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The cover design by Nadya Va'a comprises abstractions of breadfruit leaves and ocean colours illustrating the growth and development of Sāmoa, its natural resources and land. The fale motif represents the social, political, economic and religious structures of Sāmoa, with tapa (siapo) motifs and textures in the design referencing fa'asāmoa and cultural heritage. The diagonal elements from old tapa designs symbolize quantified information

The Journal of Sāmoan Studies

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Labour Mobility in Samoa: Past and Present (Part 2)

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The Socioeconomic Context of the New Samoan Exodus: 2007–2023

Penelope Schoeffel and Malama Meleisea

On 21 June 2021 hundreds of anxious Samoan men and women gathered outside a church hall in Apia where seasonal worker registration was being conducted. The building was full but, in their eagerness to register, the crowd surged inside, wrecking the hall's windows and doors in the process (Samoa Global News 22 June 2021). This event illustrates how keen many Samoans are to earn money from seasonal work.

In this chapter we draw on our own extensive observations and 'lived experience' in Samoa, as well the sources cited, to consider why Samoans are so eager — even desperate — to participate in labour mobility schemes. We ask why, despite the policies advocated by Samoa's development partners in Samoa since the late 1990s aimed at creating greater economic self-reliance, Samoa is more dependent on emigration and remittances than ever. To answer this question, we look back over the period since Samoa became an independent state 62 years ago.

Samoa's hybrid economy

Over 45 years ago, Altman (1978:39) observed that Samoa's economy was "in a state of transition from being a predominantly ... subsistence-based economy to a market economy", but that the subsistence-based production system remained an ongoing alternative livelihood for households who did not have employment in the market economy and were also unable to depend on sales of agricultural products for a steady income. In Altman's view, formal economics failed to measure non-monetary productive activities, and this was because such activities were seen as "antithetical to the capitalist or market ideology" (Altman 1987:47 cited in Buchanan 2016). Altman went on to further study the interdependencies between traditional and modern market economies, which when combined form what he calls "hybrid" economies (see Sanders 2016). Samoa offers a classic example.

The hybrid economy in Samoa is a mix of the traditional ceremonial gift exchange economy¹ and the market economy. Together they preserve and strengthen the communitarian ethics of Samoan culture, reinforcing ties that bind kin-groups² together at home and abroad.

Communitarian ethics focus on community well-being and favour doing things for the community rather than for the individual. Given these ethics, most Samoans consider their obligations to their families, villages and churches to be highly important. They therefore make economic choices and decisions that may seem strange to people from individualistic cultures. For example, family members pool their earnings, spend large amounts of money on ceremonial events and give significant portions of their income to elderly members of their families. In return, however, they receive benefits such as a strong sense of belonging, greater status in the community and life satisfaction.

The *fa'aSamoa*³ gift exchange economy is as strong today as it ever was, enhanced by remittances. However, locally sourced gifts (surpluses of the subsistence economy) have, with the exception of 'fine mats' (*'ie toga*),⁴ been replaced by cash and modern imported goods (which include boxes of canned fish and meat, biscuits, bottled water, soft drinks and wine).

The concept of *tautua* (service) is a fundamental cultural principle in Samoa (see the article titled "Samoan Tuna Cannery Workers in American Samoa" in this volume). It provides powerful incentives to young people to serve their elders. In the past they did so by, for example, planting and fishing to feed the family and to provide surpluses for ceremonial exchanges. In time their service would be rewarded with a *matai* (chief) title, and others would serve them. In modern understandings, *tautua* may be provided to families in the form of money rather than labour.

Despite low incomes and the widespread economic hardship experienced by many today, Samoans regularly contribute their time and money to family,

¹Modern gift exchange serves the same social functions as in the past: reinforcing rank hierarchies, kinship connections, allegiances and communal solidarity. In the past, gift exchange depended on surpluses from the subsistence economy.

²Samoan kinship is what anthropologists call a 'cognatic' system; an individual traces descent through the ancestry of both parents and tends to select the lines of connections (on mother's side or father's side) to which they feel the most attached.

³'*Fa'aSamoa*' (literally: the Samoan way) is the traditional Samoan socio-cultural and economic system.

⁴'Fine mats' (*'ie toga*) are handmade finely woven mats (created locally) that are used as ceremonial objects and circulate in the traditional gift exchange economy (see Schoeffel 1999).

village and church activities and give large amounts to pay for the gifts exchanged at ceremonial events (*fa'alavelave*). Funerals, for example, are a major occasion for gift exchange. The scale of a funeral depends on the social status of the deceased and his or her family, but will typically involve ten or more households (in Samoa and abroad) who are related to the deceased person pooling their money to cover the costs of the ceremonial exchange of goods, money and fine mats. As well as buying large quantities of imported items as gifts (for example, boxes of canned fish and meat), the extended family often also hires a large freezer to preserve the pigs and cattle that are slaughtered for the occasion (and given away as gifts). They also usually hire tents (to provide shade and shelter from rain) and buy food to be served to the attendees after the funeral church services, as well as items such as disposable cups, plates and boxes in which food is served. If it is a large funeral, they may hire caterers. In 2023, the cost of a funeral usually ranged between WST30,000 and WST100,000, but sometimes cost more.

In December and January each year, many ceremonial events, including family reunions, weddings and the bestowal of chiefly titles, draw relatives from overseas to Samoa. Visitors from overseas contribute to the gift exchanges at these events, usually in the form of cash. The volume of remittances increases when gifts must be purchased for such occasions, and when there are events during the year organised by church congregations, including for White Sunday,⁵ Fathers' Day, Mothers' Day and Christmas. Many businesses in Samoa depend on the spending by Samoans on gifts and other items for ceremonial events to remain profitable. Moreover, the continuous flow of people between Samoa and the countries of the diaspora for such ceremonies is the bread and butter of the airlines that serve Samoa.

Another *fa'aSamoa* expense is church membership (see Macpherson and Macpherson 2011). Membership of most churches in Samoa involves costs, and these can often only be covered with the assistance of remittances. In the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa,⁶ for example, each congregation provides their pastor with a house and annually updated furnishings, a car,

⁵"White Sunday" (*Aso Sa Tamaiti*) or Children's Day: This is celebrated on a Sunday every October. It is observed by the main churches of Samoa and is a day when children receive new clothing, including white clothing worn to church, and are given special food and sweets.

⁶ The Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS/EFKS) has the largest percentage of adherents: 27 percent of total churchgoers in 2021 (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2021b:17).

free electricity and water and gifts of food.⁷ In addition, the family units (*matafale*) comprising a congregation pool their money to pay the fortnightly offering (*alofa*) to the village pastor. And when a church has a visiting preacher, he or she is offered a traditional gift (*sua*) of fine mats, food and money.

The amounts contributed to the church by each family unit are estimated to range from WST500 to WST2000 per fortnight, depending on the socioeconomic status of each household in the church community. Congregation members also provide additional funds to build new churches (see Raela 2024). The amounts of cash and gifts given by each family are announced in church. Along with the expectation of God's blessings for giving, this public announcement provides a strong incentive to contribute generously.

A MIRAB economy

Bertram and Watters (1985) characterised the economies of small Pacific Island States as 'MIRAB': an acronym for an economy based on migration (MI), remittances (R) foreign aid (A) and wages and services supplied by the public service bureaucracy (B). Samoa fits this designation in the following ways:

- **Migration:** Relative to its domestic population of about 200,000; the Samoan diaspora is one of the largest in the Pacific and also in the world. As of 2019, 124,400 Samoan emigrants were living in New Zealand, Australia, mainland USA and American Samoa (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs cited in Howes and Surandiran 2021).
- **Remittances:** This is a key component of the Samoan economy. In 2022, remittances from Samoans abroad accounted for more than 33 percent of Samoa's GDP, placing Samoa second in the world in terms of the proportion of GDP from personal remittance income, after Tajikistan (51 percent of GDP) (The Global Economy 2022).
- **Aid:** According to the Lowy Institute's Pacific Aid Map, between 2015 and 2019 Samoa received USD868.5 million in overseas development assistance (ODA), which was equivalent to around 14 percent of annual Gross National Income, on average, over that period (Index Mundi nd). The top donors to Samoa between 2008

⁷ According to Samoan values, the pastor's house and car should be the best, or among the best, in the village.

and 2020 were the Asian Development Bank, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and the World Bank (Lowy Institute nd).

- **Bureaucracy:** This refers to the high proportion of national expenditure on government, including on wages and salaries. While the proportion of workers paid by the government of Samoa is difficult to quantify,⁸ the International Labour Organization (ILO) noted that in 2017 services accounted for 62.7 percent of all employment in Samoa, including the public administration subsector (10.4 percent). Meanwhile, agriculture employed 19.4 percent of all workers, fisheries 2.5 percent and manufacturing 6.8 per cent (ILO 2019:14).

There are many critiques of the MIRAB concept, but it should be noted that Bertram and Watters were not advocating it as a development model but were instead describing it as a macro-economic reality likely to shape future trends in small island states.

Abbott and Pollard (2020), former policy advisors for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Pacific Island states, argue that an alternative to MIRAB is to emphasise the role of the domestic private sector. They believe development could be achieved by shrinking the size and cost of Samoa's public administration, promoting efficient use of public finance, reforming land tenure and instituting a raft of measures to encourage the private sector.

They argue that:

There is an urgent need for PIC [Pacific Island Country] governments to adopt a framework for growth and development where the PICs retain a greater degree of control and direction. Strong institutions, appropriate policies, good governance and innovative private sector investment are at the heart of this alternative [to the MIRAB model]. ... In conclusion, we do not believe that MIRAB is a satisfactory or sustainable model for long-term economic and social growth and development in the PICs. It can only be sustained by increasing dependency. We are convinced that not all Pacific islanders want it this way. There is a viable alternative but it will be politically difficult and institutionally challenging to bring about (Abbot and Pollard 2020).

Abbot and Pollard (2020) acknowledge that "the MIRAB rent-earning nature of PIC economies may well be more politically palatable", but view this situation as a failure of government. They believe that job creation by the

⁸ Samoa's data on employment does not provide information on whether employers are public or private, and do not account for government expenditure on goods and services.

private sector could replace migration and remittances and that less aid would shrink the public sector. However, the World Bank has argued that even with reform of the business environment, the private sector in Samoa would not be able to absorb all the Samoans who would like to have paid work. Its influential report *Well-Being from Work in the Pacific Island Countries* (World Bank 2013:1-2) concludes that Pacific Island States such as Samoa would benefit from labour mobility in the Pacific region, especially into the labour markets of the nearest large economies, which include New Zealand and Australia.

Migration and remittances

When the authors were students at the University of Papua New Guinea in the 1970s, they were taught that underdevelopment was the result of dependency created by colonialism. The theory, proposed by scholars such as Frank (1966), Amin (1976) and Wallerstein (1979), was that the economies of colonised lands were established to benefit the controlling colonial power and that when colonies became independent their autonomy did not extend to the economy or to external economic relations, which were locked disadvantageously to the former colonial power and the capitalist 'Global North'. From this perspective, economic development must be internally generated by the private sector with as little involvement by the state as possible.

Although dependency theory is associated with Marxist perspectives, it overlaps strangely with right-wing neoliberal schools of thought about development, which view dependency on remittances and meeting the labour requirements of former colonial powers as problematic. However, dependence on remittances should not be branded as problematic or equated with beggary, because, as Ha'ofa points out:

Islanders in their homelands are not the parasites on their relatives abroad that misinterpreters of 'remittances' would have us believe. Economists do not take account of the social centrality of the ancient practice of reciprocity. ... They overlook the fact that for everything homeland relatives receive they reciprocate with goods they themselves produce, by maintaining ancestral roots and lands for everyone. ... This is not dependence but interdependence (Hau'ofa 1984 cited by Connell and Brown 2005:5).

There is a strong reciprocal relationship between those at home in Samoa and their relatives who have migrated overseas; the family members who stay in Samoa are guardians of its collective *fa'asinomaga* (heritage), which includes land, houses and ancestral and contemporary social relationships, while those overseas help to support them to do so with remittances.

This relationship serves as a security measure. The value of customary land to customary owners has less to do with its importance for economic development, as proposed by the government of Samoa and its development partners, and more to do with the way in which customary lands, and the villages and chiefly titles those lands belong to, uphold personal and family identities and a sense of social security for Samoans at home and abroad.

Samoans perceive their rights to customary land as a social safety net, rather than an economic asset. The remittances Samoans abroad send home secure their rights to use of family land and the village to which the land belongs. Remittances are the primary means to affirm and secure the rights of Samoan migrants to their social identities and to a place of belonging; a heritage. Thus, a significant motivation among overseas Samoans who remit money to help support their village families and traditional obligations is that those families are their 'placeholders' in villages throughout Samoa.

In the minds of most Samoans, the economic strategy of migration does not mean abandoning the homeland but taking it with them and keeping their *fa'aSamoa* (traditional) institutions going — on a more lavish scale because they have more money to spend on them. Samoans who live overseas tend to remain attached to their home villages, families and family *matai* titles. Indeed, families living in Samoa typically bestow *matai* titles on senior members of their close overseas kin to encourage this attachment.

The decline of commercial agriculture

Well-off urban Samoans often attribute rural unemployment to laziness. "They should go and plant crops" is a typical comment heard by the authors when the subject is discussed. However, in most cases commercial agriculture in Samoa does not offer the opportunity to earn a living wage.

The national agricultural survey of 2015 (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2016:47-48) and the agriculture census of 2019 (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2021a:279) found that most households in Samoa were producing crops for subsistence and only sold minor quantities of surplus production, and few

farming households employed external labour for farming or fishing, relying instead on family members.⁹

During the colonial period (1900-1962), export crops, particularly coconuts, were grown on large plantations in Samoa. In 1962, New Zealand handed this plantation land over to the government of Samoa as the 'Western Samoa Trust Estates Corporation' (WSTEC). It was assumed by economists such as Lockwood (1971) that an export-oriented primary industry, led by copra, bananas and cocoa, would continue to be the mainstay of the Samoan economy after independence but, instead, commercial agriculture has gradually declined,¹⁰ with the exception of short booms followed by busts, over the past 60 years.

Reasons for the decline include diminishing markets for Samoa's products, outbreaks of plant diseases and pests, cyclone damage, distance from markets, lack of economies of scale, high costs of production (see Martins and Winters 2005) and labour shortages in Samoa.

Bananas were an important export crop in the days when New Zealand gave Samoa preferential market access for its banana exports, but this stopped in the 1980s when the New Zealand economy was liberalised and Samoan growers could not compete with other producers (see Martins and Winters 2005).

Samoa experienced a short boom in growing passionfruit for a juicing plant, but the venture failed and left growers without a market. Similarly, there were great hopes that noni (*Morinda citrifolia*), a fruit that grows wild in Samoa and that is thought to have healthy properties, could be cultivated at scale and exported to the big and profitable market in China, but the market did not eventuate, at least not for Samoan growers.

Migration created new markets abroad for taro, which was in high demand among Pasifika migrant communities in New Zealand, Australia and the United States, due to their continuing preference for taro as a dietary staple. In the late 1980s there was a boom in taro exports, and taro became Samoa's major source of export income, but the boom ended in the early 1990s when a plant

⁹ Family members who work on family land are not paid. They contribute their time and labour to produce staple crops (e.g. taro and bananas), as food for the family, and other agricultural products, and in return they benefit from the pooled income from family members who are wage earners and from remittances sent from family members overseas.

¹⁰ Samoa's agriculture censuses of 1989, 1999, 2009 and 2019 show a decline in commercial production (for local markets and for export) and an overall increase in subsistence and semi-subsistence production (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2021a).

disease, taro leaf blight, began to spread across Samoa. The blight impacted both exports and the local food supply, as taro was grown by nearly all households. According to Hunter, Pouono and Semisi (1998), the blight resulted in a 95 percent reduction in the supply of taro to markets, both within Samoa and abroad. As new disease-resistant varieties were developed, taro production eventually recovered and exports resumed, but the most favoured variety of taro can now only be grown at scale in Fiji, which now dominates the taro export market once led by Samoa.

A short-lived boom in growing kava¹¹ for export to Pacific Islander consumers overseas ended when kava was banned for sale in Australia and many European countries after the year 2000 because of concerns about its possible toxic effects on the liver. Kava has been consumed in Pacific Island societies for many centuries without ill effects, so it is likely that the toxicity was a result of some producers (not in Samoa) using poor methods for drying the root and of mixing kava with other products (Teschke et al. 2011).

Cocoa production once provided good incomes for both large- and small-scale growers particularly in the western region of Savaii, but the industry was almost destroyed by back-to-back cyclones in 1990 and 1991 and has never completely revived since, despite modest demand by overseas chocolate-makers for Samoa's fine cocoa varieties. While the number of households growing cocoa increased by 19 percent between 2009 and 2019 (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2021a:41), the area of land under cocoa declined considerably from 6,115 acres in 2009 (Bureau of Statistics 2016:10) to 1,055 acres in 2019 (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2021a:41).

The fisheries sector has never been a significant component of Samoa's export economy; most catches are for subsistence or are sold at local fish-markets. Fish is expensive, so most Samoans only buy fish for their Sunday lunch (*to'onai*) and special occasions. Samoa has few locations with productive reefs for inshore fishing and has a small oceanic Exclusive Economic Zone compared to many other Pacific Island States and thus does not receive significant income from licensing fees paid by foreign-owned fishing fleets. Moreover, Samoa only has a few small village-based operations

¹¹ Kava (known as 'ava in Samoa) is made from the dried root of the *Piper methysticum* shrub. It is a beverage that has a calming and mild sedative effect. It is traditionally consumed in ritual contexts, and the traditional method of processing involves shredding, chewing or pounding the root and then infusing this with water. Nowadays it is most often processed to a powdered form.

that fish for skipjack tuna. These are mostly sold locally or to an exporter of chilled fillets, rather than being processed and canned for export. In contrast, tuna processing is a significant operation in American Samoa where the semi-enclosed deep-water harbour of Pago Pago offers an ideal mid-Pacific location for such activity.

Limited prospects for tourism

In the 1980s, without profitable markets for agriculture and with little scope for fisheries, there was a shift of economic hopes towards tourism. The industry began to show promise by the 1990s, following an extension of the international airport, the building of new resorts and a modest increase in visitors, but the expectations of a booming tourism industry were not met. Samoa is a more expensive destination in terms of airfares than similar destinations, such as Fiji and the Cook Islands, and despite extensive promotion Samoa does not attract the large numbers of tourists wanting the packaged 'tropical seaside resort' experience that drives mass tourism in larger places such as Hawaii, Bali and Fiji. In 2020, Samoa recorded a total of 23,900 tourists, while Fiji had 168,000 in that year (World Bank nd).

Most tourist facilities, including 'beach fales'¹² and small boutique hotels, are owned by Samoans (Scheyvens 2005, 2006). The provisions of loans by the Samoa Development Bank in the 1990s led to the building of more tourist facilities, among them a number of marginally viable tourism enterprises, such as hotels built in locations that are unattractive to tourists. In 2021, tourism accounted for 69 percent of the Samoa Development Bank's loan portfolio value. The tourism industry is volatile, however. The border closures between 2020 and 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on Samoa's tourism industry as many hotels closed down or had minimal occupancy rates, being mainly frequented by the local population. This contributed to non-performing loans for tourism of more than WST200 million (Radio New Zealand 5 January 2022).

It is often asserted in studies of the industry that Samoa is highly dependent on tourism (see for example Parsons et al. 2017) and while this is true, many

¹² These are clusters of small traditional-style Samoan houses (*fales*) beside the beach that are designed as accommodation for tourists (both foreign and domestic) and are typically operated by family-owned businesses. They are rented for picnics and for overnight stays. The operators also offer meals and, in many cases, cultural entertainment (provided by nearby villages).

such analyses overlook the connection between tourism and migration. Labour mobility feeds tourism in Samoa. The country's official visitor arrival statistics, collected from arrival and departure cards, show that the category of "visiting family and friends" accounted for 40 percent of visitor arrivals in 2018/19, up from 33 percent in 2014/15 (Samoa Tourism Authority 2019:50). This category today represents the largest proportion of tourists. The "purpose of travel" of the other visitors were "holiday" (39 percent), "business" (6 percent), "sport" (1 percent) and "other" (14 percent) (Samoa Tourism Authority 2019:50). The arrival and departure cards do not record ethnicity, but it is certain that the arrivals in the "visiting family and friends" category were mostly Samoans, as the country has a very small expatriate population. These visitors are a particularly valuable type of tourist as their average spend is greater than that of other tourists (Samoa Tourism Authority 2019:4).

Culture and customary land

As well as citing the factors noted above, several donor reports and academic studies have cited culture and tradition as reasons why Samoa has low agricultural productivity and limited tourism success. One such argument is that customary land tenure¹³ constrains investment in agriculture and tourism and is an obstacle to economic development. However, this contention assumes that all or most customary land has economic potential, which is not the case.

Customary land is rarely available in large contiguous holdings, because this requires complicated agreements between customary owners to merge their landholdings. Moreover, much of Samoa's customary land comprises steep mountain slopes, deep gullies and areas with rocky soils, none of which lend themselves to mechanisation and can only be used for a very narrow range of crops and purposes.

According to custom, traditional villages (*nu'umavae*) own territories from the tops of the central mountain range to the outer reef or coastline. The territories comprise areas of uncleared forest and separate holdings for houses, farming and grazing used by extended families (*'aiga*) under the nominal authority of the head of the family (*matai*) (Iati 2008). A family may

¹³ Customary land may not be sold or mortgaged but may be leased. It makes up 81 percent of total land in Samoa (Australia Agency for International Development 2008:4).

develop its land holdings if its *matai* approves the clearing of forest for planting, with approval from the village council.

Women in Samoa have the same rights to customary land as men do, but most women reside on their husband's land, not the land of their own families. When they do reside on land belonging to their own families, they have an advantage in retaining rights to assets they have developed through their own efforts or those of their own natal family members (Schoeffel and Meleisea-Ainu'u 2016).

The greatest value of customary land may be that it is a place of belonging (*fa'asinamaga*) to those living there and also for those who have moved to town or settled overseas, and who remit money to their families living on the land to affirm and secure the shared rights of those not living there (Schoeffel, Arthur and Meleisea 2021:104-109).

In 2005, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) recommended economic reforms such as legislative change to make it easier for private businesses to lease underutilised customary lands (2005:32). The former Prime Minister Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi expressed his support for such change in 2016 saying that only 0.31 percent of Samoa's customary land is leased out. He pointed out that 81 percent of customary land is under the care of *matai* and he encouraged Samoans to consider developing customary lands (Keresoma 2016:1 cited by Tavila and Schoeffel 2022). The ADB supported a project, launched in 2016, to assist the economic use of customary lands, which led to the Land Titles Registration Amendment Bill 2020. The bill provoked a public outcry, however, from many Samoans at home and overseas who perceived land registration as a threat to customary tenure, and it was as one of the grievances among voters that possibly led to the change of government in the 2021 elections.

Contrary to popular belief, most of Samoa's first-class agricultural land is owned privately or by the government (Ward and Ashcroft 1998). For example, the government owns 650 acres of first-class former plantation land in northwest A'ana District (which is visibly underutilised). Land for large plantations was acquired by Germans and other foreigners during the pre-colonial civil wars in Samoa in the nineteenth century. The greater part of this land was confiscated from German owners by the New Zealand administration as war reparations in 1918 and managed as property of the New Zealand Government until Samoa's independence in 1962, when it was transferred to the new government as the Western Samoa Trusts Estates (WSTEC). When

WSTEC experienced financial collapse in the 1990s, the government assumed responsibility for its multi-million *tala* debt. The large WSTEC landholdings were then divided between two statutory corporations and a government ministry: the Samoa Land Corporation and STEC (the name was changed from WSTEC to STEC when Western Samoa was renamed Samoa) and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Approximately 70 percent of WSTEC land was transferred to the government under the legislative provisions of the Samoa Trust Estates Corporation Reconstruction Act 1990. STEC retained the land in A'ana and 1,200 acres in Savaii. The Samoa Land Corporation leases out the land it controls for suburban housing and commercial development.

Another explanation for lack of economic development in Samoa cited by some donor reports and academics is that elements of Samoan social organisation constrain individual initiative. However MacPherson (1988:1) argues that:

Samoa social organization, per se, is not an obstacle to economic growth and provides examples of entrepreneurial individuals who have adopted items of technology and strategies that have increased both productivity and profitability in village agriculture. In no case did village social organization constrain their activity, and, in each case, the extended family recognized and rewarded the individual's enterprise by giving them chiefly titles. This sector's failure to attain higher productivity lies not solely, or even primarily, in the social organization of the village, but in rational consideration of the costs and benefits of various economic alternatives.

An example of this “rational consideration of the costs and benefits of various economic alternatives” was observed during a survey of cocoa growers (Schoeffel and Meleisea-Ainu'u 2016). The survey found that comparatively few commercial growers are young people.¹⁴ Most young people choose to seek casual work, which would earn them wages, in preference to establishing their own plantations or working on those belonging to their families (Schoeffel and Meleisea-Ainu'u 2016). This is likely to be because a young person who earns money from casual work may keep a portion of it for themselves (although they usually spend or give a significant proportion of their income for family needs), but if they work on family land, providing their

¹⁴ Most of the growers who are registered with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries were elderly.

labour as *tautua* (service), they will not have any money for discretionary spending.¹⁵

A poor location for manufacturing

The Samoan government has long sought foreign investment, especially in industries that would create employment opportunities. It was hoped in the 1990s that Samoa's large number of unemployed¹⁶ youth and its low minimum wage would attract such investment.¹⁷

The biggest-ever private sector investor in Samoa so far was the Yazaki Corporation of Japan.¹⁸ When this corporation showed interest in relocating their automobile wiring assembly plants from Australia to Samoa, the government responded with tax incentives and promises to provide land and build the premises for the company to lease without charge. Yazaki was established in Samoa first as a subsidiary of Yazaki Australia in 1991 and re-established in 1995 as an independent subsidiary named Yazaki Electrical Distribution System Samoa (YES). (See the article titled "Impacts of Labour Mobility Schemes on Samoa's Labour Market" in this volume for further details about the rise and fall of YES.)

Like most private-sector employers, YES paid most employees a minimum wage. Businesses would probably not be profitable in Samoa if significantly higher wages were offered, because of high operational costs. These costs are not due to a perverse refusal of government to adopt 'better' policies or to aid failure or to a lack of available land, but are a result of Samoa's remote geographical location, high freight costs, small domestic market, limited supply of skilled workers and limited number of high-spending tourists (see Martins and Winters 2005).

¹⁵ Samoan customary values accord leadership roles to elders, including control over customary land and assets and the income from them.

¹⁶ See the article titled 'Impacts of Labour Mobility Schemes on Samoa's Labour Market' in this volume for a discussion of unemployment in Samoa.

¹⁷ In the early 1990s, the minimum wage in Australia was between AUD10 and AUD17 per hour, whereas in Samoa the minimum wage was only WST1 per hour.

¹⁸ Yazaki is an automobile parts supplier that began operations in Samoa in 1991 and opened a factory in 1992. It closed its operations in Samoa in August 2017 (Automotive World, 25 August 2017).

Expectations, wages and cost of living in Samoa

Over the past six decades, Samoan expectations of what ‘a good life’ means have changed dramatically. In the early 1960s, most people lived in traditional (open walled structures with wooden posts) thatched or tin-roofed houses (*fales*), which were furnished simply with handmade mats and chairs that were made locally, mostly from old packing cases. Most rural villages were without electricity and most rural roads were unsealed. Most households only ate food they grew or fished themselves; few consumer goods or imported foods were available. Although many Samoans produced crops on a small scale for local markets or export, very few were successful commercial planters (see Tiffany 1975).

Today, there are still only a handful of successful commercial growers in Samoa, but the country has been transformed. With funds supplied by remittances, most Samoan families today live in European-style houses built from permanent materials (typically concrete bricks); many households now own cars or trucks; and most families have mobile phones, a television and electrical appliances such as freezers and washing machines. Thanks to development assistance funding, every village has electricity, telecommunications and piped water. Sealed roads circle both of the main islands and all villages are linked by bus services.

Whereas in the past very few people depended on money to buy food, today nearly everyone does, and items that were once luxuries (such as rice, bread, sugar, cooking oil, canned fish and frozen meat) are now seen as necessities. Moreover, there is an expectation today that people should offer imported items, rather than subsistence surplus, at traditional gift-exchange events.

The cost of living in Samoa is considered to be high relative to the income levels in the country (Mika 2019). A weekly supply of everyday food items, including cooking oil, salt, sugar, flour, tea, tinned fish, bread and rice, plus payment for electricity and piped water costs much more than the weekly earnings of an average worker on a low salary.¹⁹

¹⁹ Few Samoans individually earn a living wage; they can only get by if they pool their incomes and share the agricultural produce that is grown on customary land.

Those who do not, or cannot²⁰ grow staple food crops themselves, must purchase them. In 2023, the minimum wage was WST3 (approximately USD1.10) per hour; this was enough to buy a loaf of bread but not enough to buy a medium-sized green drinking coconut (WST4). A basketful of taro cost between WST20 and WST25 (approximately USD7 to USD9) and a bunch of cooking bananas cost between WST20 and WST40, depending on the size.

As of 2023, a full-time worker on minimum wage²¹ had an annual income of around WST6,250 (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2023). Employers tend to pay somewhat higher wages than the minimum when a worker has proved to be useful, and many raise wages by a few *tala* (Samoa dollar) per hour when a worker has been trained for a job. Some employers, such as those in the agricultural sector, provide a meal to workers as part of their daily earnings.

Public servants receive salaries above the minimum level. Salaries in the lower levels of the public service (which includes junior nurses and police constables) range from around WST7,000 to WST14,000 per annum. All employers and workers are taxed, in that they are required to contribute to the National Provident Fund, except when the worker is employed on a casual basis. The modest state pension (WST200 per month) is available for some people aged over 60.

The minimum wage in Samoa is not sufficient to support the standard of living that most Samoans expect to have today but, as noted above, the costs of operating a business in Samoa make most local employers unable to pay higher wages. Moreover, without a viable local manufacturing industry, most consumer goods are imported and the prices of such goods add significantly to the cost of living in Samoa.

Given the high cost of imported food and goods, and low local wages, all except those on the highest pay scales are currently experiencing hardship. And because people increasingly rely on cash incomes to buy food rather than on growing their food, Samoans are now experiencing increasing poverty as the cost of living rises. Meanwhile, the *fa'aSamoa* side of the hybrid economy continues to demand significant cash resources from families.

Samoa's Multidimensional Poverty Index 2022 found that almost a fifth of Samoa's population (18 percent) "live in households where at least one

²⁰ Those who live in urban areas without access to land that is suitable for agriculture cannot grow sufficient staple crops to meet their needs.

²¹ Due to the rising cost of living, in 2023 the Government of Samoa announced that it was considering an increase in the minimum wage (Government of Samoa 5 September 2023).

household member ran out of food or [was] unable to eat healthy and nutritious food in the last 12 months because of a lack of money or other resources ... and are also multidimensionally poor” (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2022).

Due to the high cost of living, most households depend on at least one member²² having paid work locally (Maiava and Likou 2016) as well as on remittances from relatives overseas. Remittances are essential to cover major expenses such as donations for church fundraising events (*taulaga* and *fa’amati*),²³ gift-exchange for *fa’alavelave*, school enrolment fees, books and uniforms, and the many other costs that are beyond their own means.

Samoa’s dependence on external countries has never been greater than it is today both financially and in terms of imports. This dependence means that Samoans are strongly impacted by inflation and supply chain disruption abroad.

Strong incentives for labour migration

The inability to earn a living wage at home has long motivated Samoans to take opportunities to migrate, and Samoans have long believed that ‘a better life’ may be enjoyed overseas. Malama Meleisea recalls seeing, as a teenager in the 1960s, a collage of photographs (cut from newspapers) on the wall of a Samoan school under the heading, “Admire the Beautiful Life in New Zealand” and marvelling at a picture of a ‘state house’ (government-subsided housing for those on low incomes in New Zealand).

As Cluny and La’avasa Macpherson describe in their article titled “Samoa Labour Migration to Aotearoa New Zealand” in this volume, migration to New Zealand from the 1950s onwards opened new opportunities to earn money to

²² Most Samoan families pool and share their income and food. In rural areas, not everyone will seek paid employment because some members of the family must commit their time to growing staple crops (e.g. taro and bananas). It is necessary to have at least one person earning money in order to pay for imported items such as rice and sugar, and that person will give most of their income to the family.

²³ Samoans are expected to donate significant amounts to their churches. Donations cover such things as the expenses (houses, cars, furniture, etc) of pastors and the building of churches. The amounts expected are high and are increasingly beyond the means of most Samoans (see, for example, Samoa Observer 11 March 2024; Raela 18 April 2024). This is an issue in Samoa today, particularly as it is one of the factors driving young people to seek better-paid work abroad.

send remittances home to Samoa, which raised the status of migrants' families.

Today, as a result of the rising cost of cultural obligations and the local socioeconomic realities, nearly everyone in the eligible age range would like to go abroad where they can earn higher wages. Many Samoans feel that emigration and labour mobility schemes are the only ways they can afford to serve (*tautua*) their families, reach their material goals and achieve 'a better life'. While permanent emigration abroad is difficult to achieve, labour mobility schemes are relatively easy to participate in. These schemes therefore provide a 'solution' for many Samoans.

The minimum wage in Australia in 2023 was AUD23.23 (approximately WST41) per hour (Fair Work Ombudsman nd) and in New Zealand it was NZD22.70 (approximately WST38) per hour (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment 8 February 2023). Depending on the job, the worker's experience and length of contract, and allowing for deductions for food, board, airfares, taxes and health insurance, workers abroad who minimize discretionary expenditures can save over \$10,000 in New Zealand or Australian dollars during a seven-month contract.

Participation in labour mobility schemes is empowering for young Samoans, particularly for young men from rural households. Through working abroad they can send remittances to their families and thereby provide service (*tautua*) and win esteem as providers. This is why even Samoans with medium-level full-time jobs in Samoa are willing to take the lower-status jobs abroad that are offered under labour mobility schemes.

Young people who don't win the 'prize' of being selected to participate in labour mobility schemes and who also cannot emigrate lose this chance to win the esteem of their families and communities.

Despite the negative impacts of labour mobility schemes on the local labour market and society (see the following articles in this volume), it is likely that as long as opportunities are available, Samoans will seek work aboard as their most rewarding economic option.

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Samoa Labour Migration to Aotearoa New Zealand

Cluny Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson

Individual Samoans decide to leave Samoa, temporarily or permanently, every day. Their reasons are many and varied: some leave in response to their families' demands or their villages' aspirations; others leave to escape their families' plans or the strictures of village life. While some leave to earn income to support spouses and families, others leave to avoid such restraints. Some leave in search of love, others depart because of unrequited love.

Studies of labour migration do not usually focus on individuals' motives for moving. While such studies are of interest, they are only relevant when opportunities to migrate are available. Most studies of labour migration focus on the macro level: on conditions that generate opportunities for migration and shape the volume, composition and directions of human movement.

This chapter examines the economic, technological, social and political factors that affect labour movement from Samoa to New Zealand.²⁴ It looks at what has driven these factors, the ways in which the factors interact and how individuals, families, churches and villages in Samoa have responded, in ways that reflect their interests, over the years.

Factors that impact migration

Countries that are sources of migrants tend to have different economic, technological, social and political conditions and factors from receiving countries. At times, the factors that lead source-country governments to encourage emigration will coincide with trends in receiving countries that lead their governments to encourage immigration, thus favouring movement between the countries. In such cases, migration will be regarded as desirable by both and promoted by both. At other times, the economic, technological, social and political factors in the source and receiving countries will not coincide, and in such cases obstacles will be placed in the way of migration. For example, new technology can result in quite pronounced shifts in the

²⁴ Other factors, such as demographic trends and the availability of information, exist, but in the limited space available we focus on these four which are widely acknowledged to be the most influential.

demand for certain skill sets in migrants and transform attitudes to migration in both the source and receiving countries.

The early period: 1950 to 1973

Economic factors

After World War II, the New Zealand economy boomed. Growth was driven by high prices for agricultural commodities in European countries where agricultural systems had been disrupted or destroyed by the war. At the same time, however, the war had highlighted the vulnerability of New Zealand's economy: it depended on industrial economies and open sea lanes for much of its imports. This realisation led to fundamental restructuring of the economy. With the aim of diversifying the economy and making it more resilient, post-war governments introduced import substitution policies, which required creating new manufacturing industries, producing everything from cars to transistor radios.

In the post-war era, as Western Samoa approached independence (gained in 1962), it too was facing new economic realities (Government of Western Samoa 1966; Pitt 1970). Improved public health had resulted in lower child mortality rates and, consequently, a rapidly growing population and projected increases in the costs of social provision (McArthur 1964, 1967). At the same time, the Samoan economy was dependent on perishable primary commodities for which there were competing producers abroad and a limited number of consumers. The country sought to increase agricultural production, but that alone could not generate the revenue necessary to sustain its growing population.

Technological factors

From the 1950s, successive New Zealand governments promoted and supported industrial growth. The local manufacturing sector, protected from competition by tariffs on imports, grew rapidly. New labour-intensive assembly-line manufacturers absorbed available urban labour and also sought to attract labour from rural areas in order to sustain their growth. But the industrial sector's rapid growth exhausted domestic labour, and it ran out of momentum.

Meanwhile, Samoan governments were employing a range of mechanical and biotechnical technologies to increase the range, quantity and quality of its primary commodities, but these technological advances could not change four fundamental realities: Samoa's distance from markets, its limited product range, competition from other producers (leading to low prices for its agricultural commodities) and logistical challenges.

Social factors

Industrialisation in New Zealand generated new, 'clean', well-paid employment opportunities in urban centres, which were protected by vigilant labour unions. Rural and urban populations started to leave traditional occupations for these new jobs, which created labour shortages in the primary sector and limited its growth.

At the same time, Samoans, who had encountered new technologies and material wealth during and after World War II, were beginning to aspire to opportunities beyond their villages. Following independence, the public sector grew, generating a range of new, comparatively well-paid wage and salary jobs in Apia, leading to urban expansion as rural Samoans moved to town to pursue these opportunities. Moreover, the growing availability of education, promoted by development programmes pursued by successive governments and supported by aid donors, offered newly educated Samoans options not just outside the village but also outside the country.

Political factors

Faced with the combined effects of the economic, technological and social factors, including pressure from interest groups – whose growth aspirations were thwarted by labour shortages – the political decisions taken by the New Zealand governments after 1950 were not surprising. A simple solution was to increase immigration, as it provided the labour required to sustain the prosperity to which New Zealanders were becoming accustomed. Government policy favoured recruiting labour from Europe and the Pacific.

At the same time, the combined effects of the economic, technological and social factors in Samoa likewise led to unsurprising political decisions by Samoan governments. Emigration provided three benefits for the country: export of the most fecund members of the population and their fertility, reduction in pressure for growth in the local wage and salaried sector, and the

possibility of opening a new revenue stream — remittances — which would foster greater economic activity in Samoa.

In these circumstances, migration served the interests of both governments. An arrangement was formalised in 1962 through the Treaty of Friendship between the Government of New Zealand and the Government of Western Samoa (Government of New Zealand 1962), which led to setting an annual migrant quota of 1,100 Samoans and their families. These migrants, who were selected by ballot, had to be of good character, with pre-arranged approved employment in New Zealand. They could obtain citizenship and its associated rights after four years of permanent residence in New Zealand.

The migration chain²⁵

To secure work in New Zealand, would-be Samoan emigrants had to identify ‘contacts’ in New Zealand who could serve as job and accommodation guarantors, cover the cost of transport and provide support until the new immigrants established a foothold in the country. These contacts became the crucial first ‘link’ in what would become a migration ‘chain’.

The contacts included Samoan professionals and business people who had settled in New Zealand; Samoan relatives married to New Zealanders; New Zealanders who had worked in Samoa who could offer jobs to former workmates; New Zealander teachers who had taught in Samoa and had maintained contact with students and their families; and even tourists from New Zealand who had stayed with Samoan families and retained links with their hosts. However, there were limited numbers of such contacts in New Zealand and not all were willing, or able, to sponsor migrants. Access to such people was scarce.

Samoans who were able to use connections to enter New Zealand and establish themselves became the second ‘link’ in the migration ‘chain’, which would eventually reach virtually every village in Samoa in the 1960s and early 1970s (Pitt and Macpherson 1974).²⁶

²⁵ Much of the information in this section is from a survey of almost 1,000 Samoans over 30 months, published in reports and summarised in Pitt D and Macpherson C (1974) *Emerging Pluralism: The Samoan Community in Urban New Zealand* and from ongoing participation by the authors in these processes since 1970.

²⁶ Similar chains were formed that linked families and villages in Sāmoa to American Sāmoa, the USA, Australia, Fiji and Tonga.

To become sponsors, these second 'links' had to be guarantors (of accommodation and employment) for prospective immigrants as part of those immigrants' visa application processes. To do this, many Samoan sponsors worked hard to establish reputations as reliable tenants and employees. Tenants sought to impress letting agents in the hope that the latter could help them find accommodation for the new arrivals they wished to sponsor,²⁷ and employees sought to impress their managers in the hope that good work records and relationships might gain them access to job opportunities for others.

Some Samoans remained in jobs they did not enjoy because they knew that new jobs in their places of employment were likely to become available and that their loyalty and performance could earn them the right to recruit Samoan relatives and friends to these jobs. Others transferred to companies that had high labour turnover²⁸ as they knew such companies would generate job opportunities for other migrants.

Some Samoan supervisors found themselves consulted by management on recruiting and managing Samoan workforces. These supervisors were required to pre-screen and train new Samoan employees and maintain workplace order. They had the power to discipline and dismiss problem employees and to reward reliable, compliant employees with work guarantees (*pepa faigaluega*).

These arrangements served the interests of employers, and they depended on Samoan supervisors more and more to recruit workers and manage their workforces. Trusted senior Samoan employees delivered them carefully selected and disciplined Samoan employees without the associated business costs of recruitment and training. As a consequence, a number of companies rapidly became major employers of Samoans, and some soon had almost exclusively Samoan workforces managed by Samoan supervisors.

Some companies became de facto guarantors of loans and mortgages for Samoan staff and assisted with their applications for residence and citizenship. Employers interviewed at the time spoke with some pride about

²⁷ This was essential because of widespread ethnic discrimination in the rental housing market during the early period.

²⁸ High turnover often resulted from 'white flight' (departure of white people from jobs). As Pacific people became concentrated in certain businesses, white (*pālagi*) employees found these workplaces less congenial and therefore departed.

the symbiotic nature of the relationship between them and their Samoan workforces (Pitt and Macpherson 1974).

The motives of these 'second link' migrants for sponsoring other migrants varied; some did so at the request, or direction, of parents and relatives, others did so as favours for old friends. Some sponsored others because this conferred on them considerable prestige and respect. Others, who were supporting large families in Samoa as well as church and village activities, reasoned that if more of their relatives were able to work in New Zealand their personal economic obligations would be lower, as the cost would be distributed over more people, and that sponsoring others into employment in New Zealand could allow the sponsors to then turn their focus to their immediate family needs in the country.²⁹

The remittances sent home by migrants meant that new income was flowing into villages in Samoa and enabling formerly poor families to accumulate wealth and prestige. Remittances were used to build European-style homes (*falepapalagi*), to invest in stores (*faleoloa*) and fishing boats (*va'afagota*), to buy equipment to transform agricultural practices and increase productivity, to buy freehold land (*fanua tau palagi*) on the edges of Apia (Macpherson 1988) and to pay for the education of children in the belief that the children might, in time, migrate abroad and support them. Families also used remittances to invest in social capital, such as contributions to the church and village projects, which enhanced family prestige in the village.

The second stream

The demand by Samoans to migrate exceeded the number of work visas supplied by New Zealand, and an illegal labour migration stream began to develop. If unsuccessful in securing work visas, some Samoans would travel to New Zealand on short-term visitor permits with the stated aim of visiting relatives and friends and would remain and work illegally after their permits expired. Some planned to work for short periods to achieve savings goals; others planned to remain indefinitely or until they were found and deported.

Demand for labour in New Zealand remained high, and some companies employed Samoans without carefully verifying their identities or right to

²⁹ This consideration became more significant as migrants formed new families in New Zealand and assumed associated financial responsibilities (e.g. larger rent, utility and food costs for larger households, school expenses, etc.).

work.³⁰ They were able to do so with impunity because when caught in violation they argued that the Samoan employees had provided false documentation. These companies generally employed illegal workers on the same terms as other employees as long as the illegal workers remained reliable and compliant, but the companies could exploit such employees in various subtle ways, such as by requiring them to perform unpopular tasks or to work long or unpopular hours. These employers could be certain that the staffs who were employed illegally would not complain.

Another set of employers, often Samoan nationals, deliberately engaged people who did not have the right to work. These employers were often intermediaries who recruited and supplied labour under contract for agricultural and horticultural work such as planting, pruning and harvesting in rural areas, where official oversight of work was limited. Initially, these recruiters sourced labour from Samoa but later began to engage unemployed Samoans who were already in New Zealand. These contractors made their income from paying workers a lower rate than that received from the employers and keeping portions of workers' wages as fees for securing them work, accommodation and transportation, which workers could not secure for themselves.

These contractors were useful to employers that needed large groups of people on a casual basis to do weather-dependent work at short notice, and that did not have the resources to locate, employ and manage this labour. Farmers and growers could make a single payment to contractors and legally absolve themselves of the costs of ensuring compliance with labour and tax laws and the challenges of managing unfamiliar workforces.

Some of the labour recruiters did this work as a service to their families, villages and church groups, and their practices were largely ethical, albeit illegal. Other recruiters only did this work as a service to themselves, and they exploited the workers for profit. The latter group could do this because they knew their 'employees' would not challenge wage deductions or question their working conditions because they had few, if any, alternatives. The dishonest contractors could, and did, summarily dismiss their employees to demonstrate their power in these relationships. Moreover, to avoid paying their employees they resorted to dishonest practices such as anonymous tipoffs to the Department of Labour just before payday, which would result in

³⁰ Industrial law placed responsibility for establishing the right to work on employers.

raids of workplaces. Seeding rumours of a planned raid would lead to illegal employees departing without their wages to avoid capture and deportation.

These dishonest recruiters generally did not remain in business for long, however, because word of their dealings soon spread within the community, and even Samoans desperate for work would not work for them. Sadly, they were often replaced by new recruiters with the same dishonest practices.³¹

Unlike legal migrants, Samoans who remained in New Zealand beyond their visa expiry and worked illegally were unable to access social services. They lived under constant threat of discovery and deportation and were unable to plan with any confidence.

In the period between 1956 and 1973, demand in New Zealand for Samoan labour remained strong and migration continued apace as early migrants established themselves and their families and founded migrant chains that grew rapidly (see Table 1). This situation ended as external factors changed both in Samoa and New Zealand.

Table 1: Number of Samoans in New Zealand, 1956-1976

Year	Total population	Inter-censal increase (%)	Samoan Born	Inter-censal increase (%)	Born elsewhere	Inter-censal increase (%)
1956	3740	211.2	2995	124.2	745	250.4
1961	6481	73.3	4450	48.6	2031	172.1
1966	8663	33.7	7447	67.3	1216	-40.1
1971	22198	156.2	12354	65.9	9844	709.5
1976	27876	25.6	19711	59.6	8165	-17.0

Source: Macpherson 1997

Transition: 1973 to 2003

Economic factors

Between 1973 and 2003, events and circumstances changed the pattern of Samoan labour migration to New Zealand. First, in 1973 the United Kingdom (UK) joined the European Economic Community (EEC), and New Zealand therefore lost access to a major market. Then in 1973 and 1974 the first global

³¹ Some of these were people who had worked for other recruiters earlier.

oil shock hit. These events led to a dramatic downturn in New Zealand's economy, which resulted in a steep increase in domestic unemployment and lower demand for new migrant labour.

Then in 1975 a new government was elected in New Zealand, one that embraced a neoliberal economic agenda and embarked on a policy of systematic deindustrialisation, which resulted in the loss of around 100,000 skilled and unskilled jobs in manufacturing and in government. This affected a significant segment of the Samoan labour force.

The economy took another hit in 1987 when a sharemarket crash toppled companies, further reducing demand for labour. Neoliberal policies were continued by the new government that came to power in 1990. The policies of successive governments resulted in a period of stagnation in GDP per capita that lasted from 1986 to 1994 as well as historically high inflation rates and unemployment rates, with a peak of 11.1 percent unemployment in 1992 (Government of New Zealand 2021).

The economic recession in New Zealand had a significant impact on Samoa's economy, which had become a mixed subsistence and cash (market) economy. Economic growth rates in Samoa, which were fuelled by remittance levels, began to fall as migrants in New Zealand lost their jobs and as the migrants' disposable incomes (and their ability to remit) declined. With the decline in remittance income, many Samoans reduced their expenditures. Consequently, some retail and service businesses saw a decline in sales and the Samoan agriculture sector suffered.

Technological factors

With job losses and price rises in New Zealand, consumer demand fell, leading to a decline in industrial production. Moreover, neoliberal policies led to local businesses facing competition from imports, which resulted in many companies automating processes or closing down, which in turn led to further losses of semi-skilled jobs.

Meanwhile in Samoa, diversification of primary production had become more dependent on new capital investment and on technology and inputs such as machinery, fencing, fertiliser and agricultural chemicals, which were needed to reach and maintain the levels of production required to produce surpluses for sale in domestic and overseas markets. The costs of these inputs were met in large part by remittances, so declines in remittances had a significant impact on the agricultural sector.

Social factors

In this period, circumstances changed dramatically as some New Zealanders who had become accustomed to high incomes found themselves unemployed while many Samoans and other Pacific Islanders remained employed in industries that New Zealanders had vacated a generation before. Resentment grew and conservative politicians capitalised on this sentiment for short-term electoral advantage.

Circumstances also changed in Samoa during this period. Dependence on remittances in both urban and rural areas had grown as new wealth altered lifestyle aspirations and consumption patterns. Accordingly, reticulated water and power, refrigeration, television and imported goods were increasingly considered reasonable expectations. These expectations could not be satisfied by increased local primary production, so many Samoans favoured migration policies that would lead to increases in remittances.³²

Political factors

During this period, New Zealand governments came under increasing pressure to reduce, or better manage, migration, and to deport those who had overstayed visitors' visas. In 1974 the Labour government instituted a major review of immigration policy and embarked on a concerted and ruthless attempt to identify and deport Pacific Islander 'overstayers' (Anae 2012).³³ Despite these measures, in 1975 Labour lost power to the National Party, which had campaigned heavily against Pacific migration. The incoming government promptly reduced immigration inflows from 30,000 to 5,000 per year (Government of New Zealand nd).

By 1977, public opposition³⁴ in New Zealand to the deportation policy and growing public awareness of the economic significance of the employed overstayers led to changes in the policy for handling overstayers. As an interim solution, amnesty was offered to established and employed overstayers to apply for permanent residence, and 69 percent of those who registered were granted provisional permanent residence. However, a popular

³² First-generation migrants tend to remit more than others, so ongoing migration is needed to keep remittances flowing (Ahlburg and Brown 1998).

³³ These included the 'Dawn Raids', which have been the subject of plays, film, song and academic analysis. See Government of New Zealand (nd).

³⁴ A significant element in this opposition was the visibility of well-educated and articulate New Zealand-born Sāmoans, who countered the ethnic stereotypes of the time.

belief arose that the government amnesties provided an incentive to overstay and that deportation of overstayers was a more effective disincentive to overstaying. The government therefore renewed the identification and deportation programme in the early 1980s and continued it until the mid-1980s (Bedford 1993). Politicians were aware, however, that immigration was not the public concern it had once been and that the existing policy was stifling growth, especially as New Zealanders³⁵ were departing for Australia, where the economy had fared better. It was clearly time for reform.

Sentiment in New Zealand changed again and by 1986 a Minister of Immigration was able to promote an immigration policy that would have been unimaginable a decade before — one that was designed to “enrich the multicultural fabric of New Zealand society through the selection of new settlers principally on the strength of their personal contribution to the future well-being of New Zealand” (Burke 1986).

A 1986 review of immigration policy led to the 1987 Immigration Act, which established a set of educational, business, professional, age and asset criteria, which became the basis of migrant selection, rather than national and ethnic origins. The new Act defined four migration streams under which people could apply: skills; business; family; and humanitarian.

An amendment to the Act in 1991 set up a system that awarded points for employability, age, educational qualifications and available funds and set a ‘pass mark’, which was adjusted annually to meet set intake targets. In 1995, in response to concerns about migration from Asia, the Act was amended again to include a ‘general skills’ stream for applicants with degrees or with certified trade or vocational qualifications, an adjustable ‘pass mark’ and tighter English-language competence criteria.

In Samoa, political opinion in this period initially favoured continued emigration to New Zealand but ran up against growing public opposition in New Zealand. At one time, even the 1,100 quota guaranteed by the Treaty of Friendship was under threat, and there was little Samoa could do as the number of permits and visas issued was reduced and the conditions around their issue were tightened (Spoonley and Bedford 2012).

New Zealand’s immigration laws after 1987 offered new opportunities for some would-be migrants in Samoa but reduced them for others. The new

³⁵ Including growing numbers of Samoans who had obtained permanent residence in New Zealand.

'family' category allowed for the reunification of families under certain conditions and therefore led to an increase in the number of people moving to join families in New Zealand.³⁶ Some of these family migrants found employment in the growing service sector in New Zealand. But the imposition of education and skill requirements, and increased competition from new source countries, restricted opportunities in New Zealand for unskilled people with limited education, who had previously constituted the majority of Samoan labour migrants. The same requirements opened opportunities to leave for skilled, highly educated Samoans with capital, however, and the addition of the 'general skills' category provided opportunities for Samoans with tertiary qualifications to leave. These circumstances led to a decline in the number of unskilled Samoan migrants entering New Zealand to work and an increase in the number of skilled migrants (Macpherson 1992). However, the skilled workers were the ones that Samoa needed to retain to ensure its own growth.

From 1991, economists and others in Samoa became concerned about excessive emigration as New Zealand's new skill-focused policy attracted skilled Samoans and began to stifle Samoa's economic growth (Shankman 1976).³⁷ These same concerns began to surface again in Samoan politics in 2020.

A new form of labour migration

As the skills composition of the labour flow changed, access by unskilled Samoans to employment abroad and remittances declined just as families and villages sought to renovate and build amenities such as school buildings and roads, and as congregations sought to build new churches and pastors' houses.

These entities found ways of effecting capital transfers that involved a different form of labour migration, however. They recognised that New Zealand's Samoan population was a source of capital, and to access this capital, villages and congregations arranged for groups (*malaga* or *asiasiga*) to visit New Zealand and perform cultural shows there. The expatriates abroad

³⁶ The situation of overstayers became increasingly difficult as families chose to offer limited accommodation to family members arriving under reunification provisions, and saw some overstayers, who had remained waiting for an economic upturn, finally leave.

³⁷ Economists and anthropologists were drawing attention to the inverse relationship between increasing migration and remittances and declining agricultural productivity in Sāmoa.

generally paid the airfares and expenses, provided accommodation for relatives in the group and hired performance venues. These shows raised large sums of money legally, quickly and with a minimal capital outlay.³⁸ They succeeded because of a highly competitive element within Samoan culture: individuals and families compete with one another to demonstrate their love and continuing commitment to their natal villages through giving gifts, which are announced to audiences during the performances and in *tusigaigoa* (roll calls) (Macpherson and Macpherson 2016). In these cultural performances, villages compete with traditional rivals, both to demonstrate their financial capacity and to enhance their sociopolitical prestige.

These shows were mixed blessings for the sponsors of these groups and the performers. On one hand, the sponsors (Samoan migrants living in New Zealand) found themselves facing large outlays for fares, expenses and gifts, but on the other hand they reasoned that these were one-off events that could enhance their sociopolitical standing and avoided the risk of housing and supporting unemployed relatives who contributed nothing.³⁹ The Samoan performers benefited from having a break from daily life and a chance to tour New Zealand and visit relatives. For some, this brief experience was enough, and they returned at the end of the *malaga*, for others the experience whetted their appetite for a new life, and they remained in New Zealand illegally.

A dilemma

Between the mid-1970s and early 1990s, all Samoans who were in New Zealand faced rising costs and the risk of unemployment, but there were different consequences for the legal and illegal residents. Legal residents had access to various forms of social provision, and although their disposable incomes and their ability to remit fell in this period, they were able to survive. But those who were in New Zealand illegally did not have government support, and their situation became critical very quickly. A number of these people, who feared deportation, which carried with it a timed prohibition on return, took what they had and returned to Samoa where they would at least

³⁸ These sums were determined by the size of villages' migrant populations and the timing of the visits, but some parties departed with as much as \$NZ 350,000 after visits of two weeks.

³⁹ However, married people who were not from the same village noted that they had to factor in the possibility that they would be required to contribute to group visits coming from both of the partners' congregations and villages, thus doubling the expense.

have accommodation and employment, even if only in village-level agriculture. Others reached out to relatives in Australia and the United States (US), hoping to find help to enter those labour markets. Still others, who were, for various reasons, reluctant to leave New Zealand, decided to wait it out, in the hope that the employment situation would improve. Their plans depended on finding a friend or relative,⁴⁰ usually a legal resident, who was willing and able to accommodate and support them in the interim. Some of these joined an exploited, insecure workforce⁴¹ without any realistic hope of having their families join them.

Legally resident Samoans in New Zealand then found themselves in a dilemma. Even those who remained employed often had much-reduced hours and were struggling to cover their basic expenses. They were not in a financial position to help others, but they faced requests for shelter and assistance from illegally resident relatives and friends who were not eligible for social benefits and could not help cover costs. These requests rested on a cultural expectation of support for kin, which was backed, in some cases, by requests from parents in Samoa. The homes of residents were usually small, with three or four bedrooms and a single bathroom (Macpherson 1997). Those in rental houses, with limits on the numbers of permitted occupants, faced the risk of losing their homes if they were caught exceeding the limits. So, even with the best will in the world, there were obvious constraints on the numbers of people they could house. In the event of overstayers needing medical care and hospitalisation, the full costs fell on hosts, because the overstayers were ineligible for any government support.⁴²

These legal residents found it increasingly difficult borrow from mainstream lenders to supplement their reduced incomes and were forced to take measures such as borrow from loan sharks, take in paying boarders and send adolescent children to work to supplement household income. A decision to withdraw an adolescent child from school meant sacrificing their child's educational opportunities — one of the reasons that they had migrated — to support a person who had migrated illegally knowing the risks.

⁴⁰ In some cases, these people sought to marry New Zealand nationals, but with no work and few assets, they were, for most people, not an attractive proposition.

⁴¹ This has continued as the case of [Crown v Matamata 2023](#) demonstrated. The prosecution of this case may act as a disincentive to the organisers of this workforce.

⁴² In some cases these debts forced hosts to sell homes and vehicles to meet the costs, which health providers sought to recover, and damaged their hard won credit ratings.

Another consideration that made residents reluctant to take in illegal residents was the fact that families who were found to have sheltered overstayers became ineligible as sponsors of visa applications, which would prevent them from sponsoring close kin in future. This factor became increasingly important after changes to the immigration law in 1991 permitted applications for family reunification.

When making decisions about whether or not to support an overstayer, legal residents tended to consider the closeness of the relative and their record of contributions to the family, church and village. Overstayers who had met obligations to family, church and village while they were in work were generally more likely to find support from legal residents than those who had not. This rationale could be justified in Samoan culture and was understood and accepted.

This process left a group of unemployed overstayers who could find neither accommodation nor employment and who were forced to return to Samoa. Their return fare was usually, and often reluctantly, paid by those who were culturally obliged to support them. Overstayers who did not wish to return and made unreasonable claims on family or abused their hosts' hospitality found themselves reported surreptitiously to immigration authorities, which then deported them and also met the cost of their repatriation. This removed the 'problem'.

New realities: 2003 to 2023

Economic factors

In the early 2000s, with the New Zealand manufacturing sector facing increasing challenges from low-cost producers abroad and with demand declining for some of New Zealand's primary products, attempts were made to add value to traditional products such as dairy, meat and wool, to create new crops and products for export markets, and to diversify the tourism industry. This led to the expansion of the horticulture, viticulture, fisheries and service sectors, all of which required labour.

In Samoa during this period, the economy remained dependent on development assistance and on remittances, which represented 18.2 percent of GDP between 2002 and 2011; 21.6 percent in 2014/2015 and 29.9 percent in 2020/2021 (Government of Samoa 2012, 2016, 2020).

Samoa's economic development plans between 2002 and 2020 led to the tertiary sector contributing a greater percentage of GDP, but the importance of the manufacturing industry (secondary sector) declined (see Table 2).

Table 2. Composition of GDP, by sector, 2002-2020

Year	Primary sector % of GDP	Secondary sector % of GDP	Tertiary sector % of GDP
2002	10	24	66
2012	10	22	68
2020	10	14.4	75.5

Source: Government of Samoa 2012, 2016, 2020

Technological factors

In response to increasing international competition and labour shortages, New Zealand companies invested heavily in new technologies to increase productivity, and they placed an emphasis on labour-saving devices. In addition, they outsourced some processing activities to low-wage economies abroad.

In Samoa, the opportunities for new technologies were limited. Moreover, the low cost of labour and the need to generate domestic employment opportunities for Samoans made labour-saving technologies politically irrelevant. At the same time, however, steadily increasing levels of education in Samoa ensured that the workforce was increasingly productive.

Social factors

New Zealanders' concerns about immigration between 2003 and 2023 focused mainly on the increasing numbers of Asian immigrants and their wealth, ownership of property and the competition they fostered in business. New Zealanders were less concerned about Samoan immigrants, given the high rates of intermarriage between New Zealanders and Samoans, increasing levels of daily social interaction, the steady growth of the Samoan middle class and the prominence of high-profile Samoans in fields ranging from music to athletics (Mallon 2012), arts (Pereira 2012), politics (Whimp 2012), law and public service.

In Samoa, attitudes to New Zealand had also changed as rising standards of living, improved health care and education offered Samoans more training and employment opportunities at home. Moreover, as Samoan enclaves became established in America, Australia and Europe, these destinations

became more accessible to would-be migrants. With improved internet access in Samoa during this period, communication with relatives abroad became easier, and Samoans were able to compare possibilities in alternative destinations to New Zealand. Today, although New Zealand remains an attractive destination for Samoans wanting to work abroad or migrate, it is not necessarily the preferred destination.

Political factors

By the mid 2000s, there was a clear need for a major review of immigration policy. A discussion document (Department of Labour 2006) identified the following challenges facing New Zealand: greater flows of people around the world; increased competition for skills, talent and labour; and an increasingly diverse population (requiring a sharper focus on settlement and integration).

The discussion document noted that the number of permanent migrants in New Zealand had grown from 8,500 in 1985 to 49,500 in 2005, that the number of temporary migrants had grown from 21,000 to over 100,000, and that between 1991 and 2005 domestic unemployment had declined from 10.3 percent to 3.8 percent. The document also noted that the challenge for New Zealand, with 20 percent of its population born elsewhere, was retaining mobile labour in a highly competitive global market. Moreover, global trends had combined to generate a shortage of both skilled and unskilled labour, which was felt acutely in New Zealand.

The policy changes that resulted from the discussion document focused on administrative, procedural and settlement provisions designed to attract and retain labour. For Samoans, these changes were significant because they resulted in an increase in the number of people allowed into New Zealand under the Samoan quota visa scheme, with the number rising from 1,100 to 1,650 per year (Government of Samoa 1 August 2023).

A 2018 study of residence approvals in New Zealand between 2012 and 2017 (Immigration New Zealand 2018) found three notable trends: partner and skilled/business visas declined over the period; dependent child visas increased; and international and humanitarian visas, which include Samoan quota visas, remained stable (see Table 3). These numbers may fall further in future as all of the partners, parents, siblings, adult children and dependent children are reunited with their New Zealand families and as alternative destinations become more attractive to Samoan skilled migrants and business people.

Table 3: Samoan residence approvals by visa sub-stream, 2012-2017

Visa type	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Total
Dependent child	480	620	650	765	931	3446
Partner	452	436	380	370	335	1973
Parent, sibling, adult child	43	12	40	20	15	130
Skilled / Business	81	76	23	44	25	249
International / Humanitarian	994	1011	1161	961	1167	5294
Total	2,050	2,155	2,254	2,156	2,477	11,092

Source: Immigration New Zealand 2018

New labour migration schemes introduced in this period to attract workers include the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) visa, the Partnership work visa, the Essential Skills work visa and business visas. Of these, the most significant is the RSE visa, which allows Samoan workers to stay in New Zealand for up to seven months (in any eleven-month period) to carry out seasonal work in horticulture and viticulture (Fatupaito et al. 2021). As Table 4 shows, the number of RSE visas granted to Samoans increased steadily between 2011 and 2021, with the exception of 2019/20, when visa numbers dropped as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 4: Number of Samoan RSE visas issued, by financial year (2011-2021)

2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
1137	1169	1238	1454	1690	1878	2315	2409	775	3334

Source: Immigration New Zealand 2023a.

Note: Financial years 2019/20 and 2020/21 were disrupted by Covid-19 restrictions on movement.

Other visa streams, which were ostensibly created to allow family reunification and to meet international humanitarian needs, in practice also contributed to the New Zealand labour market during this period because holders of such visas were able to work, and they did.

In Samoa, political attitudes to emigration changed over the period between 2003 and 2023. Strategic development statements in this period focused more on developing a resilient stable domestic economy and strategies to generate internal growth and prosperity, than on fostering labour mobility.

Family influence on migration

While economic, technological, social and political factors influence migration trends, families and villages in Samoa influence who actually gets to migrate. This is largely because most visa applicants cannot afford the fees and other pre-departure costs, such as health clearances and police character checks, and they turn to their families for help.⁴³ The families in Samoa and abroad that cover these costs select the candidates that offer the best return on their 'investment'.

The considerations have not changed much in the past 70 years. Families select the candidates who are most likely to contribute to families' sociopolitical and financial objectives and enhance families' interests and who have good records of service (*tautua*) to family, church and village.

Families may also consider issues of social equity and the need to share opportunities between the various branches of the families or between the families in a village, to avoid division and tension, which could weaken families and villages and the social solidarity on which their collective power and prestige depends.

Another element that families consider is in which of the available labour markets the return on their investment is likely to be greatest over time. This involves comparing relative wage levels in the various labour markets (including New Zealand, Australia and the United States) and the performance of those who have already worked in those labour markets.⁴⁴

Those who are in a position to petition for reunification and to provide employment and housing for candidates seeking residence visas have considerable power in decision-making, as do team leaders and supervisors of RSE teams, who influence the selection of the teams. In the latter case, the team leaders seek to provide disciplined and compliant workforces. Although the health, strength and fitness of the candidates are important, so too are factors such as self-discipline and training and a willingness to accept authority, work in a team and protect the team's reputation. As one leader explained, the 'character' requirements of the scheme — a clean police record

⁴³For example, the fee for a RSE visa in 2023 was NZ\$325 (Immigration NZ, 2023b).

⁴⁴One gatekeeper said that sending a young man to the mines in Australia had been a waste because his wages were squandered in drinking and gambling. His young relatives in Australia could not stop him because they lacked the authority, and the young man had died in an accident. She pointed out that a well-supported trainee nurse in New Zealand remained a more reliable remitter, despite earning lower wages.

and letter from a *pulenu'u* (village mayor) — were different from what he was looking for in people for his team, which were religious faith, honesty, humility, respectfulness and a willingness to learn and to work for the team.

The future

Economic, technological and political factors⁴⁵ in external labour markets are changing in ways that may lead to a reduction in demand in New Zealand for workers from Samoa in future. For example, the application of artificial intelligence in crop management and the mechanisation of harvesting could in time make some physical tasks in the horticulture and viticulture sectors redundant. Likewise, the increasing requirement of formal certification in industries in which on-the-job training was once considered adequate may raise selection standards in ways that favour migrants from competing labour providers such as India and the Philippines where certification is routine. In these circumstances, labour demand in New Zealand may favour skilled and professional Samoans and further strip Samoa's economy of the very people in whose training the country has invested for its development.

In 2021, the Government of Samoa outlined a long-term development strategy, "Samoa 2040", which aims to increase local employment and government revenues (Government of Samoa 2021). The "Samoa 2040" strategy focuses on four areas of opportunity: tourism, agriculture and fishing, the development of a digital economy and labour mobility. The latter area of focus is important because despite attempts to strengthen the domestic economy, the country increasingly depends on remittances (Government of Samoa 2008; Government of Samoa 2020). Given that remittances per person typically fall over time (Ahlburg and Brown 1998; Connell and Brown 2005), ongoing labour mobility is required to continually replenish the prime remitting group. Unless technology or geopolitics⁴⁶ can generate new revenue sources for Samoa, labour migration is likely to remain an important element in the country's future development.

⁴⁵ The growing electoral significance of the Samoan-descent population in New Zealand politics is evident in politicians' attempts in the 2023 elections to attract Samoan votes with promises of increased visa quotas, amnesties for qualified overstayers and increased support for community initiatives in health and education.

⁴⁶ For example, provision of military facilities for a major power.

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Samoa Tuna Cannery Workers in American Samoa

Brian T. Alofaitull

During the 1960s, my grandmother, from the island of Savai'i in Samoa, and my grandfather, an American Samoan, worked for the tuna canneries in Atu'u in American Samoa. They both had the same reason for choosing this work: to earn sufficient wages to enable them to fulfil their family, village and church obligations, and serve (*tautau*) their parents.

The wages my grandparents received from working in the tuna canneries helped support their families and villages and contributed to the *alofa* (church pastor contribution) in their communally oriented kin-based society. In addition, these wages provided comforts their families had never experienced before. My grandparents' stories echo those of many other Samoans and American Samoans of their generation, and of generations ever since.

This chapter examines the main push factors – the ethical, religious and cultural responsibilities – that have led many Samoans and American Samoans to seek work abroad since the 1950s. Describing the lived experiences of some former employees of the tuna canneries, this chapter offers an insight into the reasoning of the thousands of men and women who leave Samoa to work in tuna canneries in American Samoa and the similar reasoning of thousands of American Samoans who leave their homeland ('The Rock') to work on the United States mainland.

The two Samoas

The islands of American Samoa and Samoa are part of the same archipelago, and the various districts and islands were once controlled only by *matai* (the heads of extended families: chiefs). With a short distance of around 100 miles (160 kilometres) between the island of Tutuila (now part of American Samoa) and the island of Upolu (now part of the Independent State of Samoa), Samoans travelled freely within the archipelago and beyond until the colonial era, when borders were put in place. People moved between the islands of the archipelago to visit families, find spouses, attend celebrations such as marriages and the giving of chiefly titles, and also to join wars that flared up from time to time between the districts.

During the late 1800s, three colonial powers, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, contended for control over the Samoan archipelago. This exacerbated clashes between chiefs in Samoa, with three paramount chiefs competing to be the 'king' of Samoa. Following two civil wars in Samoa, which were fuelled by and participated in by the colonial powers, an agreement was reached by the colonial powers in 1899: the Tripartite Convention. Under this Convention, the western islands of Upolu, Savai'i, Manono and Apolima were placed under the control of Germany, while control over the eastern islands of Tutuila and Aunu'u, and later the Manu'a Islands, was given to the United States. The United Kingdom relinquished its 'rights' in Samoa in exchange for three islands of the Solomon Islands archipelago that had been German colonies as well as other concessions by Germany in Tonga and parts of Africa. Thus, at the turn of the twentieth century, the western islands of the Samoan archipelago became a colony of Germany – known as German Samoa – while the eastern islands became a colony of the United States of America (USA) – known as American Samoa.

At the start of World War I in 1914, New Zealand took over German Samoa on behalf of Great Britain, declaring the western islands of Samoa to be occupied in the name of His Majesty King George V (Meleisea and Schoeffel Meleisea 1987). Subsequently, the islands were a trusteeship of New Zealand until the local independence movement succeeded in ending the trusteeship and declaring Western Samoa an independent nation in 1962. In 1997 the Government of Western Samoa amended the constitution to change the country's name from Western Samoa to Samoa. The capital city of Samoa is Apia.

In 1951, governance over American Samoa transitioned from the United States Navy to the Department of Interior, and American Samoa remains a territory of the United States to this day. The capital city of the territory is Pago Pago. American Samoans are entitled to apply for United States (US) passports and can travel freely to the US.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ American Samoans are considered 'US nationals' rather than 'US citizens', and their passports are marked accordingly. As US nationals, they have the right to work in the US – in jobs that do not require citizenship – and they can apply for citizenship (via a complex process) after residing in the US for some time (NBC News 28 March 2018).

Tuna canneries in American Samoa

Prior to European contact, the Samoan economy was primarily subsistence agriculture and fishing based. In the mid 1800s, European traders and whalers introduced new forms of fishing and exchange to the Samoan archipelago, which modified traditional Samoan fishing practices. Then in the twentieth century the introduction of outboard engines changed traditional methods further, allowing Samoans to travel greater distances and faster than in traditional fishing boats, making fishing into a more commercial venture. Although sharing and trading of seafood between families and villages continue today, new technology and an increasing reliance on the cash economy from the 1940s onwards have resulted in a decline in subsistence fishing practices (Levine and Allen 2009:22-23).

In the 1940s, the US Department of Defence implemented a number of projects in American Samoa as part of the war efforts, which brought about significant changes (Department of Commerce American Samoa 2019:9) and a wave of prosperity for local merchants (Gray 1960). The construction of a naval station in American Samoa during World War II, for example, provided “high wages, on constructional work of many kinds, in unloading ships, and for those with a good knowledge of English, as interpreters” (Davidson 1967:157). During the 1940s, the United States marines outnumbered the population of Tutuila Island in American Samoa, which was approximately 16,000 (Levine and Allen 2009:9).

At that time, the international tuna market was almost exclusively under the control of the United States. American Samoa’s location became a base for distant water tuna fleets. The location was attractive to the tuna fishing and canning industries for the same reason that the location had been attractive to the US navy in the nineteenth century: Pago Pago’s deep, semi-enclosed harbour (Campling and Havice 2007:213). In addition, American Samoa, with its dispersed outer islands, has a large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), larger than that of the Independent State of Samoa despite American Samoa having much smaller islands. This large EEZ meant a larger fishing area was available.

In 1949, American Samoa was authorised to allow commercial enterprises into Pago Pago for the processing and export of locally harvested tuna (Department of Commerce 2019:8). That year, an aviator pioneer, Harold C. Gatty, acquired USD1.5 million from the Rockefeller Foundation to set up a tuna cannery called Island Packers, Inc. in the village of Atu’u near Pago Pago

(Gillett 2007:10). This business venture was unsuccessful, however, due to an inconsistent supply of fish. Gatty eventually sold the cannery to the American Samoa government for USD40,000 (Gillett 2007:10).

When the tuna enterprise was first introduced, American Samoans were consulted and it was agreed that approximately 150 Samoans would work at the cannery and that “not more than 10 non-Samoans” would be employed (Honolulu Star Bulletin quoted in Poblete-Cross 2010:509) as there were concerns about foreigners profiting from the industry to the detriment of the local inhabitants (Poblete-Cross, 2010:508-509).

In 1953, Japanese fishermen took advantage of a new rule that allowed non-US flag vessels to offload their tuna catches within the waters of Tutuila Island. In addition, tariff provisions meant that products from American Samoa (e.g. tuna) could be exported to the US tariff-free if the local component was at least 30 percent of the value — a significant advantage considering that canned tuna imported from elsewhere was subject to a duty of between 6 and 35 percent (Gillett 2007:10; Memea Kruse 2018:91). Immediately, Van Camp Seafood Company leased the site of the cannery, contracted Japanese fishermen, employed workers and relaunched the cannery enterprise (Gray 1960:264). The tuna cannery was considered a blessing for American Samoa’s citizens, offering them paid employment and the possibility of buying imported goods (Crocombe 1995:273).

In 1955, 80 percent of the region’s total exports came from the Van Camp Seafood cannery. (Poblete-Cross 2010:508). In 1963, StarKist Samoa (SKS) established a tuna cannery plant adjacent to that of Van Camp (Gillett 2007:10). The social and economic infrastructure of American Samoa began to improve in the 1960s when US President John F. Kennedy appointed Governor John Hayden to expedite the construction of new roads, hospitals and public schools in the territory. As Line-Noue Memea Kruse put it, American Samoa “was transformed into a modern island economy with the requisite infrastructure to secure private sector growth” (2018:90).

Over the years, “the tuna industry has remained the only stable industry in American Samoa” (Memea Kruse 2018:92). Today, although the public sector is the largest employer in American Samoa, the tuna canning industry remains essential, and in 2019 accounted for over 80 percent of the territory’s exports (Department of Commerce 2019:30).

Labour migration from American Samoa

The canneries provided paid employment to many American Samoans, which they were grateful for. Initially, few foreigners were permitted to work in the canneries so that jobs would be reserved for local workers, but cannery work was challenging and became less attractive to American Samoans over time. The work involved 12-hour shifts, in conditions that were:

... smelly, wet, hot (unless one works in cold storage), deafening (from the noise of machinery), exhausting (from standing for an entire shift), and dangerous (from the heat of steaming processes, the quick and sharp knives for processing, and the powerful and potentially crushing packaging machines) (Poblete-Cross, 2010:509).

Eventually, American Samoans began to “look down upon cannery work” (Poblete-Cross 2010:509), and many American Samoans began to seek employment opportunities in the public sector and abroad. At the same time, some employers in American Samoa began to seek workers from overseas. This trend continued over the subsequent decades because, as Doane and Gray observed in 2006, employers felt that local workers were “less productive, unwilling to undertake employment in certain areas, and unwilling to work for minimum wages” (cited in Levine and Allen 2009:15).

With opportunities for migration to the US mainland and Hawaii, from the 1950s onwards many American Samoans left the territory in search of higher-paid employment opportunities and education. There has been a steady stream of departures over the years. Between 2009 and 2017, for example, American Samoa saw a decline in population at an average annual rate of 2.2 percent (Department of Commerce 2019:5,10).

My grandfather was one of the American Samoan tuna cannery workers who moved to the US mainland. He came from the village of Vatia on the northern coast of Tutuila Island. It is isolated from other villages on Tutuila, and in the old days villagers had to climb a challenging few miles up the steep ridge of Mount Alava to get to town. That was the trip my grandfather made when he went to work at the tuna canneries. Like other cannery workers who came from rural villages, he moved to Pago Pago and lived with close family members.

Working in the tuna cannery made it possible for my grandfather to meet his cultural obligations to his family and village and serve (*tautau*) his father, who held the chiefly title of Alofaituli in the village of Vatia. My grandfather’s ledgers from the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s provide a glimpse of his financial

outlays before he left Vatia for America. For example, he listed the costs of building materials used for building a family house. The *fale tele* or *fale talimalo* (traditional Samoan houses) were built using local materials harvested from family land, but my grandfather's ledgers indicate that his family built a house with cement, which was no doubt purchased with earnings from the cannery.

While the wages offered in the American Samoa canneries enabled families to have access to European-style houses and other comforts, the wages were low compared to what could be earned abroad. Like other American Samoans before him, my grandfather migrated to the United States in search of the higher wages offered there.

As was the case in New Zealand (see the article titled "Samoan Labour Migration to Aotearoa New Zealand" by Cluny Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson in this volume), the process by which American Samoans, including my grandfather and most of his siblings, moved to America was chain migration. Early migrants helped their family members to migrate, and they in turn helped other family members. My uncle, Tamati, would joke with the younger generation, "We all waited for our numbers, and when you were next, you jumped on a plane to America." Once they arrived in America, many American Samoans took on menial labour jobs to survive. Some migrants, like my grandfather, found work in tuna canneries in California.

Labour migration from Samoa to American Samoa

The outflow of people from American Samoa gave rise to a labour shortage in the territory (Memea Kruse 2018:92). Consequently, the tuna canneries started recruiting immigrants to process the fish. The gap the American Samoans left was largely filled by workers from Samoa, who had fewer labour migration options than their counterparts in American Samoa.

Thus, American Samoans migrated to the United States, and citizens of Western Samoa, along with other Pacific Islanders and Asians, moved into jobs unwanted by American Samoans. Writing of the labour migration from the Samoan islands of the west to the east, Unasa Va'a observed that "Western Samoa is dependent on American Samoa for economic opportunities, and American Samoa is dependent on Western Samoa for people" (2010:82).

The main factor drawing Western Samoans to American Samoa was the higher wages offered there compared to those available at home. Like American Samoans, Western Samoans have obligations to their families, villages and churches, as part of their ethical, cultural and religious life, and the more they can earn and send home the better they can fulfil their obligations. So Samoans from Western Samoa moved in fairly large numbers to American Samoa to seek employment in the tuna industry (USGAO 2020).

Guest worker programmes were put in place to recruit workers from Samoa. American Samoans were able to sponsor their relatives in Samoa to join them as guest workers, but as sponsors they were responsible for medical bills, taxes and public debts (Doane and Gray 2006). Not all American Samoans were keen to sponsor Western Samoans, however, because despite family ties, Western Samoans were “seen as outsiders, or subordinate to American Samoans” (Poblete-Cross 2010:511) because of the lack of infrastructure in Western Samoa and the perceived ‘backwardness’ of Western Samoans.

Over the years, through intermarriage and other processes, many Samoans from the Independent State of Samoa were able to become residents of American Samoa. And some have used their residency status as a stepping stone to enter the United States (Ryn 2012). Workers from other countries, notably the Philippines, have followed suit.

In recent decades, American Samoans have begun to perceive a “strain” on their “limited resources” caused by an increasing number of “non-citizens”, such as Western Samoans, Tongans and Filipinos (Sagapolutele 28 May 2009, quoted in Poblete-Cross 2010:507). According to the 2007 report of The Future Political Status Study Commission of American Samoa, the high number of foreigners remaining in American Samoa after the completion of their contracts was a significant concern:

Policy planners and lawmakers knew and accepted this heavy presence of Western Samoans and Tongans because it was critical to the success of both the canneries and the construction industry. There were groans about the growing number of aliens, but we had to have them in order to realise the opportunities in economic development.

Today’s dilemma is different. The public is concerned about the presence of large numbers of foreigners from Asia and the Philippines. Immigration officials say the quota system is being followed with diligence. But the public is still worried. They suspect aliens are finding ways to enter and reside illegally (TFPSSCAA 2007:44)

In addition to the increasing public opposition in American Samoa to immigration and the negative perceptions some American Samoans have of Samoans from the Independent State of Samoa, another factor served as a deterrent to Samoan citizens seeking employment in the tuna canneries of American Samoa: the deplorable working conditions.

In 1995, the late Eni Faleomavaega, the American Samoan delegate to the United States House of Representatives, drew attention to the terrible working conditions in the tuna canneries. He called out the multibillion-dollar corporations' "blatant disregard, handsomely profiting from the labour of our people, yet knowingly jeopardising their health and safety" in conditions "so horrible that some workers have lost legs and fingers. Others have lost their hearing. Many have been exposed to lethal gases and blood-borne diseases" (Faleomavaega 1995, quoted in Bennett 2009:37). Despite the adverse conditions, Samoans have continued to migrate to American Samoa because of their goal of earning sufficient incomes to fulfil their family, village and church responsibilities.

In 2007, the United States passed the Fair Minimum Wage Act, which ensures scheduled increases to the minimum wages in the US, including in American Samoa. Between 2007 and 2018, the minimum wage in the territory rose by 70 percent, from USD3.26 to USD5.56 (Carreon 18 June 2020). In response to such increases, as well as to increased competition globally, two tuna canning companies left American Samoa: Chicken of the Sea closed their Pago Pago cannery in 2010 and Samoa Tuna Processors (STP) closed its plant in 2016 (Carreon 18 June 2020). StarKist Samoa, owned by a South Korean corporation, took over the STP plant and is today the only remaining cannery corporation in the territory (USGAO 2020).

Tuna exports from American Samoa to the US are currently valued at USD348 million⁴⁸ annually, on average (Samoa News 31 October 2023), and Samoans from the Independent State of Samoa are major contributors to that export income. They make up 90 percent of the tuna cannery labourers in American Samoa today (Keresoma 2022), and this workforce is crucial to keeping the canneries functioning.

⁴⁸ American Samoa's exports of canned tuna peaked in 1993 with a value of USD485 million (Department of Commerce 2006:198).

Remittances: a duty and an honour

In communally oriented, collectivist⁴⁹ kin-based societies, there is an emphasis on a 'we' consciousness, rather than the 'I' or 'me' individualistic consciousness. Members of a collectivist community seek to satisfy the needs of the wider group; this maintains stability.

Samoans have a collectivist society that is interconnected culturally, religiously and socially. According to *fa'aSamoa* (traditional Samoan culture and customs), younger Samoans are subordinate to their elders and to *matai*, who are responsible for protecting and representing their families in village and church settings. "Generally, young people work for the extended family (*aiga*), the church and the village, and through this service [*tautua*]they gain respect and high status as they grow older" (Armstrong 2008:53).

Fa'aSamoa has evolved over time, due to colonial experiences and Samoa's participation in the capitalist global economy, but village structures, chiefly authority and the culture of gift exchange are still in place today and continue to influence everyday life (see the article titled 'The Socioeconomic Context of the New Samoan Exodus: 2007–2023' by Penelope Schoeffel and Malama Meleisea in this volume).

The "Attitudes Survey", conducted in Samoa in 2022, found that being "truly Samoan" means respecting Samoan culture and traditions and "being Christian" (Leach et al. 2022:9). Despite globalisation and the influence of secular viewpoints, most Samoans maintain a commitment to the Christian faith and Samoans contribute to various church-related functions, particularly the care for their pastors within their respective villages.

When migrants leave Samoa and American Samoa, they take their Samoan values and practices with them. The family network and the sense of 'we' continue in the diaspora. My grandfather, like his compatriots, continued to contribute throughout his life to family *fa'alavelave* (family events such as funerals, pastor installations, weddings, etc.) and donated most of his resources to establish, with other like-minded Samoans, a Congregational church in Carson, California.

Remittances sent home by Samoan labour migrants have moral, ethical and religious dimensions that are linked to Samoa's collectivist society. For Lilomaiva-Doktor (2009:20), migration is culturally motivated and not self-

⁴⁹ Hofstede describes collectivism as a community with a "collective identity, emotional dependence, group solidarity, sharing, duties and obligations" (Hofstede 1980).

centred, and any act of giving is considered part of maintaining social connections and relationships of family members (*vā*). That is, remittances are part of maintaining the *vā*. Those who send remittances have a strong sense of the *vā* between themselves and their cultural responsibilities; their economic gain is not just material but part of their moral responsibility, and they practice self-denial by saving their earnings (to give to the family) rather than spending their incomes on themselves.

A 2021 study of seasonal workers in New Zealand and Australia found that the remittances sent home to Samoa reflect a strong sense of family solidarity (Fatupaito et al. 2021:56). Many seasonal workers frame their work abroad as *tautua* (service) to their families, villages and churches, and they are critical of those who use their wages for themselves (see the following articles in this volume). These young Samoans have the same ethics as their elders did — ethics that motivate the young to serve their elders and motivate all people to serve their families.

Garbin (2019) refers to “sacred remittances” as contributing to the development of both the homeland and the church. Remittances not only help families to pay for living expenses and for modern comforts, but also go toward the *alofa* (financial support of the minister), new churches, *atina’e* (church operating costs) and various groups within the Church such as the *’autalavou* (youth), *a’oga Aso Sa* (Sunday school), *mafutaga tama* (men’s fellowship) and *mafutaga tina* (women’s fellowship). By contributing to *fa’alavelave* and church expenses, individuals retain a place within the family network and express “love for God and family” while “affirming the family’s position vis-à-vis other families” in the village (Gershon 2012:57). The element of pride also contributes as a motivating force behind these efforts (Gershon 2012).

The three institutions: family, village and church are interconnected; they cannot necessarily be separated. Giving to the family for *fa’alavelave* is partly a way of giving indirectly to the church’s minister as part of *fa’aalologa* (cultural gifts). Likewise, providing funding for village projects is indirectly connected to church contributions.

Samoans often use the Samoan word *onosai* to imply calmness or patience in a given situation during manual labour or when one experiences hardship: emotionally or physically. When speaking of their feelings about financially helping their families, many Samoan migrant workers say they need to be patient (*onosai*) (see also Fatupaito et al. 2021). This means that they need to

be mindful of their obligations to help their family and church community by means of the hard work they do, rather than just seek to improve their own circumstances.

Stories of mobility between the two Samoas

With grandparents and other family members who worked the American Samoa canneries in the 1960s, I have heard stories of the experiences of local cannery workers, both good and bad. To get the perspectives of Samoans from the Independent State of Samoa who have worked in canneries in American Samoa, I interviewed two individuals: Sione, aged 22, and Tone, aged 32 (their names were changed to protect their privacy). Both worked at StarKist. Sione worked at the tuna cannery between 2019 and 2022, while Tone worked from October 2022 to November 2022, only two months. I interviewed Sione in person, but communicated with Tone via text messages and telephone. In addition, I contacted a 76-year-old woman living in American Samoa, Agalelei, who worked at the tuna canneries from the 1960s until 2008. She shared her experiences with me via email, with the help of her daughter. I also conducted an interview via email with a staff member of the National University of Samoa: Tavita (not his real name), who recruits workers to the tuna canneries. While this is a small sample, the similarities between the motivations and experiences of the interviewed cannery workers and those of many other cannery workers I have spoken to indicate that the interviewees are largely representative of most cannery workers from Samoa working in American Samoa.

Sione's story

When asked why he travelled to American Samoa and how he spent his wages, Sione responded that he went because he was excited to make his own money. He earned approximately USD5 per hour and received a raise of USD0.50 per hour every six months.

Sione gave his pay checks to his sponsor, his mother's sister, who lives in American Samoa with her husband. He lived with this aunt and his uncle during his time in the territory. They were both deacons in their church, so they had financial responsibilities of tithing and assisting with maintaining the church facilities. Sione said his earnings helped to support "*O meafa'alelotu, le nu'u, ma meafaaleaiga (fa'alavelave o Aiga)*" ("church, village and

fa'alavelave"). Church was mentioned first. As a member of the *Lotu Taiti* (Congregational Christian Church of Samoa), he was familiar with the expectations of the church. When Sione was asked to describe the specific ways in which his wages were spent, he said "*O tele mea tau le lotu, e pei o saogamotofi, o tofiga*" ("A lot of church responsibilities, such as preparations [money, food] for visiting preachers [to the village] and meetings"). When asked, "How much of your check goes to church responsibilities?" Sione responded "*E afa o lo'utotogi e alu i meafa'alelotu*" ("About half of my pay check went to church-related responsibilities"). Sione's earnings not only helped to pay for the church responsibilities of his host family in American Samoa, but also contributed to paying for the same kinds of church expenses of his parents in Upolu.

Sione said he felt good contributing to the daily responsibilities of paying utility bills and was aware of where the money was spent. He stated that Wi-Fi was a priority because everyone uses it, saying that "*Matou e ola i le wifi*" ("We are dependent on Wi-Fi"). Internet was his key means of communicating with loved ones and friends back home in Samoa, and was important for connecting to the world. He seemed to be pleased about having a bank account, stating proudly, "*Na fai ma lo'u savings*" ("I have my own savings account").

When Sione was asked, "*O fea le mea e tetoomagaiai pe a e 'pressure*" ("Where do you go when you feel pressure?"), his response was, "*O le falefaigaulega*" ("The workplace"). Sione was more comfortable with his "own people" at the tuna cannery than with his host family, or even the church community.

Sione worked 12-hour shifts stationed at the pallets loading cases of tinned fish. He seemed grateful that he did not work in the area for the *au safui'a* (tuna cleaning). Those who scaled the fish had a difficult task. According to Sione, "*O vaegalena e tigaina, e alualu e faki,ona e faigata legaluega*" ("In that section of the factory people suffer, they do not last long because it is difficult work"). He expressed sympathy for those working in that section, saying, "*E leai se tigaina o matou, e faiuma e masini, na'o i totonuoutealofaiiai e tigaina, ae maisetagatamatutua, e le talafeagai le nei ga luega ma latou*" ("Our section did not suffer in comparison to those inside; I feel for them because it is hard work and they are elderly, they are not fit enough [to do that type of work]"). He said that older Samoans "*e le gafatia*" ("cannot

handle [the long hours]”. Generally, Sione enjoyed his work because he was fit and did not have difficult tasks at the tuna cannery.

Sione was treated reasonably well by his host family. He said that he gave the host family his pay checks and they gave him money to purchase what he wanted, such as clothing. Not all Samoans in American Samoa are treated well, however. According to Sione, “*E iainiisi o tagata e o ese mai aiga sanonofoiai one e leaga o latou aiga*” (“Others [Samoans] leave their families because they are mistreated”). When asked what the meaning of being “mistreated” was, he said “*Efa’aaoga e latou naitagata*” (“They are used by the people they live with”). During the interview, Sione used the word *leaga* (bad) at least five times to describe his fellow Samoans’ treatment.

Despite his lack of control over his earnings, Sione’s experience was positive overall. Sione felt good about his experience, and was satisfied that he had contributed to a larger purpose. He was not willing to return to work in the tuna cannery, however. He said he preferred to stay with his family and village in Samoa, which are his “safety nets”, rather than be in a foreign country and be unable to find people he trusted when he was upset. Rather than live as an individual, Sione is part of an extensive network, which reflects what Podsiadlowski and Fox describe as a situation in which “self and goals are construed to be an inseparable part of a family, a tribal group, or some other definably collective set” (2011:6).

Tone’s story

Tone’s short period of employment at StarKist, while fairly well-paid, was not a positive experience. Tone said that the stench of the Atu’u tuna cannery plants was unbearable, even outside for people passing by. This matched my experience when I was in American Samoa. When I passed the tuna canneries I would cover my face with a cloth or shirt. If I found the smell outside the tuna canneries intolerable, one can only imagine how bad the stench is inside.

Tone experienced a side of the tuna cannery work that Sione never did: tuna cleaning. In a text message, Tone wrote:

I le taimi foisaauaiatu ai i Amerika Samoa ile Falelaosegaluega manaia tele ose tupe lelei ae e iai lava itu faaletonulaitii nisi o taimi e pei kava (apron) o loo faaoga e le lava toe masaesae nisi o kava ele lava foimeafaiglua (naifi) ma e iaifo nisi ole au faiglua e matapogia o nisi e ono aafia ai lo latousoifua ilemanogi o nisi o taimi e faalogoina ai nisi ole au faiglua faapeamaiuagaioani a latoumea totino o nisi e faiglua la e faasuaava o nisi e tiaiglua ae le fanoi.

During the time I worked in American Samoa at the tuna cannery, the pay was good, but there were some issues from time to time. For example, there were not enough aprons to go around for the workers; some of the knives we needed to use were not sharp enough; some workers would faint from the strong stench; other workers would complain about other workers stealing their possessions; and other workers continued to work while vomiting [because of the strong stench]; and others would just leave their job without asking permission.

In a phone interview, Tone said he made USD5.96 an hour, approximately USD400 clear a week. Although pleased with what he received, he said he had hoped to make more. Like others who went to American Samoa, he wanted to make more than what he had been paid at home (in his case, in a large hardware store) in Samoa and seek a '*manuia*' (financial blessing). Like Sione, Tone had responsibilities to his host family and his family in Samoa. However, Tone felt that although he gave most of his pay to his host family, he got little in return.

He spoke of the experiences of other Samoans working the tuna canneries and said that many people left the job because of their living and working conditions. When asked what he would change, Tone said there was a need to provide housing for workers, so that they could avoid living with host families. He also recommended improving the working conditions. Although there are regulations, he said people do not comply with them. He said there should also be an upper age limit so that older people do not suffer from the working conditions.

Although both Sione and Tone found the wages earned in the canneries attractive, neither described their experiences in a way that accords with government claims that working abroad offers Samoans opportunities for upskilling; neither felt that they had gained useful new skills while at the tuna canneries.

Agalelei's story

Agalelei dedicated forty years of her life to StarKist. Originally from Western Samoa, she moved to American Samoa at the age of 19. She received US citizenship many years later, in 2015, after she had retired.

She worked hard and was able to "move up to a supervisory role" even without a "proper education" (she left school after Form 2). She said in her first job she worked cleaning fish for eight hours or weighing cans of fish for ten hours, and eventually she became a supervisor. She knew her job well, but she "did not have the advantage of understanding [the] company [work]

benefits” that she was entitled to. However, she was given back pay when she discovered her entitlements.

When she married, Agalelei was the “primary breadwinner” of a family of four: her spouse and two young children. As well as working full-time in the cannery, Agalelei shouldered a lot of domestic work. Tasks included doing the laundry and preparing meals, which included the work of gathering bananas, taro and breadfruit from the plantation. She said that these family responsibilities were challenging to manage while working full-time at the tuna cannery.

Agalelei said she learned to work through the good and bad times at the tuna cannery. Despite it being difficult to make ends meet to support her family, she was able to save enough money to purchase a vehicle and a property in the Tafuna area. She later remarried, and she and her second husband worked long hours to build themselves a home and support their families.

Agalelei said she felt that it was rewarding that she was able to gain financial security for herself and her family. She said that had it not been for working at the canneries, “I would have been burdened with housekeeping duties for my first husband”. The tuna canneries gave her the freedom to make a living and also build “lasting relationships” over forty years of working in the industry. Although Agalelei did not mention the word “*onosai*” in her comments, this sentiment is reflected in the way she persevered through difficult times to achieve what she and her family have today.

Tavita’s story

When Tavita (a recruiter for the tuna canneries in American Samoa) was asked about the moral obligations and ‘pressure’ on young people to go away to work in American Samoa, he said:

Yes, definitely, church, the pressure of church, family, village obligations motivate them to move for a better salary or wage. That will enable them to support their parents, families and village. It is always the pride of any family to make sure these obligations are met to the highest [village standards] for the sake of their family name in the community. It is almost an insult if a family cannot meet those traditional obligations. This has therefore resulted in more young Samoan people today moving away from their villages, looking for places to free themselves from these pressures of village obligations (church etc.), and to help them from afar.

Referring to graduates of the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme in Samoa, Tavita said that in his opinion the reasons those

young Samoans choose to go to American Samoa were the higher wages there; the attractive work package offered, including health care for families and schooling opportunities for children; an opportunity to use their training; and poor financial opportunities for workers graduating with trade certificates in the Independent State of Samoa. Tavita said he supports the recruitment of Samoan graduates to “ensure their skills are well utilised and their human rights are protected”.

He believes that another reason that young trade-qualified Samoans want to move away is to “free themselves” from village tasks, which include church duties. He also mentioned that young people have a sense of “adventure”, and for them going to American Samoa was a bit like going to America, because it is different from their home islands.

Looking towards the future

Getting work at the tuna canneries in American Samoa can be a financial blessing for Samoans who have never made ‘good wages’ in Samoa. Despite the stench of the facilities and the difficult work and living situations, Samoans continue to be motivated to work at the tuna canneries in American Samoa due to the wages, which are higher than wages in Samoa and allow them to meet their obligations to the family, village and church, in accordance with their collectivist ethics.

Samoans who work in the canneries in American Samoa see room for improvement, however. Unlike the workers who go to New Zealand and Australia on labour mobility schemes, workers recruited to American Samoa are expected to find their own accommodation, which usually means boarding with relatives. As seen in the comments by Sione and Tone, this is often to the disadvantage of young workers, because they are sometimes mistreated. Many Samoans working in the canneries also feel that the working conditions are harsh and that they are looked down upon by American Samoans.

Until recently, Samoa’s government had not looked closely at the living situations and working conditions of cannery workers in American Samoa. This is in strong contrast to the attention paid to workers participating in New Zealand and Australian labour mobility schemes, which are subject to government-to-government monitoring and discussion. But in 2022 the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour began exploring the possibility of developing a labour mobility scheme for American Samoa like New Zealand’s

Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme (Talanei.com 17 September 2022).⁵⁰

At the “Atoa o Samoa” (All of Samoa)⁵¹ executive meeting between the Government of American Samoa and the Government of the Independent State of Samoa in April 2023, labour mobility was a key topic of discussion. In particular, the talks covered labour recruitment from Samoa to American Samoa, including the recruitment of skilled workers from Samoa to work at the StarKist tuna cannery as electricians and mechanics, and the recruitment of unskilled workers for the cannery floor. The talks also highlighted “human capital development” through “capacity building and professional development initiatives” (Government of Samoa 2023).

The two Samoan governments also discussed the “safety and rights of workers” at the recent Atoa o Samoa talks, but it is not clear whether improvements will be made to workers’ living and working conditions. Perhaps if the voices of the workers were heard in bilateral discussions between the governments, decision-makers would consider factors beyond just the “higher wages” that can be earned in American Samoa. If the labour of Samoans is as important to the tuna canning industry as it seems to be, the workers’ wellbeing should be closely monitored, and steps should be taken to ensure workers are well treated.

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⁵⁰ Under the RSE scheme, accommodation is provided for workers.

⁵¹ The Atoa o Samoa talks enable the two Samoan governments to discuss areas of mutual bilateral cooperation, such as labour mobility, trade, security, environmental protection, culture, agriculture, fisheries, health and legal matters.

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Samoans at Sea: Seasonal Work on Ships

*Malama Meleisea and Penelope Schoeffel*⁵²

When one thinks of Samoa — an island nation in the middle of the vast Pacific Ocean — one might assume that seafaring would be an occupation pursued by many Samoans, but in fact few Samoans are involved in the industry. This is because local opportunities for such work are limited. Samoa has interisland ferries, but these offer few positions for trained seafarers so most of those wishing to work in the seafaring industry must find work on international fishing boats, cargo ships and cruise ships — work that requires being away from home for considerable periods of time.

In 2021, around 300 Samoans were employed on international cargo and cruise ships (Membrere 2021), and as of 2024 an estimated 500 Samoans are employed on such ships. The salaries they earn are higher than what they can earn in the local labour market, but Samoa's family-oriented culture means that it is rare for Samoan seafarers to choose a lifetime career at sea.

The global shipping industry is experiencing a shortage of trained seafarers at all levels, with a shortfall worldwide of around 34,000, against a requirement of 498,000 (Yuen et al. 2018). This shortage has in recent years prompted the Samoan government and shipping corporations to promote seafaring as an employment option for Samoans looking for temporary work abroad.

This article discusses the types of seafaring work Samoans currently pursue and the training available in Samoa for such employment, and it presents the perspectives of two Samoans engaged in this work and some of the issues associated with work in this sector. Although the two interviewees are only a small sample, the experiences and motivations of these two young Samoans are similar to each other and to other accounts heard by the authors, so can be considered to be broadly representative of other young Samoans in the seafaring industry.

⁵² The authors thank Vaelua Sonny Brown (ACE, MWTI), Leitufia Fatu Lafoa'i (Head of the NUS SMT), Saivaega Meleisea and Gerard Lagavale for their assistance in researching this chapter.

Qualifications and training for Samoan seafarers

Like those who seek temporary contracts in New Zealand and Australia under the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) and PALM (Pacific Australia Labour Mobility) schemes, Samoans who want to find work in seafaring occupations must speak English, must be good health and must have a clean police record. Employment contracts for seafarers are similar to those of those on labour mobility schemes: most Samoan seafarers work on contracts of nine months per year and may apply to renew their contracts to work the following year if they have performed well.

Unlike workers in the RSE and PALM schemes, however, seafarers must complete a certificate course (in maritime-related training that meets international standards) and must hold a license.⁵³ In Samoa's context, this extra training means that seafarers are generally more highly trained in their field of work than workers who go abroad on the RSE and PALM schemes.

Training of seafarers began in Samoa in the mid 1970's when the Federal Republic of Germany set up a marine training centre under its bilateral aid programme. The training centre was led by a German superintendent with a nautical background, assisted by a technical officer with a marine engineering background. By 1980 the centre was offering a basic maritime course to qualify seafarers for work on the decks and in the engine rooms and catering departments of container ships.

A German company, Hamburg Süd, began to employ Samoan graduates on its vessels in the 1970s, and at the time it was the only international employment provider. By 1983, however, Hamburg Süd could not guarantee enough employment opportunities for graduates. New sources of employment for graduates were found, and in 1986 the Government of Samoa established the Samoa Maritime Academy (SMA). A total of 298 people were trained in the period between 1986 and 1996 (Lene 1997).

A subsidiary of Hamburg Süd — Columbus Line — provided jobs and shipboard training to Samoans completing courses at the SMA. From 2004, the services of Columbus Line were directly integrated into Hamburg-Süd. The connections between those shipping companies led to the Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC) recruiting Samoan seafarers for its cargo and cruise ship divisions. As of 2023, the MSC was the sole recruiter of Samoan seafarers.

⁵³ In Samoa, licences are issued by the Maritime Division of the Ministry of Works, Transport and Infrastructure.

The German government continued its assistance by providing nautical and technical advisors and supplying equipment for the SMA until 1992. The Japanese government also assisted the school by providing two advisors. Other donors likewise provided assistance.

In 2015, the People’s Republic of China built a new maritime campus on the Apia Mulinu’u peninsula, providing the means to consolidate marine training programmes and resources by merging the Samoa Shipping Maritime Academy with the School of Maritime Training at the National University of Samoa (NUS).

Today there are three maritime training programmes at the NUS: fisheries deckhand (certificate level I), marine engineering (certificate level II) and nautical (certificate level II). Samoa is fully compliant with the 1978 International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers. The NUS School of Maritime Studies lacks the equipment required for providing advanced marine engineering courses.

As awareness of seafaring employment has grown, more secondary school graduates have enrolled in the NUS courses. The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a reduction in enrolments in 2021 and 2022 (see Table 1), however, because practical training could not be carried out due to restrictions on movement. Most students who were enrolled between 2018 and 2024 graduated, including some who repeated the programme, and these graduates were eligible to apply for licenses under the standards set by the International Maritime Organization. The largest number of NUS School of Maritime Training enrolments each year are in the nautical programme, and its graduates are the most likely to work on foreign ships.

Table 1: Enrolments in the NUS School of Maritime Training, by year and sex (2018-2024)

Year	Male	Female
2018	132	6
2019	81	10
2020	115	12
2021	62	5
2022	76	4
2023	149	22
2024	143	37

Source: NUS School of Maritime Studies personal communication 2024

At present, Samoa only has the resources to provide basic training for seafarers. Those wishing to obtain the training required to become officers must study overseas, for example in Fiji or New Zealand. The main constraint faced by the NUS to providing officer training is recruiting suitably qualified teaching staff. Another issue is that the cost of expansion to provide officer training would be very high relative to the number of likely graduates. A Pacific regional maritime training college, along the lines of the University of the South Pacific, would be advantageous, but a cost benefit analysis suggests that the cost of transportation and housing would be too high given the small number of students.

The NUS offers certificate programmes in tourism and hospitality, but this training is aimed towards employment in local hotels and restaurants and is insufficient to qualify women to work as cleaners, cooks or stewards on ships. According to the Assistant Chief Executive Officer of the Maritime Division of the Ministry of Works, Transport and Infrastructure (personal communication 2023), graduates of the commercial cooking courses offered in Samoa and hospitality services courses offered by the Australia Pacific Training Consortium would qualify for work on cruise ships, but to be licensed they must also take the safety course offered by the School of Maritime Training at NUS.

Recruiting of licensed graduates for the MSC's fleet of cruise ships and container ships is facilitated by Samoa Shipping Services, a division of the Ministry for Public Enterprises. Male graduates mainly start work on international ships as deckhands. There are limited opportunities for Samoan women to work on international ships, and women generally work on ships as cleaners.

Between 2004 and 2012, around 120 i-Kiribati women were employed on international cruise ships under an agreement between the Government of Kiribati and the Norwegian Cruise Liner (NCL) company (Kagan 2016). However recruitment was stopped because of the perception by government officials and private recruiters that too many of these women fell pregnant on the ships. In our observation, many people in Samoa think this risk of pregnancy is a reason why women should not work abroad on labour mobility schemes. Some also think such work should not be permitted for women who have children – because they must leave their children in the care of relatives, which presents a risk that the children will be neglected (see UNICEF et al. 2024).

Types of seafaring work

Criss-crossing internationalised, de-nationalised and national waters during their employment on merchant vessels and living with multi-national crews, seafarers could ... be seen in many ways as pioneers of global citizenship (Borovnik 2009:143).

Work on cruise ships

Cruise ships represent a growing sector of the global tourism industry, with an estimated 36 million people likely to take a cruise in 2024 (Cruise Lines International Association, cited in Ortolan 7 February 2024). Samoan cruise workers are generally employed with MSC Cruises, the third-largest cruise company in the world, which has a staff of over 30,000 in total (MSC Cruises nd).

Work on cargo ships

On cargo ships, everything is mechanised and computerised. This means that the time spent in port can be less than 24 hours and, unlike cruise ships, cargo ships only need small crews. For example, “a ship carrying 9,000 40-foot containers ... may make the three-week transit from Hong Kong through the Suez Canal to Germany with only twenty people on board” (Levinson 2006). Samoans are employed on cargo ships with the MSC, which has around 300 routes to 520 ports in over 155 countries (MSC nd).

Samoan seafarers

Vai's story

Vai, a man aged 25, previously did seasonal work picking fruit in New Zealand and is now employed on nine-month contracts on MSC cruise ships. So far, he has completed three contracts on several cruise ships.

Vai graduated from the NUS Marine School in 2020. He said he was inspired to get trained in this work by his father, who had been an international engineering seafarer in his younger days and who has been a leader in establishing Samoa's seafarer training programmes.

Vai started as an “ordinary seaman”, and then became an “able seaman” when he had learned his duties as a deckhand, working mainly as one of a team of safety workers. The work is monotonous, requiring repeated checks

of safety equipment across the ship. This must be learned by heart. In his career so far, Vai recalls only one incident, where a fault (in the ship's engine room) was observed and reported for repair.

According to seafarers we have spoken with, as of 2023 Samoan seafarers earned between WST18,000 and WST24,000 for six months of work (between WST3,000 and WST4,000 per month), depending on their level of experience. In comparison, reports from RSE workers in New Zealand indicate that in 2023 they earned between WST14,600 and WST18,723 for six months of work after deductions (between WST2,433 and WST3,120 per month), and PALM workers on temporary contracts in Australia in 2023 earned between WST13,374 and WST16,897 over six months after deductions (between WST2,229 and WST2,816 per month).

As a deckhand, Vai works 8-hour shifts and is paid between USD1,100 and USD1,500 (between WST3,000 and WST4,000) per month, with a monthly deduction of USD10 for health insurance. Workers on cruise ships have to pay for half of the cost of their airfare, an amount which is deducted from their first month's pay. Some believe the deduction is made by Samoa Shipping Services, rather than by the MSC.

Vai was told by a ship's captain that "Samoans are good workers but are more expensive than others", and speculated that the reason for this may be the high cost of the airfares of Samoans to join the ships. Recruits must fly from Samoa to the port where the ship is located, such as Singapore, Dubai, Naples or Sao Paulo, and then return home at the completion of their contracts.

No overtime is paid to deckhands if their watches are extended beyond 8 hours, which some workers believe is unfair. The only exception is when deckhands assist passengers to be transferred ashore in small craft for sightseeing; in such cases the deckhands are paid an extra USD10.

Vai said he much prefers working as a seafarer to working as a fruit picker. Although the wages are not significantly higher for seafaring work, it is easier for seafarers to save money because they are provided with food and board on the ships at no extra cost. His only expenses are for drinks, snacks and other personal items while on board. When Vai worked picking apples in New Zealand he had to pay for his board and lodgings, airfares, insurance and taxes.

Vai remits part of his wages to his mother (between WST1000 and WST2000 monthly); she uses some of the money he remits for family needs and puts some aside for him as savings.

There is strict discipline on board. Seafarers are highly motivated to behave well because if they have negative reports on their personnel records they may not be offered another contract. Anyone who gets drunk or gets into a fight is fired and blacklisted. The ships carry “human resources” staff members to whom reports can be made if interpersonal issues arise such as sexual harassment or other offensive behaviour. Vai commented that Samoan seafarers who do not buy alcohol save more money than seafarers who do. Muslim Indonesian crew members,⁵⁴ for example, are likely to save more of their pay than crew members who drink alcohol.

Most of the men Vai works with are from Indonesia and the Philippines, but Vai said there have always been other Samoans on the cruise ships he has served on; on his last contract there were 13 Samoans, all NUS Marine School graduates, in the cruise ship crew of about 900 men and women. Although the crews come from all over the world, the low-paid work on ships is mainly done by men and women from low-income countries.

In terms of the social context, Vai said that at first he was a bit shocked by social life of staff on cruise ships. In Samoan culture there is great secrecy about non-marital relations, but on the ships he has worked on crew members have been open about their temporary relationships. Some crew members work as couples, but most work as singles. He said he enjoys meeting and making friends with people from other countries.

The working language on board is English, so communication between workers is easy. When he works his watch doing safety inspections, he is in a team with three other men, and the team members get to know one another well. The work is routine and repetitive, but between leaving school and starting work Vai lived in his village and became accustomed to an uneventful life, so he has no complaints about his work. His only wish would be for overtime payments, which would increase his salary.

He said that Samoan women graduating from the NUS School of Maritime Training can get jobs on cruise ships, but they are more likely to be assigned as cleaners than as deckhands. Working as a cleaner offers the chance of

⁵⁴ According to Samoan seafarers, most Muslim crew members they work with do not drink alcohol.

performance-based promotions, unlike deck work. There are no promotion opportunities for cruise deckhands unless they acquire further training, which is not provided by the company.

Vai is interested in building a career on cruise ships. He aims to study towards officer level by obtaining a certificate at the University of the South Pacific. The highest-level of training currently available for seafarers in the Pacific region is Class IV, which is offered at training institutions in New Zealand.

Vala's story

Vala, a man aged 27, is a graduate of the NUS School of Maritime Training and has completed three contracts on MSC container ships (cargo ships). When interviewed in early 2024, he was preparing for his fourth contract. He is unmarried and grew up in a rural village in Samoa.

Like Vai, he worked one season in New Zealand picking fruit. He prefers his present work because he can travel. As he commented, "Since I was a child, I've always dreamed of seeing the world".

His work is in ship maintenance and navigation. He is usually one of a crew of 27 to 30 men, and they take turns to do navigation watches using the computerized navigation system.

He is paid more than those who work on cruise ships. His basic wage is USD1,339 plus a 30-hour overtime allowance, which brings his wage to around USD1,500 (approximately WST4,000) per month, less a ten percent deduction for health insurance. He said the company and the recruiter did not deduct any of his travel costs from his wages. He saves part of his earnings and remits a portion every month to his family. He has bought his family a car and also pays for some of their expenses.

Each time he has signed on, he joined his ship in Singapore. All the ships he has worked on have called into various ports in China to unload and reload before continuing to ports in Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Container ships offer a promotion to "able seaman" without requiring further technical training. A competent deckhand can also be promoted to supervisory level (bosun), which offers a significant jump in wages. Val says there are several Samoan bosuns on MSC cargo ships, but these ships carry very small crews so opportunities to become a bosun are limited.

On several of his contracts, Vala was the only Samoan on board. On his last voyage, the crew were from Eastern Europe, and they were joined by one Samoan after six months aboard. He believes Samoans have a good reputation with the MSC cargo division because they are strong and well mannered.

He said working on ships is a lonely life in some ways, but he meets many people. In his experience, relations between the crew members are friendly and respectful. The crew members have shared access to a television and computers, and many enjoy playing cards together. Good conduct on board is required, so crew members may only buy two alcoholic drinks per day.

In 2021, during the Covid-19 disruptions, Vala spent six months in a Chinese port doing a big refit of a ship. He said that when crew go ashore, they can draw up to 20 percent cash advances on their pay. He joked that when he ate ashore in China he only ate meat that he was sure was chicken, after seeing the range of unfamiliar animals sold as food in the wet markets.

When asked about any concerns he had, he said that (in early 2024) he was concerned about the increased risk of war and piracy for seafarers, including attacks in the Red Sea on ships en route to the Suez Canal.

Vala said that he intends to keep working as a seafarer for the present, but his longer-term ambition is to migrate to New Zealand; he enters the New Zealand visa 'lottery' every year.⁵⁵

The downside of seafaring jobs

According to Yuen et al. (2018:1), retention of seafarers can be difficult because of "boredom at sea, single-task [monotonous] work environment, emotional and work-related stresses" and prolonged time away from family. The time away from family is a particular problem for workers from collectivist cultures,⁵⁶ who "prioritise family bonding over individual needs" (Yuen et al. 2018:2, citing Abdullah 2017). Also, the lack of variety on board means that younger workers often decide to leave seafaring for shore-based jobs as these give them greater freedom and comparable salaries (Yuen et al. 2018).

Because of labour shortages in the shipping industry, many seafarers work longer than eight hours daily, and therefore do not get enough rest (Yuen et

⁵⁵ Under the New Zealand–Samoa Treaty of Friendship, a set quota of migrant visas are offered (via a 'lottery') each year to Samoans who have found guaranteed employment in New Zealand, and who have clean bills of health and police clearance.

⁵⁶ See Brian Alofaituli's article in this volume ("Samoa Tuna Cannery Workers in American Samoa"), which discusses Samoa's collectivist culture.

al. 2018). This lack of rest can be a deterrent for other young people considering seafaring work, so can in turn lead to even greater labour shortages.

Attracting more workers to the shipping industry may require improving working conditions for seafarers, by giving them more rest and more varied tasks, and may also require giving all workers overtime pay.

Motivations and impacts of seafaring work

The accounts by Vai and Vala of their experiences as seafarers show that they have strong family ties, and like the workers participating in labour mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand these men see their jobs as a form of *tautua* (service) to their families and communities.

Vai and Vala both come from a small coastal village on the edge of a lagoon where their ancestors built canoes and fished, and from which, for many generations, their ancestors set sail into the ocean beyond. Their grandfathers lived lives of farming and fishing to support their families, and their grandmothers wove precious 'fine mats', which were the family's wealth, along with the land and sea.

Their village looks like a picture of 'paradise' in a tourist brochure, but it is not seen that way by its young people. Nowadays most young men and, increasingly, young women from their village hope to join labour mobility schemes or migrate so that they can earn sufficient money to meet family obligations and cover church costs, while also getting a glimpse of the world beyond.

The village houses, once made from wood and thatch, are now built with concrete and roofing iron, which are mostly purchased with income earned abroad. The families (in Samoa) of those who migrate or participate in labour mobility schemes today own cars and television sets, smart phones, washing machines and electric fans. They are the consumers of the low-end proceeds of globalised production, shipping and mass tourism systems, which are supported by the cheap labour supplied by their children and others like them from low-income countries across the world. At the same time, their purchases of consumer goods are ensuring ongoing employment opportunities abroad for young people, and these workers bring valuable foreign currency into Samoa.

All of the families in Vai and Vala's village have close relatives in New Zealand, Australia or the United States, and some have family members in two or even all three of these countries. Every family in the village has members who have gone abroad as migrant workers employed in the manufacturing and care industries or via labour mobility schemes (harvesting fruit, doing farm work and processing meat or fish), and now many families have young people who have done well enough in school to train as seafarers and go abroad to work on ships.

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A Better Life?

Penelope Schoeffel, Kalissa Alexeyeff and Malama Meleisea⁵⁷

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 builds a *falepalagi*, a European style house, in their village. At that time, most Samoans lived in traditional thatched-roof open-walled houses (*fale Samoa*) or in semi-traditional *faleapa* with tin roofs. The house they built:

... had four bedrooms, a large sitting room, a flush toilet, a dining room and a kitchen, all screened against insects and proofed against termites. Two large concrete tanks would feed water into the house. There was to be electricity too, supplied by a small generator. A small store was to be built in front of 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

⁵⁷This work was supported by Kalissa Alexeyeff's Australian Research Council Future Fellowship grant (FT FT140100299), "New Regional Labour Circuits in the South Pacific: Gender, Culture and Transnationalism," undertaken at the University of Melbourne. This article is based on findings by researchers at the Centre for Samoan Studies at the National University of Samoa: Alofipo Horisona Alofipo, Angela Natasha Anya Fatupaito, Sa'u Emo Tauave, Samoa James Utuva and Leva'a Alaelua Vaalepu (Survey 1) and Dora Neru-Faafo, Angela Anya Fatupaito, Rev. Malotau Lafolafoga, Fiu Sanele Leota, Loimata Poasa, Temukisa Satoa-Penisula, Pua Ielome Ah Tong and Sa'u Emo Tauave (Survey 2).

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's conceptualization of 'a good life' in her work *Cruel Optimism* (2011) offers an insightful frame for understanding the contradictory experiences and aspirations of Samoan labour migrants. She examines life in post-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 Samoan context. 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. Few studies 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 of research interviews undertaken by staff of the National University of Samoa with the aim of understanding the subjective motivations and experiences of Samoan participants in seasonal work schemes and considers how participation in these 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

⁵⁸Notably, 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 migration was seen 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 rise because coastal erosion threatens most of their housing, public buildings, roads and 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 Islanders and 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 to the 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 to join these schemes was demonstrated in 2021 when a crowd of Samoan men and women trying to register surged into a hall where registration was underway, causing significant damage and injuries (Wilson 2021).

⁵⁹Over 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 Plus⁶⁰ 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 Curtin (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.⁶¹With workers only 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, Australia launched 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, and they 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 numerous issues 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 interviewees, 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 interviewing twenty-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, interviewed twenty-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/meatpacking sector. 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 of the interviewees put it).⁶⁴ The money they earned enabled their families to buy items such as household furniture, appliances and cars, 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 regulations 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 that milk 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 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 back I 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

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

⁶⁵Most 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 finishing building 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 cousins and 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 weed eater, 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't work 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 went abroad 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. I did not finish [secondary] school ... because my parents could not afford it. So I 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 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's plantation, prior to going to Australia. Over there, a labour hire company specializing in supplying horticulture workers throughout the country found him working harvesting 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 family so 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 some good 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 necessities for 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 me though 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 organisers took 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.

⁶⁶This 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 not any better than going with a village group, saying that under the MCIL labour mobility schemes a 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 to become 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 schemes would 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, then signed on to the RSE through MCIL on 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. Poto also 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 one of 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 work and 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 contract is 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 was 50 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 supplying 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 a 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 was hard, 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.

The RSE workers all referred 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 our room 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 other team, 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 time that 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 was ganging 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 reports them 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.

Toa said he completed his first contract but was suspended from participating in labour mobility schemes for three years because 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 in a 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 others were 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

⁶⁷In 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 than 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 home every 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 have four 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 *amatai* 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; this tempts me with sexual feelings.

Sei emphasised that it 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 rule that 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 to New 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 Queensland for 14 months. She had previously been a student in a tourism and hospitality course at the National University of Samoa.

I didn't finish the course because I needed extra income to help my elderly parents, especially my sick father. [With my earnings from working abroad] I bought a secondhand car costing 30,000 tala for my family. I also sent 700 tala 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 was especially 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 in such 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 mobility scheme. 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 paid WST150 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 take the 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 and a 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.

⁶⁸It 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 of the respondents who 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 rules were 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 participants 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) and improve 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 support development 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 greater community wellbeing, then it would appear that the schemes have not achieved this in Samoa.

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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Samoa under the PALM

Penelope Schoeffel, Kalissa Alexeyeff⁷² and Malama Meleisea

Pamela, like many other Samoans, hopes to one day attain resident status 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 meat packer for three years. When interviewed as part of a survey of thirteen Samoan PALM workers in 2022, Pamela told the interviewer that 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 income through remittances from 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 the PLS).

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 PLS as 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 may get 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 aged care. Among skilled 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 assisting them 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 connections 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 families 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 PALM scheme. 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 interviewed via video calls. Of the thirteen respondents, eight worked in meatpacking, four in aged-care homes and one in 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 experiences in 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 contracts were motivated to work overseas to earn money to improve existing houses or build new houses in Samoa for their families and 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 article of 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 abattoirs 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 said meatpacking 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'alavelave when 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 what 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 help them, 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 had moved around within the meatpacking plant, performing a 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 and the short breaks and 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 had gained new skills and had friendly workmates, and she enjoyed the 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 freezer if 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 checkups and to church.

Unlike the other women working 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 be very 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, home every 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 to 800tala, 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 them to 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 duties 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 can work. 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 4,000 tala 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 2,000 Australian 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 to try 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 because they need 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 and wanted 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 they had paid for that training.

She felt financially squeezed by the terms of her contract. Australian companies employing workers under labour mobility schemes do 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, superannuation 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 bill for 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 are 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 or win-lose. Many of the Samoans survey respondents have mixed feelings about the schemes. While all of the participants appreciate 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 churches and 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

⁷³English 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 meatpacking and 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 by Australia’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 of education in 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 PALM could 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 country abroad with them through church communities that operate somewhat like their villages in the homeland, but Pasifika migrant families have tended to remain in the lower tiers of society in the host countries, which reinforces the intersectionality of societal race and class prejudices.

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 that Indian 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 enterprises. 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 Samoans give their families much of what they

earn and have relatively little capital 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 childrearing (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 child self-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 families and communities at 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 contracts of three or four years, or even longer, is a period of sacrifice that will ultimately better their families' lives by 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, aged care and agriculture in Australia and New Zealand in the foreseeable future.

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Impacts of Labour Mobility Schemes on Samoa's Labour Market

Penelope Schoeffel, Masami Tsujita and Michael Yemoh

Since labour mobility schemes began in 2007, thousands of Samoans have signed on to work in industries such as horticulture and viticulture in Australia and New Zealand. Among those who have joined the schemes are significant numbers of trained workers who have left their jobs in Samoa, including jobs in the government and in the professional, hospitality and retail sectors. This has left employers in Samoa without labour, which has had adverse impacts on their businesses. This article discusses labour mobility schemes and longer-term work opportunities abroad, and the problems they have posed for public and private sector employers in Samoa.

Labour mobility schemes

For many decades, labour-intensive sectors in New Zealand and Australia, such as the agriculture sector, have employed local workers, backpackers and migrant labourers, including Samoans. In New Zealand, with rapid growth of these industries and a low unemployment rate, significant labour shortages emerged in the 2000s, especially at peak periods of the agricultural cycle (Gibson and Bailey 2021). The labour migration policies of New Zealand at that time prioritized skilled workers, so the immigration door was closed for unskilled Pacific Island workers. At the same time, these unskilled workers had limited employment opportunities in their local labour markets. It was against this background the World Bank implemented a pilot seasonal work scheme in New Zealand in 2006 with forty-five workers from Vanuatu.

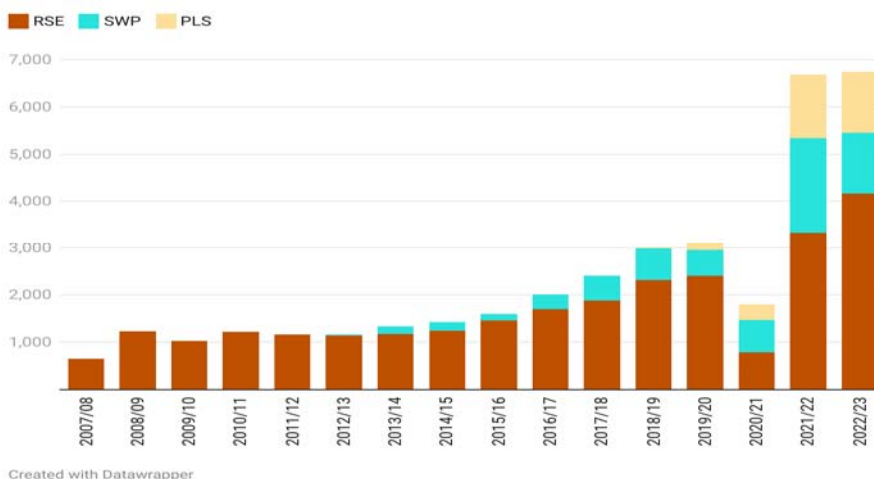
Following the success of this pilot project, in 2007 New Zealand launched the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, which allowed Pacific Islanders access as temporary workers in the horticulture and viticulture industries (see Nunns, Bedford and Bedford 2019). Under the RSE scheme, temporary visas are offered to workers for up to seven months in any eleven-month period (Immigration New Zealand nd). Between 2007 and 2021, 22,380 RSE visas were issued to Samoan workers (Bedford and Bedford 2023:41).

After much debate, in 2012 Australia launched a similar scheme: the Seasonal Work Programme (SWP). Like the RSE, the SWP offered temporary work visas for seasonal work in the agriculture and hospitality sectors for up to nine months per contract. Between 2012 and 2020, 320 Samoan workers participated in the SWP per year, on average (ILO 2022:6).

In 2018, Australia launched the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS), which provided longer-term visas to Pacific Islanders, allowing them to work for up to three years in rural and regional hotels and restaurants, the health care and social assistance sectors, as well as in non-seasonal jobs in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. After a review in 2021, the two Australian schemes (SWP and PLS) were combined in 2022 to form the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. The PALM scheme allows contracts of up to four years (Minister for International Development and the Pacific 2021).

According to Sharman and Bedford (2023), in 2018/19, 3,013 Samoan citizens joined labour mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand. In 2021/22, more than double that number were mobilised: 6,684 workers. According to Howes et al. (2022), as of mid-2022 approximately 7,600 Samoans were employed in New Zealand and Australia through the RSE and PALM schemes. Figure 1 illustrates the increase in participation by Samoans in the labour mobility schemes since 2007.

Figure 1: Samoa's participation in Australian and New Zealand labour schemes, 2007 to 2023



Source: Sharman and Bedford 2023

Note: The low figures for 2020/21 reflect the restrictions on movement during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many Pacific Island Countries participate in the RSE and PALM schemes. Of these countries, three – Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu – have contributed more than 10 percent of their male working age population to the schemes. In Tonga, it is almost one in five (18 percent), and in Samoa and Vanuatu it is 14 percent each. After that, the ratios are much smaller: generally 3 percent and below (Howes, Cyrtain and Sharman 2022).

Long-term work visas

In 2022, New Zealand introduced the Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV), a temporary work visa that anyone can apply for if they have a job offer from an accredited employer and meet the health and character requirements.⁷⁷ The AEWV provides a visa pathway for skilled Samoans to work for accredited New Zealand employers facing a shortage of skilled labour.

In 2023, New Zealand simplified the points system of the Skilled Migrant Visa, which targets people with particular skills and allows successful applicants to live, work and study in New Zealand indefinitely (Government of New Zealand nd).

Samoans can also apply for the New Zealand quota visa. Under the Treaty of Friendship between Samoa and New Zealand, an annual 'lottery' system is used to select applicants for residence visas. Up to 1,650⁷⁸ Samoan citizens aged 18 to 45, including their partners and dependent children, may be granted residence in New Zealand each year if they can prove good character and if they, as an individual or a couple, have a job or jobs to go. As of 2024, the minimum annual income is NZD53,515 (Immigration New Zealand 2024). However, although thousands⁷⁹ of Samoans apply every year, the quota is never filled, as the condition of having employment lined up in advance is hard to meet (Radio New Zealand 3 October 2017; Radio New Zealand 27 March 2018).

⁷⁷ This visa replaced several other New Zealand work visas, including the Essential Skills Work Visa, the Talent (Accredited Employer) Work Visa, the Long-Term Skill Shortage List Work Visa, the Silver Fern Job Search Visa and the Silver Fern Practical Experience Visa.

⁷⁸ In 2023, the Government of New Zealand increased the annual Samoa Quota from 1,100 to 1,650 until 2026 (Government of Samoa 1 August 2023).

⁷⁹ Until 2015, fewer than 8,000 people applied per year. Since then, numbers have increased steadily, with more than 15,000 people applying in 2017 (Radio New Zealand 4 July 2017) and 16,500 applying in 2018 (Radio New Zealand 20 July 2018).

As noted by Howes and Surandiran (2021), many Samoans with New Zealand citizenship choose to move from New Zealand to Australia, where wages are higher. Under the 1973 Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement, Australian and New Zealand citizens were able to enter each other's countries to live and work there indefinitely, but this changed in 1994 when all non-citizens entering Australia were required to have a visa. From then onwards, New Zealand citizens have been granted 'Special Category' visas, which allow them to live, study and work in Australia, but do not offer same rights and benefits that Australian citizens and permanent residents have. For example, New Zealanders are subject to deportation from Australia if they do not meet Australia's character requirements. Since July 2023, New Zealand citizens who have 'Special Category' visas and have been living in Australia for four or more years are eligible to apply for Australian citizenship (New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Tradend).

In June 2024, Australia launched the "Pacific Engagement Visa" (PEV). Unlike the PALM scheme, it allows permanent residency in Australia for eligible citizens of participating Pacific countries. To be eligible, applicants must meet health, character and English language requirements and must also have a formal job offer in Australia (Government of Australia nd).

Long-term work visas for skilled workers are attractive to Pacific Islanders, but such visas require applicants to find work before applying, which is not easy, so some skilled workers find labour mobility schemes to be more attractive.

Benefits of the labour mobility schemes

The labour mobility schemes are seen as a 'win-win' for both the sending and receiving countries. The Australia and New Zealand governments talk about the economy-boosting impact of these programmes, as they alleviate labour shortages in the receiving countries, for example shortages in the horticulture and meat packing industries.

At the same time, these schemes provide Samoans and other Pacific Islanders with temporary employment opportunities abroad and enable them to earn more money than they could over the same period at home. The Samoa Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (MCIL) 2020 annual report estimated that over a period of six months RSE workers could earn between WST14,601 and WST18,723 after tax and deductions, while SWP earnings

ranged from WST13,374 and WST16,897 for a six-month period. By Samoan standards, these earnings are high; they are similar to the annual salaries of senior officers in government ministries in Samoa.

The schemes also offer an opportunity to learn new skills (MCIL 2023). Labour mobility schemes also have the advantage that they often impose employment circumstances that facilitate saving money. Such circumstances include contractual restrictions that require workers to live in employer-provided living quarters, compulsory saving arrangements and restrictions on leaving jobs to work for another employer.

As intended, the labour mobility schemes have brought a huge capital injection into the economy of Samoa in the form of remittances from workers while they are abroad and have led to increased local spending upon the return of the workers. Returning workers usually spend their savings on goods such as cars, materials for home renovations, home appliances and furniture that enhance their families' comfort and status (see the articles titled 'A Better Life?' and 'Samoa Under the PALM' in this volume). This has brought benefits to the private businesses in Samoa that sell the imported goods that returnees buy.

From the perspective of a Samoan household, in which earnings are pooled, another benefit of labour mobility schemes is that the families only temporarily lose the services of a member, while gaining access to remittances and goods to improve their comfort and status.

A recent study, titled the *Pacific Labor Mobility Survey* (PLMS), sponsored by the World Bank with the Australian National University, surveyed workers from Tonga, Vanuatu and Kiribati (Doan, Dornan and Edwards 2023) with the objective of testing the finding of the World Bank report titled *Well-being from Work in the Pacific Island Countries* (Haque and Packard 2012:1) that:

In the Pacific island countries, which are small and far from world markets, labor mobility represents the most significant and substantial opportunity for overcoming geographic constraints on employment.

The PLMS study verified this assertion and also claimed that the New Zealand and Australian labour mobility schemes have overwhelmingly positive outcomes on the countries studied, finding that:

In contrast to common assumption, data from the PLMS reveal net social gain from the labor mobility schemes: participation generally strengthens family relationships, empowers women, and shifts gender-related norms (Doan, Dornan and Edwards 2023).

The PLMS report has a somewhat defensive tone, aiming perhaps to contradict the many media reports and studies that point to the exploitation of workers in relation to pay deductions and other abuses, the low quality of housing abroad and harmful social impacts on workers and their families at home (see, for example, Sharman 2022; New Zealand Human Rights Commission 2022; Petrou and Connell 2023). But the PLMS study did not consider the impacts of the labour mobility schemes beyond the benefits for individuals (participants in the schemes) and their households.

Among the PLMS report's recommendations is that New Zealand introduce a scheme equivalent to Australia's Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS), which allows for longer-term work visas (Doan, Dornan and Edwards 2023:14). However, before Samoa agrees to participate in such a scheme it is advisable to first consider what impacts the PLS scheme and the other labour mobility schemes have had on Samoa's labour market and public sector.

The employers' perspective: A labour shortage in Samoa

While Samoa has a fairly high official unemployment rate, which would seem to indicate that there are many young people available to work in Samoa, a study by Yemoh (2022) of managers and proprietors of thirty-one small and medium non-agricultural businesses in Samoa found that these employers believe there is a shortage of labour in the country. Overall, most employers in Samoa report having difficulty finding and retaining trained, dependable and honest workers.

Although employers mostly pay workers the minimum wage, business owners sometimes raise their wages above that minimum level to attempt to retain skilled and reliable employees. One of the employers interviewed in Yemoh's study said:

One of our priorities now is the assurance of longevity with the company. To retain workers we have in the past offered additional benefits and restructured salary or wage packages as a necessary incentive.

However, workers are always on the lookout for better-paid work. Because of the higher pay, government jobs are particularly sought after. One business owner interviewed said:

We do have some loyal staff, but also some who come for a couple of months; some are temporary and waiting for a visa. ... One left because he found a job in the government.

Labour mobility schemes offer even higher wages than the public sector, and such wages cannot be matched by local businesses. Many interviewees mentioned that they had lost, or expected to lose, workers to labour mobility schemes.

The following responses are representative of the interviewees' experiences:

I have lost nine people to seasonal work over the past four years.

We've lost seven staff members over five years.

I've lost four staff members to seasonal work since the beginning of 2021. In the last six months, we've found out about five of our staff applying and making excuses to miss work.

[We lost] up to twenty staff members in total across all my businesses. They were good people. People who are serious about work ethic, who have a commitment to a job ... will not be available as they have been snapped up by the scheme.

Employers have tried to replace staff they have lost to the schemes but have difficulty recruiting good staff. Reasons given for their dissatisfaction with employees include staff laziness and lack of drive, habitual lateness, failure to let supervisors know when they are sick or unable to come to work for other reasons, poor personal presentation, stealing and troublemaking.

The labour mobility schemes are meant to benefit unemployed people⁸⁰ who lack skills required in the local labour market, but the responses of the employers to the survey indicate that many people recruited for the schemes were not unemployed, and they already had valuable skills. A majority of the respondents said that they had lost skilled and trained workers to labour mobility schemes.

It is difficult to attract technically skilled people in our field. Once they gain the skill with us, it is difficult to retain them as their next destination is overseas with better pay.

[Labour mobility schemes] are taking more skilled workers than unskilled, especially from industries like tourism and hospitality, which were distressed by Covid-19 border closures.

⁸⁰ Officially, only unemployed people are eligible to apply for the seasonal worker schemes, but employed people have succeeded in participating in the schemes either because of the delay between the time they applied and the time they received an offer or because they were untruthful in their applications.

We have lost an engineer to the scheme.

The brightest and strongest have been recruited and exported overseas from the pool of labour.

All of the survey respondents said that they provided some sort of training for their employees. Thus, any loss of workers who may not return in the short term, or at all, to the same work roles represented a loss of resources invested, and employers in Samoa experience an ongoing cycle of recruiting and training new workers who may soon leave.

Some of the challenges experienced by employers include the following:

When I do hiring and put out an advert for a job, I tend to get almost a hundred applicants. From those, I invite about thirty for an interview. ... Not all show up for the interview. Of those interviewed, about half come to do a three-month trial. Many do not last. Usually after the first month, the number halves and after another month the number halves again.

[The loss of staff] is more than a loss of critical skilled labour; it leads to unplanned reinvestment in training, hiring, etc.

[I lost] two of my main bakers who I had... invested [in for] five years. ... I had to train them hands-on ... [and they can now] walk into any bakery in New Zealand and do the same job.

The loss of staff slows down production, which means more hiring of staff, which affects our business operations and bottom line. We lose money and customers as production goes down and or the quality is not the same.

The [seasonal work] programmes are actually draining Samoa of its best and experienced workers who have developed good work ethic and experience, thus leaving a considerable shortage at the senior level in many sectors in the workforce. The programmes are now taking senior workers and even at the management and supervisory level, out of their places of employment to do jobs [overseas] that could be done by those with lesser or no training and skills. By employing senior and skilled workers who already have jobs, [the schemes] are ... leaving huge gaps in Samoa's workforce ... which often cannot be filled for some time and it will take even years of training to achieve the same level as those who have departed.

Business owners often recruit additional workers and train them as insurance against losing those they have already trained, which increases the businesses' training costs.

The argument that seasonal workers acquire skills from seasonal work was rejected by some of the employers interviewed:

The more people we send overseas, the less we have in the country and I believe that harms the country. Even if it is seasonal. If they return to the country, they

still leave the country with fewer workers. [Loss of the trained,skilled workers] is not good for the country in the long run.

Australia and New Zealand get the best workers; the strong, able-bodied, young.... They are taking the very best of the workers from the private sector.

When the people come back, especially the men, some become very lazy. They refuse the work here because they are expecting to be paid the same amount of salary that they used to get when they were overseas.

However, another employer disagreed:

One of my staff that went on the scheme has learned a lot about the work ethic ... and [gained] work skills from the scheme.

The comments shared by Samoan employers indicate that labour mobility schemes are imposing heavy costs on local business owners by recruiting from the pool of employed skilled labour and, most importantly: trained, reliable and honest staff.

Labour mobility schemes require fit workers who are aged between 21 and 40 with a clean police record and references from community leaders; these are similar characteristics in the workers sought by local employers. In effect, local employers are competing against overseas business owners for healthy, young, honest and reliable Samoan workers.

While some businesses in Samoa have benefited from the labour mobility schemes, through sales of products such as cars, home appliances and building materials to returnees, the responses from the business owners indicate that the private sector overall has been hit hard.

The public sector perspective: Loss of an investment

The relatively high wages offered underlabour mobility schemes have led to significant numbers of Samoan skilled public sector workers, including teachers, nurses, police officers, clerical workers and technicians, leaving their jobs in Samoa to go abroad on temporary contracts. These workers usually quit their jobs in advance of applying for the schemes so they can say that they are 'unemployed' and have a chance of being selected.

In 2022, Fualo Harry Schuster, Minister for Police and Prisons, expressed concern about the impact of labour mobility schemes on the police force, saying that the Ministry was losing police officers to the schemes and that this loss of skilled staff was also affecting other fields in Samoa (Keresoma 2022).

Is 'unemployment' an issue in Samoa?

In 2021, around one fifth of the youth population (aged 15 to 24) in Samoa was 'unemployed' (Statista nd). This high rate indicates that there are many young people available to work. In that case, why are so many employers in the private and public sectors having difficulty finding and retaining employees? Does Samoa really have a high unemployment rate? To answer these questions, it is necessary to consider certain features of Samoan society and how those relate to employment.

Most Samoan households, especially those in rural areas, earn money through various means, including informal sources, wages, casual labour and remittances. Any money earned by family members is pooled; therefore only some family members seek wage employment, which allows other members of the family the time to engage in farming, fishing and other subsistence and domestic activities.

'Employment' is defined in Samoa's official statistics as paid work. Everyone not working for payment is therefore considered 'unemployed'. But these 'unemployed' people include those who are generally already engaged in unpaid work (for example selling excess produce from their family plantation) and who may not actually be seeking paid employment. Unemployment statistics in Samoa are misleading if they imply that unemployed people are idle, without any work to do; this is not the case.

In Samoa, all adult able-bodied Samoans work, but they do not all receive payment for their labour. Much work is unpaid. Most workers in Samoa can be assumed to be employed in the household-based informal economy. It is likely that in Samoa only very young children, elderly and people with disabilities are actually 'unemployed' in the sense of being economically inactive. In Samoa, it is more accurate to think of 'unemployed people' as individuals who work but who do not have regular access to cash incomes.

According to Taua'a (2021), Samoa's informal economy accounts for between 70 percent and 80 percent of the entire economy and includes small-scale street vending and local market sales of handicrafts, cooked food, processed cocoa and kava, fish, firewood and charcoal; growers, harvesters and sellers of excess fruit and vegetables, coconuts and staple food crops such as taro and bananas.

Men, especially young men, are responsible for activities like farming and fishing in the informal economy. Men grow the staple crops, go fishing, collect

coconuts, care for livestock and do heavy cooking tasks such as making the *umu* and *saka*.⁸¹ Because these young men are working for their families, providing *tautua* (service), they are not paid.

Samoa women predominate in other kinds of unpaid occupations. Women donate labour on a regular basis for community activities such as village clean ups and inspections of household sanitation (*asiasiga*), performing tasks for their churches and fundraising, while also cleaning, cooking and caring for the extended family (including children and the elderly); processing *koko Samoa* (Samoan cocoa); growing vegetables, fruit and flowers in their household compounds; and weaving mats, baskets and fans for sale in the informal economy.

Discussing Samoa's informal economy, Taua'a (2021:8) cites data from the 2011 census noting that the category of 'self employed' is not disaggregated according to whether the occupation is formal (ie. taxed) or informal, and she suggests there are more street vendors than reported (see Table 1). She also argues that the category 'subsistence' is not a meaningful one because a large proportion of subsistence producers (mainly women) also make goods for sale. According to Taua'a, gender percentages are also misleading because there is typically engagement by both men and women in informal economy occupations, for example women grow pandanus and make fans, while young men sell them on the streets.

Table 1: Informal employment by census enumeration and sex, 2011

Employment status	Total	% male	% female
Self employed	3,984	65	34
Make goods for sale	1,040	47	53
Street vendors	60	61.7	38.3
Subsistence	16,085	94.0	5.8

According to the ILO (2019), in 2017 more than two-thirds of all employed people in Samoa were male. As shown in Table 2, the unemployment rate of women is consistently higher than that of their male counterparts. The youngest age group (20–24) has the highest unemployment rate overall at 28.3 percent, and young women in this age group in rural areas have the

⁸¹An *umu* is a ground oven of hot stones, usually made on Sunday mornings and for special occasions. A *saka* is a large pot of staple food (such as taro) boiled on an open fire for daily meals.

highest unemployment rate (41 percent). The higher proportion of females recorded as ‘unemployed’ reflects the gendered divisions of labour in Samoa; normally women do not do heavy outdoor work, so men predominate in paid full-time and casual unskilled or semi-skilled paid labouring jobs. Even driving buses and taxis or operating light machinery is considered ‘men’s work’ in Samoa.

Table 2: Unemployment rates of men and women aged 20-49 (2017)

Age group	Samoa			Urban			Rural		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
20-24	28.3	21.7	38.2	22.8	20.0	27.6	29.9	22.2	41.0
25-29	19.9	18.6	21.9	15.5	17.0	13.3	21.7	19.2	25.4
30-34	14.5	9.0	22.5	8.8	5.6	12.5	16.2	9.9	26.3
35-39	10.1	6.7	15.8	7.9	4.7	12.0	10.8	7.3	17.1
40-44	7.4	3.8	14.0	7.1	1.6	13.7	7.5	4.4	14.2
45-49	6.6	5.0	10.3	7.1	9.4	2.9	6.4	4.0	12.8

Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2020a:91

The type of work that employees are required to do abroad in labour mobility schemes is mostly very physical and is similar to the work conducted by men in Samoa, so is generally considered ‘men’s work’. Hence, most of the participants in labour mobility schemes are men. Between 2012 to 2020, only 6.5 percent of the SWP participants from Samoa were women (ILO 2022), while between 2007 and 2021 only 4.9 percent of Samoa’s RSE participants were women (Bedford and Bedford 2023:43). However, perceptions are beginning to change, and there are increasing numbers of women choosing to work as fruit pickers and to undertake other outdoor work (see the previous articles in this issue).

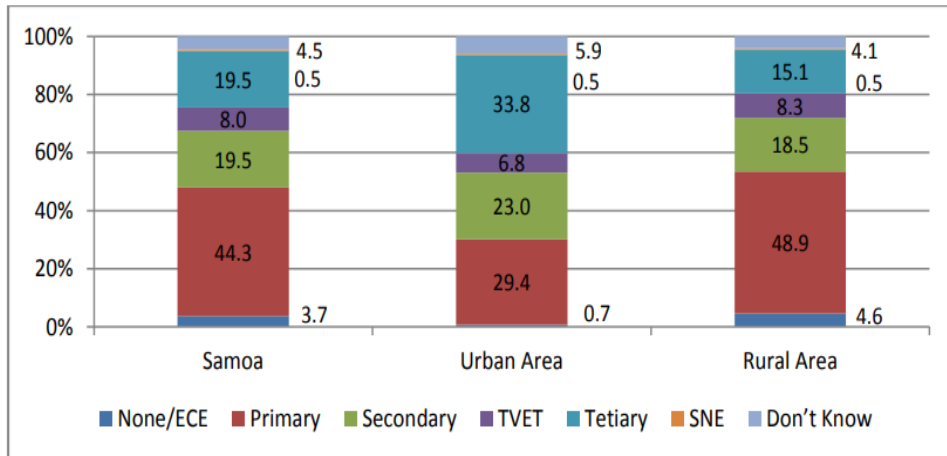
What kinds of education and training best meet the demands of the local labour market?

Unemployment in Samoa is not necessarily due to a lack of education. According to the Samoa Qualifications Authority (2021) even graduates with post-school qualifications face unemployment challenges, with only half (52 percent) of them finding employment within six months of completing their studies. This indicates a possible mismatch between education outcomes and labour market demand. It is also possible that those who have achieved post-

school qualifications are reluctant to take the minimum-wage jobs that are available in Samoa.

As shown in Figure 2, in 2017 almost half (44.3 percent) of Samoa's labour force reported primary school as their highest education attainment.

Figure 2. Labour force by completed level of education (2017)



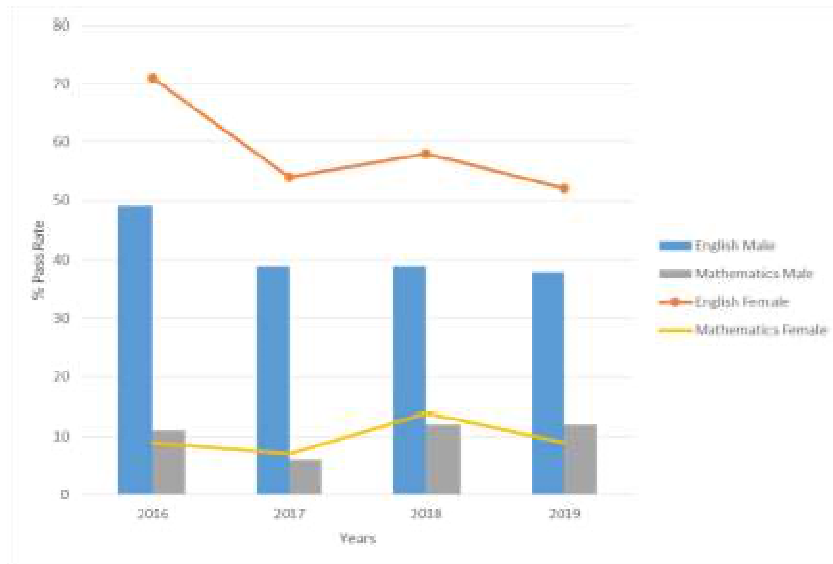
Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2017:21

Until the 1990s, admission to senior secondary schools (Years 9-13) in Samoa was often limited to those with higher socioeconomic status and with higher grades, mainly children from urban areas and children (from urban and rural areas) who passed the entry examinations for selective secondary schools. In the late 1990s, with funding from the Asian Development Bank and other donors, Samoa built and equipped secondary schools in rural areas, and therefore 'opened up' secondary education to all Samoans. Unfortunately, sufficient investment was not made in teacher training. In 2019, less than half of all students passed the penultimate examinations in subjects offered by all secondary schools, and in 2018 only 14 percent passed mathematics (Ministry of Education Sports and Culture 2019:38). A pass is required to enter the National University of Samoa although lower grades are acceptable for entry into Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes. Rural students are less likely than urban students to pass examinations with high grades.

Samoa has achieved gender parity in enrollment rates in education, but the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC) statistical digests have

shown a persistent difference in the achievements of female and male students in Samoa's primary and secondary schools, with male student performance lagging behind that of their female counterparts (see Figure 3). Young men are therefore less eligible for higher education than young women. Women also achieve more post-school qualifications than men do.

Figure 3: Male and female school leaving examination pass rate for English and Mathematics, 2016-2019



Source: Ministry of Education and Culture (2023)

Since 2004, TVET classes have been offered at Samoan secondary schools as part of the general curriculum from Year 9 to Year 13 to encourage students to enrol in TVET courses after secondary school, but a shortage of qualified teachers and limited community support have hindered effective implementation of TVET courses (Wright-Fualautoalasi 2021). In 2021, only 1,277 out of 4,546 post-secondary students were enrolled in TVET courses (SQA 2021).

There is a much higher preference among high school graduates to enrol in university courses compared to TVET courses because university courses are generally perceived as leading to higher-paid jobs. Moreover, parents of high school graduates who achieve grades that would allow them to enter university encourage their children to enrol in academic programmes at university rather than in TVET courses, hoping that the children will get

government jobs when they graduate or win scholarships to study overseas. The proportion of TVET graduates in the labour force is low compared to university graduates, with only 5.6 percent of those employed in Samoa in 2022 having TVET as their highest level of education compared to 23.4 percent having tertiary education (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2023:31).

According to the Samoa Bureau of Statistics (2023:59), in 2019 there were 276 manufacturing enterprises in Samoa, 60 of which were food and beverage manufacturers. As of 2023, Frankies was the largest employer in the private sector, with around 2,500 employees. The Ah Liki Corporation, a Samoan family-owned business, was the second largest private employer, with an estimated 2,000 employees. Most small- and medium-sized businesses are Samoan-owned, although there are several large supermarkets and hotels owned by investors from overseas and there are several multinational corporations in the information and communications industry.

Why do so many Samoan workers leave their jobs?

The experiences of Yazaki Corporation⁸² in Samoa offers some insight into the motivations and choices of young Samoan workers. During its twenty-six years in Samoa, Yazaki Electrical Distribution System Samoa (YES) employed over 60,000 local workers, mostly young early school leavers with an average age of 20 to 23. In the last five years of the company's operations in Samoa the starting rate for shop-floor operators was at the country's then minimum wage of WST2.30 per hour (about WST4,800 per year), with an annual pay increase of WST0.10 per hour. According to a study by Tsujita (2019, 2022), working conditions on the Yazaki assembly line were arduous, requiring workers to stand for long hours in a hot and humid factory floor.

Although the working conditions and pay offered by the company were not attractive, Yazaki provided an accessible employment opportunity for unskilled youth. When the company opened its doors in 1991, it was the first time that major employment opportunities became available in the formal (paid) sector for young female school leavers (unskilled female workers) in Samoa. In the company's early years, the vast majority of employees (between 90 percent and 95 percent) were women, though in its later years the gender balance became more equal, with 65 percent women in 2017

⁸² See the article titled 'The Socioeconomic Context of the New Samoan Exodus: 2007–2023' in this volume for further information about Yazaki and its activities in Samoa.

(Tsujita 2019). This change may reflect an increase in demand for wage employment among Samoan male youth over that period.

Most of the participants in Tsujita's study (2019) responded that they joined Yazakito to earn an income to support their family, and their parents in particular, thus performing their cultural duty of serving their families and villages. Earning an income also enabled young workers to gain a sense of self-worth and a temporary break from the strict oversight of their families and the village rules. However, more than half of the Yazaki operators left the factory within their first year, over 75 percent left within three years, and only about 10 percent worked at YES for more than ten years.

Tsujita found two main reasons for retention problems. First, the weekly earnings of employees were only supplements to their livelihoods; the income earned at the Yazaki factory was appreciated but was not essential to the family's survival. This is because wages are only one of several economic strategies that most households in Samoa use to get by. Key sources of livelihoods in Samoa include semi-subsistence farming on customary land, semi-subsistence fishing and remittances from relatives overseas. The second reason why employees did not stay long at YES is because they felt obliged to undertake unpaid work at home.⁸³ In Samoa young adults are expected to give priority to family, church and village activities, and daily life in Samoa is full of obligatory communal events that require their time. Such events include funerals, church hall openings, village cleanups, hosting visitors and caring for the elderly and for the children of extended family members.

Employees would quit their jobs at YES and then request to be re-employed later, when their obligations elsewhere had been met. Initially the company was reluctant to re-employ those who left their jobs, but it had to revise its recruitment policies to retain a core number of operators to meet production demands. Rehiring of former operators decreased the time allocated to training from one month to one week (the time required to refresh the skills previously acquired).

By 2011/12, retaining young workers had become more difficult and competitive due to the growth in Samoa's private sector, particularly in wholesale and retail trade, which created more low-skill jobs for local youth

⁸³ Samoa is a kin-based and community-oriented society and in this cultural context, young adults' (unpaid) labour is an important household resource, which is often considered more important than earning a minimum wage.

(MCIL 2013). By then, labour mobility schemes had also begun, offering young people alternatives to working for YES.

The company started its full operation with 1,327 employees and gradually increased the number of employees to meet expanded production volumes. Between 1991 and 2007, the company employed an average of 2,200 workers per year, with a peak of 3,500 workers in 1996. In mid-2007, due to the global financial crisis, the company lost some buyers and reduced its operation size. From 2012 onwards, the company employed around 800 people. YES remained the largest private sector employer of Samoa until its closure in August 2017.

The decision to close the factory came about as a result of the Australian government's decision to stop subsidizing the car manufacturing industry, which led to the closure of the Toyota Australia assembly plant in Melbourne, which was by then YES's sole client (Tsujiita 2019).

The origins of YES are linked to Australia's neoliberal economic policies. In 1985, the Australian government initiated a Motor Industry Development Plan, which reduced tariffs on imported goods for the domestic automotive manufacturing industry and aimed to improve the competitiveness of the industry. This plan encouraged car parts suppliers in Australia, including Yazaki Australia, to outsource the making of labour-intensive products to locations with cheaper labour costs and then import the completed products into Australia. This was only effective as long as the cheap labour force did not have better options and the Australian government was willing to support its manufacturing industry.

This case illustrates the perverse forces of globalization and neoliberal policies. Yazaki shifted its labour-intensive factory from Australia to Samoa in pursuit of a cheap labour force, but labour mobility schemes subsequently pushed this labour force to seek work in Australia and New Zealand.

Since the closure of the Yazaki factory the Samoan government has sought new foreign investors to fill the gap in local job market, but unskilled Samoan workers prefer seeking work abroad through labour mobility schemes. Given the inability of young workers to commit long-term to minimum wage jobs (due to their family obligations), the temporary nature of labour mobility work makes it ideal for many young Samoans.⁸⁴ Labour mobility schemes are

⁸⁴According to the "Pacific Attitudes" survey (Leach et al. 2022), most (84 percent) young people responded that they are very willing to travel overseas temporarily for work, but when asked about their willingness to move overseas permanently, the figure dropped to 69 percent.

especially attractive because the income earned is significantly higher than the amount they could earn at home over a similar period, and workers are able to save a considerable amount of their income (see the previous articles in this volume).

Labour mobility vs local employers

Although labour mobility schemes have boosted remittances and are very popular, these schemes have caused a local labour shortage in Samoa because thousands of working-age Samoans have gone overseas where they can earn higher incomes. Without a pool of cheap labour, Samoa has become less attractive to foreign investors wanting to invest in industries that create jobs. Accordingly, while labour mobility schemes offer well-paid temporary work for low-skilled Samoans, they can be considered a contributing factor to the perennial labour shortage in Samoa.

The anticipation was that labour mobility schemes would upgrade participants' skills and boost productivity in the domestic labour market upon the return of the workers, but instead many trained, skilled workers have resigned from local jobs and have taken their skills elsewhere, and the skills that workers gain abroad (e.g. meatpacking) are not always useful when they return.

Except for the businesses selling cars, home appliances and building materials to the returning workers, the private sector has been hit hard, with many businesses losing the investments they have made in training workers.

In effect, labour-intensive businesses in Australia and New Zealand are being backed by their governments to source cheap labour from the Pacific Islands to overcome their labour shortages, at the expense of Samoa's private sector. While business owners in Samoa are struggling to retain experienced local workers, employers in Australia and New Zealand are guaranteed by the labour mobility schemes to bond Samoan workers to the visa sponsor, usually their employer, for a contracted period of time. Employers in Samoa face similar labour shortages to those of employers in rural New Zealand and Australia, but in circumstances they cannot compete with.

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Labour Mobility: A Blessing and a Curse

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Over the past 17 years, labour mobility schemes, including the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme and Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, have offered a supposedly win-win opportunity for Pacific Island nations and the receiving countries (New Zealand and Australia). These schemes benefit Pacific Islanders by offering them higher pay and enabling them to live more prosperously in their own countries, while also benefiting New Zealand and Australia by providing labour to fill workforce shortages in certain industries.

There is no doubt that outward labour mobility has brought material wealth to many Samoans. These schemes allow people to earn and save large amounts of money very quickly, making them very popular in Samoa. With high expectations for what constitutes 'a better life', many Samoans believe that these schemes are the only feasible means of reaching their material goals. Since the schemes began in 2007, thousands have signed on for temporary jobs in New Zealand and Australia in fields such as fruit picking, caregiving and meatpacking. The percentage of Samoa's working age population participating in labour mobility schemes has risen significantly in recent years, reaching 6.4 per cent in 2023 (Dingwall 27 April 2024).

Labour mobility schemes were promoted as also benefiting the private sectors of sending countries. It was assumed that seasonal workers would return to their countries with new and economically advantageous skills, and that the money earned by those working overseas would be productively invested at home. However, surveys of Samoan participants in labour mobility schemes and Samoan employers (see the preceding articles in this volume) do not present much evidence of workers bringing home skills that can be applied in Samoa. Furthermore, we see little evidence of investment of the money earned by participants in labour mobility schemes in job-creation or productive ventures, and none of it is spent on infrastructure or social services. Instead, remittances are spent on living expenses, on traditional ceremonies (purchasing items for the gift-exchange economy) and on church donations. The savings brought home to Samoa are most often used to buy imported goods such as second-hand cars, furniture, home appliances and

building materials to improve or build houses for their families, as well as imported food and beverages.

The purchase of consumer goods with remittances and savings has benefited some segments of Samoa's private sector, particularly businesses selling imported goods, such as cars, appliances and building materials but, as discussed in the article titled 'Impacts of Labour Mobility Schemes on Samoa's Labour Market' (this volume), these gains have been offset by the difficulty businesses have in hiring and retaining workers. With many people attracted to the higher-paying jobs offered through labour mobility schemes, Samoa's business owners lose many employees annually and therefore lose the investment (training) that they put into those employees. This has become a serious concern for the sustainability of Samoa's businesses.

Until recently, most studies of the impacts of labour mobility schemes focused on the economic benefits for individuals and failed to consider the social impacts. One such study was that by Doan, Dornan and Edwards (2023), which collected data from a sample of 2,085 workers and 4,241 households in Tonga, Vanuatu and Kiribati. The report from this study was overwhelming positive, claiming that the labour mobility schemes produce "a net social gain" (2023:12). This claim contrasts strongly, however, with the conclusions of a study that examined the impacts of labour mobility on children left behind in Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. It found that the schemes have an overall negative social impact, with the mental health and well-being of children looking "quite bleak" (UNICEF et al. 2024:2). Other recent studies and analyses (see, for example, Petrou and Connell 2023; Withers 2022) likewise note numerous negative social impacts.

These studies support the findings of recent surveys of Samoan participants in labour mobility schemes (see the articles 'A Better Life?' and 'Samoa under the PALM' in this volume), which indicate that the schemes do not appear to be increasing community wellbeing. Rather, the schemes appear to have augmented and accelerated the cycle of 'keeping up with the Joneses'. Returning workers construct houses and purchase imported goods, which often sparks envy among others in the community and increases their desire to build new houses and obtain consumer goods – preferably even bigger and more expensive versions. This leads to more people participating in the schemes and to the participants going away on new contracts each year in order to obtain bigger and better consumer goods.

Returning workers may be providing their families with more material goods and comfort, but the benefits of the money they bring home can only be temporary. Household incomes in Samoa are often insufficient to pay for the extra electricity needed to power home appliances or to pay for the fuel and maintenance of the cars they buy. This means that in the absence of sufficient remittances, the appliances and cars often sit idle. Thus, labour mobility schemes have increased dependence on remittances. To meet material expectations, it is necessary to continually send young people overseas so that there is always someone in the family sending remittances home.

Because Samoa does not have affordable repair facilities, when goods break they are simply discarded. Without effective policies for minimizing waste, it is likely that broken appliances and old cars will pile up in landfill, causing pollution and posing an increasing threat to groundwater quality, ecosystem health and human health.

With so many young people going to work abroad, there has been a significant loss of productive workers at home. Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, the authors of the RSE Pacific Stream report (2020), reported that:

Household and village economic and social wellbeing may be put at risk if the same productive workers sought by RSE employers (i.e. males aged 20-49) are absent from the village for periods of up to seven months every year. This depletion of labour has the potential to compromise food production and places additional burdens on those left at home to undertake routine duties required for the orderly operation of village life.

This is backed up by the findings of studies of Samoan participants in labour mobility schemes (see the previous articles in this volume), which suggest that stress is being placed on family members in Samoa who must perform additional tasks while workers are away. It appears that the loss to labour mobility schemes of young men aged between 20 and 40 years old who are physically fit is having a major, but yet unmeasured, impact on Samoan households that depend on the informal economy.

The absence of young men in villages has disrupted some community activities, such as planting of taro (a staple food crop). Some recruiters for labour mobility schemes claim that they require young men to plant taro for their families before the men go overseas, but even if this is true, which the authors doubt, it is still necessary for others to weed and care for the taro plantations while the workers are away. The work that was once done by these young people is being taken up by others, on top of their own work. For

example, older men do the heavy work in their plantations and women engage in more subsistence cultivation work. As well as being an excessive amount of work for those left behind, this represents a major change to traditional social norms in Samoa, where older people are normally entitled to receive service (*tautua*) from young men and women, rather than engage in manual labour and undertake daily household chores.

In cases when parents participate in labour mobility schemes, the role of caring for their children is passed on to grandparents, older siblings or members of the extended family. The children left behind are in some cases not adequately cared for, a circumstance that affects the children's education and health (UNICEF et al. 2024).

For parents who seek 'a better life' through labour mobility schemes and continually return abroad on new contracts, this means that these families are almost permanently separated, with parents missing out on their children's childhoods, everyday family life and important events, while their children are raised by others and rarely see their parents, causing ongoing emotional suffering to everyone concerned.

The separation of family members for participation in these schemes appears to have led to an increase in marriage breakdown. The non-governmental organisation "Samoa Victim Support" highlights infidelity by participants in labour mobility schemes as a serious concern (Radio New Zealand 15 June 2022). In cases where husbands go overseas on labour mobility schemes and form new relationships while abroad, the former wives who live with in-laws are compelled to leave the household. These women often do not have paid employment. Children from broken families often find themselves in the care of shelters while their mothers seek work (Islands Business 15 June 2022).

It has been suggested that parents and married people who participate in labour mobility schemes take their children and spouses abroad with them (DFAT 2022). This would partially address the issue of family separation, but paying for the airfares and housing for family members in Australia or New Zealand would enormously increase the costs associated with participation in labour mobility schemes and would significantly reduce the amounts the participants could save and remit to their extended families in Samoa, including elderly parents, who depend heavily on remittances. Taking children abroad on temporary contracts would also be difficult to manage if both parents were working and were employed in different locations.

It could be argued that the accumulation of material goods in Samoa is at least reducing poverty, but a study by the Asian Development Bank of poverty in Samoa and other Pacific Islands (Abbott and Pollard 2004) concluded that poverty in these countries is mainly characterised by comparative economic hardship due to inadequate social services (e.g. primary education, public transport, water and basic health care) and poverty of opportunity.

The lack of adequate social services in Samoa is partly related to the fact that the taxes collected from workers in Samoa are insufficient to cover the costs of maintaining and improving local infrastructures such as roads, schools and hospitals. Meanwhile, the income taxes paid by Samoans while working on labour mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand benefit the populations of those countries rather than communities in Samoa.⁸⁵

With so many Samoans desirous of participating in labour mobility schemes and with insufficient information available regarding how to register and who the legitimate work agents are, many people have fallen prey to scammers who pretend to be registered seasonal work agents but simply take the money of applicants and disappear. This and other types of fraud associated with seasonal work schemes are causing significant distress in Samoa (Samoa Observer 23 October 2024).

The impacts of labour mobility schemes are also being seen in Samoan culture. While material goods accumulate, Samoa's ancient hierarchy of ancestral rank is crumbling as Samoans bestow multiple traditional *matai* titles and admiration on people who have access to money, cars and modern houses, while showing little appreciation for the people in society who remain at home to perform the tasks that maintain social stability: producing food and caring for children and the elderly.

Interdependence was once the basis of village life in Samoa when resources of all kinds were shared to maximise security. Migration has undermined the social capital of Samoan villages because, in the authors' observations, households have become less reliant on one another, leading to the erosion of small-scale mutual support and social solidarity. Labour mobility is accelerating that process so that today the major focus of communal unity are the churches, rather than village political institutions such as the

⁸⁵ Although labour mobility participants are entitled to claim superannuation from Australia or New Zealand, the process of making a claim is complicated and not everyone does so (Dingwall and Kupu 2024).

fono(governing council), *aumaga* (society of young men) and *komiti* (society of women).

Government policy and labour mobility

Samoa policy-makers once welcomed the boost that labour mobility schemes bring to the economy,⁸⁶ but in recent years opinions in Samoa have become divided, and the Government of Samoa is having second thoughts about the value of such schemes.

In 2021, immediately after a church hall in Apia was overrun by people eager to register for seasonal work abroad, the Minister-elect for Works, Transport and Infrastructure, Olo Fiti Va'ai, called for seasonal work schemes to be abolished (Sanerivi 23 June 2021).

In 2022, the Government of Samoa began to re-evaluate the schemes and consider policy responses to concerns raised about the way seasonal workers are treated overseas, the effects of separation on families, the impact of the schemes on village economies and the fact that trained and relatively well-off employees were leaving their jobs in Samoa for temporary contracts abroad.

It has become clear that as well as losing unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the private sector, Samoa is also losing skilled and highly educated public sector workers, including police officers, nurses, teachers, technicians and clerical staff. In January 2023 Samoa's Acting Prime Minister, Tuala Iosefo Ponifasio, expressed concern about Australia offering up to 3,000 work visas for Pacific Islanders, saying that this was likely to further drain Samoa of skilled workers (Radio New Zealand 23 January 2023).

In early 2023, the Samoan government put an abrupt temporary stop to the labour mobility schemes after complaints that many of those recruited for seasonal work and other labour mobility schemes were not unemployed, as the scheme originally envisioned. It then undertook a review of the impact of labour mobility schemes on the local economy (Radio New Zealand 31 August 2023).

Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata'afa raised concerns in August 2023 about the exodus of workers, particularly workers going to Australia on longer-term contracts, and said that she was worried about Pacific nations being seen as

⁸⁶For example, in early 2021 Radio New Zealand News (24 February 2021) quoted Samoa's Minister for Labour saying with satisfaction that 3,400 Samoan seasonal workers were engaged overseas at that time, and that in 2019/2020 nearly US\$80 million had been earned by seasonal workers.

nothing more than “outposts where we grow people” to work abroad (Dziedzic, Voloder and Raela 31 August 2023; ABC News 1 September 2023).

In the hope of addressing the issue of labour shortages in Samoa, the Chamber of Commerce and other private sector organisations made representations to government to ensure only the deployment of genuinely unemployed people. In response, the government held a consultation on labour mobility schemes. The outcome of this consultation was a policy paper on the labour mobility schemes (Government of Samoa 2023).

The policy paper lists the following key areas of concern:

- The loss of workers by private sector employers, the public sector and the village economy, due to the current operations of the labour mobility schemes.
- The social and cultural impacts of the labour mobility schemes.
- The narrow base of beneficiaries because of the recurrent employment abroad of the same workers.
- The violation of labour rights and human rights of workers by employers abroad.
- The need for a transparent and fair process.

As part of the new policy, the government plans to set a cap on the number of workers mobilised annually at a maximum of 12,000, with New Zealand and Australia getting 6,000 workers each (Government of Samoa 2023). In addition, the government will charge an administration fee for workers, a participation fee for Constituency Committees and fees for the accreditation of employers and regulation of third parties and private recruiters.

With regard to equitable labour mobilisation, the policy paper proposes that district committees⁸⁷ engage in vetting candidates that are shortlisted by the Labour Employment Export Programmes Division (LEEP) of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (MCIL). Each district will have its own quota, based on population data, to ensure equity of access. New rules will reinforce the authority of the LEEP to manage an improved interface between recruitment and deployment overseas. However, it is not clear from the

⁸⁷One of the major initiatives of Samoa’s new government, elected in 2021, has been to fund district committees to prepare district development plans. This proposal existed previously but was not funded. Each electoral district of Samoa has been given WST1 million to establish an office, appoint support staff and begin the planning process. It is expected that this process will lead to implementation of needs-based projects that benefit each village in a district, as well as shared district facilities and services.

policy how the district committee vetting process will work if private recruiters do not meet the new licensing criteria. Moreover, some labour mobility operators have expressed reservations about district committees being involved in the schemes as they feel it could lead to issues such as biases in the selection process (Keresoma 6 November 2023).

There are several other potential flaws in the government's proposed new policy. First, the district committees are only slowly becoming effective. Most of them are chaired by their local member of parliament and comprise a representative nominated by each village council in the district. Many have not yet fully perceived the advantages of having district planning in their own hands instead of the hands of centralised public servants and aid donors. Second, in electoral districts where the local member belongs to an opposition political party, there are perverse incentives to undermine the committees and make the government look bad when developments do not eventuate.

The policy paper also proposes that recruitment procedures be tightened to ensure that only unemployed Samoans are recruited for seasonal work abroad. It is assumed that it is easier to find work in urban districts than in rural districts, and that 'unemployment' is a greater issue in rural areas; therefore, urban districts of Samoa will have smaller quotas for workers than rural districts. However, although there may be proportionately more 'unemployed' young people in the rural districts (in the sense that these people lack cash income), young people in rural areas at least have a subsistence livelihood available to them by planting, fishing and small-scale trading. This is seldom the case for those who are unemployed in the urban districts (see the article titled 'The Socioeconomic Context of the New Samoan Exodus: 2007–2023' in this volume). Unemployment for urban people can mean serious hardship, because they have no means of feeding and housing themselves adequately. These are the people whose children walk around the streets of Apia in the sun and rain to sell cheap items such as air fresheners and hairpins, and goods such as taro chips, *lavalava* (sarongs) and fans. They are the young people and persons with disabilities who beg outside fast-food outlets in Apia after dark.

The government's new policy may succeed in ensuring that only those who are genuinely unemployed (in the sense that they have no paid work) are recruited, but such restrictions are likely to be very unpopular.

There is no doubt that most Samoans have seen labour migration as the key to 'a better life' for many decades (see the previous articles in this

volume). How are Samoans going to accept proposed restrictions if they think this will affect their chances to work overseas? Restrictions may be deeply resented.

The other risk is that, by imposing more restrictive policies Samoa will have less access to labour mobility opportunities than it wants, especially if the government agrees to suggestions such as those of Howes, Curtain and Sharman (2022), that receiving countries shift recruitment towards Pacific Island countries with lower participation in the schemes, such as the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea.

It has become increasingly clear that dependence on labour mobility should be avoided. If labour mobility schemes became politically unpopular in either of the main host countries, it is unlikely that the interests of Pacific Island states would be considered, despite the dependence of their economies on labour mobility.

As Malama Meleisea commented, in a keynote address to the 2023 ANU Pacific Update on the theme of labour mobility:

... the government can be said to be 'between a rock and a hard place'. In other words, Samoa wants prosperity without losing its most capable people, but at the same time it wants prosperity that cannot be afforded by working in Samoa. Or, as the Samoan proverbial expressions put it, "we want the trees in the forest but are afraid of their spirits" (E mana'o I le vao ae o lo'omamalumai le aitu I le aoa), or "we want yams but we are afraid of the work of digging up stones so we can plant them" (E mana'o e le ufi ae fefe I le papa) (Meleisea 2023).

Can the issues be overcome?

Since banning seasonal worker schemes would be unpopular, an alternative solution is necessary. With regard to the labour market, what seems to be required is a way of ensuring that the formal market is more aligned with Samoa's 'hybrid economy' (see the article titled 'The Socioeconomic Context of the New Samoan Exodus: 2007–2023' in this volume). That is, ensure that the local formal labour market allows Samoans to continue to meet their cultural obligations and continue to benefit from participation in community life, while also allowing workers opportunities to earn enough to afford to buy imported goods.

The labour mobility schemes have demonstrated that, in general, young Samoans will not remain long in local employment if they can find means of livelihood elsewhere that offer more flexibility (i.e. regular time off to fulfil family, village and church obligations) and that offer higher incomes.

Retaining staff in the long term may therefore require that employers acknowledge the cultural context in which their businesses operate: the fact that the gift-exchange economy still exists and that employees (especially young people) need to take leave from time to time for *tautua* (service) and for *fa'alavelave* (events such as funerals, weddings, etc.). Employers may also need to accept that many young Samoans want to participate in labour mobility schemes abroad from time to time (for the adventure and to allow them to afford to buy imported goods). Employers could consider planning for the inevitable departure of some employees and, subsequently, for the reintegration of workers returning from overseas.

In terms of mitigating the social impacts of the labour mobility schemes, it may be necessary for returnees to reconsider what they spend their hard-earned wages on. Rather than focusing their spending on consumer goods, they could consider investing their savings in training (e.g. courses in business management, tutoring, repair-work, etc) and local small businesses. It appears that many incoming migrant workers in Samoa have invested in their own training and have started small businesses successfully (see the article titled 'Voices of South-South Migrant Workers in Samoa' by Masami Tsujita in this volume).

Another matter that participants in labour mobility schemes could consider is how much they give to the Church. With the amounts donated to the Church increasing each year, the amounts left over for the maintenance and support of children and the elderly are sometimes insufficient (ABC News 19 April 2024; Radio New Zealand 6 October 2017). It may be wise for more Samoans to do what some have already begun doing: give only what they can afford (Raela 19 April 2024). For this to happen, however, it would require that church leaders recognise the damage that excessive donations to the Church can cause to families and communities, and that church leaders encourage parishioners to spend their incomes in a way that ensures that families are healthy and well cared for.

The proposed government policy changes are unlikely to reduce demand for overseas employment among Samoans or fulfil the wish expressed by Prime Minister Fiame Mata'afa: "I want Samoa to be a place where our people want to live" (Meleisea 2023). For that to happen, Samoans would have to have material desires proportionate to what their country can sustainably provide and would need to invest in their nation and its future.

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