A Better Life?

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In his novel *Sons for the Return Home* (1973), Albert Wendt describes a scene where a family returns home to Samoa after twenty years of working and saving in New Zealand, and buildsa *falepalagi*, a European style house, in their village. At that time, most Samoans lived in tradtional thatched-roofopen-walled houses (*faleSamoa)* or in semi-tradtional*faleapa* with tin roofs. The house they built:

> *… had four bedroms, a large sitting room, a flush toilet, a dining room and a kitchen, all secreened against insects and proofed against termites. Two large concrete tanks woud feed water into the house. There was tobe electricity too, supplied by a small generator. A small store was to be built in frontof the house near the road to sell essential foodstuffs and frozen meat and fish(Wendt 1973:190).*

This family had proven themselves to be a success.Through their hard work they were able to build a house and increase their family status in the community, elevating themselves above all others in the village, except the pastor.

A house is a key wish-object in Samoan narratives of 'a better life'. This is, of course, not limited to Samoa.Throughout the world, material possessions such as houses, cars, television sets and so on, form part of aspirational dreams and desires, including in countries of the global South,which are unequally but also entirely integrated into capitalist modes of production and consumption.

Tales abound from across the Pacific and beyond about the material rewards that are accumulated by working abroad.Tracey Banivanua Mar (personal communication)described returning to her village in Fiji and seeing a new and enormous house; the inhabitants left all the lights on at night as a beacon of their status and wealth. Studies of participants in labour mobility schemes from other Pacific Island nations (see, for example, Doan, Dornan

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and Edwards 2023) also note the value that people in those countries place on building homes and on purchasing material goods such as cars, furniture and electrical appliances.

Lauren Berlant'sconceptualization of'a good life'in her work *Cruel Optimism* (2011) offers aninsightful frame for understandingthe contradictory experiences and aspirationsof Samoan labour migrants. She examines life inpost-World War II America and the optimism that existed for achieving equal access to economic opportunity, upward mobility and job security. As Berlant argues, the possibilities for achieving these things have frayed in the United States since the 1990s, as precarity and social dislocation increase and as welfare provisions are eroded.And yet, Berlant observes, attachment to the idea of 'a good life' or 'a better life' remains as an aspiration, as has 'global mobilisation' such as that in the Samoancontext. Berlant argues that attachment to "promising objects" (cars, houses, up-skilling) and "a cluster of promises" (Berlant 2011:16)is a form of cruel optimism, as wealth accumulation remains the purview of only a small minority of global elites.

Participation in Pacific labour mobility schemes is an attempt by Samoans and other Pacific Islanders to attain 'a better life'. But do the schemes really provide that life? Many studies of these schemes have been conducted,[58] and the findings of most such studies emphasise the benefits of labour mobility for the national economies and to individuals in the countries that send workers.Fewstudies have given detailed consideration to the specific country-level social impacts or the long-term sustainability of labour mobility schemes.

This chapter analyses the findings ofresearch interviews undertakenby staff of the National University of Samoa with the aim of understanding the subjective motivations and experiences of Samoan participants in seasonal workschemesandconsiders how participation inthese schemes has affected them and their communities.

Labour mobility schemes in the Pacific

The idea of organised labour mobility as a means of providing employment for Pacific Islanders was on the agenda of several Pacific States from the 1990s.The Asian Development Bank (2005) and the World Bank (2006) both

[58]Notably, studies by the Australian National University (ANU) Seasonal Worker Programme,which has generated dozens of publications.https://bellschool.anu.edu.au/dpa/our-research-dpa#section-26125

advocated for regional labour mobility, as did the Pacific Islands Forum in 2005, when labour mobility was seen by Pacific Island Forum ministers as a means of increasing regional integration.The Pacific Forum Secretariat hosted discussions about the connections between remittances, migration and labour market flexibility as part of regional trade negotiations (Maclellan and Mares 2006:138-139).

Later, labour migrationwasseen by some as a means of assisting Pacific nations to adapt to or respond to climate change — recognising that it may eventually become necessary to resettle Pacific Islanders elsewhere (Campbell and Warrick 2014). This is particularly the case for Kiribati and Tuvalu, as they are the countries most obviously threatened by sea-level rise — being atolls, only a few metres above sea level — but all Pacific islands are threatened by sea-level risebecause coastal erosion threatens most of their housing, public buildings,roadsand businesses, and saltwater intrusion threatens coastal freshwater supplies (ADB 2012). All Pacific Islanders are also threatened by the increasing severity of tropical cyclones (World Bank 2017).

When labour mobility schemes were launched, they were promoted as being "win-win": they would alleviate poverty among rural, cash-poor unskilled and unemployed Pacific Islandersand impart skills, and they would at the same time ensure a steady supply of labour for the participating industries in the receiving countries, resulting in better production outcomes and economic gains.

The Government of Samoa enthusiastically welcomed labour mobility schemes. Seasonal work was originally under the purview of Samoa's Ministry of Prime Minister and Cabinet, then in 2017 it was moved tothe Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (MCIL). The MCIL was responsible for pre-selection of workers into work-ready pools.[59]

Over the years,interest in participating in labour mobility schemes has grown steadily among Samoans. The extent of the eagerness tojoin these schemes was demonstrated in 2021 when a crowd of Samoan men and women trying to register surged into ahall where registration was underway, causing significant damage and injuries (Wilson 2021).

[59]Over the years, the Seasonal Employment Unit of the MCIL has experienced numerous problems, including people being recruited without the knowledge of the MCIL and an absence of proper authorisation for workers. In 2023 the Unit was moved out of the MCIL and became the responsibility of the Minister of Finance (Tupufia–Ah Tong 7 September 2023.)

In 2017, PACER Plus[60] established the Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting (PLMAM) to enable stakeholders, (governments, employers, workers and researchers) to share information on labour mobility and cooperate fully to address any issues and ensure the schemes achieved their goals. As Curtain (2019) observed, however, "The presentations in open sessions were broad in nature and the discussion was at a high level of generality, with little or no detail about the problems on the ground and how to respond to them". Two of the authors of this article attended the PLMAM in 2022 and formed the same conclusion.

New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme

The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE)scheme began in 2007 and initially aimed to recruit workers from Pacific Island nations for temporary work in the horticulture and viticulture industries in New Zealand.[61]With workersonly entering New Zealand on short-term contracts, it was expected that the scheme would not lead to an increase in immigration.

According to Whatman, Bedford and Bedford(2017):

> *The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) policy emerged from a crisis in New Zealand's labour market in the early 2000s. Without this crisis it might never have been. Immigration is always a delicate issue politically (think Brexit), and because it involves 'the other' politicians find it a relatively tempting area of policy to tamper with (think Trump).*

Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu were the first countries to participate (in 2007), followed by theSolomon Islandsin 2010, Papua New Guinea in 2013, Fiji in 2014 and Nauru in 2015 (Nunns, Bedford and Bedford 2019:16).

According to data from New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), in 2023Samoa was ranked second, after Vanuatu, in numbers of RSE visa arrivals in New Zealandsince the scheme began (Bedford and Bedford 2023:40) (see Table 1).

[60] The Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) became PACER Plus in December 2020. Parties to the agreement include New Zealand, Australia, Samoa, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Niue and Cook Islands, Vanuatu and Nauru.

[61] In 2024, two sectors were added: meat processing and seafood processing (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade nd).

Table 1: RSE arrivals in New Zealand, by country,2007-2023

Pacific Island country	Number of RSE arrivals (MBIE data)
Vanuatu	48,131
Samoa	22,681
Tonga	20,994
Solomon Islands	6,315
Kiribati	1,981
Fiji	1,838
Tuvalu	970
Papua New Guinea	816
Nauru	95
Total	**103,821**

Source: Bedford and Bedford 2023:40

The Government of New Zealand has monitored the RSE since its inception, and it commissioned industry consultations and several detailed studies of the experiences of employers, recruiters and Pacific Island workers in the RSE (see Immigration New Zealand nd). According to Bedford et al. (2017), the New Zealand RSE scheme has been characterised as 'best practice' for the processes for recruitment, selection and pre-departure preparation, pastoral care and monitoring of conditions at the destination, and assistance with re-integration back into home communities.

According to Bailey and Bedford (2018), since 2009 a joint Approval to Recruit (ATR) system has been available to New Zealand employers allowing several employers to recruit workers together, to save on recruitment costs and decrease the risk to workers of having unpaid down time; this led to an increase in the number of RSE workers employed.

Australia's Seasonal Work Programme and Pacific Labour Scheme

Australia accepted the idea of labour mobility schemes later than New Zealand. A parliamentary enquiry in 2003 recommended that the Australian government provide support to civil society and private sector organisations to develop a pilot programme for seasonal workers from the Pacific to go to Australia. However, the then Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, and his senior parliamentary colleagues were opposed to temporary work schemes in Australia (Maclellan and Mares 2006:138-139).

Eventually, Australialaunched the Seasonal Work Programme (SWP) in 2012. Like the New Zealand RSE, the SWP allowed temporary employment of Pacific Islanders in Australia (for periods of up to nine months), mainly in the horticultural industry.This initiative aimed to contribute to Australia's development aid programme for Pacific Island states; the labour needs of industries in Australia was a secondary objective (Bedford et.al. 2017:41-42). In 2018, Australia launched the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS), which offered a longer-term visa, allowing for the employment of Pacific Islanders for up to three years.

As far as we were able to discover, in Australia the main employers are labour hire companies. These are licensed service providers, with terms and conditions that vary between states. They provide workers with temporary contracts, andthey are responsible for paying and accommodating workers and for ensuring that their sub-contractors comply with state and federal labour laws. Various reports suggest that some of these labour hire companies have abused the rights of workers (see, for example, Cockayne, Kagan and Ng 2024).

Over the years, researchers and the workers and industries participating in the SWP and PLS reported numerousissues with these schemes,so in 2022 the Government of Australia held consultations with stakeholders to consider these issues (DFAT nd).[62]The Government had earlier announced that it would be consolidating the SWP and PLS to form the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, and this came into effect in 2022. The changes introduced under the PALM aimed to streamline processes, simplify administration, reduce duplication and improve flexibility for workers who wanted to change employers. The new scheme also offered longer visas: of up to four years validity (Minister for International Development and the Pacific 2021).

Surveys of labour mobility participants

In 2020 and 2022, staff of the Centre for Samoan Studies at the National University of Samoa conducted surveys of participants in labour mobility schemes. The interviewers, all Samoans, used contacts within their families

[62] Unlike the New Zealand government, the federal Australian government has not made detailed evaluations of its labour mobility scheme publically available. As of February 2024, only a 20-page "Consultation Summary" report was available on the DFAT website. https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/engagement/pacific-labour-mobility

and community networks to identify people. These researchers had a set of general questions intended to lead a conversation (*talanoa*) about their work, their reasons for going abroad and their experiences. The interviews were conducted and recorded in the Samoan language and were then translated into English by the team members.

The first survey, conducted in 2020, involved interviewingtwenty-five Samoans who had participated in the New Zealand Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme. Besides these twenty-five returned workers, seven others were interviewed: people who had applied to the MCIL to join its "work-ready pool" or had applied to the organisers of church-based or village-based recruitment, but had been unsuccessful. At the time of these interviews, the Covid-19 pandemic had halted opportunities to participate in labour mobility schemes.

The second survey, conducted in 2022, interviewedtwenty-four Samoans who had participated in Australia's Seasonal Work Programme (SWP) and nine Samoans who had been employed on three-year contracts through Australia's Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS), of whom eight were employed in the horticultural sector and one in the cattle/meatpackingsector.All of the respondents that had participated in Australia's PLS felt that their contracts may lead to longer-term employment, and all but one of them had hopes of migrating permanently to Australia.[63]

Most of the respondents to the first survey said that before participating in the RSE scheme they were self-employed in the informal sector, growing crops for home consumption and for sale in local markets, and they had only occasional casual paid work. One woman wove mats for sale and two were taxi drivers. Five admitted having full-time paid employment, these included two carpenters, two commercial fishers, a bus driver and a shop assistant. If any others were in full-time employment before participating in the RSE they may not have said so because it is well known that the scheme is supposed to be for unemployed people. Most were from rural villages; only seven were from urban areas: suburbs of Apia or villages located within the urban area. Most of those interviewed in the first survey had recently returned from work in New Zealand orchards. All of those interviewed for the second survey had

[63] See the article titled "Samoa Under the PALM" in this volume for extracts of the interviews with Samoan participants in the SWP and PLS in Australia.

been employed in the formal or informal sector before applying for the labour mobility scheme.

Motivations for joining labour mobility schemes

When asked why they wanted to participate in labour mobility schemes, most of the survey respondents said that it was to save enough money to 'develop' the family (as many ofthe interviewees put it).[64] The money they earned enabled their families to buy items such as household furniture, appliances andcars, and to build a new house or renovate or extend a house.[65] Three survey participants said they aimed to buy freehold land where their family could build a house away from traditional village reglations and obligations. Below, we provide extracts of interviewees' responses that illustrate their motivations for joining labour mobility schemes.

Toa, aged 28, said "People who had been [to New Zealand] before said thatmilk and honey flowed in New Zealand, and I witnessed it myself". In his first season he sent home instalments of around NZD200 (WST330)from time to time and saved up about NZD8,000 (WST13,235). When he returned to Samoa, he used his savings to buy a taxi and and to build an extension to his family's house.

Pepe, aged 46, said his motivation for registering for the RSE scheme was to save money to build a new house, to replace his family's small open-walled tin-roofed house (*faleapa*).

When interviewed,Sam, aged 29,had worked six seasons abroad. He said he was motivated to go because he had parents to look after, as well as church expenses and *fa'alavelave*(family contributions to ceremonies and events) obligations. From his savings he bought a car, built an extension of his family's house, built a cattle enclosure and bought appliances for his family home.

John, aged 30, had worked four seasons in New Zealand in a kiwifruit orchard:

> *I built a small house for me and my wife and kids, and a new toilet. On another trip, when I came backI bought a new iron roof for my parents' house. After another trip I extended the front of our house. My last trip I came home early because of my mother's funeral and I brought $6,000 with me and spent it all on*

[64]Our team translated the term '*atina'e*' to mean 'develop' or 'improve', in the sense of creating 'a better life'.

[65] Most of the modern houses (*falepalagi*) built in Samoa since the 1970s were paid for with remittances. Based on our observations, house-building has accelerated considerably since labour mobility schemes began in 2007.

the funeral. I'm waiting for the next trip and I'm looking at buying a family vehicle and finishingbuilding the toilet.

Feleti, a single man aged 25, had harvested blueberries for nine months in Australia 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 made the right choice to apply to the scheme. I would 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, this was my first time overseas and leaving my family was hard.

I got paid approximately AUD600 per week, which is a lot of money compared to what I was earning in Samoa; our wages [here] are only WST120 to WST130 a week. My dream is to build afalepalagi [European-style house] for my parents and my extended family. In my family, there are more than fifteen people, because we all live together; my aunties, my cousinsand their wives and children. 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.

Feleti said his only negative experience in Australia was the amount of tax he had to pay. He also did not like the extreme changes in the weather, going from summer to winter. 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.

Aita, aged 32, completed two contracts and was preparing to leave for his third trip when the pandemic prevented it. He said that he had previously worked on a boat owned by another man.Although on good days his share of the catch earned him a good sum of money,his income was irregular and uncertain. His two seasons working abroad enabled him to buy a fishing boat and a car.

When I returned from my first trip, I bought a small fishing boat for my father,which cost $1,000. This boat he uses every day for fishing and he sells his catch for extra money. I returned from my second trip and bought a second-hand car for my family, to take the kids to school and to take my parents to where they want to go, instead of them catching the bus.

Lafuniu, aged 42, worked eight seasons at a number of different orchards and spoke of the benefits:

One trip I brought home NZD11,000, other trips NZD10,000, NZD9,000, NZD8,000. I bought a weedeater, refrigerator, washing machine, chainsaw, a small fishing canoe; I also bought a taxi and a small shop. I had never been so blessed and I think [that now] I want to retire.

Sei, a woman aged 39, said:

> *The life in NZ is a working life; you have to go to work every day in order to get the money. It's hard but it's worth it. It's good to wake up to something that progresses you throughout the day; not like here in Samoa where I didn'twork and I depended too much on my mother. I remitted money almost every week for family fa'alavelave, my children's school fees and educational needs, and I'm happy because that is why I was there: to support my family. It's not easy to get up in the early hours to go to work, when it's cold; not like here in Samoa where the weather is warm. ... In NZ I had to have many layers of clothes to stay warm.*

Tana is from a suburb close to the town of Apia. She was 26 when she wentabroad and had not had paid work before she joined a labour hire company in Victoria, Australia, for 12 months. Her family learned of the opportunities to participate in labour mobility schemes from their local member of parliament (MP), who visited households in Tana's urban neighborhood offering to help those who wanted to go. The MP had contacts in MCIL and helped people in his constituency to register. He did this to win political support in the forthcoming elections. Tana explained why she wanted to participate in the labour mobility scheme:

> *I am the eldest child of my parents.Idid not finish [secondary] school … because my parents could not afford it. SoI ended up caring for my parents and my siblings. At that time, I started work: planting beans, cucumbers and tomatoes to sell [in a stall] in front of our house … to earn money to pay my little brother's school fees. This experience 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 too, because something greater should come out of this opportunity. The purpose of the saving was to build our new house, which we live in now.*

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

> *I felt so happy because without that job, I would not have the experience of picking different types of fruit and handling them with care. It is different from picking fruit in Samoa; here we just grab it from the tree or we throw stones at fruit [so it falls down]. I gained a lot of experience in working in a team. Even though it was hard, and we worked on many plantations, it was[not difficult] if we worked together as a team. The only disadvantage of the job was the cold weather.*
>
> *It would 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].*

Fala, a woman aged 30, was a hotel waitress in Samoa before joining a labour mobility scheme. She applied to the MCIL when the RSE scheme commenced in 2007, but was initially rejected. She reapplied and was persistent, and was finally called for training in July 2021. She said she sent money home to her family every two weeks while she was away, and she also had a savings account so she had a lump sum to bring home when her contract finished. Her family comprises her father, her step-mother, her sister, brother-in-law, and their children. She paid for an extension of the family house and for home appliances, and will save to a build a chain link fence around their quarter-acre block of land when she returns to work. She wants to continue working on temporary contracts abroad, but hopes to get a longer-term contract (via the PLS) and eventually get a residence visa for Australia.

Fala longed to participate in a labour mobility scheme because:

> *I'd seen many people come back from seasonal work very successfully, and they helped a lot with family development and had contributed much in village and church activities. I wanted to be successful, just like them, and that's my reason for applying.*

Sila, a 37-year-old married man, had been self-employed, growing taro and raising cattle in his family'splantation,prior to going to Australia. Over there, a labour hire company specializing in supplying horticulture workers throughout the country found him workharvesting vegetables in Tasmania for 12 months. He could not read his contract, but said it was well explained to him by the MCIL, and he thought the work and pay were good. He is thinking of applying to go again. Sila was the only person interviewed in the second survey who had no interest in migrating to Australia permanently. He said he was satisfied with being able to live with and care for his family in Samoa and work on temporary contracts in Australia:

> *I kept looking at my family with so much love as we struggled financially with no one working, and the only income we managed to receive was through the sea and the land. I grew tired of walking in the sun to the plantation; I wanted to buy a car for my familyso I wanted to go work overseas. … There was no one working in our family [for wages] and my parents were getting old.*
>
> *I sent money home fortnightly … to provide for their needs and [provided] food for them to eat [besides] koko Samoa and fa'alifu. [Apart] from the money I sent home fortnightly, I also saved money. I saved up for somegood things for my family. The very day I landed in Samoa, was the day I bought a car for my*

parents; I saw how happy they were. It was a pleasure for me to realise that my hard work had paid off.

The earnings abroad of Iona, a woman aged 29, were very important for her family in Samoa, and she remitted money fortnightly instead of saving. The money helped her father:

… to renovate our broken house and extend our house. I trusted my father with the money I sent, and I've seen the result of his work. I am thankful to know that he made very good use of the money I sent to him. He doesn't spend it on unnecessary things. I'm thankful for my parents who I know love me and support me while I'm away. My working in Australia benefited my family a lot. I don't have a big savings account because I sent most [of my earnings] to Samoa. I only put aside a small amount to last me throughout the week until the next payday, so that I could buy basic necessitiesfor myself.

Fele said the experience enabled him to help his family:

I assisted my family financially for their church donations, fa'alavelave contributions and for their [grocery] shopping fortnightly or whenever they called me. I helped my parents, my siblings and their children. I sent them money every two weeks and I also had savings apart from the money deducted by the company. I have a goal because my parent's house is old, when I come back [next time] I will make an extension and buy some furniture, depending on how much money I have. That is something I need to do with the money I earn in Australia.

… I would like to migrate to Australia as a worker, but in a different field because I want to experience other work too … they offer many job opportunities with high pay.

Nu, aged 23, previously worked in Samoa as a taxi driver and on his family's plantation. In Australia, he worked on cattle farms, doing tasks such as fencing and loading cattle transports. Like other Samoans participating in the labour mobility schemes, 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 [in Samoa]is not enough for us to build a house [big enough] for all of us. We often struggle to get by, and I thought that this work that I applied for would help me and my family in many ways.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 doesn't matter to methough 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's 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.

Lofi, an unmarried woman aged 27, had a generally positive experience working abroad, and said she learned new skills. She said wanted to do another season and eventually get permanent residency in either Australia or New Zealand:

I hope I will be selected again to go for 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'd really like to try my luck on this so I can get a permanent visa.

All of the respondents compared the wages they earned abroad with local wages, saying that local wages are insufficient because they do not allow people to save money;the entire paycheck is spent on living expenses, donations to church and *faalavelave* contributions.

As Ioana, aged 29, said:

With only WST200 a week [in Samoa], what can I do with it? This amount won't last us for a week, or until the next payday, given the high cost of living. This money only helps with basic needs, but cannot do much, and that's why I applied[for the RSE scheme]. I saw a lot of RSE workers returning to Samoa and helping to develop their families, [bringing them out of] poverty and buying things to make life easier. I want to help my family just like they did.

Recruitment options

Most of those who were selected for the RSE scheme by the MCIL from individual applications to the "work-ready pool", thought this was better than applying via groups that were chosen and organised by churches and village councils.[66]Several pointed out that church and village organiserstook money from their working groups, leaving the workers with little for themselves.

Sam, aged 28, was initially chosen to participate in the RSE by his church pastor, who organised the paperwork and contract with members of his church in New Zealand. For his third season, however, Sam decided to register himself with MCIL because he believed he would save more money that way. Because of his prior experience he was chosen to be the leader of his team in New Zealand.

[66]This is an option for the RSE scheme, although compliance with MCIL regulation is required.

When interviewed, Risati, aged 25, had been to New Zealand twice. His aim had been to earn enough money to clear the loan on his taxi and improve his family home. He went to New Zealand as part of a group of 20 men and women who were recruited by a Samoan intermediary.

> *I was influenced by friends about the job; they talked of how beneficial this scheme was to the development [atina'e] of their family and that's why I wanted to join the scheme. One of my friends recommended me to their leader, and that's how I got in.*

He did not achieve all his goals, however, because towards the end of his second season his brother had a car accident, and without income from his brother's taxi the family was in financial difficulty, so Risati returned to Samoa to get the car fixed and take care of them.

Fata, 29 years old, worked four seasons. His first trip, before the RSE scheme began, was made with an eight-member church group, organised through connections in New Zealand. He worked on a farm harvesting onions. He later registered individually with the MCIL for the RSE scheme and he said he made more money that way. Like all the people interviewed, he was very excited about going overseas on his first trip:

> *I'm telling you I was over the moon when I was accepted in the team. We had church fundraising to fund [the expenses of] this trip. The church paid half and I paid half of my airfare. The visa and police report plus medical – I paid for it. We also took some ietoga[fine mats] for church members in New Zealand. … [But this] first trip was a big loss; I worked hard for a small pay. When I compare what I got in NZ and what we received from our weekly bonus, I think I earned better money here in Samoa. But when I joined the government seasonal scheme [RSE], that's when I knew the difference, a big difference. I managed to save money and also remitted to my family when they called.*

Pepe, aged 41, went to New Zealand prior to 2007 and worked on two contracts as part of a group of workers organised by a pastor in New Zealand. A church fundraising group helped the workers arrange visas and liaised with the employer, but the workers paid for their own passports. A relative of Pepe's in New Zealand provided housing and charged him rent of NZD100 per week. Because of such expenses, he was not able to save much money for himself. When the RSE scheme began, he registered as an individual applicant. Having had previous work experience, his employer helped him to get a renewable work visa.He worked on eight contracts through the RSE before retiring.

Sei told us that her first two seasons were with a church group:

… [It was] a big loss for me because they deducted much of my pay … to build the new church building and hall. If I didn't contribute, I would have lost my chance to be in the next recruitment. But [even with] these deductions I bought a new oven, fridge and weedeater from the money I managed to save and brought back with me. The last two trips were under the government scheme and were a success. I saved around NZD22,000, so I bought a taxi and started a small shop upon my return. [When I go again] I'm going to[save money to] build a new house for me, my husband and two kids.My last trip I brought back 6,000 New Zealand dollars, which when converted was almost 10,000 Samoan tala.

Togi, a man aged in his 40s, had worked two seasons with a church group in New Zealand harvesting vegetables. He said he would never go again:

Every time I think of it I cry. The hard work we faced every day in New Zealand was not for our benefit. We were used by our congregation and our faifeau[pastor] all this time. These people who recruited us for this work used us for their own benefit.

He explained that he thought the money they earned on the first trip would be enough to build the church, and he expected that on the second trip that he would earn money for himself:

But I was wrong, and that is the last time. None of my team members want to go again because we all know we were being used. We earned about 800 dollars a week, but deductions of rent, medical insurance, tax, vehicle, food and electricity left us with [around] 400 dollars. Then 300 dollars was deducted for the church here in Samoa, leaving us with only 100 dollars a week. This was so unfair given the hard work we did in the field, and not only that but also the cold weather we faced every day. The pay we received was not right.

Lafuniufelt that recruitment through the MCIL was notany better than going with a village group, saying that under the MCIL labour mobility schemesa whole village can be punished for one misbehaving worker:

I led a group for many years and I got to know a lot. Groups that are run by a church or village have two major issues: money and rules. Village groups punish the person who breaks the rules imposed on them by the village. Same goes with the church groups. Government groups are very different and … if you break any rules or do something bad, not only will that person will be penalised by the government, [but also] the village is punished, and the person is punished by the NZ company and will be suspended for five years. It's very serious and also it might affect the opportunities of other people who want to go.

The experience of these workers is not uncommon. Workers in groups that are organised by certain village organisations have money deducted from their wages to fund the operational costs of the organisations.Aspiring workers pay WST50 to register and must attend weekly training sessions to

increase their physical fitness, and must also donate their labour to local projects such as tree planting. Each member of the teams organised by village organisations also pays a NZD10 fee to the organiser for each week that they work in a season.

Terms of employment

Many of the workers interviewed had participated in labour mobility schemes did not fully understand the terms of employment. For example, Ioanajoked about her contract saying that, 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 main concerns were 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 that was provided for workers was in poor condition and was crowded. She mentioned that 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 contract next time:

> *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 miss my family a lot[when I'm away]. Living in Australia for these past few months I learned that you have tobecome independent, know how to budget and know how to survive, not like in Samoa where I depended on my parents for decision-making.*

Samoans in full-time employment pay tax and contributions to the Samoa National Provident Fund (NPF), so normally only those who were in casual jobs or who had been self-employed before signing on with labour mobility schemeswould be unfamiliar with salary deductions for tax and health insurance, but even experienced workers who had completed many contracts and who understood most terms and conditions were still mystified by some of the deductions and found some of the expenses involved to be too high. For example, Poto, a man aged 35,had completed a contract in 2014 as part of a group organised to help raise money for a new church, thensigned on to the RSE through MCILon his own initiative. He said it cost him WST180 for the health certificate and police report. The cost of the visa and airfare were advanced by the orchardist employer and deducted after he started work. He thought the cost of living in New Zealand was expensive. Potoalso said he thought NZD40 a week was too much to spend on his food:

There were 14 of us, and each of us put in 40 dollars weekly for our grocery shopping and 120 dollars for house rent, power and water. To me, when I calculated the 40 dollars that has been deducted [from each of us]for our weekly shopping, it totaled up to 900 or 1,000 dollars [per fortnight] … and I think this deduction was a bit too much.

Like many others, Nu found it hard to understand the terms of his employment with the labour hire company he worked for in Australia:

I still needed help when I arrived in Australia; I needed someone to explain to me things that I was not familiar with. One such thing was ... 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, what the deductions were for and for how long. I know we had sick days and how much we got paid, but I was very concerned about the amount of money that was taken out of my pay.

Many of the respondents said it was difficult to save money after the wage deductions and their own expenses were removed and after meeting their families' expectations that money should be sent home every payday. Most reported that after deductions they were left with only about half of what they earned.

Sam told us that when Samoan relatives called him to ask for money, they did not understand the deductions from workers'pay (which reduced the amount he could save) and how hard it was to earn a living in New Zealand:

My first week on the job, I'm honestly telling you that I almost gave up; I went to work in the morning crying. I never knew it was that hard to work in New Zealand doing that kind of work. It is because of this that I think Samoa is much better than New Zealand. Work is more important [there]because without work, you can't survive in New Zealand.

Louis, aged 26, worked three seasons picking apples. He noted that among the deductions from his pay was a weekly medical insurance fee of NZD10.He and his workmates did not understand the concept of insurance or tax,but he said no one was brave enough to ask about it. They were confused about the financial system that was imposed:

There was a deduction of 200 dollars every week to go in our operating account that we used in NZ, the rest went into our savings account — this account that we could only withdraw from when we come back home. And it all depends on how much your weekly salary is. There was a tax deduction from our savings account when we withdrew [our money], [which was surprising because] there was[also]always a tax deduction from our weekly pay, so we all thought our savings account was tax free.

John told us that after a very negative experience in his first season, which was with a church team organised by a *matai* of his village, he decided to register individually with MCIL, and he was chosen to go. He was able to save money but complained about the deductions for tax and medical insurance as well as the NZD150 that he paid weekly for accommodation. Like all the others interviewed, he was disappointed by the many deductions from his wages:

> *… for food we eat, soap, blankets that I'm using, house rent, company vehicle that we use, medical insurance and tax. If it wasn't for this many deductions, I would have much more to bring home with me.*
>
> *I returned with NZD5,000 dollars, aside from the money I remitted to Samoa when [family members] called. I wanted so much to be a seasonal worker because one of my friends told me that this job is very beneficial to the development of families here and also good for us single men, [if] we get to find a wife there too.*

His comment indicated that he felt that workers who participated in the RSE might find a spouse who was a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident, opening up a chance to migrate.

Vai, aged 39, was oneof two women interviewed who had participated in the RSE. She had completed three contracts in New Zealand.

> *I wanted to build a new house[when I returned] but because my mother always called to [ask me to]send some money, I always sent 800 dollars home weekly. My dreams weren't fulfilled because of that. Most of my teammates did the same, sending money back home almost every week to their families. We'd get our paycheck of 800 or 900 dollars a week after deductions, like the rent, vehicle we were using to take us to workand pick us up … and meat supply from the company.*

The other woman, Sei, told us:

> *There are a lot of deductions. I never thought it would be that many. I thought the pillow I used was free of charge [laugh] but they charged for the pillow, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, our medical insurance and tax. And the more pay you get, the higher the tax. I thought I could claim the tax back when the contract is up but that was a big NO [laugh].Another deduction was the house rent and the company vehicle we used, so after deductions I got 700 or 800 dollars a week, then saved it in our savings account. ... They issued us ATM cards, so when my husband called I just used my ATM card to withdraw money to send to my husband. I hoped he would use it wisely. The money is very good; no wonder people fight for opportunities like this. The harder I worked, the more I received at the end of the week. If I took a day off, I wouldn't get pay. If only there were not so many deductions, I might've received a lot more, like 1,000 dollars plus, and if*

converted to Samoan tala it would be close to 2,000 tala per week, and to me that's a lot. It is much, much better [now]than living the hard life back then.

Lafuniu, commenting on the work, said:

I tell you, working in New Zealand is like a competition with the men; they compete to see who fills the box fastest and who has [the most] boxes. My first trip, I came second in the list of the fastest pickers, and my second trip I came first, and this surprised my teammates. It's all based on how to use the brain and how fast you pick up how to do the job; this is why I became a leader: because of my good work performance.

He noted that the deductions for expenses took about half of what he earned:

The pay is very good. One trip [earns] approximately 23,000 dollars [NZ]per person; after deductions this left me with 10,000 dollars. … This is how much I brought with me to Samoa. If only there were not so many deductions, our earnings would be much larger. … On most trips I didn't use my medical insurance, and we know we don't get reimbursed when our contract is finished, so what we do when it comes to the end of our contractis that we play sick and we go to the hospital for a health check and to get some medicines using our medical cards. We tried to get as much medicine as possible to bring with us to Samoa, just to use up our medical insurance card.

Tax deductions: if your pay is big, then tax will increase, and if it small so is the tax. … The vehicle deduction was50 dollars per week, but where we were staying was not far from the company and we hardly ever used the car; we only went shopping once a week. I think the vehicle deduction was a bit unfair.

Fala's employer was a Tasmanian berry growing company that employed workers through labour mobility schemes for their operations, as well as suppling labour to other growers. Fala she noticed that some of the other workers did not understand the contracts and pay slips (itemizing pay and deductions) they were signing:

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 if they understood the contract they signed; most only had a vague knowledge of it, and said they just looked at the page where it mentioned the amount of money paid to them.

Fala was critical of the health insurance deduction, because she paid for her own medical treatment:

What I don't understand is that they deducted [money for] health insurance, but every time I went to the hospital for a checkup [for a Covid test or treatment for

flu], I always paid for the consultation. … I asked the palagi [white]woman why I had to pay for my checkup instead of the company paying, and she said they would reimburse my money, but they never did. Something is absolutely not right about this process. I thought they would reimburse our health insurance once we finished our contract, which is what I heard from my friends working [through] RSE in New Zealand, if our insurance was not used, but [I received]nothing.

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

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

Fele, aged 24, said he was given an oral translation of his contract, which was in English, and he signed it, but he did not understand at the time that work would not always be available. He was also disappointed about a large deduction early in his contract 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 because the company doubled my deduction. I asked for the reason, and they said it is essential to pay the debt within the first three months of the contract so that I can have my full pay quickly. … I had to pay for my house[rent], water bills and electricity [abroad], and they also deducted an amount for my savings, and said I would get that money back when I returned home.

All participants in labour mobility schemes must have a health certificate, but these do not always accurately present the facts. Fata was the only person interviewed who had a work-related health problem. He said he is unlikely to go abroad again because he has a work-related injury that will prevent him from getting a clear medical report in future. He is likely to be diabetic, but this was not revealed by the pre-departure medical check:

In NZ we had to wear safety boots at all times; my boots were are bit tight and tended to hurt my big toe. There were days that I missed work because I couldn't wear the boots, because of my big toe. I went to see the doctor … you can see now that my big toe has been amputated.

Some workers in Australia had unexpected down time. If there are down times, when no work is available, the workers are not paid, although they still have to pay for their rent and food.Felereported the worst experience of this kind. He is a graduate of the Maritime School of the National University of Samoa and previously worked on Samoa's inter-island ferries. He was recruited through the MCIL, after a fitness test, by an Australian company that

supplies workers to employers through labour mobility schemes and offers job training. Fele was still in Australia when interviewed via a video-call:

> *I came to Australia as a strawberry picker, [but] when I first got here I didn't work for two months because the fruit was not ready, and we did not get paid for that period of time. [The company said] it was written in the contract we signed that if we don't work we won't get paid. The company lent us money for our needs, but we had to pay them back once we earned our salary. When we started working and had our income, we started paying for our airfares, our house[rent] and so forth.*
>
> *Towards the end of my contract, my boss asked me if I wanted to extend my contract, but said I would have to work in a different place and pick oranges, so then I signed for another five months. There I had to pick oranges, but our working day depended on the weather, so I usually worked for only three or four days [per week] because the weather changed. The work washard, but we didn't earn much because we did not work for a whole week. We had to deal with different weather every day.*

Working and living conditions

All of the workers interviewed who went to New Zealand spoke of the strict conditions imposed on them while they were working abroad, and many of them regarded working away on labour mobility schemes as a personal sacrifice: leaving their families behind, accepting the restrictions of company rules and undertaking arduous employment in order to save money to improve the lives of their families.

Most returned workers interviewed mentioned that they had to become accustomed to cold weather and long working hours. For Pepe,the biggest impact was the routine:

> *In NZ, time is everything. We needed to be on time. It was hard at first because I'm not used to being at work on time; especially for the morning shift when I had to leave for work in the early hours in cold weather. That is where I learned that[over there] time is very important, not like here in Samoa where I can freely do anything without worrying about the time. In NZ time controls me, but here in Samoa I control the time.*

TheRSE workers allreferred to the lack of personal freedom they experienced working abroad, the expectation that they must be very deferential to authority, and the fear being reported on by one another. There was a general fear of complaining to management about any issues they had, for fear of not being chosen to work during the next season or even being

deported, in which case their families would be shamed, and they might be punished by their villages when they returned home.

Sei told us said that the MCIL required a reference from her village leaders, adding that a village can be banned from supplying workers in future if a participant in a labour mobility scheme from that village is deported.

Vai compared living in workers' quarters to being in boarding school and spoke at length about the discipline imposed by RSE employment:

> *We were reminded about the curfew; the time we could go out and the time to be back in the hotel. There were days that we finished work at 6pm, then we went out shopping, but we had to be back in the hotel by 8.30pm, and no one was allowed to go out after that. We had to keep rooms clean and be tidy and neat; also we were not allowed to eat or smoke in our rooms. There was one time we rushed to work and forgot to hang up our towels; the cleaners came into ourroom and they took photos and sent them to the hotel managers.We were warned. … When you disobey the rules you are warned, and if you continue to disobey the rules, your chance of working in the company will be terminated; they threaten us with these words.*
>
> *There was one Samoan employee who got fired because he disrespected an order given by the palagi [white people].That's why the company prefers people from Vanuatu — because they never answer back.There are times when palagi have their own misunderstanding; but us, we do not question any instruction given to us. If we do so, we will be summoned to the office and interviewed or given a warning. We are not allowed to laugh out loud, because the palagi don't like it. The strictest rule,repeated to us by our team leader, is to not answer back to a palagi because some palagi are very discriminatory. Also,our attitudes; some people seemed like they didn't care and didn't obey a word or an order from a palagi, and often we were reminded about the company rules to abide by.*

Pili, aged 41, commented on the restrictions:

> *The company kept reminding us about obedience and respect for others.*
>
> *... There was a time schedule for us to follow. We were allowed to go out, but had to be cautious because if someone is caught not coming back and seen hanging around in town, they would be questioned.*
>
> *I'm the leader of our team. … With the otherteam, their team leader collected all the money from the team to process passports and visas, but unfortunately, he used [misappropriated] it, so I was called to take a team to New Zealand … because my record of leading the previous team was very good.*

Vai commented on the rules:

> *We were not allowed to drink beer; you are warned when they catch you for first timethat if you are caught a second time you will be deported back to Samoa.*

Many of those interviewed mentioned interpersonal conflicts as a problem, referring to workers "back-stabbing" (reporting others to the company managers). As Vai said: "Another cause of trouble wasganging up of workers against one another and gossiping".

Louis told us that when a co-worker broke a rule, the whole team felt threatened:

> *There was a problem last year when some men were caught drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana. From then on there was so much tension and disrespect among us that we split [into 'gangs']; one gang finds fault in the other and reportsthem to the company's manager. We managed to solve this issue before it reached Samoa. If there was something very serious that could not be solved, the company would report the incident back to the government officials for advice.*

Risati said that some workers in his team were deported: one because he did not obey the rules and one because she was pregnant, despite the negative test on her medical report.

Toasaid he completed his first contract but was suspended from participating in labour mobility schemes for three yearsbecause he got into a fight with a co-worker during his contract.

> *Clubbing is prohibited, even alcohol consumption. There were times we bought a case of beer and sneaked it into our room because we needed to beat the cold weather and the day's hard work. Our team leader didn't know about it until later, and it ended up bad. Too much jealousy and back-stabbing. One night we got to our house after 9pm; it was not yet dark, we had our evening lotu[prayers] and afterwards we had dinner then watched TV and drank some bottles of beer with the boys, but I ended up ina fist fight with another guy because I couldn't stand his sarcastic jokes. I never thought this would affect my work because we settled everything[between ourselves]; we apologised to one another and to the team and our team leader. I told [the team leader] the truth of what happened, but he wasn't convinced.I found out later that it was a set-up because otherswere jealous of me getting promoted and because I got much more pay than them.*

Lofi told us that she believed that participants in labour mobility schemes should put their families first, and avoid bad behaviour:

> *The attitude of Samoan workers ... [there was] too much backstabbing and jealousy, which ended up in a dispute between the workers. If someone was promoted to be a supervisor, co-workers always made negative comments to that person, and tension erupted in the workplace. Some[workers] tended to break the rules to get back at the supervisor. It was a very unhealthy working environment there for our people … Some of my coworkers, once they got to Australia; they forgot the promises [they'd made] to their families.*

Fala commented that some Samoan participants in labour mobility schemes treated their work as though it were casual labour, and said that those in her team who were absentees were not offered another contract.

> *They get paid only when they work, but some worked only two or three days a week. Some went to visit their families [in Samoa] for a week or few days if their families paid for their fares. There was always an excuse for them to stay away from work. The company never cared if they didn't go to work, but kept a record of people who usually didn't work or who were often absent from work.*

Tavita, aged 24, explained that if work team leaders were chosen by company managers it could cause problems, because the managers abroad do not understand Samoan values:

> *The company is very protective of us; the only thing I don't like is when a team leader is young and most of the team are older. This young leader is too timid to correct the older teammates if they do something wrong.*[67] *Another thing is they start ganging up. It is good to have an older team leader, who can treat us equally, not a younger one – because his decision is always biased.*

Fala also referred the issue of treating elders disrespectfully:

> *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.*

Like many others interviewed, Fala saw interpersonal relations and drinking alcohol as major problems:

> *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 that the people in the group I was assigned to worked well together.*
>
> *One of the issues that did come up was consuming alcohol and at the wrong time. Some would drink the night before work and would call in sick. Some fights would break out due to alcohol consumption. The cheap cost of alcohol was an excuse to buy it and drink.*
>
> *... Other issues that came up between Samoans were that[new] relationships were formed, although they were married.*

Mala, aged 44, was employed as a storeman in Samoa before joining a labour mobility scheme. At the time of the interview, he had recently returned from his fourth overseas contract, and was planning to go again. His wages for

[67] In Samoan culture, young people do not criticise or rebuke older people. Therefore, putting a young Samoan person in charge of a group of older Samoan workers creates a dilemma for the young person and offends the older workers.

harvesting oranges, lemons and avocados were based on piece-work (per bin), and the payment varied with the different types of fruit. Like others, Mala was critical of some of his fellow Samoan workers:

> *A few incidents and issues occurred. Some of these issues were poor management, alcohol abuse, the use of vulgar language on Sundays, infidelity, fighting and being unable to adhere to rules provided by the company, to name a few. One major incident 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 the Australian police with murder and is now in prison.*

Like most of those interviewed, Fele said that Samoans wanting to participate in labour mobility schemes 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'd better stop drinking alcohol. It is one of the weaknesses of many Samoans; they spend money on alcohol and end up being sent back home, but the contract was not finished. Make wise decisions and be able to save money, and do not waste the opportunity.*

Lofi told us that she thought the one of most negative aspects of labour mobility schemes was to do with workplace relations.

> *Supervisors show favouritism 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 listen to workers'questions and problems when we approach them.*

Those who had worked in Australia did not report the same extent of restrictions on personal freedom as those who worked in New Zealand. Fala, who worked in Australia, said her concerns were mainly about workplace issues. Fala told us that a frequent issue was that workers were not paid for all of their hours:

> *Sometimes, our working hours were not counted; this was a constant issue between the company and us. We repeatedly approached the office to ask them to give us a valid reason why some of the hours we worked were not paid, but they came up with a vague explanation and said that they would "look into it". I sometimes got a back pay, but not often. The payroll officer was never around to answer our queries. It's really hard for some workers who speak limited English to fight back to get a good reason why they did not receive their full pay according to the hours they worked.*

Fala was paid on a piece work basis; for example with fruit picking: the more boxes she filled, the more money she received on payday. She said she

counted the number of boxes she filled and calculated how much she would receive on payday, but she was sometimes told that some of her boxes were no good and would not be counted, so she would get less that she expected.

Fala was also critical of the quality of the food they received and the lack of variety:

> *Money was deducted for food [but] the food we got from the canteen was not good. Some whole weeks we were only fed pork and rice. Sometimes we didn't go to the canteen to get food; [we didn't want] to be fed with the same menu. [Instead] we went to the shop to get some snacks for our nightly meals.*

Relationships and being away from home

The risk of participating in labour mobility schemes to relationships and marriages is widely discussed in Samoa, and it was mentioned by most of the survey respondents.

Mala, aged 44,reported that his marriage broke up in his absence, and he was bitter about it:

> *My wife moved out with another man.Now it's only me and my kids. I returned and my then-wife was already staying with another man in the neighbouring village. This was so hard and heartbreaking because I was sending money homeevery week, and now I know where it went: to her new family. I was so stupid then. I was only able to save a small portion of my wage, because I keep sending money to support my children and wife, without knowing the truth about my wife. I havefour boys and one girl. My ex-wife took 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 trust your wife, please join the scheme. And if you think that you can also handle what I went through, go ahead and join the scheme. Things happen and life goes on with us being able to cope and survive every turbulence we face. But be prepared for the consequences you may face, especially moving away from your wife and kids.*

Pili worked two seasons at the same orchard with a team organised by a*matai* of his village. He told us that the hard work and cold weather made him want to return home, but he said "thinking of the struggles back home gave me the courage to stay strong and work hard".

He described the temptations he faced abroad:

> *Work was very hard, and there were temptations that weakened me there, but I managed to resist those temptations. They were temptations with the opposite sex and with alcohol. It isn't easy to work alongside a female if you get too close to her;thistempts me with sexual feelings.*

Sei emphasised thatit was important to maintain family relations while away.She said she made video-calls home every night to avoid feeling lonely. On each of her five seasons working abroad, she left her young children with her husband and mother.

> *I was encouraged by my husband to go. He said that it is best for me to go to this kind of work because he heard it is good money. My husband is a mechanic, and this is where we used to get most of our money from. I was unemployed. I stayed home and looked after our baby, and I wove mats and tried selling them for extra dollars to support us. It was a hard life; I prayed hard for a chance to get seasonal work.*
>
> *... I had doubts about my husband when I was there; whether he was faithful to me or not.*

She also spoke of the issues with mixed groups of men and women working together:

> *I admit I was kind of attracted to some guys from other Pacific islands who we worked with; even Samoan guys in our team because they like to flirt with girls, me included, but I love my husband and I stayed faithful to him. No wonder couples separate and end up divorced, because of this. It's another rulethat is now enforced on everybody[no adultery], and many have been deported back home for breaking this rule.*

Vai said that he missed his family very much while away:

> *The first time I went toNew Zealand was very hard because I missed my family, especially my kids because I was away for eight months. I missed them every day.*

Vai also said that workers were warned about infidelity while away from their spouses.

> *We were instructed before leaving Samoa not to get into trouble and ruin the image of Samoa.*
>
> *... We were advised many times by our leaders about infidelity between teammates, especially married men and women.*

Gender roles and women participating in labour mobility schemes

Four of the interviewed women told us that they were doing work that they would not have done in Samoa, where heavy outdoor work is considered 'men's work'. Women in most provinces of Fiji and in Vanuatu do inshore fishing and grow food crops, but Samoan and Tongan women do not normally do this type of work. In Samoa, it can be seen as demeaning to a family if their female members do heavy work outside the house.

Sei said she came from a well-educated family and never expected to do labouring work, but needing money she took the opportunity.

Ioana had previously worked as a hotel cleaner in Samoa. She said that the work she did in Queensland, Australia, packing bananas for nine months, would not be done by women in Samoa.

> *I never thought I would do this kind of work. When I was in Samoa, I thought this kind of work was for taulelea[untitled men] only; we ladies only do household chores. But now I had to take the offer and work for whatever is given to us. We can't be choosers right? [laughing]. And the money is much better than what I earned in Samoa, and I do this for the sake of my family.*

Lofialso did 'men's work'. She worked in vineyards in Queenslandfor 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. [With my earnings from working abroad]I bought a secondhand car costing 30,000 tala for my family. I also sent 700tala to my mom every week to help take care of my sick father. My father died while I was in Australia, and ... I could not attend my father's funeral due to the Covid-19 restrictions 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.*

Fala's contract was for 12 months. Her first job was picking strawberries, starting work at 6am, picking 40 or more boxes a day. She became team leader of thirteen Samoan women. After the picking season, they worked pruning vines elsewhere. 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 they returned to picking and pruning. The work was physically demanding, with bending and lifting heavy items, and it wasespecially difficult working outdoors in bad weather. At the end of the contract she returned to Samoa, but plans to go back after three months to the same company.

The leader of a village women's committee in Samoa told one of the research team that she strongly opposed recruitment of women in labour mobility schemes, saying that if they were young and single they may form inappropriate relationships abroad, and if they were mothers their children at home would suffer if the parents separated due to infidelity. She said that despite her objections, there were four young single women from her village working in New Zealand as fruitpickers.

A *matai* of the same village spoke of a child who had died while the mother was working overseas, suggesting that the child had not been properly looked after when his mother was not there. He also described a case in which a married worker had abandoned his wife and children in Samoa and bigamously married another woman in New Zealand. This became known to all because photographs of his wedding in New Zealand were posted on social media. The man's village council punished his family in Samoa with large fines.

Failing the selection process and fraud

In Samoan villages and low-income urban communities it is prestigious to work in labour mobility schemes, especially if you have completed many successive contracts. There is therefore high demand for places insuch schemes, which means the recruitment process is open to corruption. This ranges from charging applicants an excessively high registration fee to major fraud in which large sums are stolen from applicants on the basis of false promises. Many people are confused about how to apply for labour mobility schemes, so are easy prey for scammers (Samoa Observer 2024).

Amo, aged 25, a casual worker, had been waiting for several years since registering, hoping to be chosen. When he was finally notified by MCIL that he had succeeded, he joyfully went to the airport with his suitcase and new clothes to join his team. But when he got there he was told by an MCIL official that his place in the group had been given to someone else. He went home deeply ashamed and angry about this experience. Like several others interviewed, he suspected that MCIL officials might be corrupt.

Others blame their village leaders. Vincent, aged 43, applied to join a team from his village twice without success and believes that this is because the village mayor is personally biased against him. Vincent suffered from others mocking his lack of success in being chosen. If it is known that a person has applied unsuccessfully, that person is often ridiculed.

> *It's so sad to tell someone that I wasn't picked twice, given my efforts and desire to go. I look like a failure and a loser, and that really saddens me. I was the first in our village to process papers when I first heard of the seasonal work. I applied for my passport. The processing and organizing of the trip was in progress and I was so happy. I had waited for this moment for so long and it was like a dream come true, so I could buy all the things I dreamed of. I looked at the future of my children and [dreamed of] buying a family vehicle and a small shop, but all these dreams disappeared because I wasn't picked. I'm so embarrassed every time I*

walk around the village; the [other] villagers mocked me for not going. But this doesn't stop me. I will keep on applying until I have the chance to go.

Mai, aged 35, had a job as a school groundsman, which paid the minimum wage but was not enough to support his family. His family depended entirely on Mai's wages for their living because they had no land on which to grow crops. As someone who was employed, he was not eligible to be part of the labour mobility scheme, but he applied, with all the necessary paperwork, three times. He did not inform the MCIL that he already had employment,but his applications were unsuccessful each time. He has never been told why he was not chosen.

Pe'a, aged 25, applied twice to join a labour mobilityscheme.The first time was through a man who was believed to be a recruiter and who used social media to advertise. The man collected a WST80 fee from applicants but never registered them. Later Pe'a heard that the recruiter was a fraud. Pe'a applied to another recruiter who proved to be a scammer too. This fraudster had built trust among the many hopeful applicants by holding meetings and providing training, including giving instructions about the rules of employment, but once he had collected their fees he disappeared.

Fa'aumu, aged 30, was also cheated. She applied twice through her church and its pastor for a place in on a team to pick apples in New Zealand. The 'recruiter'who said that he could help her and others in her church congregation was a Samoan from New Zealand. She and her husband paidWST150 each as a consultation fee (for him doing the paperwork),then the recruiter took them to apply for their police reports and medical certificates, for which he charged them WST250. On top of this, they paid for their passports, which cost WST500. Fa'aumu said that she and her husband also prepared a cooler of food, upon the recruiter's instructions, to take to a church group in New Zealand.

We didn't have any money at the time, so we looked for some money to process our passports because we didn't want to miss this great opportunity to help develop my little family out of poverty. I then called my brother in New Zealand, and asked if he could kindly send us 500 dollars to process our passports and he sent it. ... All of us completed processing everything that needed processing but the man was nowhere to be found. We tried many times to call him but he was unavailable.... Then my uncle in NZ called us and told us [the man] was in jail.

Despite this failure she was optimistic:

> *Even though we didn't go, we were happy that we had our passports. ... We [decided to]be persistent [and apply] for any [other]opportunitieslike this in the future. But we were mocked by the villagers for not going.*

The second time she applied, it was to a relative who organised groups to work overseas on temporary contracts. He promised to include them and took a fee from them, but after waiting some time they heard he had gone abroad with his team without them.

Minu, aged 24, said he desperately needed money*:*

> *… to buy a piece of land for my family to move to. We lived in an unsafe place where every time it rains the river floods and it flows right into our house. Not only that, but we can't cross the river to go shopping, to work or to takethe kids to school.*

He was defrauded three times. The first time was through a member of his church who told him there were opportunities to go to America, but he got no answer to his application. The second time he applied to go with a group to Australia. He paid WST50 for registration,WST50 for a medical report and WST30 for a police report,and spent money on taxi fares anda copy of his birth certificate, and WST150 for other expenses. However, the only work he was offered was at the recruiters own house. The third time he tried to get work was in American Samoa where he was promised USD5,000 per month for working on a fishing boat. He and some other men worked on a fishing boat, but were not paid.

Comparing the labour mobility schemes of New Zealand and Australia

While we cannot conclusively state that New Zealand's RSE scheme is superior to Australia's programme for short-term seasonal work, various factors suggest this is so.[68] One reason is that the RSE work (in the horticulture industry) in New Zealand is concentrated in just a few regions and therefore workers tend to stay in the same area for the duration of their contracts.

[68]It is difficult to compare the labour mobility schemes of New Zealand and Australia because of lack of data about the Australian schemes. While the Government of New Zealand has conducted regular surveys and a detailed evaluation of the experiences of both employers and workers, and published them, studies conducted by the Government of Australia have not been published in full. Several academic studies of seasonal work have been conducted and published in Australia, however.

Pastoral services for RSE workers can be provided more efficiently when workers are concentrated together.

In contrast, short-term contractwork in Australia is undertaken all over the country. All ofthe respondentswho had worked in Australia were employed by labour hire companies, some of which operate in several states of Australia, which meant that workers shuttled between various jobs and never stayed long in one place. This was not only disruptive for the workers but also reduced their ability to become more highly skilled in a particular task, and thus become more attractive to future employers.

According to Nunns, Bedford and Bedford (2020a),Samoans are a significant component of the New Zealand population and therefore New Zealanders may be more welcoming than Australians.A disadvantage of working in New Zealand, however, is that there are strict rules imposed on workers outside their working hours. Such ruleswere not reported by workers who went to Australia.

A better life?

The survey responses indicate that the deep and widespread desire among Samoans for 'a better life' is driven by status-rivalry and the obligation of *tautua* (service to family).[69] A common refrain from our survey particicipants was their willingness to endure arduous labour, loneliness, restrictions on personal freedom and self-denial to give *tautua* (through sending remittances and buying consumer goods) andimprove their families' comfort and status.

While most respondents were delighted that they were able to participate in labour mobility schemes and said they wanted to renew their contracts, almost all also reported some negative experiences, including feeling exploited because unreasonable deductions are made from their incomes, feeling that the payments they received were not what they expected, and feeling as if they were being treated as children because of the strict rules that guide their behaviour. The negative experiences cited by the respondents did not differ much from other critical findings, which argue that the terms of employment should be improved (see, for example, Nunns, Bedford and Bedford 2020a).

The Pacific labour mobility schemes are often seen to be 'win-win' because they supportdevelopment in the Pacific nations while also boosting the

[69] The notion of *tautua* is a deeply rooted cultural value. See the article by Brian T Alofaituli titled "Samoan Tuna Cannery Workers in American Samoa" in this volume.

participating industries in the host countries of New Zealand and Australia.Nunns, Bedford and Bedford (2020a:8) describe the benefits of the RSE scheme to participating Pacific Island Countries (PICs) as follows:

> *One of the objectives of the RSE scheme is to encourage economic development in the participating PICs. This happens mainly through the injection of RSE income at the grassroots level, supporting the economic wellbeing of participating families. Some of the benefits of such income can be distributed, directly or indirectly, to other households thereby potentially contributing to improved economic and social wellbeing within the community.*

Economic development in the participating Pacific nations is assumed to occur partly through investment of savings by workers upon their return home. While the responses to the surveys indicate some investment by the returning workers, including a fishing boat, a fence for a cattle paddock, a taxi and a shop, for the most part the savings are not injected into businesses, and therefore do not seem to contribute to job-creation, sustainable livelihoods or overall economic development. In Samoa, therefore, the benefits of labour mobility to the local economy seem limited to supporting the retail industries selling consumer goods and construction material to returning workers.[70]

Labour mobility schemes are also touted as offering participants an opportunity to learn new skills. While some survey respondents said they did acquire new skills from their jobs in New Zealand and Australia (e.g. skills in picking strawberries), it is doubtful whether there is any opportunity for them to use those new skills when they return to Samoa because similar employment is rarely, if ever, available there.

In terms of social wellbeing, it appears from the survey responses that labour mobility schemes have resulted in a complex set of experiences and several negative social impacts in Samoa, including a marriage breakdowns and long periods of separation of children from their parents.[71]

If ‘a better life’ simply means having a larger house and more consumer goods, then it can be argued that the labour mobility schemes have achieved that aspiration for many Samoan families. If,however, ‘a better life’ means sustainable development for the nation and greatercommunity wellbeing, then it would appear that the schemes have not achievedthis in Samoa.

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[70] Superannuation payouts (from Australia or New Zealand) received by labour mobility participants when they return home are, like the savings earned abroad, most often spent on cars and house construction, rather than being invested (see Dingwall and Kupu 2024).

[71] The social impacts are discussed in more detail in the article titled “Labour Mobility: A Blessing and a Curse” in this volume.

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