Samoa under the PALM

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Pamela, like many other Samoans,hopes to one day attain residentstatus in Australia. With this goal in mind, she gave up her job as a shop assistant in Samoa to go to Australia via the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme to work as a meatpackerfor three years.When interviewed as part of a survey of thirteenSamoanPALM workers in 2022, Pamela told the interviewersthat she was:

> *… considering migrating and staying in Australia for good. The company has offered an extension of our working years after they review our performance following our first three-year contract, so I will be on my best [behaviour] to secure another spot for me to stay longer and earn the company's favour, [which will help me] when I decide that I want to migrate.*

Pacific labour mobility schemes are promoted as 'win-win' scenarios by which Australia and New Zealand get the semi-skilled labour they need, in the regions and in the sectors where labour is needed, while helping their poor Pacific Island neighbours, the citizens of which gain employment and training, while the countries get infusions of incomethrough remittancesfrom citizens working abroad on the schemes and through the savings those citizens take home.

This chapter presents the benefits of the PALM scheme as proposed by the Australian and Samoan governments and some academics, and also the stories of Samoans like Pamela who have worked in Australia under the PALM scheme. It assesses the pros and cons of this scheme for the Samoans who go abroad, for their families and for their communities at home.

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The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme

In 2022, the Australian government consolidated the Seasonal Work Programme (SWP) and the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) under the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. This arrangement offers both short-term ("seasonal") work (as accessed via the SWP) and long-term contracts (as accessed via thePLS).

According to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)in its fact sheet (2021),the PALM scheme offers:

> *... extended visa validity of up to 4 years, with provision for multiple entry to Australia, providing employers with greater workforce stability and giving workers more time to develop skills, complete qualifications and earn income to send home to their families.*
>
> *... the ability for some PALM seasonal workers nominated by employers to apply for a PALM scheme visa onshore to be employed in longer-term work, providing improved career pathways for workers.*

DFAT (2021) claims that the PALM scheme is an improvement on the SWP and PLSas it offers increased support for workers' skills development, better oversight of employers and more flexibility for workers to move between employers in response to workforce demands, so that workers mayget longer-term contracts if opportunities are offered to them by employers and if they are not taking jobs from Australian citizens.

To prevent the kinds of abuses experienced by workers in the past, which were recorded in studies of the PLS, SWP and RSE (see, for example, Nunns, Bedford and Bedford 2020), the PALM appoints relationship managers in every Australian state and territory (DFAT 2021). Despite this, there remains room for exploitation of workers (see, for example, Stead 2021; Kagan 2024; Withers 2024).

Australia's interests

Across rich countries of the world there is a shortage of skilled workers in sectors where the work is arduous or difficult, such as agedcare. Amongskilled aged-care workers, there is a particular shortage of qualified nurses, who supervise less-qualified workers (WHO 2015). According to Howe (2009), overseas-born workers are overrepresented in the long-term aged-care workforce, and aged-care services in rich countries will increasingly depend on

workers from the Global South. Another industry facing labour shortages worldwide is meatpacking.

Like other countries, Australia has a shortage of aged-care workers, particularly in rural and remote locations. In Australia, aged-care workers include "home visitors" who assist frail elderly people with their daily personal care and "carers" who generally work in aged-care institutions where patients are unable to manage at home and may have dementia. The personal care routine involves showering and toileting patients and assistingthem with meals.

Morrison-Dayan (2019) argues that Australia is increasingly reliant on migrants and on carers from abroad on temporary visas and will need a formal aged-care labour agreement:

> *…the formation of an aged care industry labour agreement based on geographical and niche subsector labour market need is necessary to ensure the accessibility of the programme to aged care organisations. However, it is also argued that the introduction of a new low-skill visa would better facilitate the recruitment of migrant personal care workers.*

With regard to the meatpacking sector, Piller and Lising (2014:35) report:

> *Australia is one of the world's largest beef exporters. However, meat processing jobs are widely considered undesirable and are increasingly filled with employer-sponsored migrant workers on temporary long-stay visas.*

The PALM scheme allows Australia to cast itself in the role of benefactor: offering labour migrants relatively well-paid employment opportunities that not only provide them with income but also increase their skills. PALM benefits employers in Australia because they can recruit sufficient labour for jobs that are hard to fill with Australians. The benefits to Australia's employers are amplified by the selective opportunities provided by the scheme: employers get to choose the best workers, and they choose only the most motivated and compliant workers.

In 2007, the Australian government established the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC), which contracts technical colleges in the country to offer vocational courses to Pacific Islanders, leading to recognised certification in social services and trades. Chand and Dempster (2019) assert that upskilling through programmes such as the APTC can benefit the receiving countries participating in labour mobility schemes:

> *Such up-skilling can also help fill gaps in the developed countries of the Pacific Rim. The populations of these countries are aging, leaving them short of workers*

> *in fields such as elder care and agriculture. Recent policy moves … allow workers from the Pacific Islands to take up low- and semi-skilled work (Chand and Dempster 2019).*

They take only perfunctory consideration of the fact that Pacific Island countries are also short of skilled workers.

Samoa's interests

Australia is increasingly viewed as the ideal destination by Samoans hoping to migrate. Liu and Howes (2023) reported that the latest Australian census shows that:

> *The Pacific population in Australia is growing faster than that of New Zealand. The ratio of Pacific nationals in Australia to New Zealand has increased between 2006 and the most recent census (2018 or 2021) for every nationality except for i-Kiribati. For example, the ratio of Samoans in Australia to Samoans in New Zealand increased from 30% in 2006 to 45% in 2018, and Tongans from 36% to 53%.*
>
> *However, Australia is still a long way behind when it comes to Pacific representation. New Zealand's Pasifika share (including Indo-Fijians but not making any adjustment for undercounting) increased from 6.9% in 2006 to 8.7% in 2018. The comparable figures for Australia (without the Indo-Fijian adjustment) are 0.5% and 1.0% (2006 and 2021).*

The potential for contracts of up to four years under the PALM scheme allows Pacific Islanders to get longer employment contracts than under the seasonal work schemes. Those who gain work skills and long-term work experience in Australia are more likely to succeed in applying to migrate to Australia, so longer-term visas under the PALM are potentially a pathway for Pasifika people to settle permanently in Australia.

The meatworks and aged-care sectors appear to account for most of the jobs in Australia that Samoans on longer-term visas have filled, although the authors do not have access to official Australian government data on this, if such data are being compiled.

Fine and Mitchell (2007) found that immigrants from Fiji, Samoa and Tonga represented 1.5 percent of residential aged-care workforce, even though they constituted just 0.1 percent of the Australian workforce. This suggests that Samoan migrants in Australia (mostly arriving via New Zealand) are already becoming established in this employment niche.

When workers under the PALM scheme settle into economic niches such as meatpacking and agricultural labour, their connectons in these sectors will encourage and assist friends and relatives to seek jobs in them too. This was what led Samoans to choose jobs in factories and meatworks in New Zealand; most migrated to join pioneering relatives already established there, who helped them find jobs (see the article by Macpherson and Macpherson titled 'Samoan Labour Migration to Aotearoa New Zealand', in this issue of the *Journal of Samoan Studies* 2024).

In the authors' own observations of Samoan families, chain migration to Australia is fuelled by their knowledge of the experiences of familes and friends, and their perceptions that wages are higher in Australia than in New Zealand; perceptions that are fed back to Samoa, where people now hope to migrate directly to Australia rather than using New Zealand as a stepping stone as in the past.

Experiences of workers under the PALM

This survey, conducted in 2022, interviewed thirteen workers who had contracts under the PALMscheme. It was a random sample.The workers,from various communities,were identified by unrelated people who were working as teachers and support staff at the Centre for Samoan Studies at the National University of Samoa (NUS). Most of the respondents were in Australia at the time and were interviewedvia video calls. Of the thirteenrespondents, eight worked in meatpacking, four in aged-care homes and onein agriculture. Most of them left jobs in Samoa when they signed on to work in Australia.

It was a small sample, but revealing in the consistency of the participants' motivations,their experiencesin the sectors they worked in and their future hopes.Like workers on short-term ("seasonal") contracts(see the previous article in this volume, titled 'A Better Life?'), the workers on longer-term contractswere motivated to work overseas to earn money to improve existing houses or build new houses in Samoa for their familiesand to buy various consumer goods to improve the status and comfort of their families.

Whereas most "seasonal" workers (whose responses were presented in the previous articleof this volume) appeared unaware that they could transition from short-term to long-term employment in Australia, the workers interviewed in this survey had all signed three-year contracts, and ten of the

thirteen workers interviewed hoped to use their employment under the labour mobility scheme as a means to migrate to Australia.

Stories of meatpacking workers

Meatpacking is an arduous occupation, with safety and health risks, and many meatpacking companies are located in remote areas of rural Australia,so it is not a popular job among Australians, most of whom have better options.

The operation of modern meatpacking plants is unfamiliar to most Samoans. In Samoa, livestock are not taken to abbatoirs and Samoa has no meatworks. Farmers shoot their livestock and then sell the carcasses whole to supermarkets, which then chop up the carcasses.In Samoa, men, particularly young men, are traditionally responsible for skinning carcasses and butchering them (roughly, into large pieces). Working with meat is regarded as 'men's work', and is rarely, if ever, done by women in Samoa. Despite this, five of the seven meatworkers in our sample were women (including one transgender woman).

The accounts from the respondents working as meatpackers are very similar, although they were working in different states of Australia and for different employers. They were all working under contracts that did not allow them to change jobs, and none had skills in meatpacking prior to joining the labour mobility scheme.

Mele, a single woman aged 32, was working as a meatpacker in NSW. She said she had a three-year contract, and at the time of the interview had completed seven months of her contract. She first applied to the MCIL in 2016 but did not get an offer until late 2021. In Samoa she had worked as a cashier in a hotel. She saidmeatpacking was not the sort of work she would prefer, but:

> *[I took the job to] help develop my family with the things that I long for us to get, like furniture and home appliances and to buy a secondhand car for us. With the pay I got at [the hotel], 230 tala fortnightly, nothing could be done. [Now] I help with our home renovations, I contribute to family fa'alavelavewhen my family calls, and I help out with my sibling's [tertiary level] tuition. I have a savings account that I deposit half of my pay into – for me to take home when I go back to Samoa. I might give it all to my parents, for them to do want they want, but we prioritize the buying of a family car, and what's left of it will be used to buy some home furniture.*

She said the work was very arduous:

> *I have to stand throughout the process while packing and be watchful when the meat comes out to be packed, in case I miss one. At the end of the day, I have 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 10-minute break at 10:30am, a 30-minute lunch break and a 10-minute break at 2:30pm. I don't like break time because many workers crowd into the rest area, and if I get there late I don't get space to stretch my aching muscles from standing all day. We hardly ever have a day off to recharge for the next day's work, and this tires us easily.*

She had mixed feelings about her experience so far:

> *I never thought I would do this kind of work [laughing]. I'm used to doing office work, and I thought this type of work was only for men. It's a good experience though, and I get to learn something new. … I hope with this experience I can work in a high-quality independent butcher shop[in future] as a manager or a supervisor [laughing].*

She was ambivalent about the prospect of remaining to work in Australia:

> *I'm thinking of trying to get a permanent visa to live and work in Australia, but I [would] prefer to stay in Samoa with my parents and siblings. I know that working in Australia is hard because everything is[about] money, and if I don't work, I won't have enough to send to Samoa.*

Mata,a woman aged 34, had been employed in Samoa as a market rent collector before going to Australia to work as a meatpacker on a three-year contract. She applied for the job because she said what she earned in Samoa was not enough to meet the needs of her family. She said she thinks she made the right choice to take this job:

> *Working in this company has enabled me to get more knowledge and skills and the ability to do the work, and I'm happy to work each day. I have learned to be cautious every time and to make sure there are no mistakes 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 [issues], and there are safety provisions. I send money to my family in Samoa to helpthem, not just for fa'alavalave. I have savings put aside for a good project for my family when I return home.*

Pamela, a transgender (*fa'afafine*) person aged 29, said she hadmoved around within the meatpacking plant, performinga number of tasks since she began work, including packing meat on different lines, and said she had acquired a lot of new knowledge and skills. Like Mele, she also spoke of the long hours of standing andthe short breaksand also mentioned heavy lifting.

She said wanted to join the labour mobility scheme after observing other families with members working in Australia and seeing a chance to help her family:

> *Knowing that I am a transgender and I won't have children, I support my siblings. I already have land [in Samoa], so I aim to build a house for my siblings to live freely, without having to worry about who owns the house. The house they live in currently is my grandmother's; my mother has passed on. We don't know what will happen once [my grandmother] is gone, and who is going to own the house after her.*

Tia, a woman aged 30, worked as a waitress in a restaurant in Samoa prior to going to Australia, and when interviewed she was on home leave from her work as a meatpacker in Australia. She is required to return to Samoa for three months after every year of work. She described her work:

> *[My employer] exports high-quality beef, veal, mutton and goat meat to over fifty countries. I started by packing boxes for two weeks. After that, they moved me to the next level: removing the goat, lamb and sheep hooves. 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 (sheep and lamb). After one week in the cutting room they moved me to pack sheep and lamb cuts into boxes using a machine. After two weeks, they moved me to offal. This is where you pack things such as goat, sheep and lamp heads in boxes. Right now, I'm in the labelling area, using a computer to type labels for boxes that are already packed and ready to export to different countries.*

Like all the other survey respondents, she said she was participating in a labour mobility scheme to help her family. She said that her family, comprising her mother, grandmother and three younger siblings, depended on her. Her earnings in Samoa had not been enough to meet her family's needs. She said she was happy with her job in Australia, saying she hadgained new skills and hadfriendly workmates, and she enjoyedthe feeling that she was helping those at home:

> *My first pay, I sent to my mother to buy a small freezer because my family used to use our neighbour's freezerif we received a box of chicken from a family funeral or to store our shopping for Sunday [lunch]. My second pay, I sent [home]to buy a TV. I send money for my siblings' school fees, family fa'alavelave and my grandparents' expenses. I have sent money every fortnight, and I [also]have a savings account. My goal is to buy a new car for my family, especially for my grandparents, to take them to the hospital for their checkupsand tochurch.*

Unlike the other womenworking in the meatpacking sector, who had all been in paid work before they joined the labour mobility scheme, Beti, a 29-

year-old divorced woman with two children, had no paid work before she joined. She was employed with a meatpacking company in Queensland:

> *My husband was providing for our family, picking fruit in New Zealand. However… we ended up getting divorced. Now the kids are living with my mother in Samoa. I am the sole provider for them nowadays. 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 had nothing to provide for my two sons. My only option was to look for an opportunity to come to Australia to work … that is my motivation. The scheme has helped me a lot. If I were still in Samoa; it would bevery hard for me to get a job because I didn't finish school. I dropped out of secondary school. I am happy with the sacrifices I'm making now for my sons.*
>
> *I have been able to gain experience in how to process meat from the raw to the packaging stages. 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. ... I believe this also teaches us to process and make sure all things, like the tools used,...are clean at all times, for better hygiene.*
>
> *I would gladly come back to work again,as long as I am 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 gain permanent residency in Australia.*
>
> *Every week, if they have money left from the previous week, my mum tells me to save the money that I intended to send to them for the next time. I send approximately 500tala, about 280 Australian dollars, homeevery week. That is a lot of money right? If I had stayed in Samoa, I could not get that type of money each week. ... If I miss a week, I usually send them around 700 to800tala,around 400 dollars, to make up for that [missed] week. I don't want my boys to starve. You know, mothers' love, [they] will do anything for their children. I can save up to 300 dollars per week. That's a lot of money to me. I never spend money on anything that I want. ... Just on food and personal things.*
>
> *I am aiming to build a medium-sized concrete house with a better bathroom[than we have now], as currently we live in a small hut: me, my mother, my two sons and my two brothers[in Samoa]. So, if it is God's will, hopefully at the end of the contract I will come back and make this [goal] come true.*

Of the two men interviewed, one had previous experience selling meat in a supermarket and the other, a farmer, had worked with cattle and knew how to butcher them in the rough and ready Samoan manner.

At the time of the interview, Alo, a man aged 32, was employed with a meatpacking company in Queensland. He first applied for labour mobility

work via Samoa's Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (MCIL) in 2009 but was not offered work until 2020:

> *I was crying when I got that phone call from the MCIL office, and thank God I got this opportunity to work overseas. I tried for so long; I was fighting for an opportunity … to help my family develop financially. I was so happy when I got the chance to be in it; my intention isto provide my family with things they need.*
>
> *I send money every two weeks ... to my wife, for our four children's needs like food, Cash Power [electricity], 'alofa'[fortnightly offering] to our pastor, school fees and family fa'alavelave. I also send 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 live in my mother's house with my siblings.*

He said he understood the terms of his contract, although he did not understand them before he started working.

> *I thought the company would provide things to us for free, like our medical fees if we go to hospital, transportation, airfares, visasand even our mobile phone ... but they deduct the cost [of everything]from our salary. Everything you are using in the 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.*

He said he initially experienced some problems understanding his supervisor, who is from Papua New Guinea and speaks quickly, and he said the work was difficult:

> *On my first day at work, everything was hard and difficult for me to use. The use of different machines was new to me. It took me one or two days of training in how to use them. The faster you learn to use a machine, the quicker you can move to the next type of 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. ... The work is very hard, especially for first-time workers like me. The company is very satisfied with the Samoan workers' performance because they are hardworking people; not only that, but they arealsokindhearted and willing to help others.*

Alo has been offered a new four-year contract. Like other long-term contracts, it requires him to return to Samoa every year. He said he would like to migrate to Australia.

At the time of the interview, Lei, a man aged 25, was working as a meatpacker on a three-year contract in New South Wales and had been in Australia for a year. Before going to Australia, hehad worked on his family's plantation in Samoa andhad also helped to take care of his grandmother. His

meatpacking job was the first time he had ever earned money. Like the other meatpackers, his goal was to help his family:

> *I send money home to my family every two weeks, for themto buy their food and whatever they need back home. I even sent money to my mother to pay my siblings' 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 savings [account], in fact I'm thinking of buying a taxi when I return to Samoa.*
>
> *I usually offer to work on weekends [here in Australia] because the pay on those days is double, and [I can earn] more money. I've learned how important it is to work and earn your own money now. I have learned how to budget my money, not overspending it.*
>
> *The only negative [here] is that my teammates usually drink alcohol every weekend, and they ask me for money when they run out of money. If I do not give it to them, they talk about me behind my back. It isn't healthy to work with those kinds of people in the workplace. Also, my grandmother passed away [while I was here] and I was not able to go to her funeral.*

Lei did not think he would seek a new contract when his current contract ended.

Stories of aged-care workers

The aged-care workers whose stories are presented here were all working for the Australian Regional Remote Community Services (ARRCS) in Australia's Northern Territory, either in Alice Springs or Katherine. Their stories show that they had different experiences in becoming qualified for this work. They were all employed in Samoa before leaving.

According to Lowe and Coffey (2017), in 2015 the elderly constituted 9.2 percent of the Northern Territory's population, and this percentage is predicted to increase, which will place considerable strain on care facilities in future. The elderly population is likely to include a significant number of Indigenous Australians.

Sene, a woman aged 47, worked for a charity in Samoa taking care of people with mental and other disabilities before joining the labour mobility scheme. She described her current work duites and responsibilities as being:

> *… mainly focused on taking good care of the elderly. Duties include giving them baths, serving and feeding them their meals, as well as monitoring their medicine, so that they take it every day, consistently. I am on my feet all the time and am alert when taking care of the elderly. Some are not as strong and able as others. For example, some patients require special care, such as helping them into their wheelchairs and onto their beds. Others require gentle care because*

their bodies are frail and weak. At times, I work the day shift and other times I work the night shift. I also work overtime, on weekends, now and then. I really enjoy what I am doing because I have [gained a lot of] experience in 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, a woman aged 27, was a secondary school teacher in Samoa and a part-time cashier in a shop before joining the labour mobility scheme. She believed her three-year contract in Australia was renewable:

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. We received a multiple-entry visa, which lasts for five years, and we are allowed to go back home and [then] return and work in Australia again. I also want to migrate to Australia and stay here for good because they offer the best jobs and their salary is fair for the type of job you are doing.

She said she worked long hours because of overtime:

I work seven days a week. We have two days off, but to cover for someone who does not come for their shift then I canwork. I work 12 hours on weekdays and 8 hours per day on weekends. I enjoy what I do every day. I care for the elderly and I have a bond with these people because I care for them every day. Moreover, I went and worked at this company's other branch in Brisbane and worked there as a caregiver for a month. For the first week all I did was paperwork so I could be familiar with the elderly people staying there. After one week I was able to assist them and cater for their needs as a caregiver for the next three weeks. I learned a lot from working as a caregiver in different environments.

Nola was recruited by a private training company in Brisbane, which charges fees that are very high by Samoan standards and then places its graduates in work, presumably on a profit-making basis. Such training and placement enterprises, like those in the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) programme, are making profitable investments, enhanced by PALM.

Nola explained how she came to get qualifications to work in Australia:

Some members of the [training company] team came and held a training course in Samoa in 2019. The course was basically on community service and social work, and I had to pay 4,000tala for this course.It lasted for three months, and we received a Certificate in Community Service. The director of the school then offered us this opportunity [to work in aged care in Australia]; we submitted our certificates and other documents needed to the Australian High Commission and they let us know when we would be leaving. [I am] now taking another higher level certificate course in Individual Support under [an Australian education and consulting company]. The fee for this course is 2,000Australian dollars and it will be finished in November. At the same time, [I am] doing a diploma from [the same training provider that offered the original certification] for two years. I am

paying for this course, which costs me 6,649dollars. Every fortnight 200 dollars is deductedfrom my salaryfor this. These courses are very useful for doing the work that I am doing now.

She said that to ensure that her family uses the money she sends them for their daily needs, rather than for something else, she orders items(food, etc.) from a wholesaler in Samoa and pays for them by bank transfer. The goods are collected by her sister.She said she plans to use her savings towards buying a section of freehold land to build a house on in the future.

Fua, a woman aged 24, was recruited in 2021. Before going to Australia, she helped to run her family's small businesses: a shop, a brickmaking business and some fishing boats. She did a training course with the same institution as Nola before leaving Samoa:

In the course I took [in Samoa], 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. This offered us the opportunity to choose electives to pursue career interests, such as working with the elderly, working with children and young people,[and working in the field of] drugs and alcohol and mental health.... When Covid-19 struck we were not able to come, but the principal contacted us in 2021 from Australia and saidthat all our paperwork was ready, and the only things left for us to do were our interviews with our employers.

She said she sent money home to her mother, and she was also savingmoney with the longer-term goal of building a house.This meant she had little to spend on herself. She said she was generally happy with the work. She had done additional training:

Even though we studied healthcare, we did not have practical [lessons]and we are not nurses.When we came, the company offered for us to take extra nursing papers [for which they charged fees]to extend our knowledge.

She believed the training company would assist her with processing paperwork to migrate to Australia and live there permanently. She said it had offered to extend her four-year contract to six years.

It was a new experience for her to work in a diverse team:

It was not easy in the beginning, but we did our best to adapt to the environment. One of the positive experiences was expanding my knowledge about things such as communicating with people from different ethnicities. … Here, only about ten percent of the staff is Samoan and everyone else are [other] foreigners, such as Africans, Indians, etc.

The hardest challenge is trying to get the clients to understand us when we attend to them. We have translators, 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 [patients] is we use signs and gestures totry to enlighten them about what we want and what we are about to do. We have clients with [mental] disabilities; they are the hardest to look after becausetheyneed to be monitored 24/7.

Lina, a woman aged 35, already had some qualifications for the job in Australia — she had worked as a nurse in a district hospital in Samoa and had completed a Level III certificate course with the APTC in ageing, home and community support. She was married with two sons.Her husband was doing seasonal work in New Zealand, so she had left her children in her mother and sister's care. Her oldest son was 7 years old and the other was 4 years old. She said it was hard for her to leave her children, but she had no choice because she wanted her children to have a good education and a better future andwanted to provide for her poor family.She mentioned that she and others had online training when they first started work in Australia, but it was not clear if theyhad paid for that training.

She felt financially squeezed by the terms of her contract.Australian companies employing workers under labour mobilityschemesdo not have to cover the recruitment costs or, apparently, the training costs. She commented on the deductions:

A lot of things are deducted from my salary, for my transportation, airfares, visa, health insurance, accommodation, superanuation and medical care. If I'm feeling ill and want to go see the doctor, I don't know why the cost is not deducted from my health insurance. I emailed our payroll [officer] asking why they deducted the billfor my medical check-up from my salary, and they said that my health insurance doesn't cover the amount of my bill. Everything you are using in the company you have to pay for; nothing is free.

She said the work is worthwhile but hard:

When I first started, the work was not easy. I had to get up early in the morning, at 4am, to get ready for work because I had to be at the workplace at 7am and the workplace is far away from where we are staying.

It's so hard to communicate with some of the elderly people. However, there are three Samoan women here, and we work with people from other countries. It's a beautiful work environment: a good supervisor, and some of the elderly people that we looking after are so friendly. It's good money. I want to sign up to go again and work there permanently.

Overall, the survey respondents felt that the work was difficult, and for meatpackers and agricultural labourers the work was very arduous. As

expressed by one of the respondents, they were like “worker machines” where, without their families and communities, they existed only to work, to seek extra hours for overtime pay, to send home as much of their wages as they could spare after covering their living costs in communal lodgings, or to save their wages to take back as a lump sum for their family’s benefit. They were mostly lonely and worried about the impacts of their absence on their parents, their marriages and their children, although some had made friends with other Samoans and other colleagues on the job. At the same time, they were all deeply gratified that they were able to practice the deeply held Samoan value of *tautua* (service) to family, community and God.

Win-win or win-lose?

As the literature on labour mobility suggests, such schemes can be win-win orwin-lose. Many of the Samoans survey respondents have mixed feelings about the schemes. Whileall of the participantsappreciate the much higher wages they earn abroad and the benefits of being able to afford to buy imported goods (such as smart phones and fashionable shoes and clothing), and they gain satisfaction in being able to serve their families, villages and churchesand of being able to increase their families’ levels of comfort and status, most of the respondents reported challenges in terms of the difficult work, problematic living conditions abroad and the impacts of long absences overseas on their family life. They endure these troubles because of the ‘wins’.

Some argue that with labour mobility schemes there is no ‘brain drain’ only ‘brain gain’, but this is contradicted by the respondents’ accounts. Most of those interviewed were employed in wage-earning jobs in Samoa before they were recruited. Thus,when migrant workers go abroad to participate in labour mobility schemes, the small island states of the Pacific are deprived of these workers’skills and experience. Given that basic education, including the English language,[73]is provided via government funding, and given that the skills and experience of labour mobility workers are largely gained in their

[73]English is Samoa’s second official language, so most Samoans speak some English, but their level of fluency depends on their level of education. Samoans who have completed secondary education are moderately fluent in English (see Kruse Va’ai 1999). Having fluency in English makes workers more skilled and more likely to be able to extend their visas from temporary to permanent residency in Australia. (According to Piller and Lising (2014), if workers from the Asia-Pacific region wish to extend their visas they must score 5 or more on the International English Language Test.)

home countries, when these workers go abroad their countries are, in effect, subsidising the provision of workers to rich countries.

Another argument in favour of labour mobility schemes is that workers acquire new skills by participating in such schemes.While many of the respondents reported gaining new skills, those skills may not always be applicable when they return to Samoa. When it comes to skills in meatpackingand aged-care, the assertion that labour mobility allows workers to gain useful skills has little validity for Samoa and other small island states of the Pacific— where there are no meatpacking industries or specialised butcher shops and few aged-care services.[74]It could be argued that workers learn habits of punctuality and diligence from labour mobility work, but without the incentive of high wages and the associated high status, it is not certain whether returning workers will be model employees in the low-paid jobs available in Samoa.

It should also be noted that the nature of work in the Australian setting is very different from that in many Pacific nations, and work-related concepts learned in Australia are not necessarily applicable in Samoa. In Samoa, the notion of 'work' encompasses things like planting crops on the family land and helping with church projects, rather than working for money alone. It is also common in Samoa for people to take time off work to do work related to*fa'alavelave*— for example, preparing food and assisting in organising family weddings, funerals, etc. This is part of the Samoan way of being in the world, which is embedded in social activities and obligations.

Some of the survey respondents reported negative impacts of participating in long-term labour schemes, including the problem of being separated from their children. A 2022 summary report byAustralia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) proposed solutions to such issues, including allowing workers on long-term contracts to take their families to Australia with them.[75]While this could have benefits in terms of worker wellbeing and would likely benefit the children because of the higher quality ofeducationin Australia, a key problem with the idea of family accompaniment is that it seems to assume that "family" refers only to spouses and children. This does

[74]Samoa has only one aged-care home, which is mainly staffed by Catholic nuns. Most families cannot afford to pay for aged-care homes and there is strong belief in Pasifika communities that care for the elderly is the responsibility of their families.

[75] There was a strong emphasis in the report on the need to support workers' families to prepare for, settle into Australia and then reintegrate back into their home countries at the end of their deployments.

not conform to the descriptions of “family” by the Samoan workers whose stories were told in this article. Their dependents include not only their children but also their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and siblings. Workers going to Australia under the PALMcould not afford to send remittances to their family members in Samoa if they took their spouses and children with them as this would entail high costs.

DFAT recognised in the report that workers taking children with them to Australia would create additional issues. These related to:

> *... decreased remittances, potential for additional ‘brain drain’, employers’ obligations to families, cost of living pressures, and access to services and supports (DFAT 2022).*

In New Zealand and Australia, Samoans and other Pasifika people are overrepresented in the lowest paid occupations of Australian society. To the first generation of migrant workers, this may not seem to be a problem; they have more money than they would back home, they can remit money to their families and they take their countryabroad with them through church communities that operate somewhat like their villages in the homeland, but Pasifika migrant familieshave tended to remain in the lower tiers of society in the host countries, which reinforces the intersectionality of societal race and class predjudices.

The migrant phenomenon of rising socioeconomic status in the second generations is less observable among Samoans in Australia and New Zealand than it is among migrants in those countries who come from Asia. Asian migrants, particularly Indian and Chinese, are visible in Australia and New Zealand as ride-share drivers and operators of small businesses such as mini-marts, laundromats and restaurants. In comparison, relatively few Pasifika people are self-employed in Australia and New Zealand as small business operators or owners. Various explanations can account for this. One reason could be thatIndian and Chinese migrants come from cultures that place high value on private enterprise and profit-making, and large proportions of the populations of their home countries are self-employed in small entrerprises. Thus, with this perspective of business, Asian migrants are more likely than Samoan and other Pasifika migrants to identify business opportunities in their new country. Another reason may be that the high remittances by Samoans as a proportion of GDP compared those by Indians and Chinese (see The Global Economy 2022) suggest that Samoansgive their families much of what they

earn and have relatively littlecapital to invest into building businesses in their new countries.

In general, Samoan migrants are not familiar with pathways to rising socioeconomic status for themselves or their children. They generally raise children according to their traditional ideas about childraising (see Schoeffel and Meleisea 1996). Pasifika children often suffer from being caught between their parents' culture and generalised norms of society in Australia and New Zealand, which may affect childself esteem,in which case the children may not aim high, and this situation can even lead them into joining gangs.

No doubt there are individual stories of success.Certainly, individual Samoan workers earn enough money abroad to provide for their familes and communitiesat home in Samoa, and they often also form families and communities abroad. However, these wins are also accompanied by significant losses: fracturing of family and communities in their home countries and isolation and truncation of the lives of those who remain abroad. As the stories of the Samoans on long-term labour mobility contracts demonstrate very clearly, the ruptures to everyday life are extreme. Young mothers and fathers are physically separated from their children for years at a time, causing suffering for all, and the remittances they send home may not always be managed in the best interests of the children left behind (UNICEF et al. 2024).Moreover, the structural inequality that is built into labour mobility means that the rewards are never without significant costs or, at the very least, a radical reshaping of individual's ways of being in the world.

The bleak picture we are presenting here is probably not one that our survey participants would agree with. For them,working abroad on contractsof three or four years, or even longer,is a period of sacrifice that will ultimately better their families' livesby reducing their material poverty and increasing their social status, at least in the short term. But whether labour mobility will ever fulfill their dreams in the long term remains to be seen.

In 2023 the Government of Samoa developed a new policy on labour mobility, after strong representations from local business and industry about losing workers and following the loss of public sector workers in the health care, police and education sectors.[76] It is not yet clear if this new policy will change anything for Samoa, but it is likely that whatever the Samoan

[76] See the article titled "Labour Mobility: A Blessing and a Curse" in this volume for a discussion of the policy.

government policies are, high demand among Samoan people for the kind of income that allows them to buy imported goods will ensure that Samoans continue to seek jobs in meat processing, agedcare and agriculture in Australia and New Zealand in the foreseeable future.

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