse, children, parents) reacted positively or had affirmed their participation in the program. Female participants found this to be very important. For instance, a widowed ni-Vanuatu PLS worker had to seek her son’s consent before deciding to participate, without which she would not have pursued the opportunity despite her strong interest in the program. She delayed her participation for several years until her son agreed. For Australian and New Zealand employers, spousal and family consent is also required for female participation to avoid last-minute surprises. This finding emerged most from interviews with women who have not participated in seasonal work schemes when asked what has prevented them from participating in seasonal work in the past. Most said that their marital status impacted their ability to participate. They had been previously encouraged by their family to apply but were discouraged once they married and had children. In addition, they do not have the financial means to apply for seasonal work. The interview responses showed clearly that men in all three countries had far greater agency in participating in a temporary labor program. In contrast, women relied on other family members’ consent or support. In addition, men’s marital status and age were not perceived as a barrier. The quantitative survey similarly found that 69 and 70 percent of male and female respondents, respectively, stated that the lack of support or approval from the husband was a key inhibitor of women’s participation, closely followed by women’s concern about putting their reputation on the line (Figure 5).

“My son and I had a discussion together. The first time I asked him, he insisted on me spending time with him because he had lost his father. A few years later, I asked him again, and he finally understood and agreed for me to come here and work. He knows it’s for his good. My dad also encouraged me a lot, and my families also supported my plans to work in Australia.”

Female PLS worker, Vanuatu

“We had an issue where a lady’s visa was processed and plane tickets booked, but the husband disagreed for her to come. So we had to reconsider her recruitment at the last minute. We lost about \$A 2000 from that.”

Approved Employer, Australia

“My husband and I decided, so he would stay with the kids, and I would participate in seasonal work.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Kiribati

“Most married women aren’t granted permission to go by their husbands, so the majority stay back.”

Community member, rural Vanuatu

Family members were also the most common source of a loan (or gift) to help cover up-front costs of participation. As noted above, most women participated to support their families. The result at the household level was that poor household living standards provided a powerful motivation to participate. In addition, some respondents (particularly in Tonga) said that having many extended family members reliant on them for financial support further added to their motivation to join a program.

Ability to Travel With a Family Member or as a Community-Based Group

Given these family concerns, some women said they would only participate if they could travel with immediate family members, particularly their husbands. Notably, about half of the female seasonal work participants in Tonga and Vanuatu had been able to travel with a family member, such as their husband, father, sibling, or cousin. This was cited as a significant enabler of their participation. In many cases, recruitment focused on particular locations so that workers could travel as part of a community-based group. This was highlighted as an essential enabler.

“My brother had a contract with the farm, and it wanted people from one village.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

“Going in groups would help because they could help each other instead of someone going on their own.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Tonga

Community Level

Gender Norms and Community Perceptions Around the Appropriateness of Women’s Participation

Socio-cultural norms inhibit women’s participation, particularly the view that married women (especially mothers) should focus on their traditional home-based roles.¹⁹ Similar views and cultural barriers have been recorded in previous studies of Pacific labor migration (Bailey, 2014; Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020; World Bank, 2018). While customary kinship support systems across the Pacific provide important sources of childcare, women continue to be the primary household caregivers in PICs, spending more than three times as many hours on unpaid care work as men (Pacific Women, 2020). In addition, only men were considered physically capable of undertaking seasonal labor. As a result, very few positions in the labor programs were viewed as ‘suitable for women.’ At the household level, this view is primarily related to women’s traditional homemaker roles and perceptions that immoral conduct and family breakdown would result. Upon return, many female workers said they were the subject of community gossip and suspicion and, in some cases, felt excluded from their previous social networks.

¹⁹ While customary kinship and family support systems across the Pacific provide important sources of childcare, and institutional early childhood care and education have increased in PICs, women still continue to be the primary household caregivers, spending more than three times as many hours on unpaid care work as men (Pacific Women, 2020). In Kiribati, Tonga, and Vanuatu, preprimary (gross) school enrollment was 89, 48, and 100 percent, respectively, in 2020 (World Development Indicators).

Many female and male respondents said that when married women worked abroad, they often had affairs that resulted in family breakdowns. The field data provided evidence that gendered norms in home countries remain strong despite increasing exposure to 'outside influences.' While there were mixed views across survey respondents on the merits of female participation, a common perception in their favor was that women were 'responsible' and family focused. It was believed that women would therefore make good use of the opportunity. This highlights different norms and perceptions about women's participation, one that inhibits women's participation and one that promotes it.

Community attitudes towards male participation in temporary labor programs were generally favorable. Men were less likely than women to face negative moral judgment or gossip due to their decision to participate or their absence overseas.

"I think some (people) in our village have the same view as me about how women should just stay home because that is their place."

Female community member, rural Tonga

Support from Community Leaders, Including Formal Consent Letters

Support from community leaders at home was another critical enabler of women's participation. Only a few women (in Vanuatu) specifically mentioned the requirement to obtain consent letters from community leaders such as pastors and chiefs, who are generally male. This process is intended to ensure workers are of good character and have consulted their family and community about intended absences. Tongan government informants confirmed this is a standard part of their recruitment process. One Tongan woman said that her town officer selected the participants from that village. On occasion, community funds were also a source of pre-departure loans.

Support from the Diaspora and Locals in Destination Communities

In destination countries, local communities (especially Pacific diaspora) frequently provided valued support and practical assistance during workers' placements – such as greeting new arrivals with food and clothing and organizing cultural and religious events. This is consistent with other research into the important role of diaspora in supporting Pacific labor migrants (Nishitani et al., 2023; World Bank, 2021). The majority of female participants also said that relations with other workers were generally good, and their overall experience of working in a multicultural setting was positive.

"The Tongan community also assisted us by providing food when we arrived despite the fact that we do not know each other. From there, we helped each other; they loved us. In shopping centers, they paid for our groceries if they knew that we are Tongans."

Male seasonal worker, urban Tonga

However, interaction with the host community was sometimes limited, either because of geography (isolated farms) or through employer restrictions, particularly on women – for instance, forbidding the female workers to go out and participate in leisure and recreational activities outside of work. Similar issues around social isolation and restrictions have been reported elsewhere (Petrou and Connell, 2018; Stead, 2019; Tazreiter et al., 2016). Overall, male workers reported participating in a greater variety of local activities such as sporting competitions, while women were more likely to be involved in church groups and cultural events.

Macro Level

Motivators and enablers at the macro level included economic factors, such as high unemployment and low salaries in home countries; social and cultural factors such as norms and expectations around extended family support structures (ensuring members from sending households would be looked after); and international connectivity – knowing that workers and their families could remain in close contact through telephone and internet. Reliable and reasonably priced communications were not available for all participants, with internet connectivity especially challenging in the outer islands of Kiribati.

Negative perceptions in the destination countries were suggested as a possible constraint on future recruitment. In particular, several respondents felt that 'bad behavior' (such as male drunkenness) by previous cohorts of workers might lead to employer reluctance to hire more workers from their country. These fears were confirmed by previous studies that document employers either changing hiring practices in response to worker behavior or threatening to do so (Petrou and Connell, 2018; Smith, 2015).

Finally, COVID-19 had constrained recent participation due to border closures and indirectly because people were worried about traveling overseas and potentially becoming ill. Other studies highlight the mixed impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on how Pacific Islanders perceived labor mobility opportunities, with some very concerned about the risks of travel, while others were strongly in favor of resuming the schemes (Stead and Petrou, 2022). While both men and women expressed fears about contracting COVID-19 if they traveled, some men said the pandemic motivated them to seek seasonal work because of the severe economic impacts on their home country and community. Others had benefited from border closures, meaning they could stay longer overseas and earn more. Border closures during COVID-19 also brought about family tensions due to seasonal workers not being able to return home, and family members worrying about workers who were stuck in Australia/New Zealand and unable to return. At the same time, men and women reported that COVID-19 has not impacted their motivation or desire to participate in seasonal work. They hoped to return once travel restrictions were lifted.

“Because of COVID we were afraid, so we forced the farmer to send us back before the end of our contract. The farmer doesn't want to employ us again.”

Male seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu



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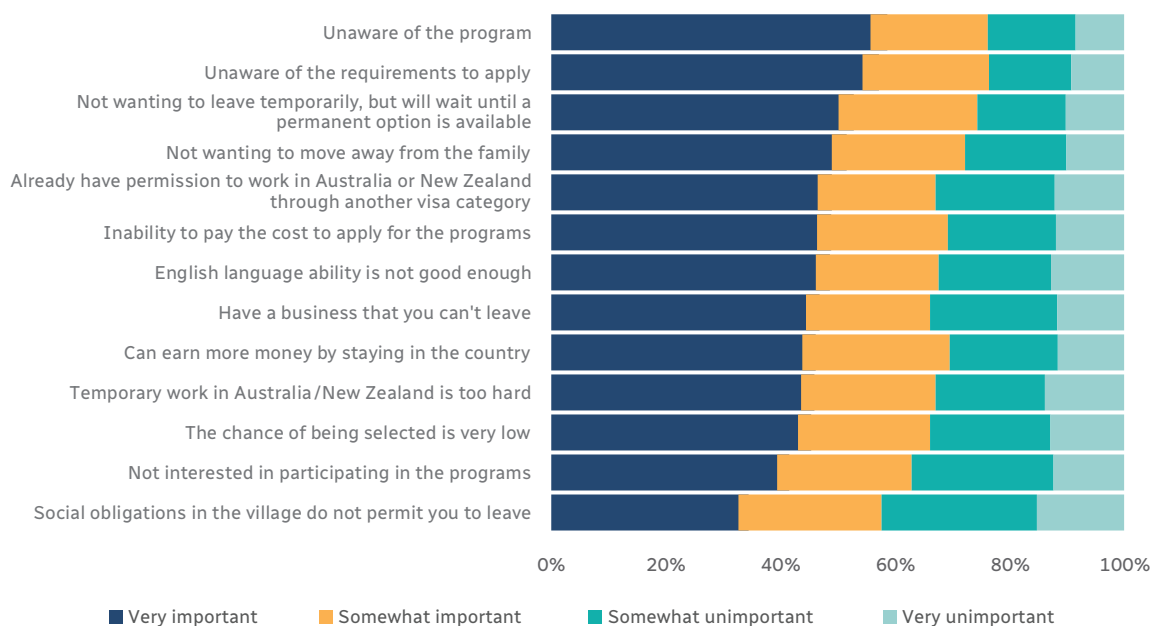
Demand-Side Factors

Institutional Level

Access to Information and Recruitment Process/Arrangements

A key factor affecting participation at the institutional level was access to information on available programs and recruitment processes, especially for women because they spent more time at home rather than out in the in the community. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of personal connections in accessing seasonal work opportunities (Curtain, 2018; Smith, 2015; World Bank, 2017a). For example, most seasonal workers surveyed by the World Bank (2017a) in 2015 heard about the SWP through friends (45 percent), family (24 percent), and community leaders (4 percent). Findings from the PLMS indicate that a large share of women and men did not apply to the labor mobility schemes due to a lack of awareness about the program (56 percent) and the requirements to apply (54 percent) (Figure 6). Survey responses were virtually identical between rural and urban locations. Data from the qualitative interviews indicate that social media sites, mainly Facebook, and word of mouth through friends and other community members were cited as the primary channels that respondents learned about seasonal work schemes. Many respondents across the categories felt women and men have equal access to information about the schemes; however, these sources differ by gender. For example, men are more likely to learn about opportunities by participating in community forums and events. In contrast, women are less active in community forums due to their preoccupation with tasks in the household. They, therefore, tend to hear about work schemes through connections with other women who have participated and are, in turn, more reliant on personal connections than men.

FIGURE 6. Reasons for not trying to work under the SWP, PLS, or RSE programs



Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Household Survey.

Some participants said the pre-departure training did not adequately prepare them for the work or the broader requirements and challenges. This is consistent with previous studies. Access to pre-departure briefings themselves can vary, as can the duration of training and material covered, and is largely a function of funding (World Bank, 2017a). At least one worker interviewed had the location and type of work change at short notice, so her training did not match the new role. Pastoral care services were available to participants during their placements, however awareness of these was somewhat patchy. For instance, few of the Tongan and ni-Vanuatu female participants knew about the welfare hotline available to workers in Australia, whereas most i-Kiribati were aware.

Yet, recruitment and pre-departure arrangements for other female participants were considered relatively straightforward and manageable. This was the perception of most of the female Tongan seasonal workers interviewed. As reported by key community informants, the Tongan government has established standard recruitment and pre-departure training procedures. These include community outreach, worker registration, screening, police and medical checks, visa applications, and verification checks. Pre-departure training generally takes five days, and then the workers fly out.

In Kiribati, too, there was a comment that requirements were 'easier' than in the past (though it was unclear if processes had changed or respondents had become more familiar with them over time). The fact that employers paid airfares and related travel costs, and generally provided a cash advance on arrival was appreciated (although noting these had to be repaid later). Most women found the pre-departure training useful (with caveats outlined below).

Recruitment arrangements that drew on personal or family ties, or relationships with existing participants, were mentioned by some as a factor that had helped them to participate. Recommendations from existing or previous workers who demonstrate a good attitude are taken seriously by employers. For instance, employers feel more comfortable employing relatives and friends of their workers if they highly recommend them for recruitment in countries that do not have strict 'equity' clauses in the recruitment process.

Costs and Complexity of the Application Process and Requirements

Many female and male participants reported finding the pre-departure and application process difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. Common challenges included: understanding what was required; language barriers and literacy challenges hindering workers' ability to complete forms; and high fees associated with obtaining documents, including passports, medical and police clearances, and visas. This was particularly mentioned in Kiribati and Vanuatu, especially by respondents from outer islands. Other elements of the recruitment process that caused difficulties included complex application forms (challenging for those with lower language or literacy proficiency, e.g., in Vanuatu) and demanding physical fitness tests that seemed more appropriate for males and were not commensurate with the type of work that women would be doing. Recruitment and pre-departure requirements, particularly fitness tests, were not considered a barrier for men. Fewer men expressed reservations around contract duration, and it was clear that men had more options in terms of 'suitable' work, including more senior or technically demanding roles.

"It was difficult for me to fill the documents because I only attended school until class 6."

Female seasonal worker, urban Vanuatu

Gender Bias in the Recruitment Process

There was also a common view among seasonal workers that recruitment processes strongly favored men. Such stereotypes have been documented in previous studies, and in some instances have been reinforced by host country policies. For example, in New Zealand the Ministry of Social Development has placed restrictions on RSE employment in pack houses, preferring to prioritize local workers for these jobs (Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020). Recruitment agents and individual interviewees often expressed an understanding that only men had the necessary (physical) capacity and were required by the employers. For example, reports that significantly fewer women pass fitness examinations suggest these are more geared towards male capabilities. A few community informants and agents said they deliberately steered away from recommending women to avoid the 'issues' (infidelity, pregnancies, family breakdown) they believed would otherwise result. The PLMS worker survey found that 29 of male and 33 percent of female migrant workers perceived that the local selection process discriminates against women (Figure 5).

“Through a fitness test organized by our agent, out of a total of 50 plus women, only 4 of us made it through...and of the men, there were around 100 plus.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

“We decided to send more men than women, just to limit the issues (around infidelity and pregnancy). These issues, both men and women are involved. But we limit the intake of women, so we don't have too many issues like that happening.”

Key informant, Vanuatu

Most employers interviewed say they are dissuaded from hiring women due to the potential for pregnancy during temporary work placements. Issues around pregnancy increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions as workers could not return home (Bedford and Bailey, 2022). Pregnancy tests are conducted for most females recruited as part of medical checks, and all those who test positive are disqualified (on physical fitness grounds). This complicates visa and employment compliance for three reasons. First, pregnant women are thought to be not healthy and fit for work. Second, the health insurance cover for the program excludes pre-existing health conditions, and there is a waiting period for new conditions such as pregnancy. Third, pregnant or nursing workers become the employer's responsibility, which is difficult when employers are also providing pastoral care for multiple other workers. It is important to note that given the short-term nature of Pacific labor migration work schemes, workers under the SWP, RSE, and PLS are not subject to paid maternity leave. In addition, worksites do not provide on-site childcare facilities.

“Last week, we also lost a lady since we found out that she was five months pregnant. She didn’t want to miss the opportunity but didn’t help us by forging her way through. Showing negative pregnancy tests is a requirement, so some women try to evade pregnancy tests by sending their other family members (such as female cousins) to do the test. One person came five months pregnant, and now as the employer, I am supposed to help her and manage her... Across my three farms, we have five pregnant ladies: three were pregnant when they arrived, two have been pregnant (since) arrival, which is another issue.”

Approved Employer, Australia

Certain jobs emphasize specific physical characteristics, such as height, as a hiring condition which may disqualify some women. This is only applicable for particular task types such as berry picking, which requires workers to be above a minimum height. Some farms, such as citrus and melon, also require more muscular workers, disadvantaging women. Automation at the workplace further undermines female participation in bigger farms. This is especially the case where most of the labor needs for 'female-suited' tasks are being met through mechanization.

“Gender is not equally spaced across the board in all industries. Some have practical difficulties. Fieldwork for citrus is exceedingly hard work and exceedingly onerous work. Workers carry 20 kilos on the pouch in front of them for hours.”

Approved Employer, Australia

“The only challenge is the height issue... For raspberries and blackberries picking, we need people to be a little bit on the taller side. Anyone below about 1.50 will very, very much struggle with reaching the blackberries and raspberries... We have a lot of very, very capable people who are 140 centimeters tall and so do not meet our criteria. We will be setting them up to fail if we allow them to come.”

Approved Employer, Australia

“Although we need people in our pack sheds, a lot of those pack sheds are automated, so fewer people are needed. The packing shed that could take more females now requires fewer people due to automation. So instead of say 100 female workers, they will only need say 20.”

Approved Employer, Australia

Having said this, the study finds that employers are increasingly recognizing the value of women workers and have overcome bias about the types of roles that women might be able to take on. Previous studies have documented similar attitudes among RSE employers (Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020). Almost all employers interviewed see significant potential for females to be more efficient than men in many areas.

“We found that females have more attention to detail, so we want to use them more and even let them supervise.”

Approved Employer, Australia

“Women are more hard-working, almost no time off, very committed. Men have more time off, less productive.”

Recognised Seasonal Employer, New Zealand

“For berries, our female farmers are some of the best. They have quick and soft hands, so they don’t bruise the berries. And we found that female workers do better.”

Approved Employer, Australia

Availability of Accommodation Facilities Suitable for Women

When employers could not offer adequate accommodation facilities for women, they steered away from hiring women. Employers said that smaller companies often do not have separate housing facilities for women, making it harder for them to hire them. In addition, employers are worried about female workers’ safety when companies are located in remote locations.

“We need bigger places to take on women and men because they’d have the capacity to provide separate facilities for women and men. Smaller companies just can’t do this. Getting the accommodation approved by the labor department is very hard as it’s highly regulated, so it’s not easy to just add more (women).”

Recognised Seasonal Employer, New Zealand

“Accommodation is often in the middle of nowhere. I would be concerned if there are only women living there. But a mix is acceptable. Employers have to consider a lot of those (factors).”

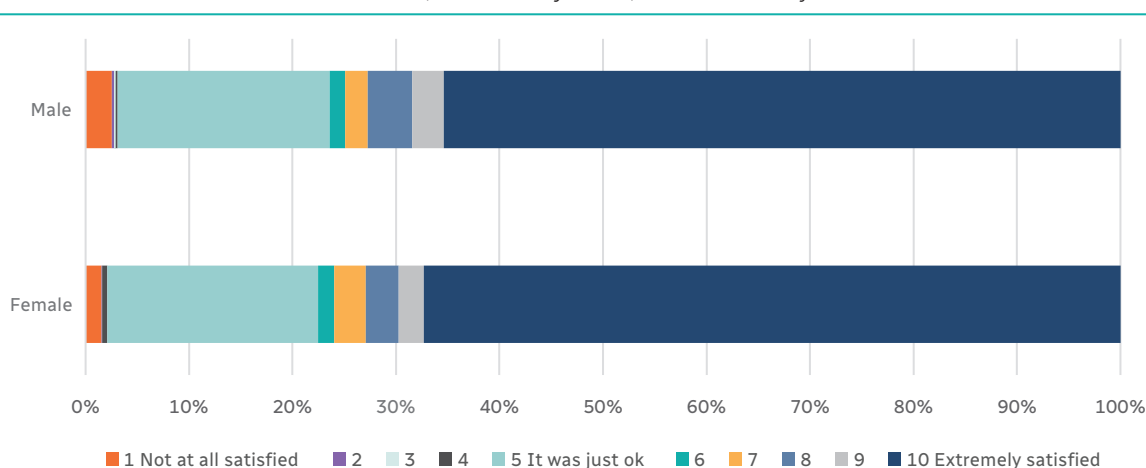
Approved Employer, Australia

Concerns Over Contract Conditions, Pay, and Deductions During Employment

Overall, most men and women workers felt positive about their experience working in Australia/New Zealand. This is consistent with previous studies of worker satisfaction (World Bank, 2017a, 2021). Respondents reported that what they liked most about their experience was the exposure to new work experience, the pay, and exploring new places. The quantitative data indicates that 65 and 67 percent of male and female workers surveyed, respectively, were 'extremely satisfied' with their experience (Figure 7). A small share of workers reported dissatisfaction due to unfavourable workplace conditions (accommodation, deductions, contract conditions) and discriminatory attitudes from employers.

FIGURE 7. Workers' satisfaction with their work experience

Overall, how satisfied are you with your current job? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 = Not at all satisfied; 5 = It was just ok; 10 = Extremely satisfied



Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

Many women raised concerns around contracts and work conditions. Some said the contract length was simply 'too long' for them to contemplate leaving their children behind. Shorter contracts were more attractive to women, especially where female participants are married and have children, as they are less disruptive to women's family responsibilities. Shorter contracts were also reported as a mitigating factor for issues that could arise overseas such as fluctuating work hours. The lack of provision for married female workers to travel together with their husbands (and children) was a further impediment. A high share of PIC migrant workers surveyed expressed a preference for bringing their families to Australia and New Zealand during their work placement (Figure 8). Regardless of gender or nationality, avoiding family separation was the key reason for this wish, while accessing education for their children was also very important for workers from Vanuatu and Tonga.

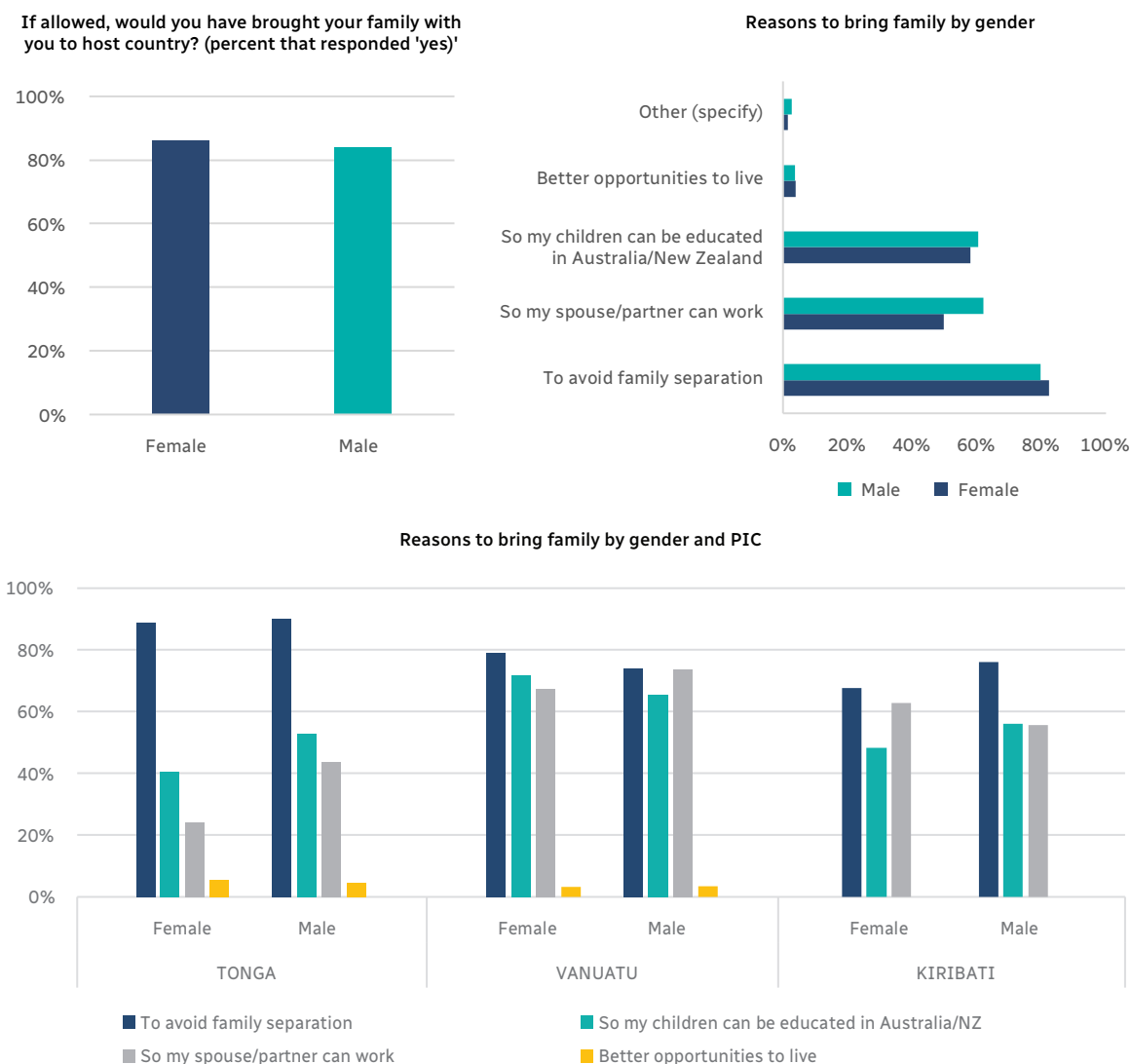
“Sometimes we have shorter hours and not enough earning for our living, accommodation, transport, and our remittances.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Kiribati

“December was the only time that raspberry was ripe because it was the summertime and we would go early and finish late, but when it was not good, we would only work from 7am to 8am and then by 9am we had no other work and would just be sitting there doing nothing until it was time to go back home. Rent was still being deducted, although we were only being paid for the short hours. I think Australia should have just been three months, and then we came back and just waited for when it was time to pick the raspberry. Time in Australia was too long compared to the work, I think.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Tonga

FIGURE 8. Workers’ preferences about bringing family to Australia and New Zealand



Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

A few specific instances were raised around inflexible contracts. This meant the workers could not move to a new location or return home when the available work dried up – leaving them out of pocket for living expenses. Similar concerns over fluctuating work hours and earnings alongside continuing deductions and living expenses have been reported in previous studies of labor mobility schemes (Petrou and Connell, 2018; Williams, 2010). Other workers interviewed had been made redundant or had their working hours unexpectedly reduced, resulting in income loss. In one case, this related to a short picking season. This posed a challenge regarding savings potential and workers' ability to cover living expenses, with these costs independent of work availability.

“When it would rain for a whole week, the men would not be able to work, meaning we could not pack as well, leaving our pockets empty at the end of the week, but compulsory deductions still happened, cutting down on our savings.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

Some seasonal workers stated they did not fully understand their employment conditions, particularly pay and deductions. This lack of understanding is likely related to inadequate pre-departure training (World Bank, 2017a), language issues, and poorly-worded contracts (Holani, 2017). Recent research by the ILO (2022) similarly found that Pacific seasonal workers often complained about high pay deductions and a lack of understanding about how pay deductions were calculated. The prospect of higher earnings through temporary migration was a clear motivator for participation, and the employer pre-paid, up-front costs such as airfares. Most also provided a cash advance on arrival to assist with settling in and tide workers over until their first payday. These were critical enabling factors. However, transport costs and advances were then deducted from the first few wage payments, and employer-arranged accommodation and food were also charged. These (and possibly other) deductions sometimes resulted in dissatisfaction over low pay and a lack of transparency. A few workers also mentioned a lack of clarity around superannuation deductions and rule changes. The quantitative data mirrored the qualitative findings, revealing that three of the top five reasons for worker dissatisfaction were related to earnings being lower than expected and deductions being too high and non-transparent (Figure 9). Survey data indicates that there was little difference between schemes and gender, with the top reasons for dissatisfaction with the seasonal schemes being lower than expected earnings and working hours, while male RSE workers thought the work was too physically taxing. PLS workers similarly indicated that the main issues with their employment were that work was either too physically demanding or their earnings were lower than expected.

“We also had problems with our superannuation withdrawn. We were told that we had to work certain hours to be entitled to a certain amount of superannuation which was very different from what we had before. Again, they were unable to explain to us so that it was clear why these changes also happened to our superannuation.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

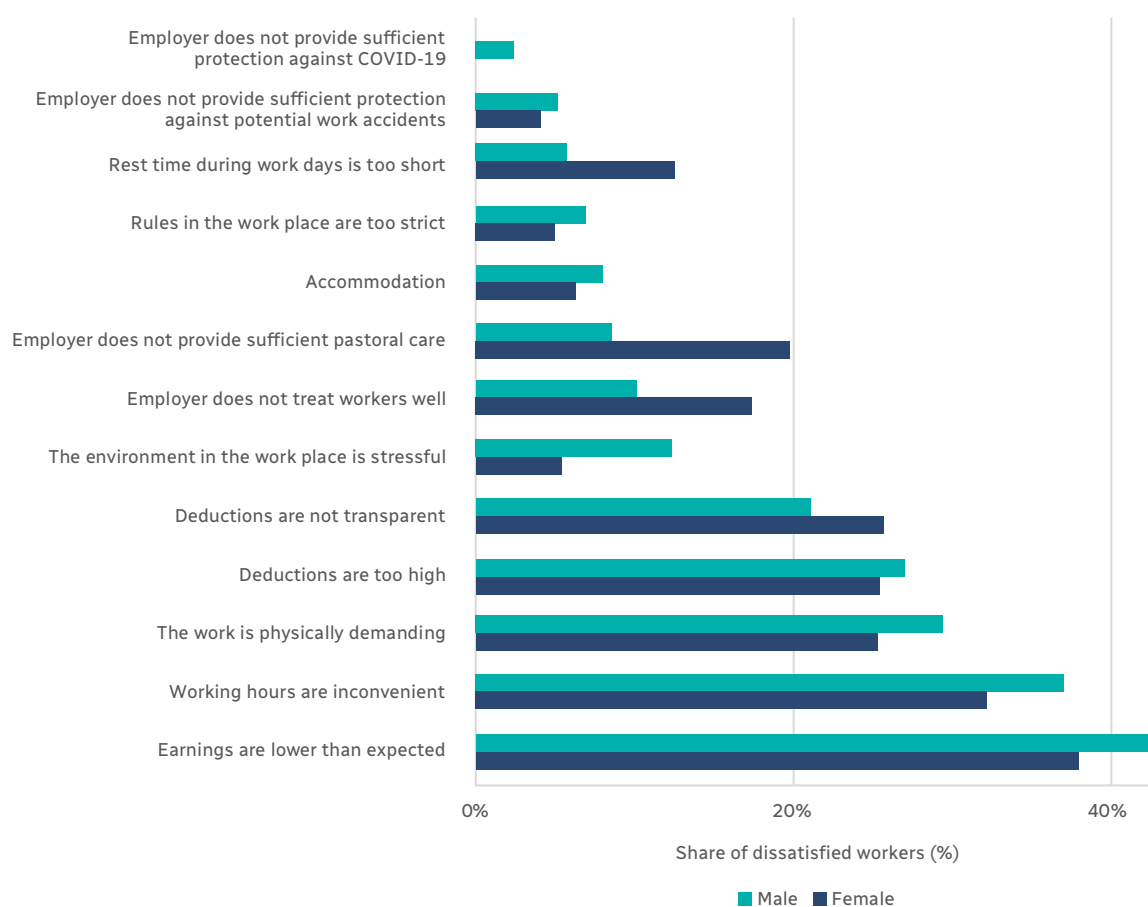
“Yes, our company was not good, and there were too many deductions from our pay, approximately. Our spending is between \$NZ 120–280 monthly, and our deductions can be \$NZ 600+ monthly. Also, we were accommodated in a hotel, and we did not have any options to not eat from the hotel.”

Male seasonal worker, rural Kiribati

“I didn’t like the deductions, and I need to know how much they are deducting from my payment and what for.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Vanuatu

FIGURE 9. Workers reasons for dissatisfaction with Pacific labor mobility schemes



Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

Inadequate Health Insurance

Medical insurance was a particular concern mentioned by several women and men participants. Issues around health insurance and facilities that are inadequate or difficult to access have been reported elsewhere, as has the reluctance of workers to attend health care appointments due to fears over missing work and expenses (Bailey, 2009; Holani, 2017; Smith, 2015; Tazreiter et al., 2016). Some workers interviewed said they were told they would have access to Medicare in Australia. Once they realized this was incorrect and that their insurance did not cover routine health care, most tried to avoid doctor visits. Over one-third of male participants reported struggling when becoming ill or injured because of this coverage gap. Similarly, many seasonal workers were unaware of welfare services (i.e., migrant settlement services, social integration services, GBV hotline and referral services, grievance redress services) available to them, and those that did felt they were ineffective. Results of the quantitative survey showed that when they faced issues, the majority of workers approached team leaders (52 percent), employer (32 percent), while around 20 and 7 percent did so with the liaison officer and the Fair Work Ombudsman, respectively (Figure 10).

“\$300+ was taken out for our insurance for medical, but we weren’t covered when we went to the hospital/clinic. When we asked, our supervisor told us it would only apply if we went and became patients in the hospital and were hurt from work. We were not satisfied.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Tonga

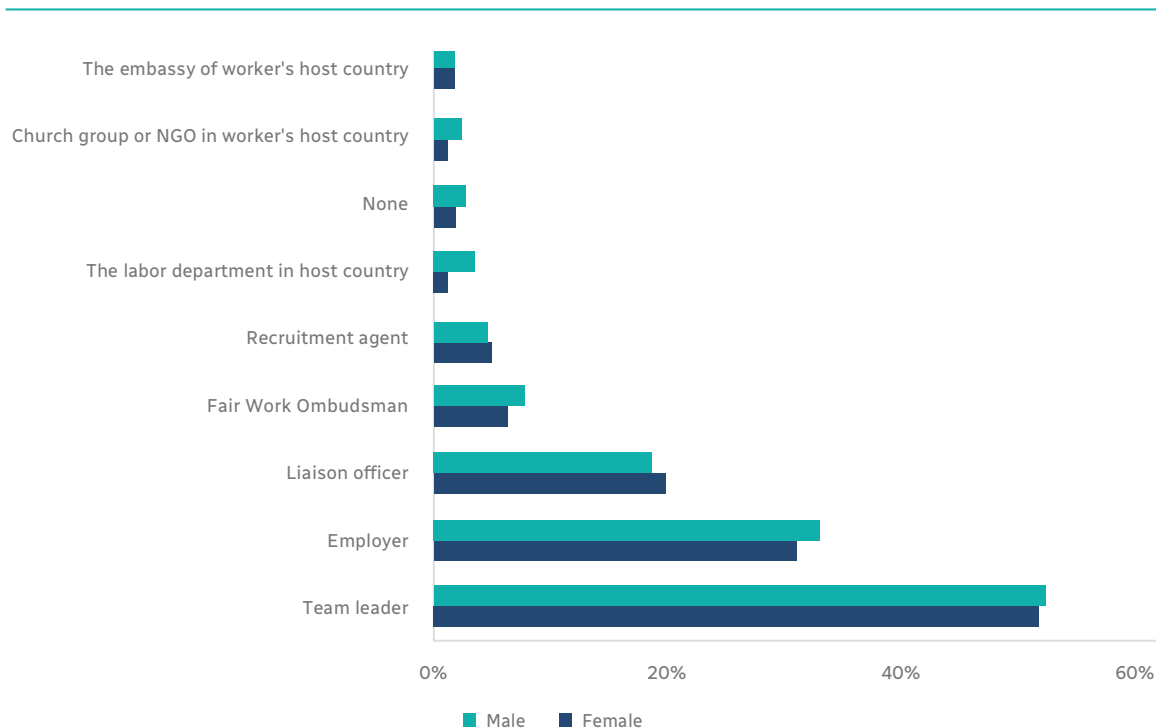
“I have never come across a hotline for the welfare of workers.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Vanuatu

“At one point, I was hospitalized and couldn’t afford to pay my hospital bills. I was shocked by the hospital cost; the total amount was around \$4,000. I had to let my family know of the situation and not send money but concentrate on paying off my hospital bills. The difficulty is that my insurance can’t pay for my bills...so I had to pay on my own. But I managed to pay off that bill.”

Female PLS worker, Vanuatu

FIGURE 10. Workers' choice of who to lodge complaints to
In case you want to complain or report an issue related to your working or living conditions, who would you complain or report to?



Source: World Bank, 2022, Labor Mobility Omnibus – Migrant Worker Survey.

The issue of health insurance cover was also brought up by employers who said current arrangements were inadequate to meet women’s sexual and reproductive health needs due to the clause of ‘pre-existing health conditions’. All employers agreed that significant financial and worker welfare repercussions might fall to the employer to deal with due to this gap. Such issues are not well-addressed in current program arrangements and government policies. Employers complained that the government does not offer adequate support for workers and employers when there are ‘out of the box’ scenarios, such as occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Another thing that complicates the matter is that health insurance does not cover anyone who comes to the program pregnant. It means they have to take care of the cost of their health. They have to pay upfront for all the costs of the child. Where do we house them then? Is it fair for a worker to have a baby when they are living with four other ladies?”

Approved Employer, Australia

“For pregnant women, we have to take time out to take them to their appointments. It is time-consuming. We do not put on additional pastoral care for pregnant ladies, so all other workers lose out on the pastoral care we have. We have had to rearrange our entire accommodation so that the pregnant women do not inconvenience the other 300 seasonal workers.”

Approved Employer, Australia

“The lack of support from the Australian Government to cover hospital costs, immunization costs, and welfare support are deplorable. It is very poor. Approved employers cover the cost. But that’s for the employers who keep the workers. We have many female workers having \$A 20,000 hospital bills because they are stranded here and cannot return home.”

Approved Employer, Australia

Gendered Division of Work

Most seasonal workers stated that men and women do the same work. However, only men were cited as being able to do more senior roles and technical tasks, including supervisory positions, operating machinery, and delivery activities. These divisions were primarily derived from the differing levels of physicality involved in work tasks, with men tending to take on work tasks that involved more physical labor or being outside, for example, pruning or cutting trees, operating machinery, and women with 'lighter' or indoor tasks, such as fruit picking, packing, and wrapping produce in warehouses. These differences in jobs assigned to women and men are not necessarily negative. Many respondents feel this is fair, with the role division suiting women's and men's respective abilities and interests. Both women and men rationalized this due to perceptions that men are 'stronger' and better able to cope with harsh weather conditions. However, some female seasonal workers stated that women might want to be given the same opportunities as men to take on more technical and leadership roles.

“Because men are physically stronger and fitter than women so they are assigned the heavy-duty tasks while women do the lighter tasks.”

Male seasonal worker, urban Vanuatu

“If women were allowed to learn they can do the same.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Kiribati

Concerns Over Living Conditions and Personal Safety

Women participants’ most cited concern was their living conditions and personal safety during their placements, mainly where women and men shared accommodation. Many workers reported accommodation facilities were shared between both female and male workers. This presented a myriad of risks, the most concerning of which are sexual harassment experienced by female workers and feeling unsafe due to being accommodated in shared facilities with men. Instances of sexual harassment are likely underreported. Similarly, if women are seen as the cause of infidelity and if they can be the cause of gossip because of marriage dissolution, this would dissuade women from reporting sexual harassment. In addition, shared accommodation provided a source of rumors concerning affairs, which poses issues for workers’ reputations and their relationships with partners at home. Women also reported frustration at the amount of noise men would make, which disrupted their rest time. In addition, workers said poor conditions at some accommodation facilities were not suitable for living comfortably. Some men also expressed concerns over shared accommodation during their placements; however, whereas this was a safety issue for the women, the problem for men (at least those from Tonga) related to unwanted ‘temptations.’ Male and female migrant workers surveyed in the quantitative survey stated that the main reason for dissatisfaction with worker accommodations was that they were too crowded (69 percent and 83 percent of male and female respondents, respectively) (Figure 11).

“Another problem is that our rooms can’t be locked from the inside.”

Approved Employer, Australia

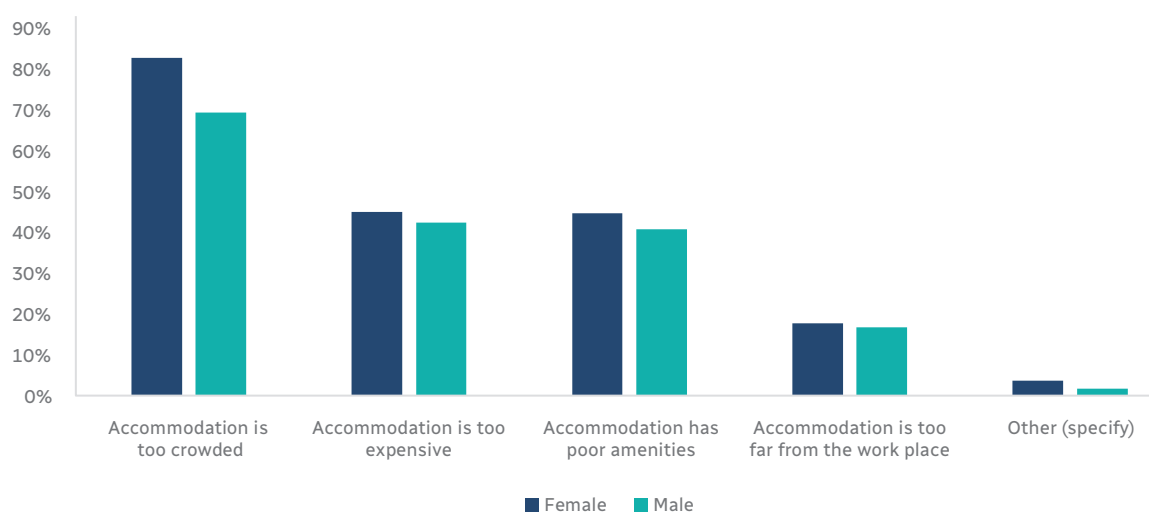
“Our living environment and accommodation arrangements were unsuitable for women and men. We were over 200 people, and there were only three toilets and three bathrooms for the women. The men also have three toilets and three bathrooms. I don’t like walking to the toilet and bathroom outside of the place we sleep.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Vanuatu

“I thought we would stay in different locations, men and women, but I was surprised we all stayed in one building. Our group leaders approved our request to be in separate buildings, but the owner did not accept it. As a result, many families broke up.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

FIGURE 11. Reasons for worker dissatisfaction with accommodation in host country
What are you not satisfied with?



Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

Gender identity can further complicate accommodation requirements. According to one employer, at least three Samoan ‘male’²⁰ workers who were recruited in 2021 revealed upon arrival to the farms that they identified as females and would not share rooms with males. Other females were also uncomfortable with sharing rooms with persons they considered to be male.

Bullying, Discrimination, or Unfair Treatment at Work

While the majority of female and male workers reported being treated fairly by employers and the host country (Figure 12), the qualitative study revealed some workplace issues, which included perceptions of bullying, discrimination, or unfair treatment at work reported by both men and women. For example, seasonal workers described being mistreated by colleagues and employers at the workplace, citing discriminatory attitudes and the way employers spoke to workers. A few women reported sexual harassment in the workplace but were not explicit about the details. For Tongan workers being required to work on Sundays was cited as a problem, given their strong religious beliefs and practices. Around 40 percent of female and male workers surveyed said they would prefer to work for a different employer in the future (Figure 12).

“Yes, we felt we were bullied by the supervisor...he always picked on you. When the counting was wrong, it was always us, and then I had to fight to make it correct because the error was from another worker from a different island.”

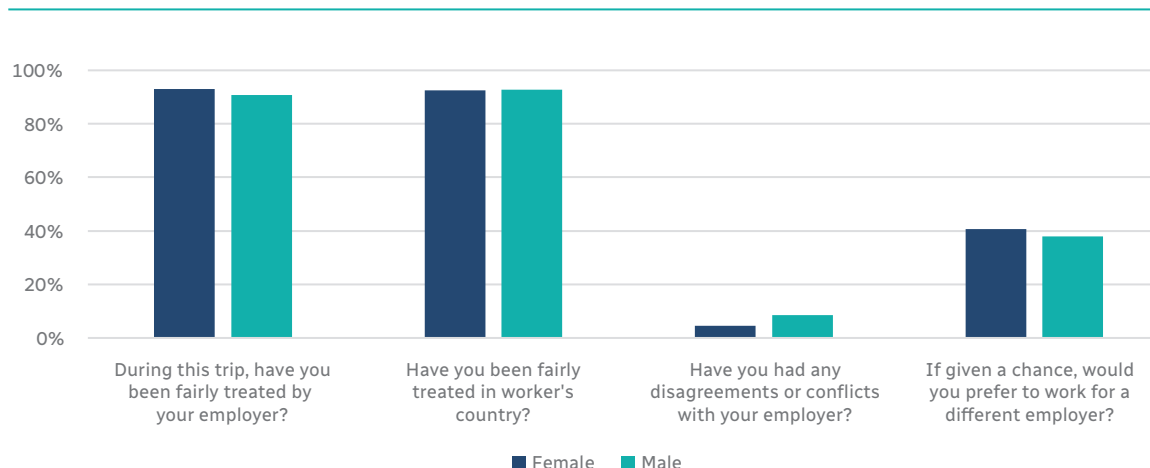
Female seasonal worker, urban Kiribati



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²⁰ In traditional Samoan society, 'fa'afafine' are people who identify themselves as having a third gender or non-binary gender. An integral part of Samoan culture, fa'afafine are assigned male at birth, and explicitly embody both masculine and feminine gender traits in a way unique to Polynesia.

FIGURE 12. Workers assessment of treatment by employer
Share of female and male workers that responded 'Yes'



Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

Issues Remitting Money Back Home

Seasonal workers encountered some problems in sending money back home. This included remittances sometimes taking longer to process when the amount of money is bigger, or a shortage of cash at the ATM in Kiribati (for instance), and there were challenges in sending money to family members living on outer islands. In addition, seasonal workers complained of poor currency exchange rates which contributed to feeling that they were losing money and sending back less than they had hoped, which led to several workers choosing not to transfer funds home while working overseas. Such issues around remittance costs are longstanding, and previous research suggests that government efforts to promote knowledge about remittance costs and options have had limited success (World Bank, 2017a). Furthermore, workers employed in remote towns may have limited access to and options in terms of MTOs, meaning they cannot 'shop around' for lower fees (World Bank, 2021).

"Our currency rate is too high so if I send money over it'll decrease. For example, if I send VT 10,000 my family will receive probably VT 7,000"

Male seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

"Yes, my family lives on the outer island, and there is no Western Union so I have to find someone to take the money and transfer it to the island."

Male seasonal worker, rural Kiribati

The Gender Effects of Seasonal Work Programs

This section explores the positive and negative gender effects of temporary labor migration on women, their households, and local communities in PICs (Table 3).

The study's results uphold several findings of previous studies on the effects of Pacific labor migration schemes. Prior studies emphasize that the schemes have delivered significant economic benefits to workers' households and communities, enabling improvements in the lives of workers and their families by providing money for school fees, housing improvements, community projects, or recovery after cyclones. For example, previous research into the SWP found that the scheme had a significant impact on household savings. Over a six-month employment stint, the average SWP worker transferred \$A 6,650 in savings at the end of their stay (World Bank, 2017). Likewise, impact assessments of the RSE found that the program benefitted participants with increases in per capita incomes, expenditure, savings, and subjective well-being, with some evidence of small positive spillover benefits to their communities in the form of public goods (Gibson and McKenzie, 2014; Bedford and Nunns, 2020). In Tonga, the proportion of school-age children enrolled and attending classes was 7.7 percent higher for households involved in the SWP. In addition, several evaluations have found that returning SWP and RSE workers made monetary contributions to local churches and schools and upgraded community infrastructure (World Bank, 2017a; Gibson and McKenzie, 2014; Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020; Bailey, 2014; Dun et al., 2020).

The study also validates previous evidence of the effects of women's participation in Pacific labor migration schemes on their agency and empowerment.

Female seasonal workers interviewed as part of the World Bank's (2018) social assessment of the SWP reported positive changes resulting from gaining new skills and knowledge, including increased levels of financial literacy, English language proficiency, leadership and entrepreneurial skills, as well as improved ability to control and manage household finances, and coordination between spouses on the way money is spent. The assessment found shifting views on gender roles regarding 'who does what' in the household, as survey respondents reported that it is acceptable for 'good' husbands to

help their wives with household chores such as cooking, cleaning, washing, and looking after the children when the wife participates in seasonal migration programs. Some studies have also highlighted that male seasonal migration may enhance women's agency and empowerment due to wives taking up new roles and responsibilities and women's increased control of income, resulting in increased household power. For example, in Samoa, women noted that such empowerment has come from performing traditionally male roles, such as learning to drive so they can take their children to school or visiting town to shop in their husband's absence (Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020). The World Bank's (2018) assessment of the SWP found that wives of seasonal workers reported gaining more control of household finances as recipients of remittances. Other research has also pointed to wives of migrant workers embarking on new entrepreneurial ventures with SWP/RSE income (Holani, 2017; Bailey, 2014).

A key overall conclusion of this study is that women's participation in labor mobility schemes can help shift gender norms and relative bargaining power of women, favoring more gender egalitarianism. The study shows that women's labor migration experience increased their access to and control of financial resources and the acquisition of new knowledge and skills – e.g., farming techniques, organizational skills, financial management, and English language proficiency – which can help with future employability and new productive enterprises. Many female participants reported increased self-esteem, confidence, financial independence, and ambitious future aspirations, as well as increased collaborative decision-making between women and their spouses. It has enabled some women returnees (at least in Vanuatu) to leave unhappy or abusive relationships. Many women reported that their family relationships had improved, and more household responsibilities were shared as a result of labor mobility. However, the study revealed differences in female returnees' experiences between PICs. For example, there was a clear sense in Kiribati that returnees are expected to fit back into traditional roles. Nonetheless, and overall, community members reported that women had gained more prominence and visibility in community life as a result of labor mobility, and were taking on more active leadership roles.

Despite its benefits, participation in temporary labor migration has also been associated with social problems, including negative impacts on women and children who remain at home. The study substantiates many of the findings from previous studies. These include the increase of the work burden on the wives/partners of seasonal migrants, potential negative impacts on school attendance, and marital problems. Previous assessments of the SWP and RSE found workloads for women in Tonga and Vanuatu increased significantly, resulting in a 'double shift.' Wives often must work on subsistence farms, manage household budgets, care for children and the elderly, and engage in community and church-related work to facilitate men's participation in seasonal work (World Bank, 2018; Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020; Rohorua et al., 2009). Ethnographic studies by Smith (2016) and Bailey (2019) of RSE sending families have also found that women are filling in the labor burden of their absent husbands. In a recent study of the RSE, key informants reported children dropping out of school around age 14 due to the lack of parental support and guidance at a critical stage in their children's education. This was directly linked to the repeated seasonal absence of one or both parents (Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020; Smith, 2016). Likewise, an exploratory study of impacts on Tongan families in Lifuka, Ha'apai, by Moala-Tupou (2016) found children of RSE and SWP seasonal migrants aged 13–16 are more likely to have increased housework and farm work responsibilities during their parent's or older sibling's absence, reducing their time and energy available to devote to schoolwork.

The most widely reported negative aspects of women's and men's absence overseas were increased workload and stress on family members from sending households, and adverse outcomes for children – such as neglect, disciplinary, or behavioral problems. There were also numerous reports of family breakdown and increases in 'arguments' within the family. Another commonly raised issue at the community level was adverse perceptions, moral judgments, and gossip regarding participating women who had recently returned. This was especially marked when only a small number of women from that community participated. Other issues of concern were raised regarding male seasonal work, including men sometimes squandering their pay, especially on alcohol, and therefore having lower savings on return compared to women who were more family-focused in their spending and saving. More broadly, men's misuse of alcohol, drugs, and kava during and after work placements was widely seen as a problem for those individuals' health and the well-being of their families and communities upon return home.

Table 3. At-a-glance: Gendered impacts of female and male participation in Pacific labor migration schemes

	Impacts of female migration	Differences of female and male migration
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL	<p>Positive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved living standards, financial security, and the ability to make productive investments Women's control over income and decision-making power in the household Acquisition of new skills and personal attributes Enhanced self-confidence, self-determination, self-esteem, and future aspirations Ability to leave unhappy/abusive relationships <p>Negative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling homesick and missing family Potential lasting effects of sexual harassment experienced during placements 	<p>Positive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Men gained a wider range of skills, e.g., machinery operation Women benefit and contribute more because of their stronger family motivation <p>Negative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reports of male seasonal workers squandering their pay (e.g., on alcohol, drugs, and kava or 'extravagant'/unnecessary items) during and after work placements (impacting individual health and well-being) and contributing to family tensions)
HOUSEHOLD LEVEL	<p>Positive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic and material benefits to households Stronger family relationships and greater sharing of responsibilities <p>Negative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased workload/stress on family members from sending households Negative impacts on children's welfare, mainly in terms of discipline and behavioral issues Family breakdown, suspicions of infidelity 	<p>Neutral</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Male participants tend to invest their earnings and savings in business and asset acquisition, while women allocate their income to family goals like children's school fees <p>Negative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative community perceptions, moral judgments, and gossip affect women The adverse impacts on children are more significant when the absentee is the mother as often children are more dependent on their mothers for emotional support and day-to-day care
COMMUNITY LEVEL	<p>Positive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic and material benefits – including community assets and generating more local employment Greater prominence/visibility for women in the community New friendship/support groups of former work colleagues 	<p>Negative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women are more frequent targets of negative community perceptions, moral judgments, and gossip, but men are not completely spared Drugs and alcohol use, especially among men Some suggestions of localized labor shortages from male participation; are less for females

Positive Effects on Women, Households, and Local Communities

Individual Level

Improved Living Standards, Financial Security, and the Ability to Make Productive Investments

Regardless of gender, labor mobility participants emphasized the substantial financial and livelihood benefits that resulted from their overseas work. This is consistent with previous studies of the schemes that highlight the economic benefits of labor mobility (World Bank, 2017b, 2021; Gibson and McKenzie, 2014; Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020; Dun et al., 2020). In line with other research, many of the benefits reported in this study were deliberately targeted at the household and community level (i.e., paying children’s school fees, funding home improvements, building a house, buying a boat, establishing connections to electricity and water supply, contributing to church and community activities). The workers themselves gained higher living standards, access to labor-saving household items such as washing machines, improved mobility through vehicle purchases, and the financial security of having savings put away for future needs. It is noteworthy that male seasonal workers reported investing their income to fund businesses and purchase assets, including vehicles and livestock, while women’s income was more oriented towards family goals such as paying children’s school fees. There was a general sentiment across the categories of respondents that women are better at managing the income earned through seasonal work than men, with women’s use of income gaining greater endorsement from their communities.

“It really helped us. For us, our children’s school fees could be covered with no problems. We were able to extend and renovate our home. Sending money to my children in Ha’apai, we were able to do that every week because the pay was very good.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Tonga

“I see fathers do not think seriously about saving. Mothers who have gone have come back and do many things compared to fathers. They came back, bought land, and think seriously about doing things for their children.”

Community member, rural Vanuatu

Increased disposable income may also be creating a shift in household food sources with implications for culture and tradition. While respondents indicated most people still tend to rely on their gardens as their primary source of food, some have observed households that have participated in seasonal work are increasingly purchasing food from stores due to having more money. Similar observations have been made in previous studies of RSE participation (Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020; Craven, 2015). In Vanuatu, it was suggested that increasing consumption of store-bought food by some seasonal workers was undermining traditional ways of living, and could have broader cultural implications given the importance of gardens and subsistence practices to the community.

Savings from seasonal work helped some women and men set up businesses and acquire materials for productive endeavors. In Tonga, for example, three of the 36 women interviewed reported setting up small food canteens; some did tapa making and mat weaving, and one had a sewing business. A few others had new or expanded farms or had resumed wage employment. However, most focused on home duties and 'resting' between seasonal work placements. In Vanuatu, too, 24 of the 36 female respondents who had previously participated in seasonal work schemes reported they had been engaged in income-earning or livelihood activities since returning from their last seasonal work contract. Most felt their participation in seasonal work had assisted with this somehow. The majority were still doing the same activities before they left (growing and selling vegetables, working in a school canteen, working as a tailor, selling handicrafts). At the same time, five had embarked on new income-generating activities such as making pastries, selling them at roadside food stalls, and setting up a canteen. In Kiribati, 11 of the 12 female workers were engaged in the same activities they did before their work placement in Australia and New Zealand, such as sewing, home gardening, and shopkeeping. As for male seasonal workers, most were awaiting their subsequent seasonal work placement and engaged in income-generating activities such as fishing, money lending, home gardening, construction work, timber logging, etc.

"When I returned, I tried running a canteen to assist with our source of income and living and it has been going well up to now."

Female seasonal worker, urban Tonga

"I am now making local pastry and selling it at roadside food stalls. I am also helping my mum with her catering business."

Female seasonal worker, urban Vanuatu

"After participating I was able to purchase building tools that have improved my business, and now I am recognized by the government as a local construction business."

Male seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

Acquisition of New Skills and Personal Attributes

Nearly all female returnees reported having acquired new skills and personal attributes which were beneficial in their day-to-day lives and, in some cases, might help with future employability. In addition to job-specific skills – such as the grading and packing of fruit and agricultural skills – the most common improvements cited were English language, time management, financial management, and leadership skills. This is consistent with previous studies of labor mobility and skills acquisition (World Bank, 2017a). While not everyone was using the specific skills learned, many referred to better time use and structure and a new understanding of the importance of hard work. Some also commented on the personal benefits from interactions within their workgroup and with other diverse cultures.

“Yes, my English speaking, working with different personalities as well as endurance in working long hours (have improved). Also being able to communicate and being more productive with my time and looking for opportunities.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Tonga

“I am really satisfied because here in Vanuatu we are a bit slack on punctuality but working abroad teaches us about being more punctual and that there is a time for everything.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

“The skills I have gained will be helpful when I start my planned business selling seeds in Kiribati.”

Female PLS worker, Kiribati

Male workers have gained similar skills to women through seasonal work schemes, but have more opportunities to learn additional job-related skills. These job-related skills included operating heavy machinery and formal training supported by employers. Male respondents were also more likely to say that the skills gained while working overseas had been helpful for their gardening and subsistence-based activities back at home, improving existing businesses, and assisting in establishing new businesses.

“I also went to carpentry training, and I got a certificate. My boss paid for this training and also for my English class.”

Male seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

“Yes. I used my pruning skills here in Tonga for our garden.”

Male seasonal worker, urban Tonga

“I learned carpentry skills, use of hydraulic tools and electrical skill training and pruning skills.”

Male seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

Increased Self-Confidence, Self-Determination, Self-Esteem, and Future Aspirations

Many women also reported that their self-confidence, self-determination, and self-esteem had increased due to participation in labor mobility. This mirrors findings from previous studies (Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020; World Bank, 2018). Interestingly, this response was less common among i-Kiribati women. A greater sense of financial independence and decision-making agency was also evident among many women returnees. Most female workers said their aspirations and plans for the future had changed for the better since participating in seasonal work, and they had the financial means to achieve these. Several women in each country had invested in productive enterprises such as small businesses or expanding their farm areas – giving them even more significant financial security and a sense of personal achievement. Women also reported making extensions and improvements to their homes and coming up with new business ideas, such as catering and baking businesses. There were also reports that participation in seasonal work had catalyzed shifts in how women wanted to live their lives. The broader perspectives they gained while overseas were a key contributor. Most household members of female seasonal workers also reported that the returned worker now has greater self-confidence. Women that had participated in seasonal work reported becoming stronger, more independent, being able to make their own decisions, and taking risks such as setting up and running their own businesses.

“It has changed me a lot. It has made me strong. I have always been surrounded by my family, and coming here, I had to live on my own, which changed me to become a strong woman and be independent. Experiencing different cultures is a good thing too.”

Female PLS worker, Vanuatu

“I notice she strives more for things she wants. She got married and went out to get a piece of land. Her husband seems to be content but (the participant) goes out and gets things done. Like our house, I didn’t think she would extend our house as she is a girl, but she did it.”

Family member of female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

“I think I’ve changed...When I am in Vanuatu, I don’t talk to people. But when I was in Australia, I tried my best to speak out and talk to my supervisor...I have changed a lot. I’ve tried my best to move away from my shyness and approach the supervisor to ask for help.”

Female PLS worker, Vanuatu

“My cousin was a participant in the SWP program. She came back and created a recycling business. She uses recycled materials to make baskets. Another family member started a potato garden and sold her produce in the community.”

Female PLS worker, Vanuatu

The improved confidence and self-esteem of returned women workers also increased their agency and sense of independence. This was corroborated by the quantitative data that revealed that 81 and 82 percent of female and male migrant workers, respectively, reported feeling greater agency from having participated in labor mobility and 87 percent of women and 86 percent of men reported having greater control over financial resources. However, there was some variation evident between countries, with workers from Tonga less likely to feel they had gained in agency or financial control (Figure 13). Nearly all the women participants interviewed said they made decisions more independently now. Other household members confirmed these impacts. In Tonga and Vanuatu, three-quarters reported that their female relative makes more decisions independently since returning from their seasonal work placement. The combination of greater self-confidence and financial independence enabled some women returnees to leave unhappy or abusive relationships. In Vanuatu, a few women reported their participation in seasonal work had supported them to leave relationships where they were unhappy or subjected to abuse and enter new relationships with new partners.

“Instead of dependence on my husband, I now can do things like run my canteen and feel good about it.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

“My first partner was threatening me...so I decided to leave him. And that was when I met my new partner.”

Female seasonal worker, urban Vanuatu

FIGURE 13. Effects of participation in Pacific labor migration schemes on agency and financial autonomy



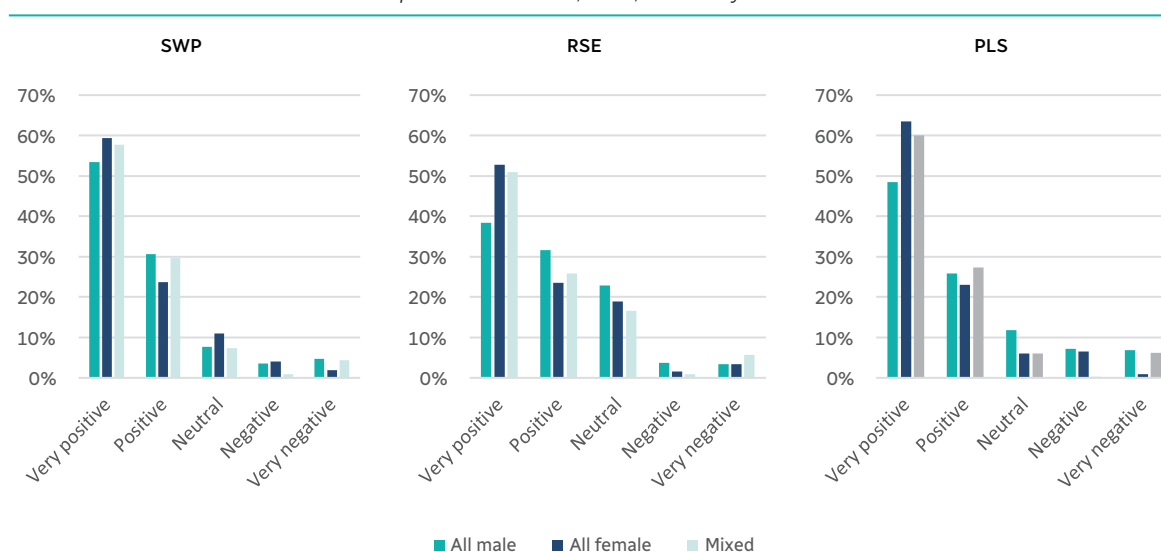
Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

Household Level

Economic and Material Benefits to Households

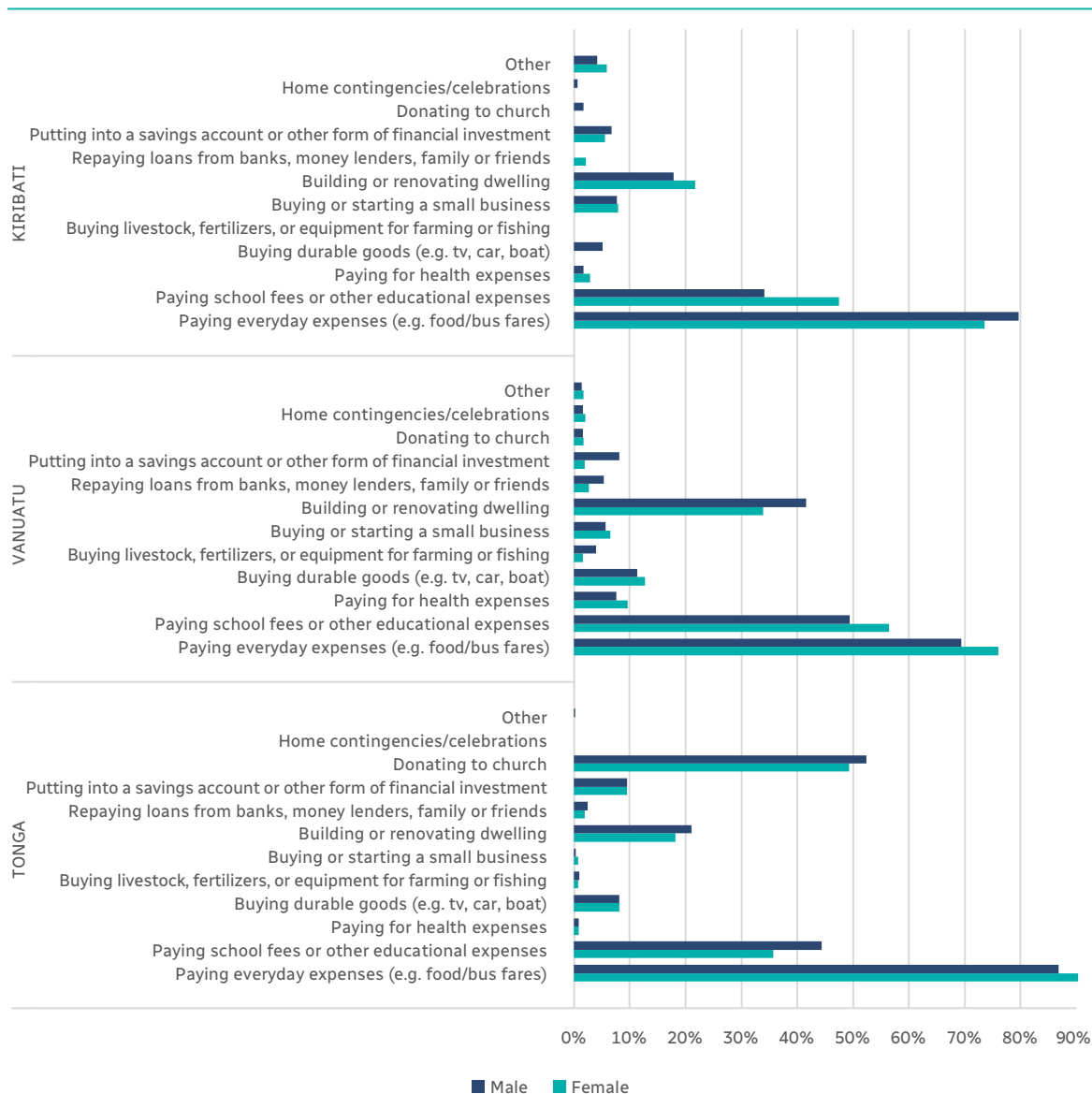
Overwhelmingly, both survey results and the in-depth interviews with male and female workers revealed the positive effect of Pacific labor migration schemes on families' welfare (Figure 14). The in-depth interviews revealed that most male and female participants were firmly focused on providing benefits to their household and extended family. The quantitative survey found that, on average, female and male workers said that in the last week, after taxes and deductions, they had earned around \$A 790 and \$A 830, respectively, and remitted around \$A 741 and \$A 751, respectively. The survey data also showed that the frequency of remittances was similar for both female and male workers, with the majority sending remittances weekly or bi-weekly (Figure 16). Being able to earn, remit, and save significant sums of money allowed them to meet family needs such as schooling costs and loan repayments; improve their living conditions (e.g., renovate, extend, or build a house); buy a vehicle and/or major household items such as furniture and white goods; assist other family members; and save for the future. The quantitative data indicates that regardless of gender and country of origin, most remittances were used for meeting everyday expenses such as food and bus fares, paying education-related expenses, and investing in housing (Figure 15). Women who have not participated in seasonal work also said one of the most significant benefits of participating in seasonal work is being able to improve your family and household. All participants said the income was used to help with living expenses, to provide greater support during urgent times, and to purchase things they were not previously able to afford. Family members said that women either sent money back when their family needed it, or saved the money and brought it back home. As noted above, a number of interviewees – both males and females – said that women were more focused than men on meeting their family's needs.

FIGURE 14. Impact of labor mobility on temporary migrant households
What has been the impact of the SWP, RSE, PLS on your household?



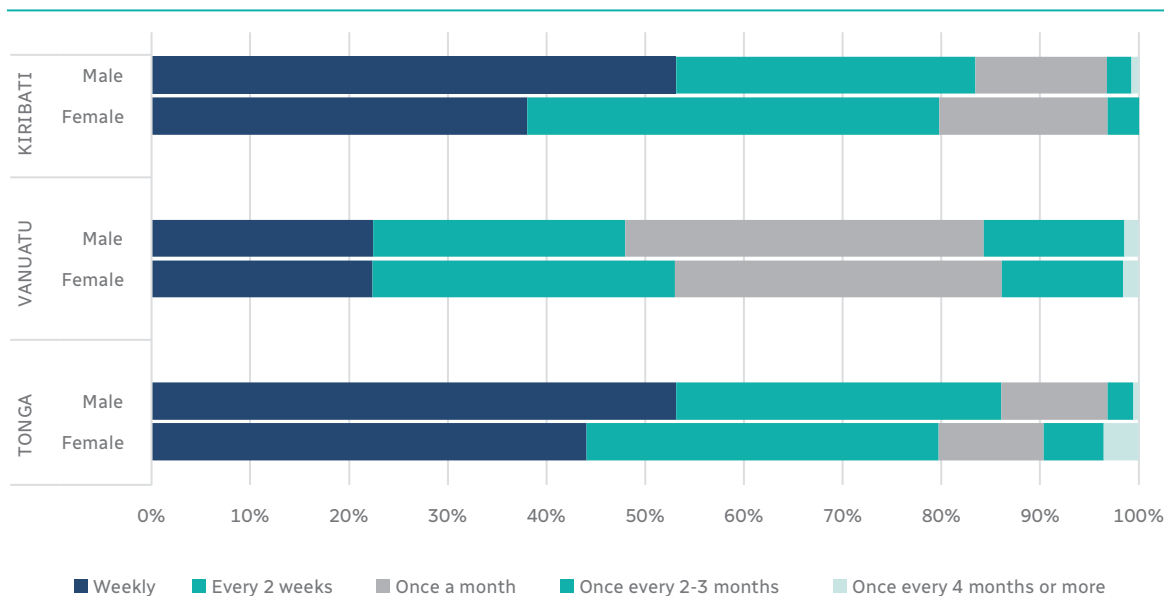
Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Household Survey.

FIGURE 15. Spending of remittances by gender and home country
What do you intend the money to be mainly spent on?



Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

FIGURE 16. Remittance frequency by gender and home country



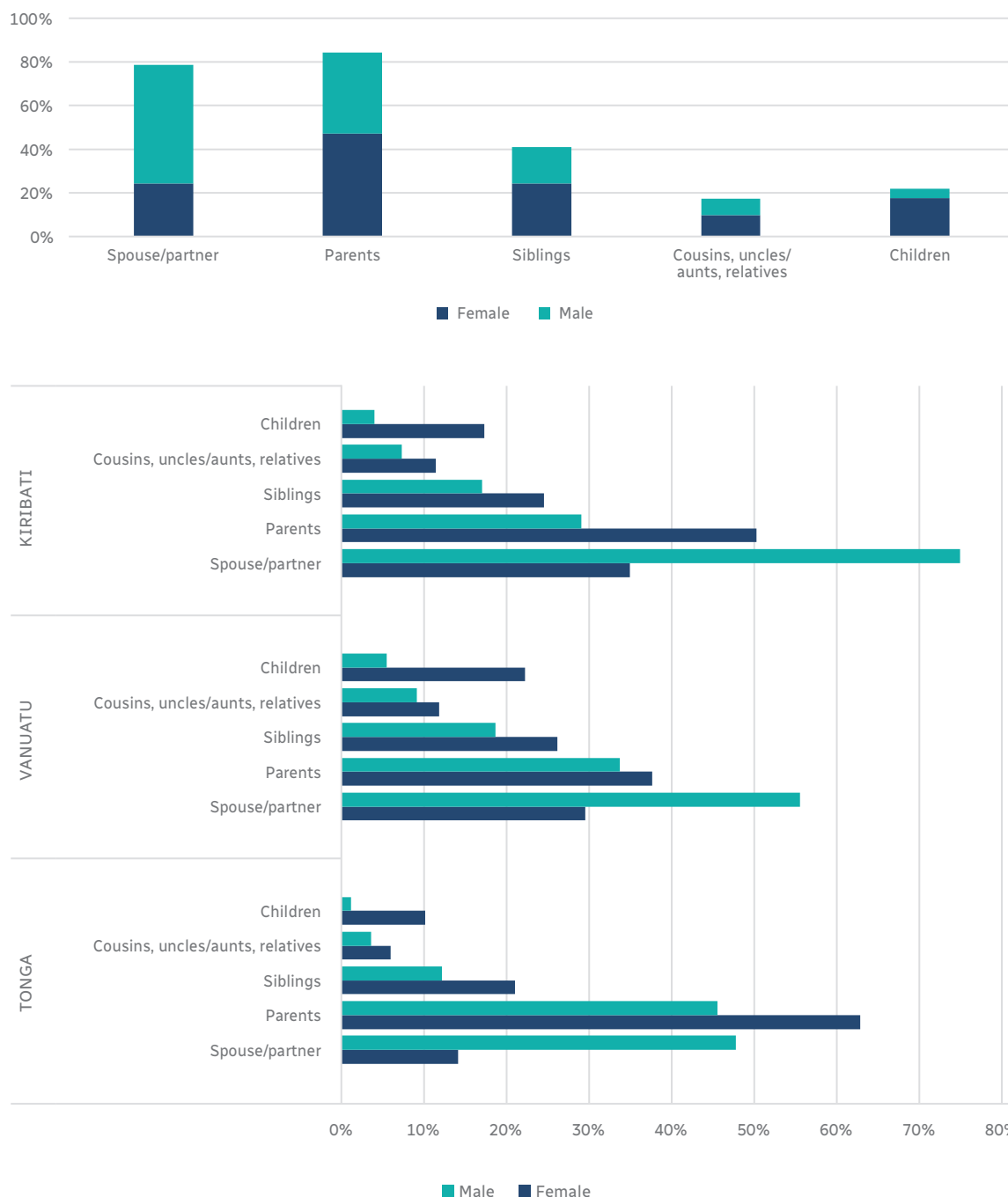
Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

Female and male seasonal workers send money through friends, Western Union, and bank transfers. Most participants said they could send more than they expected and send money when there is a need. Remittances reported by participants ranged from \$A 500–1000 a month. The majority of women sent money transfers on a monthly, weekly, or bi-weekly basis. Results from the quantitative survey show that female and male migrant workers sent money to their spouses and parents for the most part, although a greater share of female workers, particularly in Tonga, reported that they sent more money to their parents than male workers (Figure 17). This is likely a reflection of the fact that female workers were more likely to be single than their male counterparts.

“She (daughter) helps with our living expenses...she asked someone here to bulk purchase our food, and she sends \$200 every two weeks. She is happy, and that is what matters the most.”

Family member of female PLS worker, Kiribati

FIGURE 17. Recipients by senders' gender



Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

Women's Control Over Income and Decision-Making Power in the Household

Over one-third of female seasonal workers and their family members felt women's participation in seasonal work had improved women's control over income and decision-making power in the household. This was primarily due to their new role as financial providers in the family, which gave them more significant involvement in deciding how household income is used. Most female seasonal workers said that

decisions were still made jointly with their husbands, but the interviews indicate increased collaborative decision-making. Aside from influence over the use of financial resources, most women felt they had greater decision-making power over household spending. Some women have also developed tactics for consolidating their control over family spending choices, including limiting the amount of money they send back home.

“It changed when I returned. I was involved more in decision-making regarding money or family issues.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

“Whenever I can’t make any decision on any issues, she sometimes decides for both of us, her mindset has been changed by participating in seasonal work.”

Husband of female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

“Men are the head of the family. They are the breadwinners, and they can do everything, but women are meant to stay at home. But through this program, women have access to leave home and work for their benefit and their families. I no longer depend on my husband to make decisions. I can now earn and manage my income and do anything with my money.”

Female PLS worker, Vanuatu

“I control my household expenditures in Kiribati by limiting the money I send back home.”

Female PLS worker, Kiribati

However, the perception that women must be subservient to their male partners/husbands appeared ingrained among a few female seasonal workers. They believe that despite improvements in women’s financial and social status from participating in seasonal and temporary work in Australia and New Zealand, male partners should still take the lead in household matters. Social norms and socialization nurture and reinforce these attitudes, and participation in the seasonal and temporary labor migration has not changed this for some female participants.

“Women or couples need to trust and respect each other when they are away from their families. I can see a big difference, especially when women work; they have greater control over their finance and what they want to do in life. In my opinion, I disagree because I think taking control over her husband is not a good thing. It is not a good idea for wives to overwrite their husband’s leadership.”

Female PLS worker, Vanuatu

Stronger Family Relationships and Greater Sharing of Responsibilities

In several instances, across all three countries, seasonal workers and their household members felt seasonal work had strengthened family relationships.

Research into the RSE scheme supports this finding that, in some cases, seasonal work can improve marital relationships (Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020). However, other studies have found relationship issues to be more widespread (Rockell, 2015; Withers, 2022). Participants in the qualitative study attributed improvement in relationships to increased household income and material goods that have improved communication, understanding, and respect – and decreased arguments between partners, especially where money stress was previously a source of conflict. The quantitative data also indicated that labor mobility could have a positive impact on relationships. When asked whether participation in labor mobility schemes had impacted their marital relationship positively or negatively, 69 and 62 percent of female and male workers, respectively, said that it had had a positive effect. Significantly, and while there was some variation, positive impacts were reported regardless of home country or labor mobility scheme (Figure 18). In most cases, female workers could constantly contact their family members, giving them much-needed support and encouragement while away. They communicated daily with family members via Facebook messenger and phone, and said there were no issues with these forms of communication (Figure 19 and Figure 20). Time spent apart was also cited as fostering a greater sense of the value of family members among some respondents, including observations partners have become more mature in their absence. The positive effect on children was also reflected in the quantitative survey (Figure 18). In addition, several female workers did not think families were negatively impacted by parents taking up seasonal work overseas. This was based on shared understandings that seasonal work is for the benefit of the family. While these findings are encouraging, it must be noted that relationship issues can be a sensitive topic, and it is therefore possible that such issues were underreported.

“For me and my husband, our relationship has just grown deeper. We have grown to appreciate each other more after the sacrifice we have shared.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

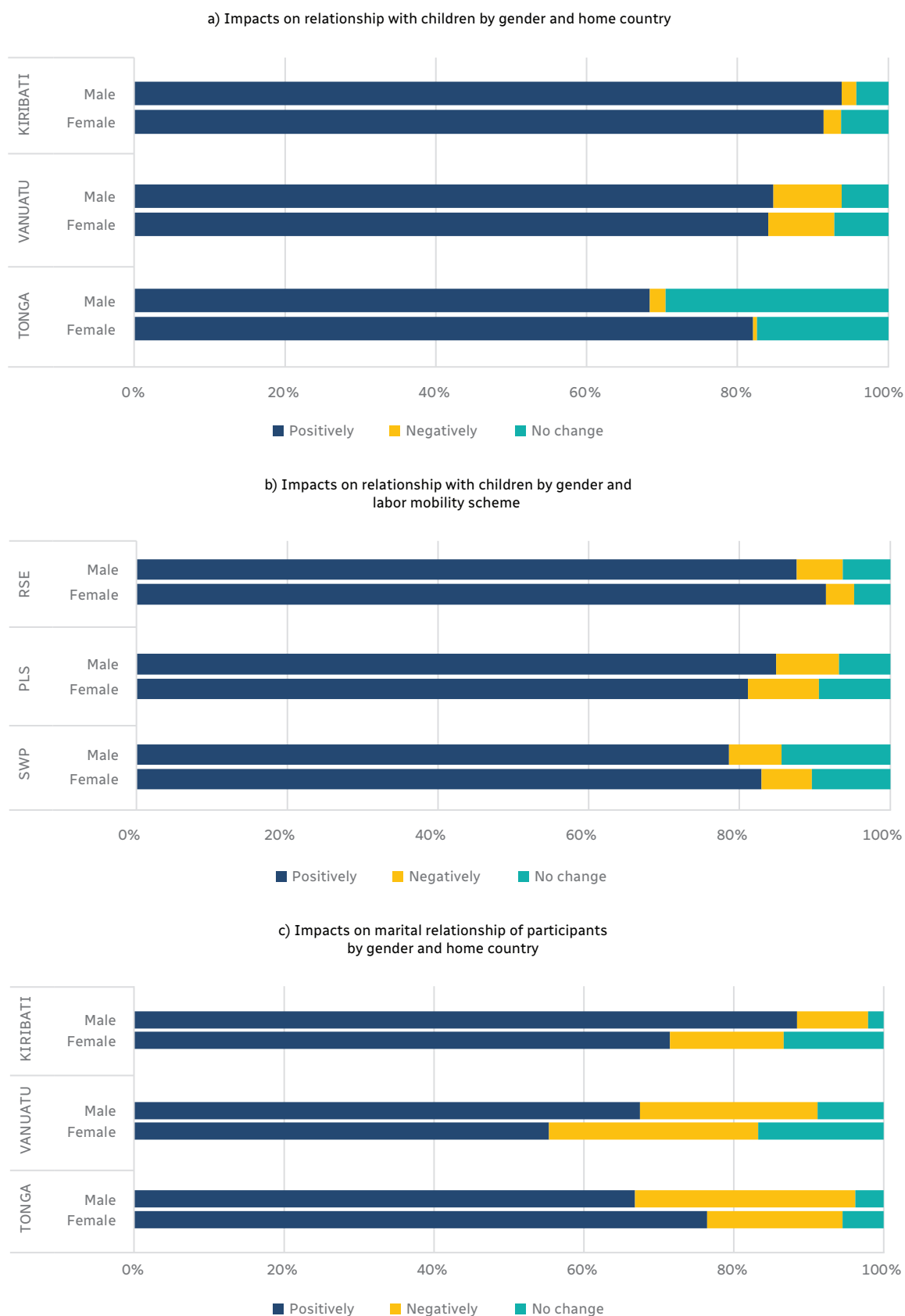
“I was able to start building a better house for us to live in, and that has been key to our relationship growing stronger.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

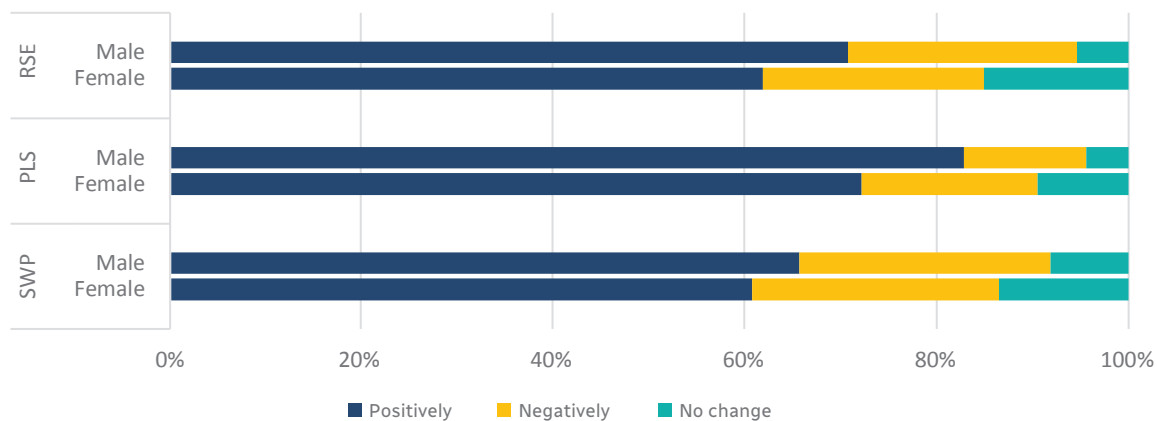
“It brought us closer and we communicated more, especially about our family affairs.”

Family member of male seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

FIGURE 18. Impacts of labor mobility on marital relationship and relationship with children

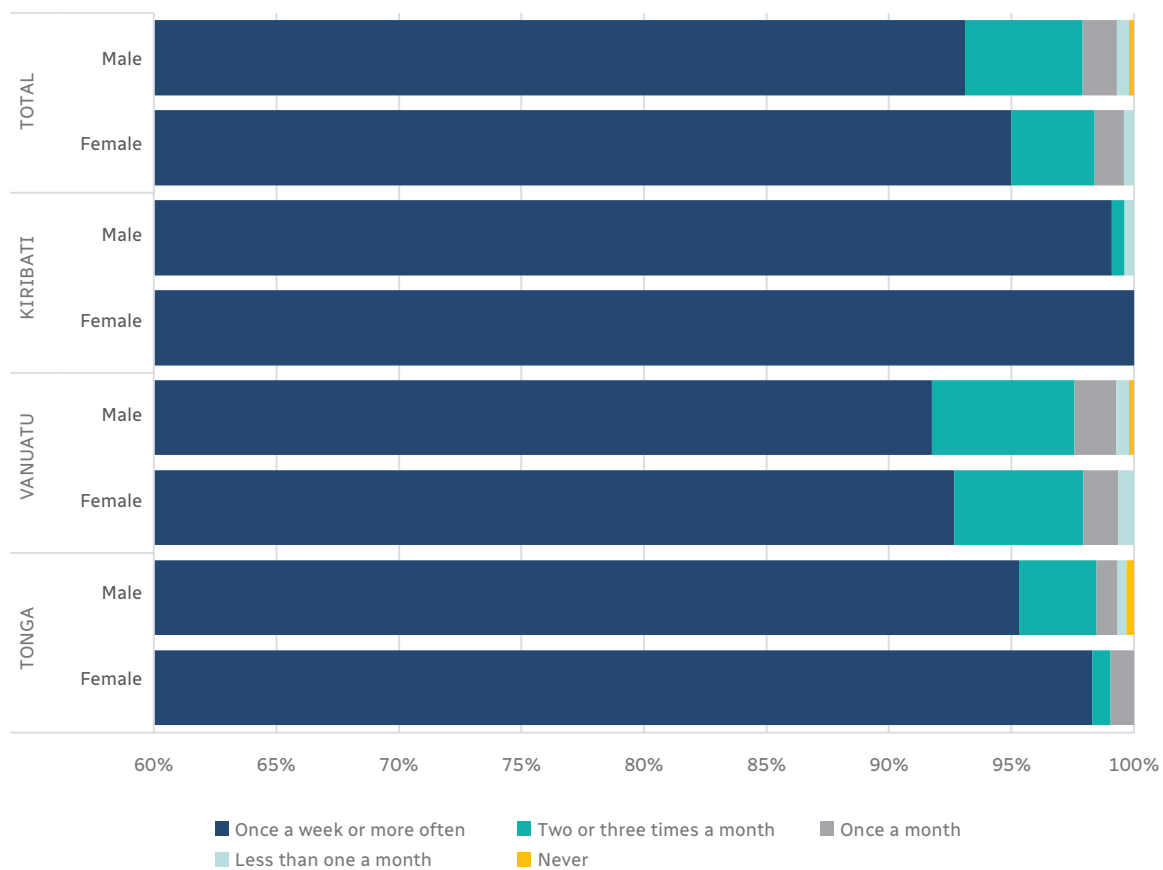


d) Impacts on marital relationship of participants by gender and labor mobility scheme

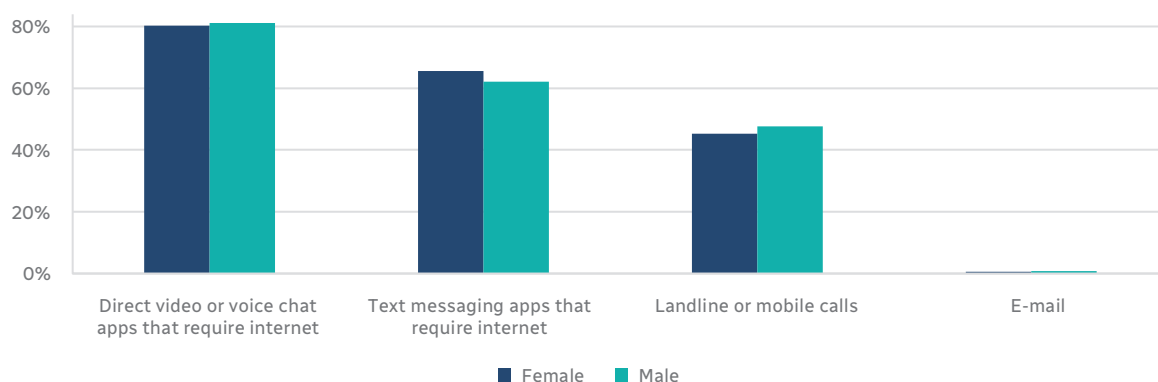


Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

FIGURE 19. Communication frequency with households by gender and home country



Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

FIGURE 20. Mode of communication by gender

Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Migrant Worker Survey.

Interviews in Kiribati and Tonga also revealed that female seasonal labor migration led to greater sharing of household and caretaking responsibilities. Previous research into the impacts of SWP participation has documented similar changes in Vanuatu and Tonga, however, while it was considered more acceptable for men to help out in domestic roles when women were away, cultural and gender norms persisted, and these changes did not appear to be long term (World Bank, 2018). By contrast, many of the returned i-Kiribati and Tongan female workers interviewed said they are continuing to share more responsibilities with their husbands, and also, in some cases, their children have become more responsible too. The blurring of gender roles also occurs as a result of male participation. Most male seasonal workers reported having a female relative take on their responsibilities while away. Several said that their female relatives continued to help with 'male' duties even after returning. Male workers' experience away from home also affected their willingness to contribute to household chores. For example, in Tonga, three-quarters of their family members said duties are now shared. In Vanuatu, most respondents felt there had been no noticeable change in the roles and responsibilities women and men carry out in the household, citing social norms and religion as reasons these have remained the same. However, many respondents have observed a change within their families. Some male partners of women who have participated have gained a greater understanding of women's household responsibilities. Participation in seasonal work and seeing how things are done overseas inspired one male worker to recognize his wife's contributions to their business.

"Before, mum did most of the cooking and washing, but after she participated, we are all sharing chores equally and tending to our own laundry."

Family member of seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

"Since my return I have made a new home and we are both sharing the house chores."

Female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

Community Level

Contributions to Community Infrastructure Assets, Events, and Flow-Ons of More Local Employment

The main community-level benefits noted by respondents resulted from more significant income inflows. There were numerous instances of returned female workers contributing to community and church fundraising for community events and facilities. These, along with household-level improvements and new business activity within the community, also resulted in critical flow-on benefits such as more local employment (especially for construction) and greater local availability of some goods and services. The availability of overseas employment opportunities also helped reduce inequality within the community. The quantitative survey reinforces these findings with more respondents reporting that labor mobility had a 'very positive' or 'positive' impact on their community (Figure 21).

"They contributed to the water solar system project of the community and also to church activities such as fundraising."

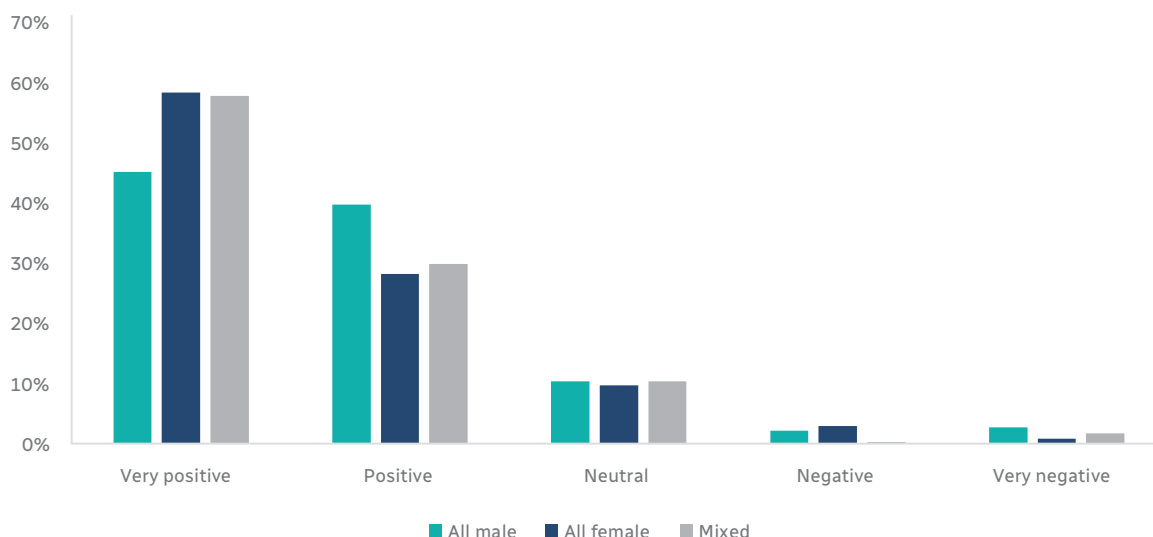
Community member, rural Vanuatu

"I have seen from other villages that those who participated have changed the way they live, started their business, improved their home structures."

Community member, urban Kiribati

FIGURE 21. Impact of Pacific labor mobility on home communities

What has been the impact on your community from households participating in Pacific labor mobility schemes?



Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Household Survey.

Greater Prominence and Visibility for Women in the Community

In some communities, women had achieved greater visibility and prominence following their return from work placements, in both urban and rural areas. This was partly a direct result of their increased ability to contribute financially and reflected greater self-confidence in having their voice heard and potentially taking on leadership opportunities at the community level. For example, in Kiribati, the majority (80 percent) of women who have not participated in seasonal work said that there had been changes in women's situation due to women participating in seasonal work. As highlighted below, some male seasonal workers also shared this view on how women play an active and visible role in the community.

"Most women in our community are leaders here and they are very active more than men. In the community, the women are very strong."

Male seasonal worker, urban Kiribati

"In our village; many more women are now in village committees."

Female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

"She is now confident participating and contributing to community and family affairs. She takes the lead in church women groups and if there is a community event, the community looks up to her to take the lead."

Family member of female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

While there were suggestions, especially in Tonga, that women's greater empowerment was resulting in an easing of men's dominance at the community level, it remained clear that there were limits to this impact. Key community informants in Tonga and Vanuatu noted that men continue to play a significant role, with women primarily influencing women-only groups. In Vanuatu, cultural and religious views contribute to gender inequality. In some instances, women have faced consequences when they are perceived to have transgressed traditional gender roles. For example, one female respondent reported that roles she was assigned while participating in seasonal work schemes (as a supervisor) were not approved of at home, resulting in her losing that position.

“During my second year, I became a supervisor. I took many women to New Zealand to work, but when we came back, a man from Tanna said that this job is not for women so they took my name off the list.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

“Though we can make our own decision, sometimes our culture is still there.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Kiribati

In Tonga and Vanuatu, in particular, community respondents conveyed their expectations that returned seasonal workers (especially men) should contribute to the community, such as funding infrastructure and equipment to enhance community facilities and support church and cultural events. These expectations have also been reported in previous studies of labor mobility (Bailey, 2014; Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020) and stem from cultural norms around reciprocity and exchange practices that are linked to well-being (Faleolo, 2019). Several respondents expressed disapproval towards those who have used their earnings from seasonal work to lift themselves and their families rather than the broader community.

“People who have participated are not giving their money to help the community. But you can see that they have built their nice concrete houses.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

“(Women are) subject to community gossip especially if she is spending her money to improve her family living.”

Family member of female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

New Friendships and Support Groups of Former Work Colleagues

Both female and male workers reported maintaining new friendships or support groups of former co-workers. The evolution of such 'seasonal work' social networks has been reported in previous studies of the seasonal schemes (Cummings, 2016). Several former workers had continued to stay in touch with those they had worked with overseas, and for some this provided a source of information on future work opportunities. For some respondents, these connections represented a broader social and support network incorporating people living in other locations but did not necessarily change or challenge existing support structures, with individuals still turning to their family and friends prior to their seasonal work engagement for support.

"They have become like family, and we are still in contact and help each other when needed."

Female seasonal worker, urban Tonga

"Yes, my team has a group chat on messenger, and we still hang out together for kava. We just attended our driver's wedding, and one of our teammates just had a baby."

Female seasonal worker, urban Vanuatu

"Yes, they keep the special bonds that they create with others abroad, whether on the same island or different island, mainly through texting through messenger."

Male seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

"It increases an individual's friend group not only here in Santo but from other islands in Vanuatu, friendships that are supportive and last."

Community key informant, urban Vanuatu

Negative Effects on Women, Households, and Local Communities

Individual and Household Level

Feeling Homesick and Missing Family

An important negative impact of temporary labor migration for women participants was feeling homesick and missing family, especially for those that participated in the PLS. While the majority said they had no issues with communication with their family members back home, a few women in Kiribati said they had never communicated with their husbands while away as they did not know how. Other challenges included the high cost of communication/internet and lack of communication/connectivity with the outer islands in Kiribati. Women also expressed feelings of homesickness – missing their children and family. This homesickness is partly attributed to a long time in Australia without the opportunity to travel with spouses and children. The extended lockdowns precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic compounded this challenge,

making some workers detest the experience and vowing not to undertake such a journey in the future without being accompanied by children or spouses. Some PLS workers had stayed and worked in Australia for up to three years without being able to travel back home due to the travel restrictions imposed by Australia and PICs during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Despite this, some were positive about the experience, highlighting the eventual economic gains from the prolonged stay. To cope with these challenges, women talked with their husbands and shared their challenges with their workmates and supervisors.

“It’s to do with loneliness, missing family, mum, and dad that leads to homesickness.”

Female PLS worker, Vanuatu

Increased Workload and Stress on Family Members from Sending Households

Due to the gendered division of labor in communities, when women or men participate in seasonal work, their absence can create a gap where their responsibilities are left mainly to female family members. However, during interviews, female seasonal workers said that family members were happy to take on their roles and responsibilities in their absence. They supported their partner’s participation because they knew it would benefit the whole household. For example, brothers who helped do the male seasonal workers’ activities in Kiribati were paid for their work. Similar arrangements, whereby seasonal workers have paid others to perform tasks in their absence, have been reported in previous studies of the RSE scheme (Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020).

“When he was away, there was a lot of work, especially with the kids’ education, I was tired because he wasn’t here; sometimes I miss him very much, also with the church activities, but I do my best.”

Family member of male seasonal worker, Vanuatu

In Vanuatu, some respondents noted that localized labor shortages had arisen, especially for physically demanding work such as construction or planting subsistence gardens, due to men being away on work placements. This issue did not occur when women were away, as their capabilities were less in demand at the community level. This is consistent with results from the quantitative survey that indicate when women participated in seasonal work, adult males from the household were more likely to take over responsibilities that involved decision making or physical

labor, while adult females within the household were more likely to take over caring responsibilities. However, when men were the ones to participate in labor mobility, adult women from the household were more likely to take over their responsibilities regardless of gender norms around domestic and other duties (Figure 22). Some interview respondents noted workers' participation in high-level roles, including in government, and with higher levels of education (several male workers had attended university), who were leaving formal employment because of the pull of potential income overseas.

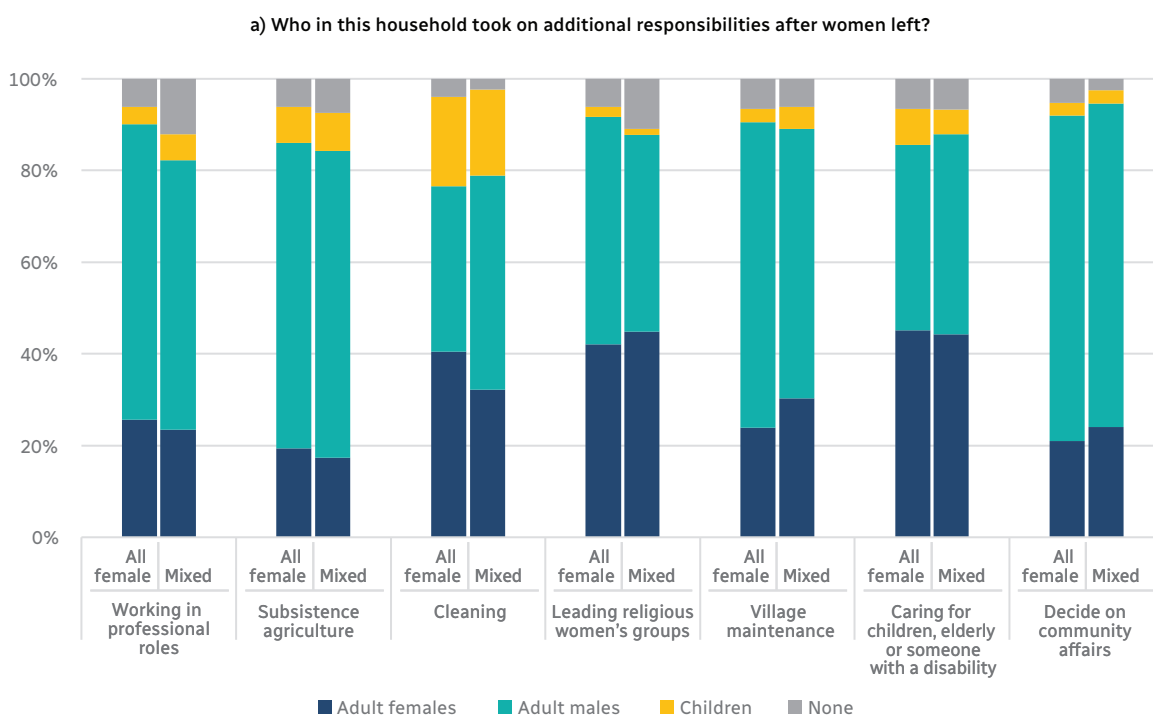
“Currently, the community is running short of young people, male and female... And now we don't have enough people to do our community work.”

Key community informant, rural Vanuatu

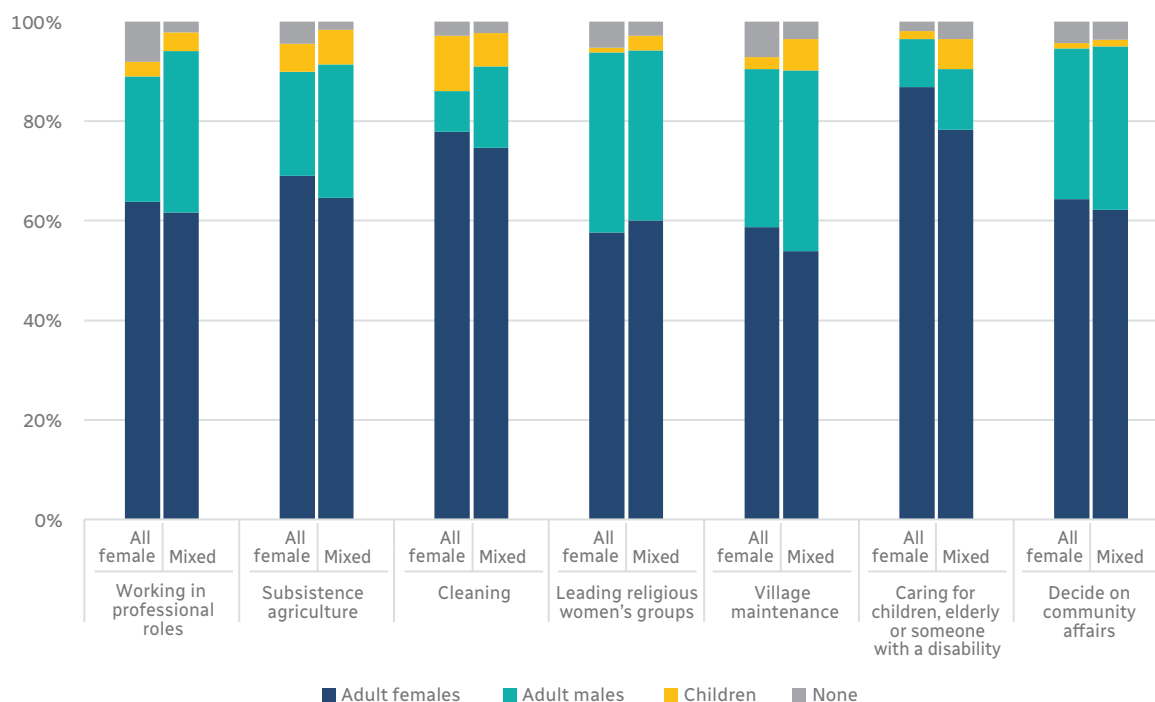
“Since participants are abroad for long periods, they are not here for the planting seasons, so we that are left behind plant for them, and when they return, they just harvest, and when it is time to plant again, they are ready to travel out.”

Community key informant, rural

FIGURE 22. Allocation of additional responsibilities when women and men left to participate in labor mobility



b) Who in this household took on additional responsibilities after men left?



Notes: Labor-sending households are households with at least one household member who was working in either the RSE or PALM scheme at the time of the survey, or who had worked in either of the schemes and had returned. Non-sending households are households without any household member participating in either the RSE or PALM scheme. These households might have member(s) who had applied for but were not selected for any of the schemes. This report uses the terms “labor-sending households”, “sending households”, “migrant-sending households”, and “participating households” interchangeably. Likewise, the report uses the terms “non-sending households”, “non-participating households” and “non-migrant households” interchangeably. PIC labor-sending households are classified by the gender of labor market participants, as follows:

- 1) All male: all households members participating in labor mobility are male
- 2) All female: all members participating in labor mobility are female
- 3) Mixed: members participating in labor mobility are both male and female.

Source: World Bank, 2022, PLMS – Household Survey.

Negative Impacts on Children’s Welfare, Discipline, and Schooling

There was a common perception that children are adversely affected when a parent participates in temporary labor migration. Similar concerns have been raised in previous studies of labor mobility schemes (Bailey, 2014; Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020; Withers, 2022; World Bank, 2018). Most female participants said the impacts on families are similar regardless of who migrates. Still, others said negative consequences such as discipline and schooling are more significant when the absentee is the mother, as often children are more dependent on their mothers for emotional support and day-to-day care. In one instance, the partner of a male PLS worker had deserted their children and eloped with another man. The father felt this left his children vulnerable, and he sent them to live with his parents in a different village. Opposing views on women leaving children behind were standard in the broader community. For instance, around half of non-participant families reported children suffering from female participation in seasonal work. In some cases, relationships with the children were weakened (at least in the short term). For example, the husband of a female worker said that the children had become closer to him, but they were more distant from their mother since her absence. A few male workers also reported weaker bonds with their children.

“When my mother left, we the kids felt it, and so it’s better having our mother at home to look after us, especially the younger kids.”

Child of a female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

“Many of the families who leave on seasonal work leave their children with their grandparents and lack proper discipline so that today already some children miss school and suffer neglect.”

Key community informant, rural Tonga

“With the introduction of this new scheme PLS, I hear that many children are left behind with their grandparents while their parents travel abroad to participate. Not saying it is a bad thing, but three years is a long time for a child to grow up without their parents.”

Key community informant, rural Vanuatu

Family Breakdown, Suspicions of Infidelity, and Domestic Violence

All respondents cited family breakdown as an unfortunate but relatively common result of participation in seasonal work programs. Concerns over family breakdown are longstanding and have been raised in previous studies (Kaiapam, 2021; Rockell, 2015; Withers, 2022), although in some cases evidence of family breakdown has been largely anecdotal. Most respondents said that family breakdown and related issues were the fault of individuals rather than the programs *per se*. Seasonal workers engaging in extra-marital affairs while overseas, or partners at home having affairs while their spouse is working overseas, were commonly reported, resulting in family breakdowns. While many respondents saw this as one of the main problems arising from seasonal work, only a few respondents had experienced family breakdowns due to infidelity while separated from their partners. Both male and female workers were equally perceived as engaging in affairs while working overseas. However, many respondents, including females, spoke of women having affairs as more problematic than men.

“I see the problem caused by women, especially married women, because when I was overseas, I would meet married women in different places, so a lot of family breakups happen due to women going on seasonal work.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Tonga

“Yes, many families are negatively affected by this seasonal work, unexpected pregnancy, family discord etc., so I suggest that if both husband and wife can go together to avoid these kinds of issues.”

Family member of female seasonal worker, urban Kiribati

“If a married woman participant stays overseas for a long period of time, her responsibilities at home will be neglected. It’s the same for married men. I have heard that especially men when they stay away for a long period of time, they tend to forget about their wives and have affairs with other women overseas.”

Key community informant, rural Vanuatu

“I think the program is good, but there are problems. When (my husband) was away, he would not call, and I felt bad as I suspected he was having an affair. We went through a bad time, and his mother helped by speaking to him so we finally resolved it.”

Wife of male seasonal worker, urban Tonga

There was reluctance to discuss the issue of domestic violence in the community in general, but some study participants indicated that seasonal work had increased intimate partner violence. In Tonga, none of the female seasonal workers acknowledged any incidents. Still, four of the 24 family members of male seasonal workers and three of 17 family members of non-participants said that domestic violence increased due to the programs. Interestingly, male seasonal workers were more open to talking about the issue. Six of the 36 interviewed cited seasonal work as a source of arguments with their wives or other female relatives. Twelve of that cohort said that domestic violence within the community has increased due to seasonal work. In Kiribati, four out of the 11 male seasonal workers said male/female participation in seasonal work had increased domestic violence. Key community informants also acknowledged the issue in both Tonga and Kiribati. In Vanuatu, most respondents reported domestic violence was widespread in their communities, with most feeling instances of domestic violence increasing. However, there were mixed opinions on whether this was related to labor migration, with many respondents feeling both participants and non-participants are affected by domestic violence. Five of 36 female seasonal workers interviewed reported their participation had caused conflict with their partners. Across all respondents who felt women’s involvement in seasonal work schemes contributed to increased domestic violence – marital affairs and extended time away from families were the two common reasons for this.

“Domestic violence has increased mainly because of rumors that are spread about one individual cheating on their spouse whilst away causing more arguments which lead to domestic violence.”

Community member, rural Vanuatu

“Domestic violence cases are increasing tremendously. I cannot blame the seasonal work program, I blame the participants and their individual choices. This is more to do with accommodating of male and female participants in one accommodation.”

Husband of female seasonal worker, urban Tonga

A few ni-Vanuatu respondents felt that seasonal work schemes decreased domestic violence rates. This was attributed to lowered financial stress, which was noted as a significant cause of relationship conflict. Higher-income levels allow people to leave partners when they are unhappy or there has been infidelity rather than turning to violence. One respondent thought domestic violence had decreased because men were better able to take care of themselves, including cooking and doing laundry, without having to depend on women to do chores for them.

“Domestic violence has decreased because, in the past, many young people are just at home and fighting with their spouses because of lack of money, but these labor schemes have occupied a lot of young folks and given them aspirations to work towards reducing domestic violence.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

“Domestic violence level has decreased maybe because more people are getting educated about the effects.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

Community Level

Negative Community Perceptions, Moral Judgments, and Gossip

At the community level, the only commonly raised negative issue was around adverse perceptions, moral judgments, and gossip regarding women who were participating in or had recently returned from labor mobility. There is a widespread perception that when women travel alone to live overseas, they tend to live 'immoral' lives, affecting how society receives them when they return home. All informant categories noted that returned seasonal workers were frequently targeted with negative gossip, particularly infidelity. This was especially marked when only a small number of women from that community had participated. There was perhaps greater scope to refute inaccurate hearsay in cases where several local women were co-located during placements. This means that returnee female seasonal workers, especially those that have been away for longer stints, such as in the case of PLS workers, must grapple with isolation as they must deal with community members who are less likely to welcome them genuinely. The increased self-esteem and confidence of most seasonal and temporary workers could help mitigate this impact. While women were the more frequent targets of community gossip, men were not wholly spared either. There were also reports of envy and mistrust of overseas influences. Community members claimed that some female worker returnees consider themselves superior and spend too much time on their physical appearance instead of their traditional duties. Whether real or perceived, this phenomenon has implications for how women are accepted when they return to their home country.

“Men will experience this differently and, in my opinion, men don’t face any problem, but for women, the community will gossip about women being more independent.”

PLS female worker, Vanuatu

“There are always stories about men and women on the program, but more about women, and nobody knows what the truth is.”

Community member, rural Tonga

“When women are involved in marital affairs, they become the center of gossip in the community.”

Male seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

“(Women are) subject to community gossip especially if she is spending her money to improve her family living.”

Family member of female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

Drugs and Alcohol Use

Both male and female workers and community representatives agree that some male seasonal workers misuse alcohol and kava, spending their earnings on these items, both while away and when they return from seasonal work. Some respondents felt seasonal work had led to increased drug and alcohol consumption, supported by increased disposable income held by participants. This is cited as an issue among men more than women. Men’s drinking, both at the workplace and when they returned home to their households/communities, was described as an issue that brought shame to the other Vanuatu and i-Kiribati workers. In Vanuatu, of the wives of male workers interviewed, almost half felt there had been an increase in alcohol consumption due to participation in seasonal work schemes. Young people were also reported to be consuming alcohol and other substances due to a lack of parental supervision while their parents were overseas working.

“I have seen some men wasting their money on alcohol and forget about their children and families.”

Family member of male seasonal worker, urban Vanuatu

“The consumption of alcohol is very high here in my community. Mainly participants who came back from seasonal work. They use their money to buy alcohol and cause problems when they are drunk.”

Family member of male seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

“Men when they come back, they get drunk, they spend money drinking kava, but some are just like women, (they can) act responsibly.”

Community member, urban Kiribati

“90 percent of people working here return with alcohol, and they spend a lot of money in Port Vila before returning to their communities. They spend a lot of money on kava and alcohol consumption. When they return to their islands, they no longer have money to support their family needs because they have used up their savings in Port Vila.”

Male PLS worker, Vanuatu

However, a few respondents felt substance use had decreased due to the seasonal work scheme, with reasons given including increased maturity and responsibility shown by participants or boosting individuals’ chances of being selected for seasonal work programs.

“Seasonal work schemes have decreased the number of young people who are unemployed in this community. Young people have also stopped drinking too much alcohol because there’s an agent here, and everyone wants to participate in seasonal work. They stop drinking because they want to be recruited.”

Female seasonal worker, rural Vanuatu

“Joining the program has helped him to stop drinking alcohol.”

Family member of male seasonal worker, rural Tonga



Recommendations

This final section offers policy recommendations for addressing the issues and challenges identified in the previous sections. Recommendations are grouped into three focus areas, namely those that seek to: (1) increase women’s participation in seasonal work programs; (2) improve the experience of seasonal workers; and (3) minimize the adverse effects of seasonal migration while maximizing the development impact of seasonal migration in labor-sending communities. Tables 4, and 5 outline suggested recommendations in the aforementioned focus areas. A short description follows each recommendation.

Increasing Women’s Participation in Seasonal Work Programs

Recommendations to increase women’s participation in seasonal work programs are grouped into those focusing on seasonal employment’s demand and supply dimensions. On the demand-side, suggestions include: (1) expanding the range of sectors and work opportunities for women and addressing gender bias in the hiring process, and (2) encouraging more family-friendly approaches in labor migration. On the supply side, recommendations include: (1) simplifying and streamlining pre-departure processes and providing precise and targeted gender-specific information on available programs; (2) strengthening pre-departure training; and (3) conducting community-level awareness-raising campaigns on the broader benefits of women’s participation in labor mobility programs.

Table 4. Recommendations to increase women’s participation in Pacific labor migration schemes

	Recommendation	Barrier addressed	Entity responsible
DEMAND SIDE	Expand the range of sectors and work opportunities for women and address gender bias in the hiring process	Recruitment agents and AEs prefer recruiting men. The perception that certain jobs are not suitable for women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFAT and MFAT • Employers • Recruitment agents • PIC government agencies
	Encourage more family-friendly approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit couples where feasible (with suitable accommodation) • Explore options to enable young children to accompany couples • Allow for family visits or accompaniment, especially on more extended placements • Provide greater contractual flexibility to reduce or extend contract length 	Women’s household and care responsibilities pose a key constraint to women’s participation Marital status affects participation especially due to perceptions/ occurrence of infidelity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFAT and MFAT • Employers
SUPPLY SIDE	Simplify and streamline pre-departure processes and provide clear and targeted gender-specific information on available programs	The complexity of the application process and lack of timely, clear, and predictable information about recruitment and departure formalities affect female participation Women think there are fewer opportunities for women in Australia/New Zealand and that recruiters are mainly looking for men as potential workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment agents • PIC government agencies • Returnee seasonal workers
	Strengthen pre-departure training and include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on living and working conditions, requirements, and expectations during placement, including issues about pay and deductions • Sexual and reproductive health education • Sexual harassment awareness-raising and what to do in case of assault • Strategies for relationship maintenance; ideally involve spouses and children 	Pre-departure training is not always provided (particularly in the case of agent recruitment or where timelines are tight) and does not appear to be imparting all essential information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment agents • PIC government agencies
	Conduct community-level awareness-raising campaigns on the broader benefits of women’s participation in the seasonal work program	Socio-cultural norms view that married women (especially mothers) should focus on their traditional home-based roles, that only men were physically capable of undertaking seasonal labor, and that very few roles in the labor programs were ‘suitable for women’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LSU • Recruitment agents • Community leaders

Demand Side

Given that temporary labor programs are demand-driven, the starting point for increasing participation by women rests with the Australian and New Zealand governments along with the LSUs in sending countries. It is noteworthy that several LSUs, for example in Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga have increased the share of visas granted to female seasonal workers in recent years following the introduction of targets and efforts to increase the number of women in their work-ready pools. In addition, Australia's PLF has gender advisors sitting in LSUs, which has had a significant impact on these developments.

Expand the Range of Sectors and Work Opportunities for Women

Employer associations can work with Australia and New Zealand government agencies to broaden and expand labor mobility schemes to a greater range of sectors and industries such as tourism, hospitality, and aged care. This has already occurred to some extent with recent reforms to the PALM scheme lifting restrictions on industries of employment as long as businesses are located in eligible (rural) locations. In addition, Australia and New Zealand governments could work with employers to alter their perceptions of gender stereotypes of suitable employment for men and women and identify job opportunities and tasks for women within a sector. Within PICs, there is scope to support greater women's participation through: (1) clear messaging to PIC governments and their LSUs to promote better gender balance and ease concerns over adverse outcomes for women; (2) introducing targets or quotas for women participants within the overall demand parameters, with a mindful approach to balancing gender equity objectives with any potential negative impacts on overall demand for workers; (3) revising the selection criteria and processes to reduce barriers to women – for instance, any physical fitness tests should be commensurate with the actual requirements of the tasks they will be undertaking; and (4) working with agents to build awareness and capacity on recruiting women and ensuring recruitment efforts are more targeted in reaching women.

Pacific Labor migration programs can also benefit from insights drawn from countries with a more balanced gender distribution in migration. For instance, the Philippines has successfully integrated labor migration into its development strategy by investing in long-term skills development initiatives. Notably, in response to the increased demand for health care workers in the United States from 2000 to 2007, the Philippines took a proactive approach by expanding its nursing education programs (World Bank, 2023). This move led to a substantial surge in enrollment and graduation rates in Philippine nursing programs, with many students switching from other fields to pursue nursing. In the context of climate change, skills development for vulnerable populations such as women is also vital in preparing them for potential migration and entrance to new labor markets. Additionally, the language and literacy barriers in accessing labor migration opportunities, as highlighted in the report, underscore the necessity for skill development tailored to women's needs.

Encourage More Family-Friendly Approaches

Women's household and caring responsibilities pose a key barrier to women's participation in seasonal work. At the same time, female and male seasonal workers (but especially women) are frequently targeted with negative gossip, particularly around infidelity. Labor mobility programs could be recalibrated and redesigned to encourage more family-friendly approaches to tackle these barriers. Some of the changes that could be introduced to promote women's participation and mitigate the adverse effects of women and men's absence in sending households would be to: (1) provide greater contractual flexibility to reduce or extend contract length by providing migrant workers with multi-entry visas; (2) recruit couples where feasible (with suitable accommodation); and (3) explore options to enable young children to accompany couples. As part of the PALM scheme reforms, Australia has announced that family accompaniment will be trialed from early 2024. The PLMS survey of workers found that a great proportion of workers expressed a desire to bringing their families during their work placement to avoid family separation.

Address Gender Bias in the Recruitment Process

Through collaboration between Australia, New Zealand, and the LSUs of Pacific Island countries, a comprehensive evaluation of governance arrangements and the recruitment process for workers can be conducted to identify potential gender biases that may favor the recruitment of men. Gender biases can vary across the major recruitment methods, including government-managed work-ready pools, licensed private agents, and direct recruitment pathways. Based on the findings of this assessment, the governments of Australia and New Zealand should work together to put in place policies and mechanisms to support greater female participation in Pacific labor mobility schemes. Some sending countries, such as Tonga, have focused on utilizing the work-ready pool to address gender biases in the direct recruitment pathway. This study did not collect enough data on different recruitment/governance methods and their impacts on women's participation in labor migration schemes to provide more detailed recommendations.

Supply Side

Simplify and Streamline Pre-Departure Processes and Provide Clear and Targeted Gender-Specific Information on Available Programs

Pre-departure application processes can be especially daunting for women. Therefore, a key area of improvement is to simplify and streamline pre-departure processes so that there is adequate time between the announcement of successful applicants and departure from the PICs for participants to make the necessary arrangements at home. The program could grant funding for the costs associated with preparing documentation, obtaining passports, and acquiring necessary personal items such as appropriate clothing. This would also help make participation more accessible for those living on the outer islands and would be particularly beneficial for women who generally have lower levels of access to funds to pay for such costs. For example, the Mexican government has provided grants for first time applicants to the

Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) between Mexico and Canada. Programs can also provide an advance or access to a tailored loan facility so participants can cover pre-departure costs without imposing on other family members.

In addition, recruitment agents should ensure women in sending communities have access to clear and targeted gender-specific information on available programs, options, and requirements for participation. This could be done as part of a wider communication campaign targeted at women featuring examples of successful women participants. For instance, communication materials could engage female seasonal workers in awareness-raising and information-sharing activities on the schemes – face-to-face and through local radio, TV, and social media forums. This could highlight the significant socio-economic impacts of women's participation on their households and communities. It might also help alleviate negative household and community-level perceptions based on specific incidents or hearsay, provide practical information on what to expect from the experience, and support prospective workers to feel prepared. In partnership with recruiting agents, local civil society organizations can also help establish and strengthen the existing network of returnee women and men in the PICs.

Strengthen Pre-Departure Training

The study found that pre-departure training has not always been provided (particularly in the case of agent recruitment or where timelines are tight) and does not appear to impart all essential information. Many participating women (and men) said they did not fully understand their employment conditions, particularly pay and deductions. This suggests a lack of understanding of different aspects of labor migration programs and inadequate levels of pre-departure training. Over the past year, the Australian and New Zealand governments have worked to enhance their labor mobility program's pre-departure orientation. However, this research underscores the need for more comprehensive information to ensure that all workers, including those recruited directly by employers or agents (especially first time participants), receive thorough pre-departure briefings and training. Key components to be included in pre-departure briefings are:

1. Information on living and working conditions and requirements and expectations during their placements
2. Costs of recruitment, transportation, and housing in Australia and how these are paid for
3. Clarity around terms and conditions, especially pay and deductions – including how to read and interpret pay slips
4. Awareness and training on social issues such as sexual exploitation and harassment (SEAH) and alcohol consumption
5. Content on relationship maintenance; ideally involving spouses and children in relevant aspects of the training
6. Safety information and what to do in the event of an assault, accident, or emergency

7. Other practical information, such as what (and how much) to pack
8. Financial literacy training, including support for remittance receivers on topics such as opening new bank and mobile money accounts.

In order to improve the clarity of the terms of employment, the ILO's (2022) report recommends that workers have the option to review and possibly renegotiate the terms of their employment, particularly regarding pay rates and deductions for accommodation, transport, and other factors, before they sign their contract.

Community-Level Awareness-Raising Campaigns on the Broader Benefits of Women's Participation

At the community level, a communications campaign could be conducted to build support for husbands and extended family members on broader benefits for the community and families of women traveling for work. The study revealed that for women to participate in the program, they often need the support of their husbands and other family members. Therefore, awareness-raising communications campaigns should include the positive impact of women's participation in seasonal work programs, using case studies and 'stories of change'. In addition, measures should include working in partnership with community leaders and husbands/wives to profile positive role models of seasonal workers and their spouses in changing community perceptions and attitudes towards women in seasonal work programs.

Improving the Experience of Seasonal Workers

The study found several weaknesses in labor mobility programs relating to worker safety, well-being, and working conditions. These included: shared accommodation between male and female seasonal workers creating discomfort and instances of sexual harassment; inadequate access to health care and support services; workplace bullying, racism; inadequate work availability resulting in lost income; low level of knowledge among employers about PICs cultural and religious practices; and lack of support from governments in Australia, New Zealand, and PICs for employers when complications arise in workers' contracts as a result of drug abuse, crime, pregnancy, childbirth, etc. Table 5 provides recommendations aimed to improve seasonal work experience by (1) ensuring worker safety and well-being, including providing separate accommodation facilities and facilitating access to health care and support services, and (2) improving working conditions, including ensuring workers are not financially disadvantaged by inadequate work availability, addressing workplace harassment and discrimination, and fostering cultural awareness among employers.

Table 5. Recommendations to Pacific labor mobility experience

	Recommendation	Barrier addressed	Entity responsible
WORKER SAFETY AND WELL-BEING	Provide separate accommodation facilities	Shared accommodation between males and females creates significant discomfort for many seasonal workers, male and female alike	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers Australian/New Zealand governments
	Facilitate access to health care and support services	<p>Inadequate health insurance cover to meet the health needs of workers, especially female workers</p> <p>Lack of awareness of welfare hotlines and support services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DFAT and MFAT Employers Local Pacific diaspora/ community organizations
	Strengthen access to grievance and other dispute resolution mechanisms for workers	Lack of awareness of welfare hotlines and grievance redress mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DFAT and MFAT
WORKING CONDITIONS	Make it easier for workers to change employers to match work availability	<p>Inadequate work availability, e.g., enforced days off, resulting in lost income</p> <p>Lower hourly rates and unexplained deductions appear to be a concern and impact the experience of female and male workers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DFAT and MFAT Employers
	Address workplace harassment and discrimination. Foster cultural awareness among employers	<p>Workplace racism, bullying, sexual harassment</p> <p>Low level of knowledge among employers about PICs' cultural and religious practices – e.g., Sunday work should be optional</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DFAT and MFAT Employers

Provide Separate Accommodation Facilities for Men and Women

Separate accommodation facilities for men and women are essential to overcome many perceived and apparent risks for women participating in temporary labor migration – including their safety during work placements and mistrust from husbands and other family/community members at home. In addition, mixed accommodation is culturally inappropriate and is viewed as problematic by both male and female workers alike. Therefore, the program should require employers to provide or facilitate segregated single-sex accommodation. Where full segregation is infeasible, at a minimum, employers need to ensure separate sleeping areas and bathroom facilities, and where feasible, minimize other shared areas such as kitchens, living, and laundry spaces. In addition, employers should provide personal spaces that are safe and secure, for example, lockable bedrooms and bathrooms. Financial incentives could potentially be introduced for employers to rent separate accommodation for women, where it is available, or to build additional accommodation facilities. While accommodation guidelines already exist, it is clear that they are not always adhered to. In this regard, in line with ILO's report recommendation, Australia and New Zealand should implement steps to improve enforcement of accommodation standards for seasonal workers (ILO, 2022).

Facilitate Access to Health Care and Support Services

Seasonal workers expressed widespread concerns over the high costs of health care and limited coverage of health insurance. Many struggled when becoming ill and injured because of this coverage gap. Women also have limited access to reproductive health services, including when they become pregnant, which puts the burden on employers. The labor mobility programs must ensure adequate access to health services for workers. Enabling access to Medicare (in Australia; equivalent in New Zealand) and less restrictive insurance coverage during workers' placements would reassure employers and workers and protect women's rights in the workplace. In this regard, the ILO (2022) recommends that seasonal workers should be provided access to the public health system in Australia/New Zealand based on equality of treatment with nationals.

Pacific labor migration schemes can learn from other countries' schemes and mechanisms for health care provision. For example, in Korea, migrant workers under the Employment Permit System have access to national health insurance (Cho, et al., 2018). Within 15 days of signing a contract, the migrant worker must register with the main insurance schemes, including the national pension scheme, national health insurance, industrial accident compensation (tailored to foreign workers), and repatriation cost insurance. This policy mirrors the four major insurance programs for Korean national workers.

Labor migration schemes should also approach the issue of female migrant workers and the eventuality that they could become pregnant in terms of broader employment rights. It is crucial to safeguard their employment rights, accommodation, and protections throughout the process, including equal treatment, non-discrimination, access to appropriate health care, pre- and post-natal support, and maternity leave. This issue necessitates an in-depth policy discussion that integrates gender-responsive approaches and engages multiple stakeholders. Global experience can inform approaches to managing similar issues, such as Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), where the rights of all workers, including temporary foreign workers, are protected by law. SAWP's seasonal agricultural workers have access to free (universal) provincial health insurance coverage, which covers the costs for medically necessary services related to pregnancy.

In addition, there is a need to improve awareness of the (Australian) welfare hotline and access to pastoral care services. Workers and employers must know their rights and obligations under the pastoral care policies. Employers must meet the pastoral care policy requirements to obtain Approved Employer/Recognised Seasonal Employer status. They range from: transportation for workers at arriving and departing ports, as well as work transportation; suitable and affordable accommodation; induction to work and social life in Australia and New Zealand; access to health care and banking; protective equipment; translators; and if necessary, access to religious observations,

recreation, and links to the local community and church groups. In addition, employers should ensure that their staff working on PICs worker welfare have a contextual understanding of the Pacific islands. Labor mobility programs should review guidelines for pastoral care for workers who suffer health and well-being challenges and ensure the availability of well-trained and dedicated welfare staff to attend to the needs of workers with professionalism. This support could extend to workers who disengage from the employer.

Pacific labor migration schemes can look at other countries that have put in place dedicated programs that support migrant workers. For example, in Korea, support and counseling for migrant workers during their stay in Korea is provided by the HUG Korea (government-run counseling centers for foreign workers) along with CSOs (Cho, et al., 2018). HUG Korea's counseling centers are financed by the Ministry of Employment and Labor. The centers are located nationwide, with a geographical focus on areas with high concentrations of low-skilled migrant workers. In addition to guidance and counseling in migrants' native languages, they provide a platform for migrant workers to discuss difficulties associated with living and working in Korea. HUG Korea centers, along with CSOs, host regular cultural activities in public spaces for both natives and foreigners and also use social media to broadcast the services they provide.

Increase Access to Grievance and Other Dispute-Resolution Mechanisms for Workers

It is essential to strengthen access to grievance and other dispute resolution mechanisms for workers in cases of alleged abuse of their rights without fear of retaliatory measures. Grievance mechanisms exist in ANZ but are sometimes not used because of a lack of information, cultural hesitations, shyness, and some sending country governments urging their workers not to use them. Grievance redress mechanisms need to be independent, not tied to Approved Employers, and involve women's groups and CSOs. The study highlighted questions about the accessibility and effectiveness of these channels for seasonal workers. By giving people the capacity to provide feedback to Pacific labor migration scheme administrators, a grievance mechanism gives beneficiaries and the public a voice in the program's administration and performance. Increasingly, grievance mechanisms are essential for identifying and responding to GBV (sexual abuse and exploitation/sexual harassment [SEA/SH]). As a result, it is also a crucial instrument in monitoring SEA/SH risks, and more broadly GBV risks, and a pathway for referring workers to support services for survivors of GBV.

Specifically, grievance redress mechanisms should:

1. Include multiple channels through which complaints can be registered in a safe and confidential manner, including through anonymous complaints reporting mechanisms or trusted intermediaries (ideally, trusted women)
2. These channels should respect the privacy of complainants and require their informed consent throughout the grievance mechanism process. In this regard, grievance redress mechanisms should adopt a survivor-centered approach whereby the safety and well-being of the survivor is the first priority, and any action is only be taken with the survivor's informed consent
3. Establish standard operating procedures for receiving GBV-related complaints, for referring complainants to GBV services, and for processing the complaint
4. Grievance mechanism should be sensitive to social or other constraints women face in reporting cases of GBV
5. Ensure appropriate training of grievance redress staff and any focal points or intermediaries (if designated) to handle GBV complaints appropriately
6. Identify and map GBV support services in areas of Pacific labor migration employment
7. Ensure that grievance mechanisms provide adequate safeguards against possible risk of backlash from reporting
8. Train grievance mechanism staff on protocols for handling GBV-related reports, emphasizing survivor-centric approaches and the importance of maintaining confidentiality
9. Involve communities, local authorities, and women's groups in the development of grievance mechanism policies and procedures
10. Undertake community outreach to explain the functioning of the grievance mechanism. Disseminate information on how to report complaints, including that reporting grievances will not negatively affect program participation.

Make it Easier for Workers to Change Employers to Match Work Availability

Working conditions are another concern raised by many female and male workers.

The lack of clarity concerning pay and deductions, and irregular hours, were issues that workers consistently brought up. Labor mobility schemes also need to provide the flexibility to allow workers to change employers to match work availability and provide greater clarity around terms and conditions, especially relating to pay and deductions, including clearly itemized pay slips. The minimum hourly pay requirement for farm workers enacted by the Australian government in April 2022 will improve seasonal workers' salaries and help to address the underpayment of workers (Cooper, 2022).

While in most temporary labor migration schemes for low-skilled workers, changes of employers are not often permitted, there are some notable exceptions.

In Korea, the Employment Permit System (EPS) allows employees to change employers up to three times within the same sector and under limited conditions, including delays in getting paid, verbal or physical abuse, or employer bankruptcy (Cho, et al., 2018). To initiate the change process, EPS workers must obtain approval from the Human Resource Development Service of Korea (the implementing agency of the labor migration program), with justifications agreeable to both worker and employer. After terminating the initial contract, a worker has three months to find a new job before he or she will be asked to leave Korea. If the job center has not found a new job match within two months, the search will be escalated to meet the deadline. The matching process for a change of employer is similar to the initial job matching; in both cases, employers are provided with a list of potential workers instead of workers being given information on potential employers. In the United Arab Emirates, workers received higher benefits upon contract renewal after a reform allowing them to change employers (Kagan and Cholewinski, 2022).

In addition, the governments of Australia and New Zealand can establish pathways from seasonal to temporary visas and, ultimately, to permanent residency. Australia, for example, has announced a new pathway for permanent residency through the Pacific Engagement Visa and an allowance for PALM workers who are in longer placements (one to four years) to bring their families to Australia. These opportunities can help inspire migrant workers to improve their skills during their stay in the host country and advance in their careers.

Address Sexual Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace

Women in male-dominated fields like the agriculture sector are put at heightened risk when no systems are in place to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, physical abuse, or compounding issues like alcoholism and drug abuse.

The threat is even more pervasive in remote locations with limited supervision and feedback mechanisms. For example, some female seasonal workers reported sexual harassment when engaging in employment overseas. This issue is likely being underreported due to a myriad of reasons including: its taboo nature; fear of losing employment; lack of confidence in the available redress or response mechanisms; or female workers feeling

unable to substantiate their claims with evidence, not realizing that a particular behavior is a form of sexual harassment, dreading facing an uncomfortable confrontation, or feeling uncomfortable reporting it. Another form of harassment involves hostile working environments, in which the conduct of coworkers or supervisors creates conditions that are intimidating or humiliating for women. It is also plausible to expect that women who had negative placement experiences such as bullying and sexual harassment would continue to suffer post-traumatic stress or other adverse effects after their return.

Addressing sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace is of critical importance. Employers need to develop and strengthen policies to prevent and counteract bullying and sexual harassment in the workplace. Companies should also focus on protocols for reporting, accountability, and fair conflict resolution, to create a trusting workplace (IFC, 2018). Specifically, an anti-sexual harassment policy should:

1. Clearly outline commitment to a harassment-free workplace (including employees' behavior outside of the workplace)
2. Detail sanctions for policy violators, potentially including termination and referral to law enforcement if appropriate
3. Provide direction on how to lodge sexual harassment complaints and identify the services available for victims
4. Clarify protections and support for bystander employees who report incidents and a process for action and follow-up, including reporting on progress and referrals to community support services
5. Stipulate that complaints will be treated with utmost confidentiality and discretion
6. Reference applicable laws on sexual harassment, indicating the potential for criminal prosecution for anyone found to have committed sexual harassment or assault
7. Include training and awareness-raising to ensure that all staff understand these policies in the workplace
8. Establish clear codes of conduct for employees and project staff on worksites and in the workplace. Having staff sign and agree to uphold these codes of conduct can be an effective strategy across many sectors. Codes of conduct should clearly outline what constitutes unacceptable behavior and the consequences for harassment or any other type of gender-based violence. Mechanisms should also be created for the community for reporting.

In addition, managers and supervisors of companies that hire seasonal workers could be trained on the principles of establishing respectful workplaces. This training would include providing cultural awareness and teamwork training and activities to foster workplace harmony, reduce misunderstandings, and improve the experience for all parties.

Maximizing Development Impact of Seasonal Migration in Labor-Sending Countries

To address the social effects of seasonal migration on sending households and optimize the benefits of labor migration for both the communities of origin and destination – and the migrants themselves – clearly formulated strategies and interventions are needed. Policies and interventions should include linking remittances with broader financial services and financial literacy training, and providing gender-friendly business development services (BDS). They can be grouped into those that: (1) seek to mitigate the social impacts of labor mobility; and (2) maximize the development impact of seasonal work in home countries. Table 6 presents the key recommendations for both strategic objectives.

Table 6. Recommendations to mitigate the negative social effects and maximize the impact of seasonal migration in sending countries

	Recommendation	Barrier addressed	Entity responsible
MITIGATE THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SEASONAL MIGRATION	Conduct family workshops to help to migrate workers' family members to prepare for the challenges of long-term separation	A marital relationship suffers when the overseas male partner believes that their partner is being unfaithful at home. This can lead to domestic violence, divorce, or destitution of children A high sense of female responsibility towards households means that females are more likely to participate when there is an alternative caregiver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment agencies PIC government agencies
	Institutionalize and expand support services for migrants and their families	Disruption to family life and lack of a parent's care and supervision might negatively affect children's school performance Concerns over care arrangements involving extended family, particularly for remaining male partners who might struggle to adapt to care provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LSUs and PIC government agencies in partnership with CSOs and development partners
	Implement solutions to foster communication of seasonal workers with families in sending countries	Reliable and reasonably priced communications were not available for all participants, with internet connectivity especially challenging in the outer islands of Kiribati	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PIC government in partnership with development partners CSOs

MAXIMIZE DEVELOPMENT IMPACT	Link remittances with broader financial services and financial literacy training	Seasonal workers may allocate their earnings and savings towards unproductive expenditures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development partners, MFI, and local banks
	Provide gender-friendly business development services (BDS)	Inadequate quality of BDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development partners, MFI, and local banks
	Engage the diaspora to enhance local community and human capital development	Lack of investment of PIC communities' local development and human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PIC governments, civil society organization, diaspora organizations

Conduct Family Workshops to Help Seasonal Workers' Family Members to Prepare for the Challenges of Long-Term Separation

Family separation places strain on social ties and familial relationships. The study found evidence that some workers and their families experience difficulties maintaining relationships at a distance – including instances of extra-marital affairs, relationship breakdowns, and challenges associated with managing childcare and other domestic responsibilities. There are also misunderstandings between workers and families (e.g., concerning finances, communication, or social media) that can contribute to distrust and relationship breakdown.

To mitigate these risks, recruitment agencies and LSUs should provide family workshops to help migrating workers and one significant other family member prepare for the challenges of long-term separation. This could be done by expanding the pre-departure briefing format. The training should cover issues such as financial management, relationship and communications maintenance, ways to prepare and cope with any problems relating to long-term separation, equitable household decision-making, equitable allocation of roles at home, and harmful gender norms that lead to domestic violence and its consequences. In Vanuatu, the 'Family Readiness Pilot' (*Famili I Redi*) program is assisting couples in gaining a better understanding of what to expect from work in Australia and learn techniques to maintain respectful, empathetic, compassionate long-distance relationships, as well as negotiate financial management (Palladium, 2022).

Institutionalize and Expand Support Services for Migrants and their Families

There is a need to establish or expand family welfare support services for sending families at the community level. LSUs can establish a family welfare unit and outreach program that could work on identifying, developing, and strengthening connections with informal (e.g., churches and village chiefs) and formal (e.g., government and civil society organizations) stakeholders who are able to assist with social issues and develop referral systems for support services. LSUs can undertake a mapping of support services and identify needs and gaps for sending households to begin this work. Some concrete measures include creating a tariff-free central hotline that provides information and counseling services and allows migrants and their families to share their difficulties, as well as the creation of safe spaces and community groups where migrant-sending families can share their struggles and help each other to find solutions. The social costs of seasonal migration of sending households could be less traumatic and resiliency could be enhanced if migration experience is collectively shared and socially normalized, with adequate support systems in place. Enabling a culture of support and recognition of the efforts of migrant families requires partnerships with civil society, the private sector, media, and non-governmental organizations.

Furthermore, schools, community centers, and church groups could offer additional support for children to address some of the limitations in health, social, and cultural resources at home. For example, community centers could offer respite childcare for aged caregivers and children, access to cultural enrichment, academic support, social connection, and counseling. Beyond these strategies, another possibility would be to provide visiting 'family coaches' who could offer parenting support, resources, and advocacy in securing services for caregivers and children from sending households. Proactive initiatives to build resilience in children – whether based with family coaches, in community centers, or at schools – could be valuable in buffering the adverse effects of parental absence. Incorporating counseling and resilience-building into comprehensive plans to support children may ease psychosocial distress and reduce the escalation of slight psychosocial problems to severe ones.

Implement Solutions to Foster Communication of Seasonal Workers with Families in Sending Countries

Communication with migrants is the key to the well-being of sending households. Community-based organizations may help establish and run Internet centers that provide migrant families free access to Skype, MSN, or any locally popular instant messaging service to keep in touch with migrants. In locations with no or patchy connectivity, labor-sending countries – with support from development partners – can invest in and improve the quality of telecommunication infrastructure.

Link Remittances with Broader Financial Services and Financial Literacy Training

Remittances can be a driver for bolstering women's financial inclusion and financial literacy. Women can exercise considerable individual and collective agency through their remitting practices, both as recipients and senders of remittances. To bolster this opportunity, it is essential to find innovative form linkages between remittances and financial services tailored to women, such as remittance-linked savings; financial products such as personal and emergency loans; housing finance; microinsurance; pensions, etc. In addition, the need to remit or receive money leads women to open their first bank accounts in their names/under their control. Therefore, programs can facilitate access to other formal financial services offered by banks, including savings, credit, and insurance – as well as the first step for introduction to entrepreneurship.

Women in PICs would also benefit from financial literacy and financial management training, and tailored advice. Women could learn about various financial services (including affordable remittance services) and how to use remittances efficiently and sustainably for the household. The impact of financial literacy goes beyond the migrant's financial situation to the (extended) family and the community. Financial training can also be embedded in pre-departure training to orient women on banking and options for sending and receiving remittances.

Provide Gender-Friendly Business Development Services (BDS) for Migrant Entrepreneurship

The study found that many female seasonal workers interviewed mentioned that they had invested their remittances and savings in starting small businesses. Women are, in general, in more need of capacity-support for developing their entrepreneurship endeavors than men. Therefore, the provision of business development services (BDS) tailored to women in PICs is an area that development partners in PIC countries can support. The content of BDS needs to be based on the specific needs of the local business context and the female target group. A gender-focused needs assessment should be conducted to assess: availability; affordability; type of economic activities and products; current capacity and knowledge; accessible location; time of the day; the length of BDS; and cultural barriers to accessing BDS to inform the content and delivery methods of BDS. BDS should also encourage group formation and organizing among micro- and small-sized women's enterprises to improve their bargaining power and formalize their voice and needs. BDS can also include confidence-building training, life skills development, and follow-up mentoring services.

Engage the Diaspora to Enhance Local Community and Human Capital Development

Policies for engaging the diaspora are becoming a significant component of development strategies of migrant-sending countries through networks, information, and integration (Boyle and Kitchin, 2013; Gamlen, 2006; Pellerin and Mullings, 2013). The interviews revealed that during their placements in Australia/New Zealand, many workers were well-supported by the local diaspora community, both with arrival and settling-in support, and subsequently during their stay. Boyle and Kitchin (2013) identified the following diaspora roles: advocacy; direct investment; knowledge networks; philanthropy; return migration; tourism; and human capital efforts. PICs can design policies to facilitate diaspora philanthropy to enhance local community development. For example, in the Philippines, associations of overseas Filipino workers are engaged in diaspora philanthropy that has helped to respond to natural disasters and other local development endeavors (Alayon, 2009; Licuanan et al., 2015). Besides financial assistance, diasporas can assist human capital development efforts in PICs by sharing knowledge and contacts, participating in mentoring organizations, training talented colleagues, and joining think tanks, consultation groups, and advisory councils. For example, The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE) attempts to improve the entrepreneurial skills of Indians both in India and in the diaspora through mentoring, networking, and education.



Concluding Remarks

This qualitative study has highlighted the positive and transformational impacts of Pacific labor migration for participating workers, households, and communities.

Some of these findings are new, and others confirm what has been identified in previous studies. Interviews across the board show that the scheme has improved the welfare of seasonal workers, their families, and communities. It has resulted in building permanent houses, home improvements, school fees, and money for the community, church, and customary needs. At the individual level, the interviews show that temporary labor migration programs unequivocally have resulted in the accumulation of human capital gained by working abroad, such as qualifications, interpersonal skills, time management, and notions of independence. Consistently, female participants reported a newfound sense of financial and economic independence, higher self-esteem, and specialized knowledge and skills, as well as gaining greater power within the family due to their greater control over financial resources and contribution to household spending. By sending remittances, women emerge as breadwinners, a role typically attributed to men in many societies, which ultimately enhances their social status and can improve gender equality over generations. There is an overall perception among respondents that female participants are likely to send more remittances than men for household spending on children's health care and education, for home improvements, and to invest in business endeavors. Respondents said that men sometimes misuse funds on alcohol or items considered 'extravagant' or unnecessary. In sum, while women participate in seasonal work programs in small numbers, the economic gains are significant when they do. Pacific labor migration provides the potential for women to transform their lives and social status on their return home, opening spaces for women to participate in community affairs. The overall conclusion of this study is that women's participation in Pacific labor mobility schemes has reshaped gender norms and relations, promoting transformative interventions towards more gender egalitarianism in PICs.

The study also revealed that a migrant's absence has some negative consequences for non-migrants, be they children, the elderly, or a spouse.

Interviews echo findings from previous studies that describe the emotional toll that family separation has on family members, especially when the periods of absences are long, such as under the PLS or because of repeated seasonal labor migration of a family member. The most reported prominent adverse effects for children were neglect or behavioral problems. There were also numerous reports of family breakdown caused by married seasonal migrants having affairs. Notably, a new finding is the perception (by both men and women interviewed) that it is the woman's fault when extra-marital affairs and family

breakdowns occurred following women's participation in labor migration. There were also mixed reports of whether seasonal labor migration provoked domestic violence, which had not been documented previously. Respondents from Vanuatu were more willing to discuss domestic violence than those from Kiribati or Tonga, with some suggesting that actual or suspected infidelity on the part of women participants led to increased domestic violence. Yet, other key community informants and seasonal migrants in Vanuatu said that domestic violence in the community had fallen, partly due to improved household financial status.

The study also highlights women's constraints in participating in seasonal or temporary work and issues arising during placement. Among the key constraints women face are their marital status, consent from partners, and gender bias in hiring. There is an overall perception that it is inappropriate for married women to participate in seasonal work since their primary responsibilities lie in their caring and domestic roles within their household. Some women also were concerned that if they left their children behind, they might not be adequately supervised and cared for. In addition, family breakdowns attributed to other women's participation deterred them from joining. Women also relied on consent, or at least support, from other family members. Men's marital status and age were not perceived as a barrier. At the institutional level, women face gender bias in the hiring process. Employers and recruitment agents prefer hiring men, as they consider them to have more options in terms of 'suitable' work (more physical capacity), including more senior or technically-demanding roles. Employers also prefer hiring men to avoid issues related to pregnancies and family breakdowns.

Finally, the study points to several problems arising during placements. Key among those were unfavorable workplace conditions in terms of perceptions of underpayment, unfair and high deductions, limited coverage of health insurance, and unsuitable accommodation that increased women's vulnerability to sexual harassment, gossip, and suspicions of infidelity. The negative experience of shared accommodation, in turn, exacerbates women's disinterest in participating in the labor mobility scheme. This is due to the stigma of infidelity that could be associated with it. The latter finding concerning shared accommodation has not been highlighted in other studies so starkly as in this research.

The interviews did not reveal many differences in findings between urban and rural locations. This may be attributed to the fact that some rural areas in the sample do not participate in seasonal migration to a significant degree. However, one difference found across the board was that the geography and remoteness of some rural locations, especially outer islands, entailed higher travel costs and limited availability of relevant information, resulting in uneven access to migration opportunities. In Kiribati, in particular, rural resident workers found it harder to obtain the necessary documentation to apply for seasonal programs because they had to travel to urban centers and wait for their papers to come through. In Kiribati, too, seasonal workers reported difficulties in remitting money and communicating with family members in rural locations.

In terms of reported differences in seasonal migrants' experiences in the different programs (SWP, RSE, PLS), a few differences were reported by community key informants. There was a general perception among key informants from Vanuatu and Tonga that employment under the SWP in Australia provides higher wages than the RSE in New Zealand. In terms of differences between the PLS and the other two schemes, an issue that elicited stronger opinions was concerns over children's welfare when the mother travels under the PLS and children are left in the care of extended family. The other two significant differences were that aspiring PLS workers needed a higher educational level than workers applying to the SWP and the RSE. For instance, prospective applicants had to fill out forms to apply for the program, complete some tests, and be interviewed by Australia-based employers. None of these could be feasible without a minimum level of formal education.

Pacific labor mobility schemes, including the PALM and RSE, are now well-established programs for temporary labor migration. The schemes, though not perfect, are commended for their clear guiding principles, institutional arrangements, and constant efforts to strengthen their implementation. However, a few significant challenges require further policy innovation and action. For example, the need to increase women's participation in seasonal work programs, prevent sexual harassment, and offer sex-segregated accommodation in Australia and New Zealand. Temporary migration programs can also provide more family-friendly approaches such as family accompaniment, especially for longer-duration programs such as PLS. Further, Australia and New Zealand governments can improve worker protection by providing seasonal workers with health insurance covering basic procedures, counseling, and social support through more robust pastoral care. In addition, allowing seasonal workers to switch jobs under certain conditions can reduce the number of migrants falling outside of contracts, as may happen in job mismatch. In sending communities, there is a need to provide support for sending families, and for returnees to be integrated into local communities. PIC governments can partner with civil society organizations and donors to design and implement programs to help mitigate the adverse effects arising from worker absences and maximize the development impact of temporary labor migration programs brought about by remittances and skills acquisition of seasonal migrants.

Certain policy and program changes might be easy to make, while others require innovative solutions and concerted efforts from different stakeholders across countries. For changes that require greater policy coordination, policymakers could create regional stakeholder groups involving employers, unions, local government officials, church and government welfare agencies, and relevant representatives from local PICs communities. As relationships between employers and communities strengthen, opportunities for collaboration may develop, such as skills training and capacity-building programs for PICs, supporting community projects in PICs, and other joint ventures.

The recommendations presented in this report, aimed at enhancing women's participation in Pacific labor migration initiatives, improving working conditions for women, and maximizing the development impact on women, families, and communities in PICs, are also relevant to similar temporary labor migration programs and migration routes in other parts of the world, as the issue of low female participation is not unique to Pacific labor migration schemes.

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Appendix 1. Recruitment Methods of Seasonal Workers

Employers in Australia and New Zealand recruit seasonal workers through different methods that are determined by participating PICs and differ between countries. Recruitment models fall under three categories: (1) job seekers pre-register for a work-ready pool,²¹ and government officials select workers directly according to the criteria nominated by the employer; (2) employers engage a private sector licensed recruitment agent²² in-country to select workers; or (3) employers recruit workers directly in the participating country; however, they must also liaise with the participating country's labor-sending unit and follow their guidelines for worker registration to ensure eligibility (Curtain and Howes, 2020).

In Tonga and Vanuatu, the government plays a reduced role in worker recruitment, largely outsourcing recruitment and associated functions, such as helping workers get a visa or medical clearance, to employers, their representatives and the private sector (agents). Tonga relies heavily on direct recruitment facilitated by a number of intermediaries. The Labor Sending Unit (LSU) maintains a small work-ready pool, but a very small share of workers is recruited from the work-ready pool. The new labor mobility policy, endorsed by the cabinet in 2020, emphasizes the value of employers recruiting through the work-ready pool. Consequently, more effort is now going into registering workers for this method of employer selection. Direct recruitment also occurs through an employer's team leaders or other return workers who are asked to select new workers. The Tongan diaspora also plays an important role in recruitment (as intermediaries and employers). In Vanuatu, there is no work-ready pool for seasonal work (there was one, but it was abolished in around 2010), though one has recently been set up for PLS worker selection. Recruitment relies on licensed agents who work on behalf of Australian and New Zealand employers to identify, screen, brief, and arrange transport to Australia or New Zealand for selected seasonal workers. Licenses are issued separately for the two schemes (SWP and RSE) by the Department of Labor and Employment Services and are renewed annually. Most if not all licensed agents are ni-Vanuatu.²³ Many agents are past seasonal workers themselves and have set up an

²¹ Selection processes for work-ready pools are determined in each participating country. Nonetheless, all candidates must be fit and healthy, of good character, and meet all other SWP/RSE/PLS eligibility criteria. Pre-screening and selection of workers is commonly done at the village and district level by district and town officers. Applicants for the work-ready pool must submit a letter of support from their partner/parents. An independent third party from the applicant's local community (e.g., a town or district officer) must complete an evaluation form and provide their informed assessment of whether the applicant satisfies the selection criteria. Applicants may also attach a character reference from their church or religious leaders or other community leaders to support their application. Employers work with the participating country's labor-sending unit (LSU) to shortlist, interview, and select workers from the work-ready pool.

²² Licensees work on behalf of employers to identify, screen, brief, and arrange transport to Australia/NZ of selected seasonal workers.

²³ An indigenous person from Vanuatu.

agency to assist extended family members with the hope of a shared benefit in the long run. Several issues have been raised regarding the recruitment agent model, mainly relating to charging workers fees for finding employment in seasonal worker programs and the existence of 'fake' (unlicensed) agents.

In Kiribati, recruitment via the work-ready pool is the preferred recruitment pathway. The Overseas Employment Unit of the Ministry of Employment and Human Resources establishes a work-ready pool of suitable candidates with qualifications in horticulture, automotive mechanics, carpentry, painting, tiling, plumbing, roofing, hospitality, age care, and community services from which the Australia and New Zealand employers can recruit. Here, although employers make the final recruitment choice, they have to select workers from the work-ready pool.²⁴ The work-ready pool is established through a three-step process.²⁵ In the first step, candidates from each island register their names through their island councils. First, screening is carried out from the registration list by an island council's Pre-Selection Committee, and eligible candidates' names are forwarded to the Ministry for further screening. In the second step, forwarded candidate names from each island council are screened further by the Overseas Employment Unit where specific criteria are reviewed for each candidate. Finally, in the third step, successful candidates undergo a pre-departure program which is jointly delivered by the Ministry's Marine Training Center (MTC) and Kiribati Institute of Technology (KIT). Some of the core components include employability skills such as communication skills, learning to work in cultural diversity, leadership and teamwork, personal hygiene and work health and safety, and goal setting. Similar pre-departure training courses are delivered by all sending countries. Finally, there are three countries – Fiji, Samoa, and Solomon Islands – which take a 'mixed' approach; there is a significant work-ready pool, but employers either do not have to use it or can nominate the workers they want to hire into it.

²⁴ Timor-Leste, PNG, Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Nauru all require hiring from the work-ready pool.

²⁵ See website from Kiribati's Ministry of Employment and Human Resources for an explanation of the process: <https://www.employment.gov.ki/labour-division/overseas-employment-oe-unit/overseas-employment-process>



