

RESEARCH REPORTS

Results of a Qualitative Survey of Samoan Workers in Australia's Pacific Labor Mobility Programme (Palm)

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Introduction

This article presents the findings of interviews done by seven staff members, three men and four women, from the Centre for Samoan Studies at the National University of Samoa. It is a follow-up study to complement an initial study by the Centre for Samoan Studies with workers who had done seasonal work in New Zealand (see Fatupaito et.al. 2021) They used their own contacts to each identify and interview three persons from their own family or from their community networks, a total of 24 interviews. The researchers had a set of general questions intended to lead a conversation (*talanoa*) with the workers about their work, their reasons for going and their experiences. The 24 interviews were conducted in the Samoan language and then each interviewer translated the recorded interview into English. The interview summaries do not use the real names of those interviewed, according to ethical considerations

Our report has two parts, the first present results of interviews with seasonal workers, the second on workers employed under the terms of the Pacific

1. The Australian Seasonal Worker Programme

Of nine first-time workers in the SWP, eight were employed in horticultural industries and one in the cattle industry. Almost all the same issues were described by our 2021 survey of participants who worked under the New Zealand RSE but some more troubling experiences were described in relation to their employment with labour hire firms that had not come up in relation to the New Zealand RSE. These are referred to in the conclusion of this section of the article.

Participant's experiences of seasonal work in horticulture and aviculture

Fala, a woman aged 30 was a hotel waitress in Samoa. She had initially applied to MCIL when the RSE scheme commenced in 2007 and persisted by following up regularly until she was finally called for training in July 2021. She wants to continue doing seasonal work but hopes to work on the longer term on PLS with the hopes of getting a residence visa to Australia. Her employer was Tasmania berry growing company that used seasonal workers for their operations, as well as supplying labour to other growers. She longed to go because:

I've seen many people who came back from seasonal works very successful and have helped a lot with family developments and have contributed much in village and church activities. I want to be successful just like them and that's my reason of applying.

Her contract was for 12 months. Her first job was picking strawberries, starting work at 6 am and she picked 40 boxes a day or more. She became team leader of 13 Samoa women. After the picking season for that fruit, they worked pruning vines. When that work was done, they were sent out on shorter jobs to vegetable growers to harvest potatoes and pumpkins, and then to a vineyard to label and pack bottles of wine, then returning to picking and pruning. The work was physically demanding, sometimes in bad weather with bending and lifting heavy items. At the end of the contract, she returned to Samoa and plans to go back after three months to the same company.

She received fortnightly pay-slips itemizing her pay and deductions.

I observed people who were given the contract to sign, they just signed without reading or they just scanned through without reading properly to understand. As a team leader, whenever there's a problem within the workforce, I always asked my teammates how they understand the contract they signed, most have a vague knowledge of it and said they just looked at the page where it mentioned the amount of money paid to them.

Deductions were frequently an issue with the employer:

Sometimes, our working hours have been deducted and this is a constant issue between the company and us. We constantly approached the office to give us a valid reason of why some hours we worked have not been paid but they came up with a vague

explanation that they will look into it. I sometimes got a back pay but not often. The payroll officer is never around to answer our queries. It's really hard for some workers who speak limited English to fight back for a good reason of why they did not receive their full pay according to the hours they worked and the reason for such deductions.

She was paid on a piece work basis; for example, with fruit picking the more boxes she packed the more money she received on pay day. She said although she calculated her picking and how much she would receive on pay day, she was baffled to be told that some of her boxes were no good and would not be counted, so she gets less than she expected.

Money is deducted for food [but] the food we get from the canteen is not good. Some whole weeks we are only fed pork meat and rice. Sometimes we don't go to the canteen to get food to be fed with the same menu; we went to the shop to get some snacks for our nightly feed.

She was also critical of the health insurance deduction, when she had paid for her own treatment:

What I don't understand, they deducted our health insurance, but every time I go to the hospital for checkup [for Covid test, or treatment for flu], I always paid for consultation. I ask the palagi woman why I get to pay for my checkup instead of the company and she said they will reimburse my money but they never did. Something is absolutely not right about this process. I thought they will reimburse our health insurance once we finished our contract like what I heard from my friends working as RSE in NZ, that if our insurance was not used but nothing.

She added that her superannuation payment was not made and she was suspicious that the labour hire company was defrauding Pacific Island workers:

We still are waiting for it. The lady filling this entitlement said the only company that hasn't filed any super is this company. I smell fraud here.

She said she sent money to her family every two weeks, and had a saving account so she had a lump sum to bring home when her contract finished. Her family comprises her father, her stepmother, her sister, brother in law, and their children. She paid for an extension to their house and for home appliances, and will save to build a chain link fence around their ¼ acre block of land when she returns to work.

She thought the one of most negative aspects of seasonal work were to do with workplace relations

Supervisors show favoritism towards some of the workers, especially to the Tongans [who had been on the job longer and were well known to the managers] and officers of the company don't attend to the workers queries and problems whenever we approached them.

She commented that some Samoan seasonal workers treat their work as though it was casual labour and that those in her team who were absentees have not been offered another contract.

They only get paid only when they work, and some work only two or three days a week. Some go visits their families for a week or few days, if their families pay for their fares. There is always an excuse for them to stay away from work. The company never cares if they don't go to work, but always keeps a record of people who usually don't work or constantly absent from work.

Fele, a man aged 24, reported an even less happy experience with a labour hire company. He is a former graduate of the Maritime School of the National University of Samoa, and worked on Samoa's inter-island ferries. An Australian company recruited him through MCIL, after a fitness test, which supplies workers through the seasonal worker programme and offers job training and placement. He was still in Australia when interviewed via Zoom:

My contract is for nine months [but] it was extended for another five months in a different location. I left Samoa to start my contract in September 2021 and I will be returning home in November 2022. I went to Australia as a strawberry picker, when first get there I did not work for two months as the fruit was not ready and we did not get paid for that period of time, and it was written in the contract we signed if we don't work, we won't get paid. The company lent us money for our needs but we needed to pay them once we earn our salary. When we started working and had our income that is when we started paying for our airfares, our houses and so forth. Towards the end of my contract, my boss asked me if I want to extend my contract but I have to work in a different place to pick oranges, so then I signed for another five months. Where I am working now I had to pick the oranges, but our working day depends on the weather therefore I usually work for only 3 or 4 days as the weather changes from time to time. The work is so hard but we don't earn much since we do not work for a whole week. We had to deal with different weathers every day.

He said he applied to be a seasonal worker because he had observed many men from his village returning home from seasonal work:

They were able to develop their families by building new houses, bought a new car that encourages me to come as a seasonal worker and be able to help develop my family.

He said he was given an oral translation of his contract, which was in English, when he signed it. He was puzzled about having to pay a double deduction to repay his recruitment costs:

They deducted from my pay the money they spent on my Visa, airfare, hotels and food before I got paid. I paid off my debt within the first three months of my contract as the company doubled my deduction. I asked for the reason why and they said it is a must to pay the debt within the first three months of our contract so that I can have my full pay quickly. I have to pay for my house, water bills, and electricity and they also deducted an amount for my savings and I will have that money back when I have to return home.

Overall, he had experienced many disappointments, but he said: the experience enabled him to help his family:

I am assisting my family financially for their church donations, fa'alavelave contribution and for their shopping fortnightly or whenever they call. I help my parents, my siblings and their children. I have to send them money every two weeks and I have a saving apart from the money deducted by the company as my saving. I have a goal since my parent's house is old, when I come back, I will make an extension and have buy some furniture depending on the money I have now that is something I need to do from the money I am earning here in Australia I would like to migrate to Australia as a worker but in a different field as I want to experience other works too, they offer many job opportunities with high pay.

Like most of those interviewed Fele commented Samoans wanting seasonal work overseas should deny themselves and save for their families:

The work is hard and the money earned is good so if they plan to work on contracts in Australia, they better stop drinking alcohol. It is one of many Samoans' weaknesses, they spend more money on alcohol and end up sent back home but the contract is not finished. Make wise decisions and be able to save money and do not waste the opportunity.

The extent to which low-income households wanted to send their young people overseas to work was explained by Tana, she was 26 when she went, and had not had paid worker before she worked for a labour hire company in Victoria for 12 months. Her family learned of the opportunities for seasonal work from their local member of parliament, who visited household in her urban neighborhood offering to help those who wanted to go. The MP did this to win political support in the forthcoming elections. He had contacts in MCIL and helped them to register and be chosen:

I am the eldest child of my parents, who did not finish [secondary] school because my parents could not afford. So, I ended up caring for my parents and my siblings. At that time, I started working at planting beans, cucumber and tomato to sell at [a stall] in front of our house ... for paying my little brother's school fees. This encouraged me to ... become a seasonal worker to help and develop my poor family. I usually sent money to my parents weekly and saved money as there should be something greater to come out of this opportunity. So, the purpose of the saving was to build our new house [that] we live in nowadays.

She said she had no issues with the terms of her employment and is going again to the same job:

I felt so happy because without that job, I did not have the experience of picking different fruits and handling them with care. It is different from picking fruits in Samoa, here in Samoa we just grab it from the tree or use the stone to throw at it, in order for us to have it. I have learned a lot of experience from working together as a team. Even

though how hard and how many plantations we were planned to work on, it is nothing if we work together as a team. The only disadvantage of the job was the cold weather.

It will be great if we can migrate and stay permanently in Australia and if it is possible my parents and my siblings can apply too [laughing]

Some in our sample were well educated; for example, Neta a married woman aged 27 was formerly employed in Samoa as a teacher and librarian in a secondary college. She worked in Tasmania, mainly picking berries. She said she applied for seasonal work because her wages were not covering her obligations for her family, church and villages. She said she understood her contract in English, which she signed in Australia. She had no issues with the terms of her employment and was proud of the help she gave her family:

Every fortnight I sent money home of SAT \$1,000.00 in total to my parents and children for their school needs. When I returned, I brought with me SAT\$20,000, part of this money was used for our car maintenance to transport my children to school and use most for family development. I also helped out [to make] a small vegetables garden, to earn extra cash.

Her concerns were mainly about workplace issues and like many others interviewed, she saw drinking alcohol as a major problem:

They [the workers] were not working together. One would try to pull to other down instead of encouraging. This was a norm for Samoans and I'm lucky enough that the group I was assigned to work well together. Some of the issues that did come up were consuming alcohol at the wrong time. Some would drink the night before work and would call in sick. Some fights will break out due to alcohol consumption. The cheap costs of alcohol were an excuse to buy and consume.

Other issues that came up were between Samoans. Relationships were formed knowing that they are married. There were conflicts between supervisors and workers. Some supervisors treated elderly workers as if they were children. These positions were used with disrespect towards workers and discrimination and unfairness was observed.

Similarly, Sila, a 37-year-old married man, had been a self-employed farmer growing taro and raising cattle. He worked for a labor hire company specializing in supplying horticulture workers throughout Australia. He was employed in Tasmania for 12 months harvesting vegetables. He could not read his contract but said it was well explained to him by MCIL, and he thought the work and the pay was good. He is thinking of applying to go again, and is the only person interviewed who said they had no interest wish to migrating to Australia. He said he was satisfied with being able to live with and care for his family in Samoa and do seasonal work in Australia:

I kept looking at my family with so much love as we struggled financially with no one working and the only finance we managed to receive was through the sea and the land. I grew tired of walking in the sun to the plantation, so I desired to buy a car for my family

and then I wanted to go work overseas. There was no one working in our family [for payment] and my parents were getting old.

I sent money home fortnightly to provide for their needs and [provided] food for them to eat [beside] koko Samoa and fa'alifu. From the money I sent home fortnightly, I also had a savings, I saved up for something good for my family. On the very day I landed in Samoa, it was the day I also bought a car for my parents, and I saw how happy they were it was a pleasure for me to realize my hard work has been paid off.

Nu, a 23-year-old man previously worked as a taxi driver and on his family farm, in Australia he worked for a farm labour supplier on cattle farms, doing tasks such as fencing and loading cattle transports. Like others he wanted to raise the living standards of his family:

First and foremost, I needed money for the development of my family. My family is poor, and we get by via the plantation. ... Sadly, the money I earn from my taxi driving job is not enough for us to build a house fitting for all of us. Many times, we struggle to get by and I believe that this work, which I am applying for, will help me and my family in many ways.

He said found it hard to understand the term of his employment with the labour hire company:

I still needed help when I arrived in Australia; needing someone to explain to me things, which I was not familiar with. One such thing was reading and understanding the pay-slips. (I had) a written contract. It was explained to us, but due to my education being limited, I found it hard to understand some things. For example, trying to understand what the deductions are for and for how long. I know we have sick days and how much we get paid, but I am very much concerned about the amount of money that is taken out of my pay.

Overall, he liked the work and said:

I have learned how to drive several machines like the tractor and plow. Also, I have learnt how to fix fences. Moreover, I have learned how to skin cattle and prepare them for transport. Furthermore, I have learnt how to manage different tasks and led a team of [Samoan] workers by the end of my contract.

I would gladly sign up again because my family desperately needs the money. The experience was good and new for me but it was hard work though. This does not matter to me because I must do what I can to provide for my family and children.

I would like to take my kids to Australia for a good education and a better future. I hope this can be achieved. I want nothing but the best for my family and my children. They motivate me to work hard and try my best to provide and care for them. That is why I am applying for this job. I need the money so I can take good care of my family and children. Nothing else matters.

Feleti, a single man aged 25, was previously employed by an oil company for 5 years. In NSW Australia he harvested blueberries for nine months to support his family. He spoke of the cost of living in Samoa

Things have changed rapidly since I left; now ohhhhh, the prices of basic things like soap and flour have gone up. I have made the right choice to apply to the scheme. I would also like to thank the previous government for these great opportunities for our people. I miss working in Australia. I am willing to continue as long as I can. It was all worth it, the heavy work and tiredness were all worth it for my family. Mind you that this is my first time overseas and leaving my family was hard. I got paid approximately AUD 600.00 per week which is a lot of money compared to what I was earning in Samoa; our wages [there] are only SAT \$120 to \$130 a week.

My dream is to build a falepalagi (European house) for my parents and my extended family. In my family, there are more than fifteen people, because we all live together with my aunties, my cousins, and their wives and children, so it's very not healthy to live together under one roof, right? This is why I was motivated to go; I want to build a house for my parents

He said the negative experiences in Australia were the amounts of tax he had to pay, and the extreme changes in the weather, going from summer to winter when he said he got sick from the cold. He also said having no access to church was hard for him when he felt he needed spiritual support of the mind. He joked about applying his experience from his work in Australia to Samoa

The skills that I have gained and knowledge regarding picking blueberries will benefit when applied to picking blueberries in Samoa because this knowledge and skills, not everyone knows how to pick this fruit. We only know how to get taro but blueberries, oh no, it's way different. You have to be careful in picking them and know when the berry has turned blue then you can pick them. I believe, if we have blueberries in Samoa, I can do training to teach people how to pick this fruit.

Mala, a man aged 44, formally employed as a storeman, had recently returned from his 4th overseas contract with a labour hire company, and is planning to go again in 2023. His wages were based on piecework per bin harvesting oranges, lemons and avocado; the payment varied with different types of fruit. Like many others the need to send money home on payday meant he could not save to build a house or buy a car. His marriage broke up in his absence and he was bitter about it:

My wife has moved out with another man, only me and my kids. I returned and my then-wife has already stayed with another man in the neighboring village. This was so hard and heartbreaking. Because I have been sending money every week and now, I know where it goes, to her new family. I was so stupid then. I was able to save a smaller portion of my wage, because I keep sending money to support my children and wife without knowing the truth about my wife. [I have five children] 4 boys and 1 girl. My ex-wife is now taking my daughter with her and I am with all of the boys.

if you are single, go ahead and apply to the scheme, and if you are not single but you trust your wife so much, please join the scheme. But if you think that you can also handle what I went thru, go ahead and join the scheme, things happened and life goes on with us being able to cope and survived every turbulence we faced. Be prepared for the consequences you may face especially moving away from your wife and kids.

Like others he was critical of some of his fellow Samoan workers

There were a few incidents and issues that have occurred. Some of the issues were poor management, alcohol abuse, the use of vulgar language on Sundays, infidelity, fighting, and unable to adhere to rules provided by the company to name a few. One major incident I recalled was when a Samoan team leader physically assaulted one of our team members, which resulted in his death. The team leader was later charged by Australian Police with murder and is now in prison.

Many women we interviewed said they did 'men's work' in Australia. In Samoa it can be seen as demeaning to a family if their female members do heavy work outside the house. Ioana, a woman aged 29 had previously been working as a hotel cleaner. She said that the work she did in Queensland for nine months packing bananas would not be done by women in Samoa.

I never thought I would do this kind of work. When I'm in Samoa, I thought this kind of work is for taulelea [untitled men] only, we ladies only do house chores but now I get to take the offer and work for whatever is given to us. We can't be choosers, right? [Laughing] And plus the money is much better than what I earned in Samoa and I do this for the sake of my family.

With only SAT\$200 a week, what can I do with it? This amount won't last us for a week to wait for the next pay day given the high cost of living. This money only helps with basic needs but cannot do much and that's why I apply. I've witnessed a lot of RSE worker returning to Samoa and helped developed their families from poverty and buying things to make life easier. I want to help my family just like them.

Her earnings are very important for her family in Samoa and she remitted money fortnightly instead of saving. The money had helped her father:

To renovate our broken house and extend our house. I trust my father with the money I send and I've seen the result of his work. I am thankful to know that he make very good use of the money I sent to him. He doesn't spend on other unnecessary things. I'm thankful for my parents who I know love and support me while I'm away. My working in Australia benefited my family a lot. I don't have abig savings account because I send most to Samoa. I only put aside a small amount to last me throughout the week until the next pay that I can buy necessity and basic needs for myself.

Ioana joked about her contact saying like most workers, she did not read the terms of employment, just the wages and time of travel and date, but she had no problems with the terms; her only concern was having sore legs from standing all day and the stress of keeping up with the conveyor belt. She also said that she thought the housing was in poor condition and crowded. Male and female quarters were in separate parts of the same building. She plans to go back however, and would like to have a longer-term contact:

if the new Labour party in Australia offer permanent visas for [seasonal] workers from the Pacific, yeah, I would love to get a permanent visa to live in Australia and work to

help develop my family and get them out of poverty. But I would always like to come back to Samoa when my contract ends because I missed my family a lot. Living in Australia for these past few months I learned that you have to grow independently, know how to budget and know how to survive, not like in Samoa I depended on my parents for decision making.

Lofi, an unmarried woman aged 27-year-old, also did 'men's work' in the field in vineyards in Queensland for 14 months. She had previously been a student in a tourism and hospitality course at the National University of Samoa.

I didn't finish the course because I needed extra income to help my elderly parents, especially my sick father. I bought a secondhand car costing WST\$30,000 for my family. I also sent WST\$700 to my mom every week to help take care of my sick father. My father died while I was in Australia, and worst, I could not attend my father's funeral due to COVID 19 restriction and the lockdown. I also sent my monetary contribution for my father's funeral. Like everyone else, I want to help and support my family financially. They are dependent on me as the main income earner of the family.

Lofi believed that all seasonal workers should put their families first, and avoid bad behavior:

The attitude of Samoan workers [there was] too much backstabbing and jealousy, which ended up in a dispute among the workers. If someone had been promoted to be a supervisor, co-workers always said negative comments towards that person and tension erupted in the workplace, some tend to break the rules to get back [at the] supervisor. It is a very unhealthy working environment there amongst our people. Some of my coworkers, once they got to Australia; they forgot their promises to their families.

She had no issues with her terms of employment, her experience was generally positive and she learned new skills.

I hope I will be selected again to go to the next harvest season so I can continue supporting my family financially. I heard there is a quota open for Australia and New Zealand to process permanent residency for seasonal workers from the Pacific, which I pray will apply to us also. I don't know how this works but I really like to try my luck on this so I can get a permanent visa.

Findings on Seasonal Work in Australia

These are not enough data to conclusively state that the New Zealand RSA scheme (see Fatupaitu et.al. 2021) is superior to Australia's SWP but they suggest it is so, even though the pay in Australia is higher than that offered in New Zealand. There are many reasons why seasonal work in New Zealand might work better for Samoans than in Australia; one being that New Zealanders are familiar with Samoans as a significant component of the population and therefore may be more welcoming than Australians. Another is that the horticulture industry is concentrated in a few regions and so support services can more efficiently be provided.

Our sample of seasonal workers were employed by Australian Labour hire companies, (licensed service providers) operating in several states of Australia. Many workers are shuttled between jobs for varying periods reducing their ability to become more highly skilled and thus more attractive to future employers. Their accounts suggest that the practices of Labour hire companies are a concern. They provide skilled and unskilled temporary workers on contracts, under which the company is responsible for paying and accommodating workers and ensuring that their sub-contractors comply with labour laws. However, there are down-times when the company has no work available, so the workers are not paid, although they still have to pay for their rent and food.

Another issue is that seasonal work programs are supposed to benefit unemployed Samoan, yet many of the workers in our sample had previously had jobs, only one having been self-employed and one a tertiary level student. As with the New Zealand RSE scheme, MCIL is responsible for pre-selection of workers into a 'work-ready' pool. In some cases, company representatives come to Samoa to check the workers approved by the Ministry of Commerce, Labour and Industry (MCIL). None were recruited by Samoan labour recruiting organizations, but were all registered with MCIL

2. Workers in the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS)

The PLS allows a quota of workers to work in Australia for three years or longer and in industries that needed labor such as care of the aged and meat-packing. The scheme was envisaged as a 'win-win' because it may offer some workers higher wages and possibly a migration pathway to Australia, while reducing the recruitments costs to employers. In this section we present the perspectives of twelve people. Eight of them work for meat packing companies and four of them in aged care homes. Most of them left jobs in Samoa when they signed on to work in Australia

Workers in the Meat Packing Industry

Mele is a 32-year-old single woman from a rural village who works as a meat packer in NSW. She had previously worked as a cashier in a hotel. She was recruited through MCIL on a three-year contract, and had been working for seven months when interviewed. She said the occupation was not the sort of work she would have chosen, but it was offered and she accepted. She first applied in 2016 but did not get an offer until late 2021. She wanted to go because:

I want to help develop my family with the things that I long for us to get, like furniture, home appliances and buy a second hand car for us. With the pay I get at [the hotel], nothing can be done with a \$230.00 fortnightly.

She through the standard fitness test and training offered by MCIL was not very useful, but fitness is needed for the work:

The hardest part of doing this type of work was to stand all day. I have to stand all throughout the process while packing and to be watchful when the meat comes out to be packed in case I miss one out. At the end of the day, I feel back pain and the only thing I want to do after work is to lie down to relieve the pain. We start at 8am and finish at 5pm. With a 10mins break at 10:30am, then 30mins lunch break and another 10 mins break at 2:30pm. I don't like when we have breaks because many workers crowded in the resting area and if I get there late, I won't have a space to stretch my aching muscles from standing all day. we hardly have a day off to recharge for next day's work and it tired us easily.

She was given a written contract to sign which explained pay rates per house and company policies and regulations. Her week pay slips itemize her earning and deduction for rent, transport and health insurance. Workers provide their own food. She has mixed feelings about her experience:

I never thought I would do this kind of work [laughing]. I'm used to do office work and I thought this type of work is only for men. It's a good experience though and I get to learn something new I hope with this experience I get I could work in a higher quality independent butcher shop as a manager or supervisor [laughing]. I'm thinking of working to get a permanent visa to live and work in Australia but I prefer staying in Samoa with my parents and siblings. I know that working in Australia is hard because everything is money and if I don't work I won't have enough to send to Samoa.

Her goal is to help her family:

I get to help with our home renovation. I get to contribute to family faalavelave when my family calls and help out with my siblings tuition. I also have a saving account that I invest half of my pay into for me to bring home when I come back to Samoa. I might give it all to my parents to do what they want but we prioritize the buying of a family car and what's left of it is to buy some home furniture.

Mata is a 34 year old woman from an urban area. She previously worked as a rent collector in Apria. She now works as a meat packer in New South Wales, and has a three-year contract, having applied through MCIL.

I am now working where the seal machines are in sealing the papers after the meat has been packed. What I do is I scan the packed meat with the computer, label it with the stickers and send them to another team for orders.

She applied for the work because she said what she earned in Samoa was not enough to meet their needs. She has no issues with her contract (which is in English) and receives pay slips and understands her entitlements.

Working in this company has enabled me to receive more knowledge, skills, and the ability to do the work and [I am happy] to work each day. I have learned to be cautious every time and to make sure there are no misdeeds on the computer during busy times. I have learned to improve my communication skills with supervisors and managers when there are issues regarding work. For me, everything is okay at work, there are no defects, and there are safety provisions. I send money to my families in Samoa to help, not just for fa'alavalave. I have saving put aside for a good project for my family when I return home.

Pamela is a fa'afafine aged 29 and works for on a three-year contract in Queensland and has been there for a year. She was previously employed in Samoa as a sales person. She described her meat packing work:

Where I was first positioned is the steak lineup where all sorts of steaks such as the scotch steak, porterhouse steak, rump steak, round steak and more are catered. There's a room where they run two lines, the first one is where one steak per packet is packed and in this same line, it can also change from one steak per one packet to two steaks per packet. However, orders cannot be mixed. For instance, if a company placed an order for 200 Scotch, we can make 200 Scotch until they are done before we can change to another packing. Line two is where the steaks are packed into trays instead of packets. We receive different orders from different companies ... and this is the side where the sausages, burgers and mince are also made. I started in another area but I have been shifted to another capacity, which for me, it has helped me gained more knowledge. Before I came here, I did not know that the cow's intestine was used to produce meat, there's fabric made out of the cow's skin and much more, but thanks to this job, I now know a lot of things which are good to work and experience new knowledge and gain new skills.

She thought the fitness test and training provided at Joe's gym by MCIL was useful.

In this job, we are required to stand the whole day, say for example we start at 5am, the break is not until 9:30am but we are on our feet throughout the whole four and a half hours. There's a 7'oclock 5 minutes break but this is to go to the bathroom hence it is just 5 minutes and we are not allowed to sit down plus, there are no chairs. Besides standing all the time, we are also required to carry heavy things as we often rotate from one section/team to another to make sure we are familiar and know how to operate in the different areas of the factory.

Her motivation to apply for the work was because:

I have been observing most of the families in our neighborhood who did not have a lot of money but whose families were well developed with new houses and vehicles because their relatives came under the seasonal workers' scheme abroad, so I wanted to join to try for myself and for my family.

Her contact was in English:

One of the officers at MCIL translated each section to us from English to the Samoan language. When I had my interview, the interviewer asked questions regarding my educational background and how well I was in English as everything in this job is in English.

Her experience has been positive and she would like to stay in Australia, but has plans to help her family:

I am considering migrating here and staying (working) here for good. The company has also offered an extension of our working years after they review our performance after our first 3 years contract at present so I am to be on my best to secure another spot for me to stay longer and earn the company's favor to help when I decide that I want to migrate.

I am assisting my family in providing for them especially with their needs at home for food and such essential. I send money home every week except for the Covid-19 timeframe where I sent money twice a week to assist with their needs. I also send money for faalavelave aside from the weekly remittance I send.

Besides the money I send to Samoa, I have my own saving, which I plan to use to build a house for my younger siblings. The house they live in currently is my grandmother's (my mother has passed on), we never know what will happen once she's gone and who's going to own the house after her. I already have land so I aim to build a house for my siblings to live freely without having to worry about who owns the house. Knowing that I am a transgender and I won't have children, I know this house will be very useful for my siblings.

She offers this advice for other Samoans who want to come on the PLS:

a palagi never wastes time, they are always on time, and when they fire you, they do not give second chances unlike how things are in Samoa. Over here, even if you're just by one minute late, you will still be warned or get told off. Be wise, save money and always remember it is very humiliating to farewell in tears yet say hello to your Samoan family again when you get sent back.

Tia is a 30-year-old woman from a rural village; she previously worked at a waitress in a restaurant in Apia, and now works for a company in Victoria on a four year contract,

Every year I have to return to Samoa as per written in my contract. It's been 3 months now. The company exports high-quality beef, Veal, mutton, and Goat meats to over 50 countries. On my first day at McPhee Bros, I started packing boxes for two weeks. After that, they moved me to the next level of removing the goat, lamp and sheep hoof. After a week, I was moved to a different station, using knives. It took me a day to learn how to use a knife. The next day I started in the cutting area by cutting off bone in sheep and lamb. One week that I was in the cutting room they moved me to pack sheep and lamb cuts in boxes using a machine. After two weeks they moved me to offal. This is where you will pack things such as goat head, sheep and lamb head in boxes. Right now I am in the labeling area, using a computer to type labels for boxes that are already packed and ready to export to different countries.

She thinks the fitness test and training provided by MCIL was useful, as the work requires long hours standing, starting at 5 am and finishing at 2.30 or later.

She applied to go because she wanted to:

help provide my family with things they needed because I'm the only one who works to provide for my mum, grandparents and my 3 siblings. My salary from my waitress job was not enough for my family needs. I'm very excited when I get this opportunity.

Her contract was in English and translation was explained verbally but MCIL staff.

when I received my first pay slips, there are a lot of things deducted from my salary for example visa fee, airfares, utilities, health insurance, they provide our mobile phone so they have to deduct from our salary, transportation and accommodation after these deductions I have only got half of my salary. Lucky that I got one hour of overtime for every day. [I asked how long with will take to pay off] my visa and airfares. They say one year.

She is happy with her job, saying:

I gained a lot of experiences and skills in this company the faster you learn the more opportunities that they give to you to move around and learn new things. To me there is nothing bad or negative about the job. I enjoy the job, because it is easy and simple, because of using technology these days. The people I'm working with are so friendly and helpful when I need help.

I want to sign up again but I don't want to migrate to Australia because I'm the oldest. I have to take care of my family. I want to come and work after my contract, then go back and develop something for my family financially, which is my parents, my three siblings, and grandparents.

My first pay I send to my mother to buy a small freezer because my family uses our neighbor's freezer if we have a box of chicken from a family funeral or our Sunday shopping. My second pay I send to buy TV. I send money for my siblings' school fees, family faalavelave, and my grandparent's expenses. I have sent money every fortnightly and I have a savings account. My goal is to buy a new car for my family, especially for my grandparents when they go to the hospital for their checkup, church and also I want to take them around Savaii

Alosio a 32-year-old man from a rural village He previously worked for supermarket and now works for a company in Victoria, doing similar work to Itele, and has a two year contract through MCIL.

I heard of the PLS program from one of my friend who works at MCIL, that they were looking for people who are interest to work in this kind of work. That was in 2009. I went and filled out my form to the MCIL for a 2 years contract. In 2020, I got a phone call from MCIL, asking about my name and asking if I remember my form that I filled out in MCIL for seasonal work. I say yes, but I don't remember the year, but they say that my name is registered on their system in 2009; it's been 12 years on that time. So they tell me to come with my passport in their office the next day.

I'm crying when I got that phone call from the MCIL office and thank God that I got this opportunity to work overseas. I have been aiming for so long, I have been fighting for an opportunity to work as a seasonal worker to help my family develop financially. I was so happy when I got the chance to be in it with my intentions that I will provide my family with things they needed.

His contract in English was explained by MCIL but did not really understand the terms until he started working.

I thought the company would provide for us for free like our medical fee if we go to the hospital, transportation, airfares and visa even our mobile phone that they provide, but they deduct the cost from our salary. Everything you are using in company they deduct from your salary. If you feel ill and want to see the doctor and your health insurance is not enough to cover your bill you have to pay from your pocket.

On my first day at work for McPhee, everything is hard and difficult for me to use. The usage of different machines is new to me. It gives me one or two days to do training on how to use it. The faster you learn to use a machine, the quicker you move to the next different type machine for this job. But the slower you learn, the slower you move to the next round.

In the company there are supervisors and managers in different sections who are monitoring the operation of the company and the workers. I know the work is very hard, especially for first time workers like me. The company was very satisfied with the Samoan workers performance because they're hardworking people, not only that, but they are kindhearted and willing to help others.

He said he had experienced some problems understanding his supervisor, who is from PNG and speaks fast, but otherwise he feels positive. He has been offered a four-year contract that required him to return to Samoa every year, and well go in January 2023. He would like to migrate to Australia.

He is helping his family:

I have to send money every two weeks of my pay day to my wife for our 4 children's needs like food, cash power, alofa to our pastor, school fees, and family faalavelave. I also sent money to my mother. I have a savings account; my goal is to build a new house for my children because at the moment we stay at my mother's house with my siblings.

Lei is a man age 25 from a rural village, he previously worked on the family farm and helped to take care of his grandmother. He now works for a company in Queensland and was recruited through MCIL on a three-year contract and has been there for a year. When he was recruited he said:

we had several meetings to discuss what is expected from us and warn us about the rules of being a seasonal worker which includes we are not allowed to have alcohol during working hours. My mother signed my consent, which allowed me to come and work in Australia. We had training for one day this work needs people who are fit, I learned from there that I need to stay fit as this work I had to stand for the first 5 hours before a break and then back to work again.

He wanted to go because:

I need to help my family financially, as I have seen many people whose families' standard of living has improved since they go and work as seasonal workers. Since I don't work [for payment] I need to work and earn my own money not only to help my family but myself.

He said he understands his contract, entitlements and deductions and described his experience:

My experience working in this company is to know how to pack the meet probably so that it can be well reserved. Also how the cattle are divided into different parts and how to pack them differently. The more boxes I packed a day, the more income earn, I experienced from there that if I do not work hard I will not have anything to eat.

I usually offer to work on weekends as the pay for those days is doubled, and more money is earned for me. I learned how important it is to work and earn your own money now I learn how to budget my money without overspending it.

The only negative is that my teammates usually drink alcohol every weekend and they will ask me for money when they run out of money, if I do not give it to them they will talk about me behind my back. It is not healthy to work with those kinds of people in the workplace. Also, my grandmother passed away and I was not able to come to her funeral.

I am considering coming back and working here but, going back to Samoa as I need to help develop my family back home.

I send money home to my family every two weeks to buy their food and whatever they need back home. I even sent money to my mother to pay my siblings' school fees at the National University of Samoa. I sent money to help my family when my grandmother passed; I sent my contribution to my mother. I have a saving in fact I am thinking of buying a Taxi when I come back to Samoa.

Beti is a 29-year-old divorced woman with two children; she previously stayed home to care for family. She is employed by a company in Queensland.

I was unemployed, a stayed home mom and taking care of the kids and taking them to school. My husband had an opportunity to join the apple scheme in New Zealand and he was providing for our family. However due to our differences, we end up getting divorced, now the kids are staying with my mother in Samoa, I am the sole provider for them nowadays me and my brother in Australia as well. I will be here for the next three years I know it's hard for me and my kids as I miss them so much but yeah this is for them

I have nothing to provide for my kids as I have two sons. My only option was to look for an opportunity to come to Australia to work and provide for my sons and my mother and my family. And that is my motivation. The scheme has helped me a lot, if I am still in Samoa, it's very hard for me to get a job as I didn't finish school. I drop out of secondary school. I am happy with the sacrifices I made now for my sons.

I saw the advertisement on TV one evening and I went to get a form from the MCIL. It takes two to three weeks to wait for them to reply. Before being offered the opportunity, before being selected by MCIL we must go thru physical training and examinations which helped prepare us physically for the scheme. Fitness is very important in this job and this helped me a lot to expect heavy work and set a mindset to get ready for the job.

She says the work is hard by she has learned to do it:

I have been able to gain experience in how to process meat from the raw to the packaging stage. The different processes to clean meat before consumption are quite an advantage for me in this scheme. In Samoa preparing a pig to cook in an umu is easy with minimal concerns about cleanliness. However, here everything should be perfect and clean within the meat industry, I believe this also teaches us to process and make sure all the things like tools used and cooking meat should be clean at all times for better hygiene.

She would like to continue in this work:

Well, it's money and support for the family; this is the most important thing.

I would gladly come back to work again as long as I am alive and fit for the job. If becoming a permanent resident assists my family and its development, I would gladly do it. I know the work is not easy, but I have to be strong for my boys and I would love and wish to have gained a permanent residency in Australia.

This has helped me become a better mom to my boys, I have been able to send them money weekly for their lunches and food. I am also helping my grandmother with some money for her church offerings and family faalavelave like funerals and weddings.

She supports her family in Samoa:

Every week and if they had money left from the previous week, my mom will tell me to save money that I intended to send to them for the next time. Approximately WST 500, about \$280AUD every week. That is a lot of money right? If I stayed in Samoa, I cannot get that type of money for a week. Fortnightly, if I miss a week, I usually send them money around \$700 to WST 800 around \$400AUD to make up that week, I don't want my boys to starve, you know, mothers' love will do anything for their children.

I can save up to \$300AUD per week. That's a lot of money to me. I never spend money on anything that I want. It is just food and personal things.

I am aiming to build a medium concrete house with better bathrooms/ restrooms for my mother and sons, as currently, we lived in a small hut, me my mother my two sons, and two brothers. So, if in God's favor and hopefully at the end of our contracts I will come back and make this come true.

A Worker in the Banana Industry

Manu is a man aged 41 years from a rural village, previously a farmer who did casual paid work when it was available. He now works for a banana growing, packing and distribution company in Queensland.

The job was at first hard and demanding, and it took some time for me to adapt and adjust. One challenging factor was the heat. Working in the hot sun was quite difficult. Then the strength for the hard labour in cutting and carrying the many banana bundles and so forth. it was not easy to understand when we arrived in Australia. There was little

contact with a Samoan person that could help me understand what the boss was asking of me.

I was given pay slips, but I could not understand the deductions. We were paid weekly. I was aware there was some money taken from my pay, but I was not sure what some of them were. I blame my limited knowledge of English and education. Yet due to these weaknesses, I feel blessed and am grateful to GOD for giving me this opportunity.

He said he likes the job:

It has been a great experience for me. Back in Samoa I was always ill and weak. This was due to the constant many faalavelave but not enough cash. But now I work hard as we have to do so that we get good money to send to our family back home. Another additional great experience for me is team work; our team motto was we always support each other. Our team leader said we can only have a rest once we feel ill and if we are not feeling good,. He encouraged us to always prioritize our health. There are 10 of us from Samoa (men) who work together with people from different countries. Every country they have their own team leader.

What I earned from my farm is not enough to support my family, especially I have 8 kids, so it is my responsibility to work hard to give them a good life. Taking care of my family and my children is my top priority. Also, I have church and village matters to tend to. With so little money I earn from my plantation. The result is obvious, I need this work.

I am sending them part of my pay weekly so that my kids won't feel hungry, and I am saving up for a good house to build, since my wife and my kids are staying in a faleo'o (small open-walled Samoan house). My first thing to do when I come back is to build a large European house for my kids. My family is quite poor and they all look up to me to provide for them. This job will allow me to provide all the good things for my family and children.

I am considering migrating here and working here for good. I am going to be at my best and work hard to secure another spot for me.

Workers in Age Care Services

Sene is a woman aged 47 years from a rural village. She previously worked for a charity taking care of people with mental and other disabilities. Her former boss nominated her to apply but she was recruited through MCIL for work for Australian Regional Remote Community Services (ARRCS) in a Northern Territory town

I work as a Nurse taking care of the old people. My work duties and responsibilities mainly focused in taking good care for the elderly. Such duties to note were giving them baths, serving and feeding them their meals, as well as monitoring their medicine to take day by day consistently. I would be on foot all the time and be alert in taking care of the elderly. Some were not as strong and able as the others. For example, other patients required special care such as helping them onto the wheelchair and onto the bed. Others would require tender care for their bodies were too frail and weak. At times, I would work the day shift and other times I would work the night shift. I would also work overtime in the weekends now and then.

She says she now has enough money to help her family financially, especially her children, because her pay from her previous job was not enough. She says she has a fair command of English and anything she wanted to know about the term of employment was explained by MCIL.

I am now sending them money fortnightly. I am also saving up for their future. My kid's education comes first to me and I will do anything to take good care of them. They are the reason why I chose this line of work. To earn, provide and care for them. My eldest daughter is in her Foundation year at NUS and the fees are expensive. My eldest son is in College. Both fees together amount up to a great price. That is why I strive for my work to provide for my children . (Her parents and husband take care of them)

I really enjoy what I am doing because I have experienced a lot about this job and my co-workers have supported me in every way. I will gladly sign up on a contract again. I will always choose Australia for work.

Nola is a 27-year-old woman, formerly a secondary school teacher in Samoa and part time cashier in a shop. She is now also working for a service provider in the Northern Territory, in an age care facility.

My contract is an open contract we came here for 3 years and it is up to us if we want to extend our contract or not. I work 7 days a week; we have 2 days off, but if I need to cover for someone who does not come's shift then I can. I work 12 hours on weekdays and 8 hours at weekends. I enjoy what I do every day, I care for the elders and I have a bond with those people since I cared for them every day. Moreover, I went and work at this company's other branch in Brisbane and work there as a caregiver for a month. For the first week all I did was paper work so I can be familiar with the elderly people staying there after one week then I was able to assist them and cater for their need as a caregiver for the next three weeks. I learned a lot from working as a caregiver in different environments. I started my contract in August 2021 hopefully by 2024 I will sign another contract so that I can go visit my family and then come back here to work.

I would love to sign and go again when my contract is finished but since our contract is an open contract. We received a multiple Visa which last for 5 year and we are allowed to come back and go back and work in Australia again. I will also want to migrate to Australia and stay here for good as they offer the best jobs and their rate for salary is fair based on the type of job you are doing.

She was recruited by a private training company, which places its graduates:

We were not recruited by the MCIL but by the Bradford Institute, which is located in Brisbane. Some members of their team came and held a training course it in Samoa at Nu'u in the year 2019. The course was basically on community service and social work and I had to pay \$4000.00 (WST) for this course, which lasted for 3 months, and we received our Certificate 3 Community Service. The director of the school offered us this opportunity, and we just submitted our certificates and other documents needed to the Australian High Commission and they let us know when we will be leaving. We are now taking another course, Certificate 4 in Individual Support under FOX Education and Consultant. This fee for this course is \$2000.00 (AUD), which is sponsored by the FOX Education Consultants, and it will be finished in November. At the same time, we are

taking a diploma offered by Bradford Institute of Advance for 2 years. I am paying for this course which cost me \$6649.00 (AUD) and \$200 (AUD) is deducted from my salary every fortnight. These courses are very useful in doing the work that I am doing now.

She cares for her family in Samoa:

every week I pay for their shopping at a Wholesale outlet and my sister will pick it up. I send my dad money every time he calls when they have a family falavelave, and for his church donations or when he wants to go see a doctor. I even sent money to my sister who is caring for my father when she needs money for her children's school stuff. I do have savings since I started working; I save money in hopes that I can do something for my family when I go back. This year I gifted my father a car for Father's Day and his birthday. Since now my other goal has been achieved, my saving is still ongoing in hopes that by the time I go back I can buy a piece of land for myself since the land that we are staying on is customary land.

Fua is a 24-year-old woman from an urban neighborhood. She formerly worked for her family's small businesses, a shop, brick-making business, and fishing boats. She has a four-year contract with a regional authority in Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia.

This age care home is where we are responsible for looking after the health of elders in terms of their medication, and generating the list for their food (which patients and which food they can and cannot eat). We are also responsible for measuring their blood level and diabetes similar to the work done at the hospital by nurses however; ARRCs is only for the sick elders. Once a new client is admitted, we are the ones responsible for examining them to see what level their health is on (the company offered to pay for our additional nursing papers when we came)

Like Nola, Bradford recruited her after she had paid them for training

MCIL's involvement [in recruiting age care workers] is to help identify the individuals and their qualifications. When we graduated in 2019 from the Bradford Institute and Technology in Samoa with a Certificate III in Community Services (they were based in Nuu at the EFKS church in 2018/2019) where I studied skills essential for maintaining personal safety while helping others, how to manage personal stress, and communicate with clients from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds which offers us the opportunity to choose electives to pursue career interests such as working with the elderly, working with children and young people, drugs and alcohol and mental health, the head of the school told us that we were supposed to depart Samoa for Australia by the end of 2019. However, Covid-19 struck so we were not able to come hence the principal contacted us in 2021 from Australia that all our paper-work was ready and the only thing left for us to do were our interviews with our employer. We departed Samoa on the first week of October 2021

She is generally happy with the work:

There are a lot of things I have learned from this job, never mind the money but the experiences and knowledge I gained because even though we studied health care but we did not have practical and we are not nurses but when we came, the company offered for us to take extra nursing papers to extend our knowledge. It was not easy in the

beginning but we did our best to adapt to the environment. One of our positive experiences is the ability to expand my knowledge about something such as communicating with people from different ethnicity.

The biggest negative experience we are facing is the complications caused by the multicultural environment we work in unlike in Samoa where there's only a little number of foreigners, which causes the language barrier. However, here, only ten percent of the staff are Samoans and everyone else are foreigners such as Africans, Indians, etc. and the access to shops is limited. The hardest challenge about it is trying to get the clients to understand us when we attend to them. We have a translator but we have to book her or him to come to translate and they are not available all the time. So what we do when we attend to them is we try to use signs and gestures to try and enlighten them about what we want and what we are about to do. We also have disabled clients who are the hardest to look after as clients with disabilities should be monitored 24/7.

Under this job, the company can also assist in processing paperwork for migration and living in Australia permanently. The company has also offered to extend the four years contract to six years so it can help with paperwork and I plan to also apply as Australia can offer opportunities in so many areas much more than in Samoa and I hope I will be successful in this.

It is always my mother I send money to weekly. Though I am paid fortnightly I receive a net pay that is more than enough for my saving and to send money back home each week. The purpose of the saving I am putting aside is to buy land and build a house in Samoa.

Lina is a 35-year-old woman from a rural village. She previously worked as an enrolled nurse in a district hospital. She's married with 2 children. Her husband was working on seasonal work in New Zealand. She has left her children in her mother and sisters care. Her eldest son is 7 years old and her youngest son is 4 years old. She says it was hard for her to leave her children but she had no choice because she wants her children to have a good education and a better future and provide for her poor family.

Like the other age case workers, she was recruited through MCIL for the same regional service provider, like the other Samoan workers in age care on five year contracts, as a caregiver in aged care home in Northern Territory and has been there for over a year.

I am confident that I got the job because I have an Australia Pacific Training Consortium (APTC) certificate III in individual support (Ageing, Home and Community). MCIL called to confirm that I was one of the candidates in July 2021, and then departed Samoa to Australia in August 2021. We were told about the working life in Australia, it's not easy, and of how to adjust to it.

I work full time Monday to Saturday on a roster from 7am to 2:30pm. There are three Samoan women here and we work together with other people from different countries.

When I first started the work was not easy. We have training when we first started and the same time that starts our online course. My job is to help the client with

personal care activities, including bathing, skin care, and back rub, dressing and undressing, feeding, and shaving. I help clients take prescribed medication and measure blood pressure. Sometimes I will help a doctor if they need assistance. I have to arise early in the morning at 4am to get ready for work because I have to be at the workplace at 7am and the workplace is far from where we are staying.

I signed a written contract in Samoan language. I received my pay slips every fortnightly of payday through my phone. There's a lot of things that I deduct from my salary for my transportation, airfares, visa, health insurance, accommodation, SUPA, medical if I'm feeling ill and want to go see the doctor, so I don't know why I deduct health insurance. I email our payroll asking why they deduct my salary for my medical check-up, but they say that my health insurance doesn't cover the amount of my bill. Everything you are using in the company you have to pay nothing is free.

She sends money home for her family:

I send money every two weeks on my payday to my mum for my children needs and also family faalavelave, church taulaga and so on. I am saving to take money home for the purpose of buying a car for my parents and children.

Overall she likes the work:

The only negative experience I came across with during our job every day, it is so hard to communicate with some of the elderly people. However it is a beautiful work environment, good supervisor, and some elders people that we looking after are so friendly. Good money.

Many benefit from [this kind of employment] like a pay rise every 6months (Jan to July). We have access many training and development courses through their learning platform, 6 weeks annual leave + 17% leave loading for example, money is paid on top of our normal pay to compensate for expenses during annual leave.

I want to sign up to go again and work there for good.

Findings on Workers in the PLS

Most of the workers had jobs in Samoa before they left, but said they had financial difficulties making ends meet. The meat workers said they were learning new skills but the claim that the PLS leads to 'brain gain' rather than 'brain drain' is doubtful as there is no organized meat industry in Samoa to employ them back home. Similarly for the aged care workers in Samoa; there are no state provided aged care services in Samoa to employ them. Several of the aged care workers had paid for their own training, and in two cases they were continuing to pay for training. Thus, Samoan people could be said to be subsidizing social services in Australia by paying the training institutions who recruited them to work in aged care institutions.

Further analysis of the data from this survey will be included in a forthcoming book on Samoan labour mobility

Reference

Angela Anya Fatupaito et. al. 2021. Samoa's New Labour Trade. *The Journal of Samoan Studies* Volume 11, No. 1.