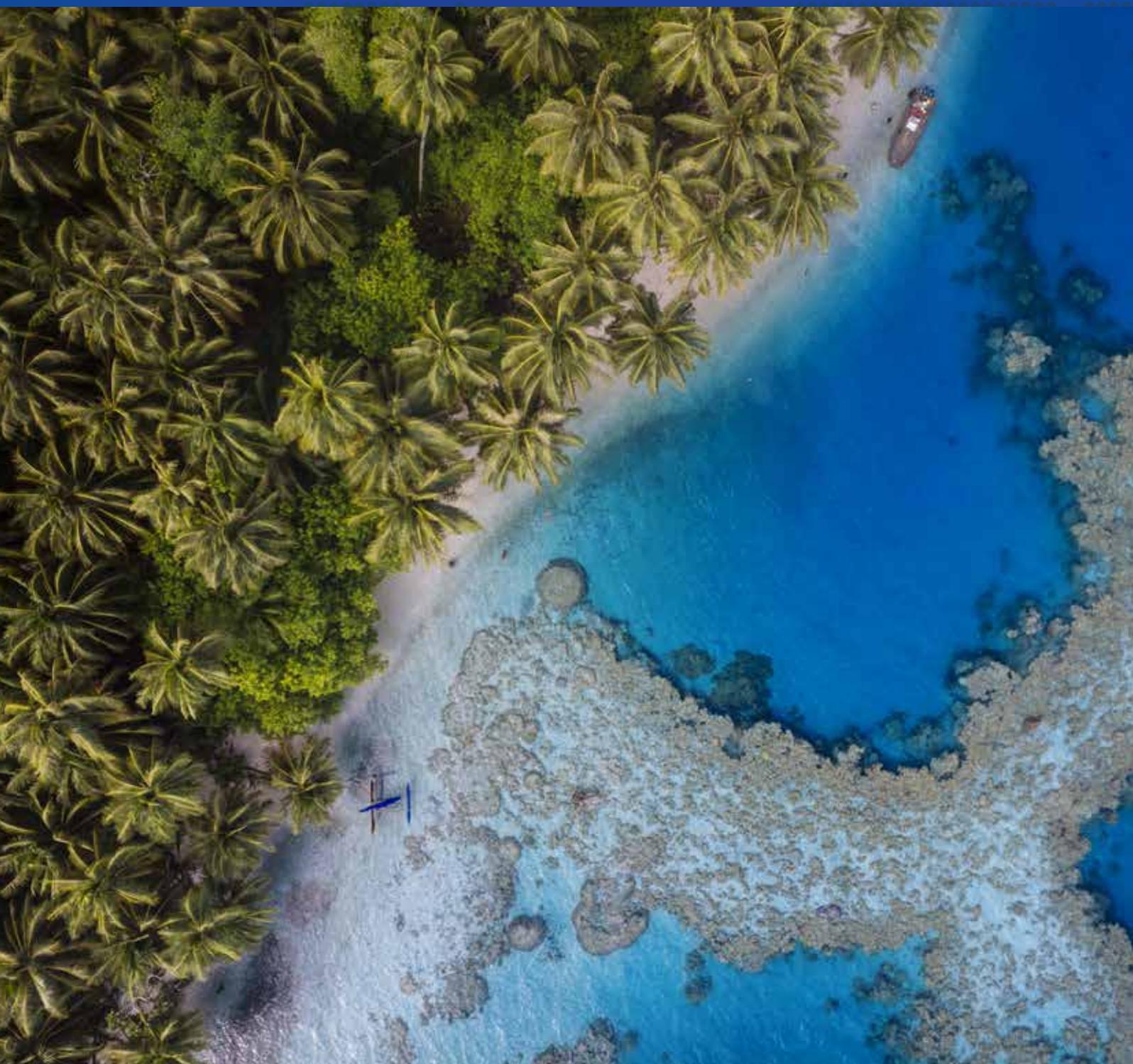


Rapid Assessment of the Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19 on Labour Mobility in the Pacific Region



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

APTC	Australia Pacific Training Coalition
AUD	Australian Dollar
AUSTRAC	Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre
CARES	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, United States
COFA	Compact of Free Association
COVID-19	Novel Coronavirus Disease
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia
DESE	Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australia
DOFT	Department of Finance and Treasury, Australia
FNPF	Fiji National Provident Fund
GDP	Gross domestic product
GNI	Gross national income
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
INZ	Immigration New Zealand
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MBIE	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, New Zealand
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand
MPP	Ministry for Pacific Peoples, New Zealand
MTO	Money Transfer Operator
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NZD	New Zealand Dollar
PFIP	Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme
PLF	Pacific Labour Facility (Australia)
PLM	Pacific Labour Mobility (Visa Holders)
PLS	Pacific Labour Scheme (Australia)
RBA	Reserve Bank of Australia
RBF	The Reserve Bank of Fiji
RSE	Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (New Zealand)
RSP	Remittance Service Provider
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (United States of America)
SWP	Seasonal Worker Programme (Australia)
TDB	Tonga Development Bank
TOP	Tongan Pa'anga
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TVOM	Toso Vaka O Manu
UN	United Nations
UNDP	The United Nations Development Programme
USD	United States Dollar
VUV	Vanuatu Vatu
WHO	World Health Organization

GLOSSARY

Definitions adapted from IOM *Glossary on Migration* (2019) and the World Bank (2007) *General principles for international remittance* unless otherwise stated.

Term	Definition
Diaspora	Migrants or descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging, either real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background. They maintain links with their homelands, and to each other, based on a shared sense of history, identity, or mutual experiences in the destination country.
International Remittances	A cross-border person-to-person payment of relatively low value. In practice, the transfers are typically recurrent payments by migrant workers (for example who send money to their families in their home country every month).
International Migrant ¹	An international migrant is a person who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status.
Labour Mobility ²	International labour migration is broadly defined as the movement of persons from their home State to another State for the purpose of employment. In its most simple form, labour migration occurs when a person is recruited from their home State to take up employment in another State, or when a person migrates to another State with the aim of finding employment. When managed well, labour migration brings many benefits to migrants, communities, employers, governments, and other stakeholders, in countries of origin and destination. For countries of origin, labour migration reduces the stress of national unemployment or underemployment, and contributes to development through remittances, transfer of skills, and the creation of business and trade networks. For countries of destination, labour migration helps address critical labour shortages, especially within the context of ageing populations and changing labour demographics. For workers, migration provides opportunities to raise income levels, gain skills and competencies, and improve living conditions for their families and communities.
Compensation of Employees	In the labour mobility context, compensation of employees refers to the income of border, seasonal, and other short-term workers who are employed in an economy where they are not resident and of residents employed by non-resident entities.

1 The United Nations, <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions>.

2 www.iom.int/sites/default/files/ourwork/ODG/GCM/IOMThematicPaper-ExpandingLabourMobilityChannels.pdf.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rapid spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) since March 2020 has amounted to an unprecedented global health crisis. In order to suppress disease transmission, governments have implemented a range of public health and social measures that in many cases exacerbate underlying socioeconomic challenges.

This is precisely the experience of Pacific Island Countries that have only registered a small number of COVID-19 cases yet are facing devastating impacts on key economic sectors such as tourism, trade and labour mobility as a consequence of travel restrictions, border closures and quarantine measures. In order to assess the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 in the Pacific region, the United Nations (UN) system and other development partners are working together to present evidence of the impact of COVID-19 on lives and livelihoods in Pacific island countries to inform interventions by UN agencies, governments and development partners.

This report constitutes a rapid assessment of how COVID-19 has affected labour mobility and broader migration trends in the Pacific region, examining the perspectives of government officials, migrants awaiting departure in countries of origin, migrants (seasonal workers and temporary migrants) in destination countries, diaspora communities, and development partners. Countries covered under the assessment include Fiji, Marshall Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, in addition to Australia, New Zealand and the United States as countries of destination.

KEY FINDINGS

Aside from Fiji, which has experienced a small number of COVID-19 cases, none of the other focus countries have suffered any direct health impacts and there are no reported cases among seasonal and temporary migrant workers in Australia and New Zealand. Currently, Pacific Governments are readying themselves for the return of repatriated workers and citizens with initiatives that seek to support and facilitate individuals in quarantine for up to 14 days. Furthermore, medical facilities have been prepared to support potential COVID-19 cases that may emerge once border restrictions are lifted. Primary research identified immediate financial and welfare responses

across the region in addition to Australia and New Zealand that have helped support migrants and their families to address the impact of COVID-19 and risk mitigation measures. The research has also addressed what has or in some instances, has not taken place to support the households of seasonal workers, and those workers who have been unable to depart for their work placements.

Pacific Island migrants waiting to be deployed and their households

Currently holders of labour mobility visas are not able to depart Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu due to border closures and suspension of flights. Vanuatu specifically has stated that access to the labour mobility programmes is suspended until further notice.

A range of stimulus measures has been introduced across the region to help alleviate income constraints, these measures have boosted existing social welfare mechanisms by better supporting families through additional contributions to food, health and education initiatives. By way of example, families who have been affected by COVID-19 in Fiji may make deductions from their superannuation and at the same time rely on Fiji's free education policy that is extended to low socioeconomic households.

In contrast, interviews that were conducted with Pacific Government officials have highlighted that seasonal workers who are unable to travel are often overlooked for economic welfare measures. This has left migrant workers in a state of suspension. Furthermore, in most countries, migrants about to depart are not covered by any targeted Government welfare measures.

The preliminary findings predict that income for remittance-dependant households will drop but many experts suggest that it is still too early to deduce the exact socioeconomic impacts. Nevertheless, for workers in limbo, Pacific Labour Facility (PLF), Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) and other organizations will be assisting with reskilling and training workers. Sectors of focus will include tourism, hospitality and health.

In terms of proposed measures, Governments are now seeking ways to support prospective seasonal workers and their households who may be facing economic hardship as a result of reduced remittances, economic downturn and in some instances, the damage wrought from Tropical Cyclone Harold (TC Harold).

Pacific Island migrants in Australia and New Zealand

The rapid assessment found that some Pacific migrants participating in seasonal and temporary migration schemes in Australia and New Zealand could not return home due to border restrictions. In both countries, some workers have been able to continue working either with their existing employer, or following redeployment, with a new employer. This has sometimes involved reducing the number of hours worked. At the time of writing, in Australia alone, 1,989 Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) workers have been redeployed. This has been achieved through an unprecedented level of coordination amongst approved employers in Australia, with the support of the Australian Government, specifically the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE).

DESE has approved over 2,000 new visas allowing SWP workers to remain legally for up to 12 months. The PLF has assisted 74 PLS workers with redeployment to new employers.³ However, approved employers are concerned that the administrative process is causing unnecessary economic burden and the subsequent impact on remittances.

In New Zealand, all 3,342 Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (RSE) visas, scheduled to expire between April and June 2020, have been extended to 25 September 2020. RSE workers have been supported through Toso Vaka O Manu (TVOM), a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) funded and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, New Zealand (MBIE) implemented, welfare-oriented labour mobility and institutional strengthening programme. As of 15 June 2020, over 1,500 RSE workers from the countries covered by the assessment are continuing to work including with alternative employers and half of these have full-time employment opportunities. Around 300 workers⁴ have been prioritized for repatriation, while an additional 1,000 seasonal workers are not working.

Recently, various media sources in both Australia and New Zealand have reported on migrant living conditions in during the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, it was discovered that many Pacific Islanders were placed in cramped living quarters in regional Australia even though deductions were being made for proper rental accommodation. In February 2020, a report was published about a case whereby 70 seasonal workers from Tonga were found to be residing in a five-bedroom house in Tasmania. During the lockdown period cases were subsequently discovered in regional New South Wales whereby it was revealed that nine Samoan nationals were sharing cramped living quarters even though a deduction of AUD 150 was being made each week for a more reasonable living space.

Interviews conducted for the rapid assessment did not shed light on these challenging circumstances due to limitations in data collection given the continuously evolving nature of the crisis. Many workers instead reported increasing anxiety due to family separation, especially those whose communities were affected by TC Harold. On the other hand, most migrant workers interviewed appreciated the opportunity to continue earning money during a time of severe economic downturn globally. Remittances have continued to be sent, although whilst the frequency may be similar to previous sending patterns and initial increases may have been recorded, there is evidence to suggest that values are dropping.

Marshallese migrants in the United States of America

Interviews and surveys conducted for Republic of Marshall Islands found that workers in the United States face a serious risk of contracting COVID-19. Pacific Islanders appear to be contracting the disease at a greater rate than most other communities.

While significant economic support is due to be made available under the United States CARES Act to Marshall Islands households⁵ and currently, for diaspora communities across the United States, there is a substantial risk of ongoing economic and welfare support drying up. Many Marshallese workers are not eligible for Medicare and Medicaid in the United States, which places them at risk of economic hardship, if they contract COVID-19. While they are currently able to access the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), any removal of access to this programme could result in migrant community members being denied access to good nutritious food.

Remittances

Pacific Island Countries share a strong reliance on the remittances that are sent by both the Pacific diaspora community and seasonal workers. Over the years, many Pacific countries have recorded a steady increase in the flow of remittances from Australia, New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom. In 2019 alone, it was recorded that Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu recorded a remittance intake of over USD 500 million. Senders often have access to cost effective rates due to the healthy competition in the remittance market. Irrespective of the available choices, the cost of transferring remittances remains far higher in the Pacific region than global averages. The strict lockdown measures in New Zealand in particular, and Australia, resulted in a sudden lack of access for many people to traditional cash-based services. Interestingly, from the data sample collected between the period of March to April 2020 it was discovered that there has been a significant shift by consumer senders' to transmitting remittances through digital platforms. Moreover, the Reserve

3 PLS visas are for three years and have therefore not needed to be extended. A broad range of welfare support measures have been provided to PLS workers with telephone and online support available to SWP workers too.

4 All figures represent countries covered by the assessment, unless otherwise specified.

5 Providing one can prove they have lost their job due to COVID-19.

Bank of Fiji shared compelling data showing an increase of 68 per cent from FJD 2.75 million in March 2020 to FJD 4.62 million in April 2020. This data would support research findings that diaspora communities are continuing to remit, and that Pacific migrants on extended visas are continuing to support their families.

Recommendations

Based on the key findings and conclusions from the rapid assessment, the report makes the following recommendations to enhance social protection for migrant workers and their families and to improve overall migration governance with a view to supporting economic recovery. Several programmes and initiatives are already underway that could be scaled up and replicated.

Short term

1. [Include Pacific seasonal workers who have been unable to depart their home countries and households dependent upon remittances in COVID-19 assistance measures.](#) Many workers who were due to depart prior to COVID-19 pandemic have had no income since March 2020 and with the economic downturn in their countries would not be able to easily seek new employment. Income support should be backdated from when the worker was due to leave and provided until they can travel or have been able to secure alternative employment. Remittance receiving households with no alternative source of income are also at risk.
2. [Ensure adequate support is provided to Pacific seasonal and temporary workers in countries of destination including coverage under government income support schemes, medical insurance and opportunities for repatriation.](#) The rapid assessment demonstrated that while support was provided by employers and other stakeholders to extend visas and ensure redeployment, Pacific seasonal and temporary workers nearing the end of contracts or awaiting new placements did not receive any income support, despite not having any income. Recent news reports indicate that the situation could be worse than initially understood, which emphasizes the importance of ensuring that all migrant workers are supported with relevant support schemes or fast tracked for repatriation.
3. [Provide psychosocial counselling and services to Pacific labour mobility workers and their families affected by COVID-19 border closures.](#) Migrants and policymakers interviewed for this rapid assessment reported increased levels of anxiety by Pacific migrants facing extended periods of family separation and in some cases coupled with disaster

recovery. Support should be provided to ensure that migrants and their families receive appropriate counselling and mental health support. Ensure that this psychosocial support integrates specific strategies and actions to prevent gender base violence within the households and communities, particularly intimate partner violence, and to support the victims.

4. [Ensure support is provided to Pacific diaspora communities in countries of destination.](#) The rapid assessment demonstrated that in addition to or in lieu of the support provided by governments, informal support networks and responsibility of care for migrants unable to depart lay on Pacific diaspora communities. Specifically, for the Marshallese diaspora, community, medical and nutritional support should be provided, including access to health care and SNAP should be prioritized for community members in the worst affected areas.

Medium term

5. [Convene regional consultations between Pacific Governments and countries of destination to support safe migration for economic recovery.](#) There is a need, especially following discussions amongst government currently underway on a “pacific travel bubble”, that these discussions should also address how safe migration of Pacific labour mobility workers can support economic recovery. This would be beneficial for both countries of destination by filling critical labour market gaps and countries of origin through provision of employment and remittances. The primary objective however should be ensuring health and safety of citizens. This could include measures such as arranging quarantine facilities and providing financial support for workers in quarantine; ensuring that employers are also supported to provide these services; risk communication information to migrants and their families; waiving of any additional certification costs. The processes around the repatriation and reintegration of the workers after their stay will also be vital to keeping the Pacific islands free from COVID-19. This consultation should be convened at the regional level through coordination with relevant regional organizations such as PIFS alongside UN agencies.
6. [Wherever possible, training and reskilling of Pacific labour mobility workers should take place in each country of origin so that migrants have alternative employment options.](#) Given that COVID-19 is expected to have far reaching impacts on economies of countries of origin including employers of Pacific labour mobility workers, Pacific Governments through the support of relevant development partners should undertake labour market assessments to determine

skills gaps in relation to available job opportunities and should ensure that Pacific migrants receive relevant training and reskilling opportunities. Such activities are already being implemented by APTC and PLF amongst others. At the same time, Pacific labour mobility workers should also be supported to establish small businesses as an alternative employment option. This may include business training programmes, financial and investment management information. These initiatives when undertaken must ensure that women have equal opportunities to access diverse training that allows them to move to better employment options.

7. [Continuously monitor and frequently evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on labour mobility.](#) Given the continuously evolving nature of the crisis, it is important to regularly monitor and evaluate experiences of seasonal and temporary migrants and to compile lessons learned and best practices related to resuming labour mobility programmes. This would also include conducting relevant research into determining the impact of COVID-19 on future labour requirements or shortages, the likely additional costs of running the seasonal worker programmes, impact of seasonal workers that require to remain behind for additional seasons. This would also help identifying solutions on how to keep costs of for seasonal workers at a reasonable level⁶ such as potential additional costs for travel, two weeks paid quarantine, accommodation that meets physical distancing requirements.
8. [Based on regular monitoring and evaluation, review labour mobility schemes](#) to ensure flexibility to reassign and reschedule job placements and enhance portability of seasonal workers across employers. While several seasonal workers have been given the opportunity to extend their stay in Australia until the pandemic passes, bureaucratic delays have affected the portability of workers from one improved employer to another. At the same time, as some seasonal workers may extend their stay in Australia for an additional season, adequate time should be provided for their rest and recuperation at home which may require delayed deployment or reassigned work placements. For migrants that have not yet departed but that will be able to travel once borders open, their work placement may need to be reviewed.
9. [Scale up provision of information and support to ensure that remittance values and volumes are maintained during the COVID-19 crisis.](#) Recommendations for policymakers

to ensure that remittances continue to flow are encapsulated in the “Call to Action Remittances in Crisis: How to Keep them Flowing” launched by the Governments of Switzerland and the United Kingdom on 22 May 2020, in partnership with the World Bank, UNCDF, IOM, UNDP, the International Association of Money Transfer Networks and the International Chamber of Commerce. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Government of Fiji and Government of Vanuatu support the call to action and encourage the implementation of key recommendations. These include recognizing the provision of remittances as an essential services; economic support for migrants and remittance service providers; supporting digital remittance channels; recommendations for regulators to ensure remittance service providers continue to service clients; and for service providers to reduce costs, invest in financial education and awareness, promote and establish migrant-centric financial products.

10. [Increase understanding of social impacts of COVID-19 on migrant sending households, including on education and food security implications for families.](#) Based on these research studies, ensure that medium-term Government support measures to address household level food security and education is responsive to and inclusive of the needs of migrant families. Upcoming socioeconomic impact assessments related to COVID-19 must sex-disaggregate data, both from secondary and primary sources regarding migrant workers and apply a gender analysis lens.

Long term

11. [Strengthen data collection on remittance corridors to better understand remittance trends and flows.](#) This would help to provide a more accurate picture on remittance trends that are emerging from the COVID-19 crisis and provide policy makers with a better understanding of how diaspora and seasonal workers provide for their households. Specific corridors that require further data analysis include:
 - a. United States–Marshall Islands and other South Pacific countries
 - b. New Zealand–South Pacific countries

This data should also help increase understanding of remittance sending, receiving and consumption habits by gender; as well as how these remittances are sent (formally versus Informally) and the availability of services amongst existing remittance service providers and rates. Several stakeholders, including the International Monetary Fund Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre, IOM, World Bank, Sendmoneypacific amongst others are currently conducting research and data analysis on these topics.

⁶ Though not in accordance with international guidelines and best practices on recruitment, including ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment, travel costs are generally paid by the seasonal or temporary worker. If air travel becomes prohibitively expensive, it will not be in the worker's financial advantage to embark on seasonal employment.

12. **Provide digital financial education.** The COVID-19 lockdowns have accelerated the uptake of digital remittance services. Ongoing education and awareness-raising will help to support adoption of lower cost remittance services. Remittance service providers traditionally find it hard to transition clients to digital channels due to lack of digital readiness and financial awareness, and lack of identification documents. Higher rates of digital financial inclusion can mitigate this and help keep flows in formal channels. This should also pay specific attention to ensuring that the gender digital divide does not impact women in terms of their possibilities to send and receive remittances. Ongoing programmes support the development of digital financial channels, including digital financial transfers.

13. **Encourage diaspora community investments.** Develop economic strategies which will seek to entice the diaspora community to invest more capital into emerging sectors

identified by Pacific Governments. These strategies will look into enhancing the ease of business through streamlined processes, reducing the costs of doing business, creating tax benefits for diaspora community members and moderating business requirements.

14. **Establish long-term safety nets to provide relief during disasters.** Through pilot schemes including Pacific migrant worker contributions, employer contributions and support from destination country Governments, long-term safety nets could provide disaster relief when hazards such as COVID-19 or natural disasters occur in migrants' countries of origin, necessitating remittance flows to support family. (See appendix 2 for further details.)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Pacific region can be characterized by a range of mobility trends: internal mobility within Pacific countries; intra-island mobility for the purpose of employment; movement to neighbouring countries of destination in search of economic opportunities, improved health and education outcomes. This comprises the movement of students, permanent residents, seasonal workers and temporary migrant workers.

With the outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in March 2020 and first cases in the Pacific region, like elsewhere in the world, Pacific Governments reacted quickly and decisively, declaring a state of emergency in some places alongside mobility restrictions. Border closures were quickly enforced to help alleviate any risk to Pacific island countries where health systems could easily be overwhelmed without appropriate infection control measures being taken.

At the time of writing, slightly over 360 cases were recorded in a few Pacific Island Countries and territories (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, French Polynesia, Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and New Caledonia). Fiji at its peak recorded 18 cases, but the country's lockdown measures, and contact tracing kept case growth contained, with no active cases by 5 June 2020. Countries of destination for Pacific migrants, Australia and New Zealand registered higher numbers of confirmed cases along with the United States. Since early April 2020, the number of infected COVID-19 patients fell significantly in both Australia and New Zealand. Though the context continues to evolve and risks of second waves persist, new cases in Australia are generally below 10 per day (early June 2020).

Pacific Governments had to deal with the dual threat of natural hazards and COVID-19. This risk became a reality just two weeks into COVID-19 lockdowns as TC Harold, caused damage to the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga. The strict COVID-19 measures that were in place in each affected country influenced relief efforts. Humanitarian assistance from Pacific Governments itself, as well as externally from Australia and New Zealand had to observe strict protocols to limit any potential risk of COVID-19 spread.

The pandemic has had a substantial impact on mobility in general, bringing this to a halt across the globe. The Pacific region has been no outlier to this, and movement within the region came to a standstill from late March 2020. As a consequence of mobility

restrictions, suspension of air travel and border closures, many Pacific migrants including seasonal and temporary workers have found themselves caught in countries of destination, unable to return home due to border closures. Similarly, migrant workers due to depart have found themselves unable to leave their Pacific countries for employment. As the medium to long-term impacts of COVID-19 on economies and societies in the Pacific region and countries of destination for Pacific migrants continue to evolve, it is likely that considerable impacts will be felt on labour mobility and migration trends within the Pacific region.

This report summarizes key findings and recommendations focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on labour mobility in the Pacific region, focusing on the countries of Fiji, Marshall Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. It further contributes to the United Nations Joint Socioeconomic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in the Pacific region. Specifically, the assessment aims to support Pacific Governments to harness the gains of labour mobility schemes in their efforts to address socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and to ensure that the needs of all migrants and their families are incorporated into relevant government programmes and policies.

1.1 Methods and Limitations

The rapid assessment of the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 on Labour Mobility in the Pacific Region was conducted between 11 May 2020 to 5 June 2020. The assessment aimed to understand two key questions:

- How has COVID-19 affected labour mobility in the Pacific region? What has been the effect on the human security of migrant workers, diaspora communities and migrant-sending households in the Pacific region?
- How have governments responded to COVID-19? How have migrants and their families been supported during this time?

As indicated above, countries covered under the assessment include the Pacific Island countries of Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Within the report, Australia and New Zealand are referred to as countries of destination for seasonal workers and temporary migrants from Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, and the United States is discussed in relation to the Marshall Islands.

In responding to these questions, the assessment and recommendations draw from desk research, alongside findings from key informant interviews and surveys. Desk research

covered a review of impacts of COVID-19 and labour mobility in the Pacific region, media articles on issues related labour mobility in the context of COVID-19 and its associated impacts. Given that the crisis is continuing to evolve, the media continues to be a key source of information in the absence of academic and institutional literature.

Over 30 informant interviews, and seasonal worker and diaspora surveys were held across all eight countries. The perspectives of seasonal workers, temporary labour migrants and employers in countries of destination, migrant households, aspirant migrant workers and those enrolled but unable to migrate, diaspora communities, and relevant governments are incorporated in the report.

In Pacific Island Countries covered by the assessment, insights were drawn from Ministries of Education, Fisheries, Foreign Affairs, Immigration, Internal Affairs, Labour, Trade and Commerce, Central Banks and National Provident Funds. Seasonal workers who were unable to depart Tuvalu were interviewed, with further interviews of Fijian, Ni-Vanuatu, Tuvaluan and Tongan seasonal and temporary migrant workers in Australia and New Zealand. Surveys of Pacific diaspora communities and migrant workers were also held in Australia and for the Marshallese diaspora community, in the United States. Approved employers, the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF), Australian and New Zealand government departments and Money Transfer Operators were consulted. Interviews were conducted in English and in person (where permitted) or via online communication tools or by telephone.

Given the rapid nature of the assessment and limited time frame for data collection, the report is not without limitations. Firstly, while the study aimed to collect gender-disaggregated data and include gender differentiated analysis where possible, the research team was not able to access women migrant workers both in countries of origin and destination, which constrained a gender-specific inferences. This also extends to data on vulnerable groups, such as people living with disabilities, youth and older people.

Secondly, data collection with migrant workers was conducted remotely and in English language (with translator support), which may not have proved conducive to collecting sensitive information related to living and working conditions as the situation may require. Similarly, COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and physical distancing measures implied that in most instances it was not possible to hold in-person meetings.

Thirdly, accessing respondents within the short timeframe of the data collection exercise, particularly in higher levels of government was challenging. In Vanuatu interviews were

conducted in the midst of recovery processes for TC Harold, which resulted in only one government interview. Fourthly, it was not possible to have access to households of migrant workers for this assessment. Therefore, all feedback pertaining to impacts on households, aside from interviews held with PLS workers unable to depart Tuvalu, has been gathered through interviews with seasonal workers currently in Australia and New Zealand.

Finally, while the report aimed to examine the short, medium, and long-term impacts where these can be reasonably forecast, and the impacts at community or organizational levels, as well as for individuals and governments, the evolving nature of the situation required that findings be continually updated. This creates a substantial risk that some of the information featured in this report may be out of date at the point of dissemination. Aside from limitations in the data collection and rapid assessment exercise, there are also numerous challenges related to the availability, accessibility and reliability of data on migration trends and labour mobility in the Pacific region. Firstly, quantitative data on the number of Pacific migrants overseas is often spread across different ministries. Where this information or central database exists, it is rarely disaggregated by gender and age which renders an analysis on gender-differentiated trends difficult. An exception is of course that departments of labour in countries of origin and destination do collect and keep an up to date database for migrants participating in seasonal and temporary labour mobility schemes. For the Marshall Islands, there is an absence of data related to the size of the diaspora community in the United States, given the free movement protocols between the two countries. This also extends to the level of information available on the United States – Marshall Islands remittance corridor.

In terms of remittances, New Zealand does not currently monitor remittance value and volume flows into the Pacific with the same level of detail as Australia. The New Zealand Police Financial Intelligence unit does capture cross border wire transfer data for NZD 1,000 and above. Unfortunately, this means that most personal remittances are not captured by this measure. Aside from lack of available data, accessibility is also a challenge.

The two largest global MTOs that cover the Pacific region, Western Union and MoneyGram, were unable to share any specific data on the Pacific region. They are both listed companies and as such do not disclose the breadth of information that other regional MTOs provide on their services in the Pacific. However, they are reporting substantial growth globally in their digital services since COVID-19 restrictions were set in place in March 2020. Finally, in the current context, securing reliable and up to date data continues to be a challenge. For migrants in countries of origin, data was accessed through Governments which had limitations as it was based on self-reporting through employers, which could imply accuracy issues.

1.2 The Migration Context in the Pacific Region

Migration from Pacific Island countries to the major countries of destination occurs both temporarily and permanently for many reasons. This includes the migration of temporary and seasonal workers through labour mobility schemes such as the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) and the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) for Australia and the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme of New Zealand, and the movement of permanent residents through established permanent migration pathways. Intra-Pacific migration is also an important trend in regional migration, particularly for technical and high skilled labour migration. Pacific Island countries also host migrants from some developed and developing countries outside of the Pacific region, although numbers are small in comparison to major destinations in the region.

1.3 Permanent Migration and Diaspora Communities

Pacific Countries have a long-established migratory history with neighbouring developed countries such as Australia, New Zealand and United States amongst others.

Fiji's largest diaspora population is spread primarily across Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. It is believed that the vast majority of Fiji's diaspora population currently lives in Australia with many electing to reside in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. In 2016, 61,469 Fiji-born people lived in Australia, with the total Fijian Diaspora population standing at 98,472. On a similar note, the Tongan community has a strong presence in Australia and the United States (Salt

Lake City and San Francisco) but by and large Tonga's largest diaspora community can be found in New Zealand. Moreover, there are more Tongans or people of Tongan descent living outside of Tonga than Tonga itself. These diaspora communities are responsible for the majority of remittance flows into Fiji and Tonga.

Tuvalu and Vanuatu by contrast have much smaller diaspora populations, but on a pro rata basis have considerable numbers of their population participating annually in the region's labour mobility programmes.

The Marshall Islands forges a different migratory path to its South Pacific neighbours. In 1983 the Marshall Islands signed a Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the United States which allows for the free movement of Marshallese people to the United States. This open pathway has meant that one third of the Marshall Islands' population is believed to be living in the United States as the migratory route opened up in the 1980's. In addition, an estimated 6,000 to 20,000 Marshallese are believed to be living in Northwest Arkansas where many are believed to be working in poultry packing plants. Further communities can be found in California, Hawaii and Iowa.

Table 1 details the Pacific diaspora population and Pacific seasonal and temporary workers in Australia, New Zealand, United States and the United Kingdom (Fiji) as at 21 May 2020.

Table 1: Pacific Island populations living overseas, by country

Country	Fiji		Tonga		Marshall Islands		Tuvalu		Vanuatu	
	Total	PLM	Total	PLM	Total	PLM	Total	PLM	Total	PLM
Australia	98 997 ⁸	499	32 691 ⁹	2 284			702 ¹⁰	27	964 ¹¹	4 950
New Zealand	14 445 ¹²	460	60 336 ¹³	1 607			3 537 ¹⁴	113	492 ¹⁵	3 849
United States	32 304 ¹⁶		57 183 ¹⁷		27 000 ¹⁸	N/A				
United Kingdom	6 754 ¹⁹									

PLM = Pacific labour mobility visa holders

8 www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3412.02017-18?OpenDocument (accessed 14/5/20).

9 http://stat.data.abs.gov.au/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ABS_C16_T05_SA.

10 http://stat.data.abs.gov.au/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ABS_C16_T05_SA.

11 http://stat.data.abs.gov.au/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ABS_C16_T05_SA.

12 http://archive.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request_value=24706#24706 (accessed 14/5/20).

13 www.mpp.govt.nz/pacific-people-in-nz/.

14 www.mpp.govt.nz/pacific-people-in-nz/.

15 www.mpp.govt.nz/pacific-people-in-nz/.

16 www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-12.pdf (accessed 14/5/20).

17 U.S. census data 2010.

18 Marshall Islands in U.S. population estimate in 2020; Last U.S. census data from 2010 - www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-12.pdf.

19 www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.asp.

1.4 Temporary and Seasonal Migration

In addition to permanent residence pathways, a number of Pacific migrants also move overseas temporarily through seasonal worker schemes and for other temporary labour mobility opportunities. New Zealand launched the RSE scheme in 2007 with an initial cap of 5,000 workers per annum. After much success with both employers and workers the RSE scheme is now open to 14,400 workers (from October 2019) from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu and it also allows Pacific workers to be engaged in horticulture and viticulture. Vanuatu workers have for several years represented the biggest cohort of Pacific workers employed under New Zealand's RSE scheme.

Australia's SWP commenced a three-year pilot from 2009 and 2012 and initially featured seasonal workers employed in the horticulture industry from Tonga, Kiribati, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea. Following a successful pilot, this was then extended to Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Recently, over 33,000 Pacific seasonal workers have participated in the SWP since 2012, with the broader agricultural sector now participating in the programme.

Australia's, SWP scope includes horticulture, aquaculture, cane and cotton agricultural sectors. Tourism operators have also recently been granted access to the programme in certain locations, including Western Australia, Northern Territory and South Australia's Kangaroo Island. The 78 approved employers in Australia are free to source workers with contracts for up to six-month from Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu (and other larger Pacific countries). Tuvalu, as one of the more remote smaller Pacific states, able to send workers for up to nine-month placements.

Australia's PLS is a three-year employment visa that was launched on 1 July 2018. It is focused on longer term lower and semi-skilled positions in a range of industries including agriculture, horticulture, forestry, hospitality, tourism, fisheries, meat processing, and the aged care sector. The broader range of employment opportunities presents more opportunities for women to seek employment under the PLS, particularly in hospitality, tourism and aged care. Workers from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu are currently able to apply.

The SWP and PLS are both uncapped and therefore it is difficult to allocate a specific figure to the number of Pacific migrants participating in a given year. SWP and PLS intake is a direct response to the demand for Pacific employment from Approved Employers in Australia.

All three labour mobility programmes (RSE, SWP and PLS) are popular, with many employers remaining engaged with the programme and forming strong bonds with their workers and their workers' communities. It is very common for seasonal workers to return year after year. These programmes are based on bilateral agreements, with regulations and connections between the destination country and the Pacific countries.

1.5 Remittance Inflows into the Pacific

For most Pacific seasonal workers, the key driver engaging in labour mobility in Australia and New Zealand is to be able to earn significantly more money than they can in their countries of origin. Pacific migrants often intend to send a considerable portion of this money back home to support their families. A study of Ni-Vanuatu and Tongan remittance behaviour in 2016 shows that each cohort remitted, on average 12.1 per cent and 27.7 per cent of their income respectively. Lower income (earned by Ni-Vanuatu workers compared with Tongan workers at the time) has led to lower remittance despite currency value changes. (MBIE, 2017). Moreover, although there is no specific data available for the five countries analysed, at a global level, women migrants send approximately the same amount of remittances as men migrants. However, research suggests that women tend to send a higher proportion of their income, even though they generally earn less than men (IOM, 2010).

Remittances sent home by Pacific seasonal workers contribute to the household budget, education and health costs. Migrant workers who have been working several seasons overseas use part of their earnings to establish businesses or build/repair houses. Over time Pacific seasonal workers have been able to earn sufficient funds to start their own businesses, buy land, build homes, and make them disaster proof. In addition to remittances sent back by Pacific labour mobility workers, diaspora communities in countries of destination also send back remittances.

The remittances volume detailed in the next page in table 2 represents total remittances and includes both Pacific labour migrants and diaspora sent remittances. Tonga has the largest share of remittances as a proportion of its GDP. Remittances sent by its seasonal worker cohort are a key source of revenue for the country.

Table 2: Pacific remittances, population and GDP indicators

Indicators	Vanuatu	Tuvalu	Marshall Islands	Tonga	Fiji
Population 2019 (UN)	292 000	12 000	59 000	104 000	890 000
GDP 2019 (USD, UN)	864 Million	44 Million	199 Million	427 Million	4 874 Million
Remittances Volume (USD, World Bank)	35.2 Million	4.1 Million	31.5 Million	183.3 Million	288 Million
Remittances, % of GDP 2018 (World Bank)	3.85%	9.5%	14.21%	40.70%	5.14%
GDP/Capita 2019 (UN)	3 130	5 430	3, 753	4 300	5 860

Source: United Nations, World Bank.

The below table outlines remittance volumes between 2009 and 2019. Fiji has seen consistent growth, whereas Tonga, a country that relies far more on remittances (over 40% of GDP in 2018) has seen more erratic increases in volume. Preferred modalities for sending remittances include sending remittances in cash through money transfer operators, with cash collection at the receiver's end.

Table 3: Migrant remittance inflows (USD million)

Remittance inflow	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
Fiji	171	176	160	191	204	221	251	269	274	285	288	2 205
Marshall Islands	24	22	22	23	25	26	27	28	30	31	31	289
Tonga	82	74	84	91	123	119	150	126	159	183	183	1 374
Tuvalu	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	46
Vanuatu	11	12	22	22	24	64	104	81	26	35	35	436

Source: World Bank, 2020.

2. HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED LABOUR MOBILITY IN THE PACIFIC REGION? WHAT HAS BEEN THE EFFECT ON THE HUMAN SECURITY OF MIGRANT WORKERS, DIASPORA COMMUNITIES AND MIGRANT-SENDING HOUSEHOLDS IN THE PACIFIC REGION?

All five countries included in this rapid assessment have faced immediate impacts related to COVID-19. The sudden closure of borders across the region in March 2020 resulted in many Pacific labour mobility workers suddenly finding themselves unable to depart Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu for pre-assigned employment in Australia and New Zealand. At the same time, thousands of workers have been unable to return home. As identified at the outset, the impact of COVID-19 on migration from the Marshall Islands is distinct as there is no participation in labour mobility schemes, migration is generally permanent.

The following section summarizes the participation of workers from various Pacific Island Countries in respective employment schemes being undertaken primarily in Australia and New Zealand. In addition, the correlated data attempts to divide and highlight the migrant worker trends.

2.1 Data of Pacific Temporary and Seasonal Workers in Countries of Destination

The data in the next page demonstrates the participation of seasonal workers from Pacific Island Countries working primarily in Australia and New Zealand. In addition, the data captures the number of respective nations who are participating in the various labour schemes that are being offered.

From the correlated it is clear to see the states in Australia

and regions in New Zealand that host the largest number of Pacific Islanders workers under the schemes. This information is crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic because it exhibits how extensively spread out workers are, and it can potentially project how vulnerable some cohorts may be compared to others.

Lastly, the data signals an overwhelming participation rate amongst men, but it is of note to mention that the rate of engagement amongst women, whilst low, is growing.

2.1.1 Australia

Table 4 shows Australian SWP Workers by location and country of origin as at 21 May 2020. This includes both scheduled and extended workers that have been unable to return home due to border closures.

Table 4: SWP workers by location and country of origin, 21 May 2020

Country	New South Wales	Northern Territory	Queensland	South Australia	Tasmania	Victoria	Western Australia	Total
Fiji			25	46		25	49	145
Kiribati	47		2	61	21	28		159
Papua New Guinea	5		68	6		5		84
Samoa	30	8	238	0	10	74	14	374
Solomon Islands	2		51	28	1	35		117
Timor-Leste	61	48	112	211	144	327	158	1 061
Tonga	90		417	181	449	463	62	1 662
Vanuatu	453	79	986	690	130	859	139	3 336
Total	688	135	1 899	1 223	755	1 816	422	6 938

Note: These statistics refer to workers in Australia not the number of visas issued.

*Disaggregated data by gender not available; RMI does not participate in the SWP.

Source: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), Australia.

Men continue to account for a large majority of participants in the Seasonal Worker Program, though with increasing participation of women migrants. For 2018–19 female participation improved slightly up to 17.9 per cent from a 13.4 per cent in 2012–2013. This may reflect eligibility changes, allowing tourism employers to use the SWP. Even though data is not separated out into industries and the SWP numbers for tourism are small compared to horticulture, tourism seem to offer a good possibility to overcome a stubborn gender gap for Pacific labour mobility.

Table 5 shows PLS workers currently in Australia by nationality, sex and female participation along with the location as of 15 May 2020. Almost all workers who were in country on 20 March 2020 continue to be employed under the PLS with some workers redeployed to other sectors.

Table 5: Pacific Labour Scheme workers by location, gender and country of origin, 15 May 2020

Country	Fiji		Tonga		Tuvalu		Vanuatu		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
New South Wales	27	98			3	11	14	35	188
Northern Territory		2				2			4
Queensland		58	4	6		12	11	40	131
South Australia		17	5				6		28
Tasmania			1						1
Victoria		13						22	35
Western Australia	1	4		48		4	1	15	73
Australia	28	192	10	54	3	29	32	112	460

Source: DFAT and DESE, Australia.

Note: RMI does not participate in the PLS.

2.1.2 New Zealand – labour mobility summary (Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu)

It was anticipated that the vast majority of the 14,400 workers would have worked in New Zealand over the 2019–2020 period, if COVID-19 had not restricted arrivals from March 2020. At the time the border closed on 19 March 2020, there had been 11,152 RSE arrivals since 1 July 2019.

Table 6 breaks down the expiring RSE visas between March and June in New Zealand. The total represents the number of workers caught in New Zealand and unable to travel.

Table 6: RSE visas expiring from March to June 2020

Nationality	March	April	May	Jun	Total
Fiji	20	8	116	27	171
Tonga	30	81	582	257	950
Tuvalu	-	-	10	-	10
Vanuatu	78	391	1 064	678	2 211
Total	128	480	1 772	962	3 342

Source. Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (MBIE) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand (MFAT).

Note. RMI does not participate in the RSE scheme).

Table 7 shows the total number of RSE workers by region in New Zealand.

Table 7: RSE workers by region, 13 May 2020

Region	Fiji	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Northland	-	20	-	116	136
Auckland	12	38	4	15	69
Waikato	-	17	-	-	17
Bay of Plenty	110	244	3	582	939
Hawkes Bay	243	395	78	1 048	1 764
Gisborne	-	-	-	-	
Central North Island	-	7	-	20	27
Nelson	57	714	28	376	1 175
Marlborough	19	12	-	468	499
Canterbury	2	27	-	60	89
Otago	2	-	-	612	614
Total (as of 15 May)	445	1 474	113	3 297	5 329
RSE Workers on Extended Visa (region unknown)	171	950	10	2 211	3 342
RSE Workers under normal contract period	274	524	103	1 086	1 987

Source. MBIE and MFAT.

Table 8 details Pacific migrants in destination countries in May 2020. This reflects all known Pacific labour mobility visa holders provided by DFAT, DESE and MFAT. This does not include permanent migrants, citizens or holders of highly skilled migration visas.

Table 8: Pacific workers in destination countries, May 2020

Visa Type	Fiji	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Marshall Islands
Seasonal Worker Program workers in Australia at 21 May 2020*	145	1 662	N/A	3 336	
Pacific Labour Scheme at 15 May 2020	220	64	32	144	
RSE Workers**	445	1 474	113	3 297	
Overseas (location unspecified) ***					200 (US) 85 (across Kiribati, Philippines, Guam, Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China, Fiji)

Source: Ministries/Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu

*Includes over 2,000 SWP workers on extended visas as of 28 May 2020 so may be subject to change if repatriation occurs before the end of June 2020.

Confirmed expired/extended Australian visas (subclass 403) have not been provided. The Australian figures represent all visa holders in place on the above dates.

**Includes both RSE workers under normal contract, and RSE workers on extended visas as of 13 May 2020

***This reflects Marshallese temporarily caught overseas. It does not include diaspora in the United States

For the Marshall Islands, the stringent restrictions on flights into the country has meant that some citizens have been caught overseas and therefore not been able to return to their employment and their businesses. It is possible that some workers will not return until August 2020. There are various travel reasons given – most were travelling for holiday or business, (219); medical (35); study (31).

2.2 Economic Security

The strict COVID-19 measures that were enforced globally have played a major role in the universal economic downturn. At times, businesses that were deemed as essential services were only allowed to operate. In addition, the border closures and 14-day quarantine periods had adversely affected rates of employment.

In terms of impacts on the economic security of Pacific diaspora, communities in Australia and New Zealand have and continue to face economic hardship with many Pacific islanders out of work. In particular, low income households are the most impacted which limits the support that some Pacific diaspora households can provide to their families in Pacific Island countries. Marshallese workers in the United States have been particularly negatively impacted with much higher exposure to the COVID-19 virus, and the associated economic downturn. Many Marshallese migrants in the United States have temporarily been made redundant or are working reduced hours and are experiencing

reduced household income as a result. Some people have reported choosing not to work to not potentially expose other members of the household, including elderly people with pre-existing conditions. All Marshallese workers are however eligible for welfare support, (although not all benefits such as SNAP), and this has been helping to mitigate loss of earnings.

For Pacific migrant workers, at the time of writing, the majority who were due to return from Australia and New Zealand to their countries of origin have been able to secure further work with their existing, or with new employers. Only a few seasonal workers may be experiencing gaps in employment while they wait to be moved to a new employer, or reduced hours.

For those workers that have been able to continue working for this unexpected extended period, they have been able send remittances to support their family. These household remittance inflows that are unexpected (for those households continuing to receive remittances) will likely go a long way to protect households from the more severe economic shock

otherwise being experienced across the region. At the same time, additional medical and transport costs related to extension of visas and redeployment with new employers will have a direct impact on worker net income. For workers with reduced hours, this could contribute to a reduction in remittances that can be sent to support worker households in PICs.

For Pacific migrant workers that were expecting to depart their countries of origin for placements, border closures and suspension of flights has resulted in them remaining in their home countries without any local employment. In Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu they do not qualify for government financial support, which in addition to the loss of remittance revenue, impacts their household income. The lack of clarity on when borders may reopen makes it difficult for employers and employees alike to plan accordingly.

Aside from the direct impacts of COVID-19 on Pacific migrants and their families, the overall macrolevel economic impact on key sectors of the Pacific economy is also likely to have cascade and indirect impacts that also affect migrant and diaspora communities. Tourism is one such sector which is a major source of revenue for the Pacific Islands that has been hit hard by COVID-19. Taking the example of Fiji, where Tourism is the most important sector of the Fijian economy, GDP is expected to decline by nearly 38 per cent. (KPMG, 2020). Over the past decades, many seasonal workers including in Vanuatu have invested in tourism related businesses such as taxis and minibuses which they operate when they are home. It is not uncommon for family members of seasonal workers to manage these businesses whilst other family members are working overseas. The economic downturn and impact on the tourism sector is likely to reduce income from such services for an extended period. At the same time, additional revenue from remittances to support the development of such small businesses is also likely to be affected. Discussions have begun on how to safely implement a trans-Tasman travel bubble, with the intention to include the Pacific Islands, if this can be done with no risks to health.

The fisheries industry is another important contributor to GDP of Pacific Island countries. In the Marshall Islands, this constitutes the largest private sector contributor to the economy, through the sale of fishing rights to other nations. In the 2018 financial year this sector accounted for over 10 per cent of GDP. The fisheries industry employs both Marshallese and foreign workers as maritime crewman on the fleet and as maritime observers on fishing vessels. Disruption due to travel restrictions reducing export potential to the United States, and a reduction in demand for Sashimi grade tuna from Japan (due to lockdown related restaurant closures) has meant that the fishing industry has been severely impacted and this has resulted in both Marshallese and other Pacific migrant workers losing employment. With tourism at a standstill, workers in hotels and

catering have been impacted. Construction is also at a standstill, and this employs migrant workers, mainly from the Philippines.

The above economic impacts are compounded even further with the sudden change to the level of remittances arriving from the United States to the Marshall Islands. In many aspects, the sudden loss of employment or reduced hours that some workers have found themselves experiencing will no doubt have impacted on remittances sent back home to households in the Marshall Islands.

2.2.1 The sudden impact of COVID-19 on remittances to the Pacific

There were significant challenges faced by both senders' and receivers' when transferring and receiving money during the lockdown period. At both ends, money transfer operators were either closed or had reduced operating hours. These problems were amplified further as senders faced the additional burden of having to travel further than usual whilst using a reduced public transport system.

While some remitters have moved to online money transfer via banks or online operators, not everyone has the financial capabilities or suitable access to internet to do this. Seasonal workers interviewed for this rapid assessment observed that they have had to adapt their remittance sending behaviour as a result of the difficulties of sending in person. One respondent noted that they were not sending money via a mobile MTO app whilst others had stated that they had shifted to sending money online through banks. In other instances, some remitters opted to wait and did not send money during the lockdown periods.

Central banks, Australian and New Zealand regulators, and money transfer operators (MTOs) reported a substantial shift towards digital services. The sudden inability to send in cash resulted in some people not being able to send money at all until restrictions eased, while others sought new methods of transfer. The SendMoneyPacific remittance comparison website is focused on comparing all remittance services from Australia and New Zealand to the South Pacific, and the United States to Fiji, Samoa and Tonga. During late March and April when the lockdown measures were at their most strict, the website saw visits increase by 97 per cent between March and April 2020.

Digital only MTOs have generally seen a surge in volume whilst larger MTOs that offer both digital and cash-based services have seen a significant shift amongst their customer base towards sending via digital channels. All MTOs that offer multi-channel services have been encouraging customers to send digitally during the pandemic.

The table below outlines the growth in their remittance and mobile top up services between 18 March 2020, when border closures commenced, to 3 June 2020. The data below represent year on year change in value sent. The majority of this MTO's customer base for these corridors are SWP and RSE workers.

Table 9: KlickEx Fiji and Tonga corridors, 18 March to 3 June

Corridors	Send Money/ Bill Payments Growth	Mobile Top Up Growth
Aus/NZ to Fiji	19%	14%
Aus/NZ to Tonga	16%	130%

2020 versus 18 March to 3 June 2020

Fortunately, MTOs in New Zealand were later classified as an 'essential service'. This meant that they had to comply with strict conditions if they were to remain open during the lockdown period. Despite the allowances that were made, many MTOs

remained closed because they had operated within shopping malls, travel agents and restaurants. This resulted in only a small number of MTOs remaining open throughout the level 4 lockdown.

Several reserve bank and MTO discussions that were held by the World Bank and the Developing Markets Associates Global discovered that the volume of remittances initially fell during the strictest lockdown period and steadily rose once conditions were relaxed. However, in totality, the value (the total currency amount) of the remittances sent is reported to have been falling during the period of the strictest lockdown period. This may reflect both lower foreign exchange rates for most of the period since the lockdowns commenced, and unemployment or reduced hours amongst Pacific diaspora and seasonal workers that has impacted the amount they are able to send.

Tonga Development Bank has seen the Ave Pa'anga Pau (APP) service record initially very large increases in value sent before the lockdown restrictions were implemented in various countries and after the lockdown restrictions were relaxed. The highest growth was recorded by RSE workers in April 2020. The growth of RSE transfers has tapered off in May, but they continue to record growth in diaspora sent remittances.

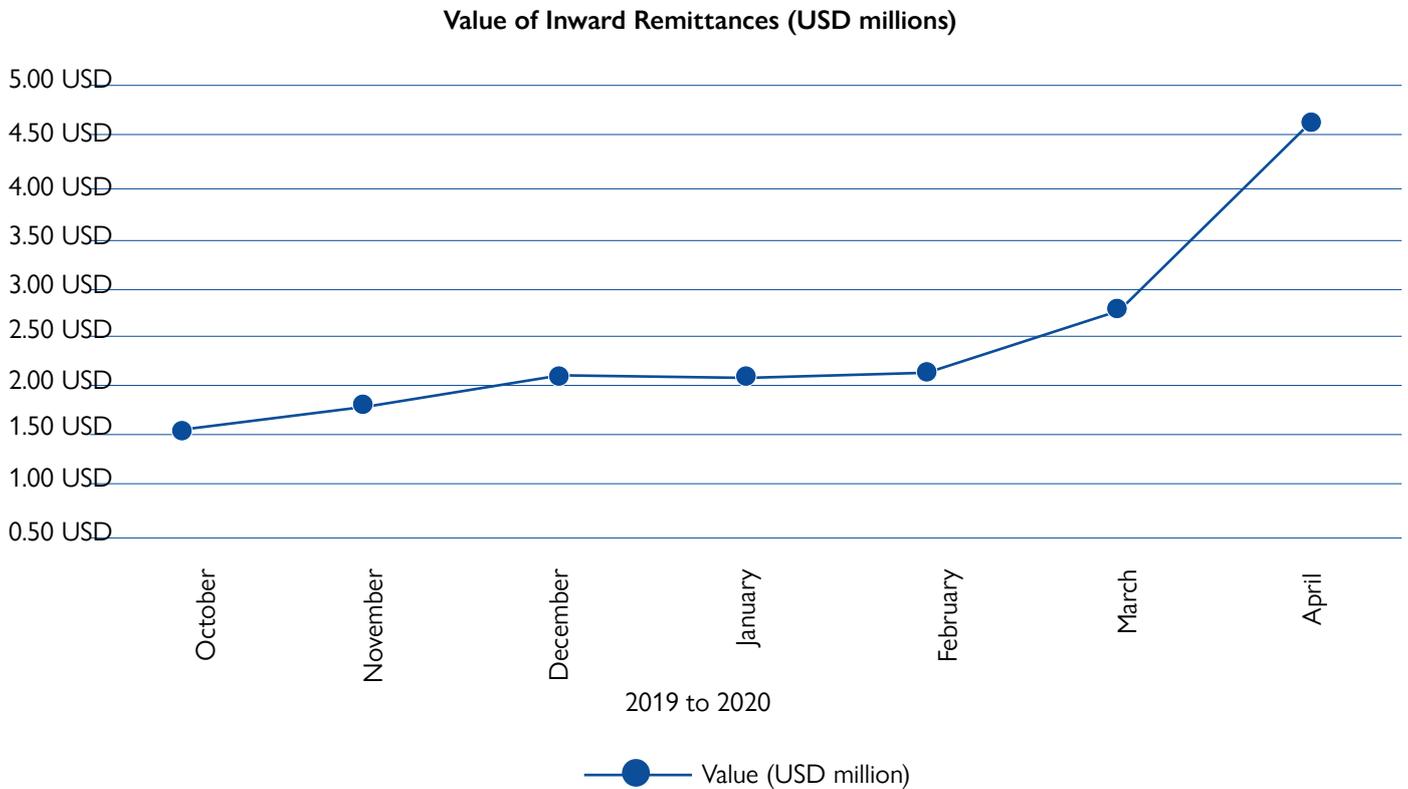
Table 10: APP New Zealand to Tonga value change, January to May 2020

Months	Total change (%)	RSE change (%)	Diaspora change (%)
Jan			
Feb	-20	-26	7
Mar	53	68	6
Apr	91	102	34
May	-1	-6	33

Vodafone M-PaiSA operates mobile money (mobile wallet) services in Fiji. Over the course of the pandemic, Fiji has recorded a very significant increase in inward remittances sent to mobile wallets during the lockdown period. The latest data for April recorded FJD 4.62million, a value increase of 68 per cent and a volume increase of 59 per cent on March 2020. The average value per transaction was FJD 314 – approximately USD 140. Most significant mobile remittances were sent from the United Kingdom, that is an important destination for Fijian soldiers serving in the British Army.

Figure 1 shows that since COVID-19 restrictions began in all major remittance sending markets to Fiji, the value of mobile money inward remittances has soared.

Figure 1: Value of Inward Remittance into Fijian mobile wallets, October 2019 to April 2020

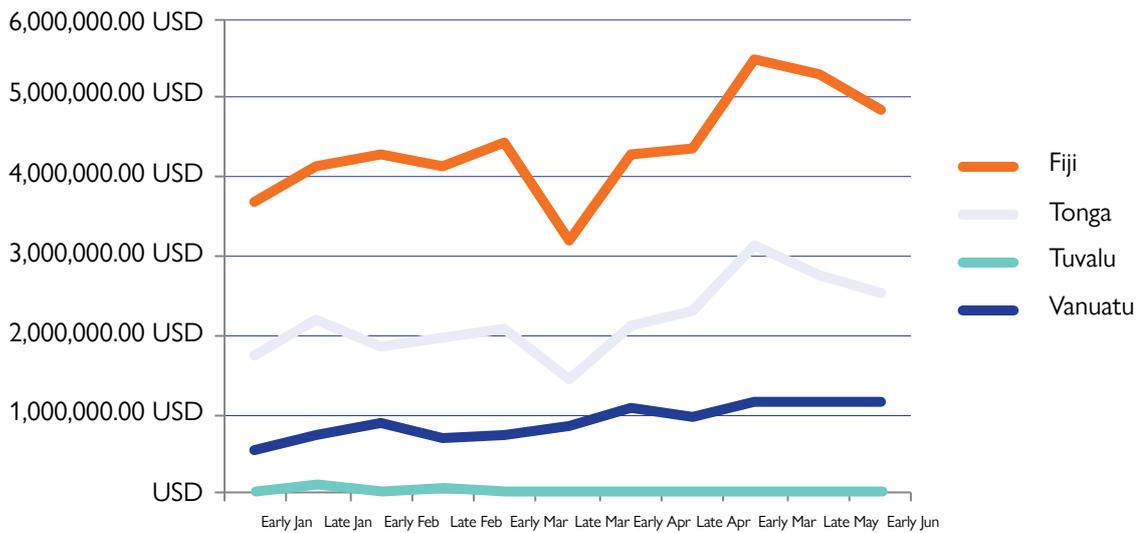


Source. Reserve Bank of Fiji COVID-19 Remittance Volatility.

The Australian regulator, AUSTRAC, has provided fortnightly remittance volume data from the beginning of 2020 to early June. The data highlights a significant fall during March over the most severe period of Australia’s COVID-19 lockdown for Fiji and Tonga – the two remittance receiving countries with both significant diaspora communities and PLM worker cohorts. This period saw many MTO agents closed across the country. Since mid-April, the value of remittances sent to Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu continued to rise once lockdown restrictions were relaxed in various countries. Values steadily rose during April 2020 as migrant workers and diaspora communities were able to access MTO services that were previously prohibited from operating.

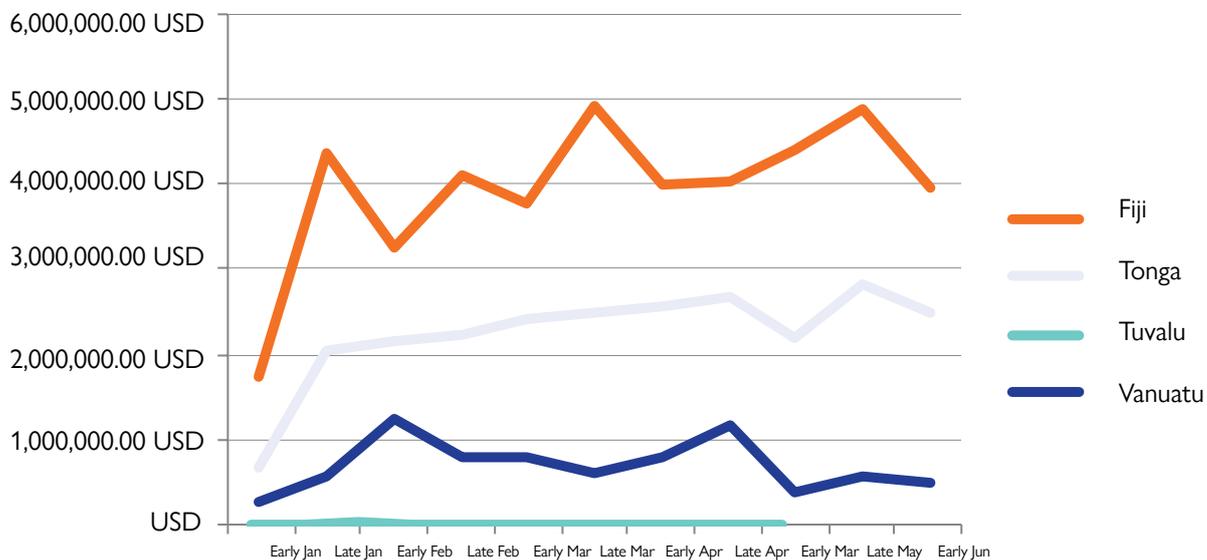
The data in the next page would support research findings that diaspora communities are continuing to remit, and that Pacific migrants on extended visas are continuing to support their families. The data for the same period 2019 is included in figure 2 in the following page which does not show such a considerable dip and rise in remittances. The figures also demonstrate that migrant workers and diaspora communities are sending more of their savings to assist families in Pacific Island Countries who have been impacted by the economic downturn caused by COVID-19.

Figure 2: Value of outbound remittances from Australia to Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu in USD, January to June 2020



Remittance Value AUS - PAC 2020

Figure 3: Value of outbound remittances from Australia to Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu in USD, January to June 2019

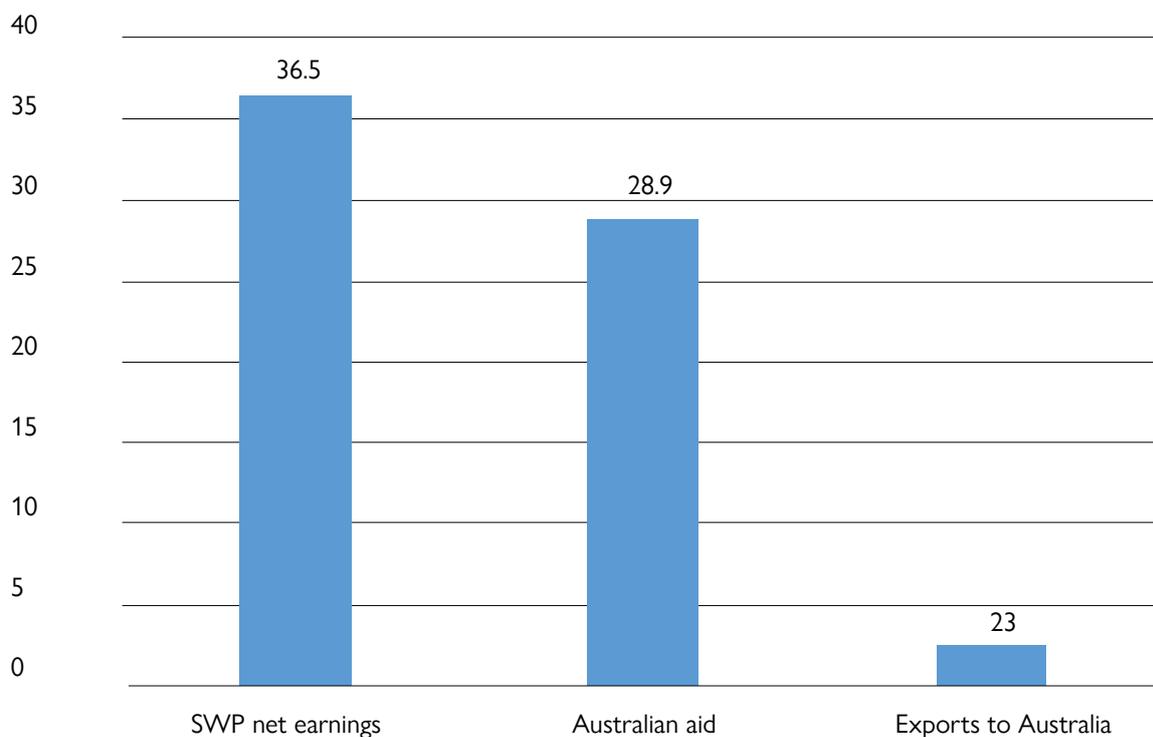


Remittance Value General 2019

CASE STUDY: Impact on Tongan Worker Remittances

For Tonga, Australian labour mobility is more important than aid and trade combined (DevPolicy, 2020). Overall net earnings from SWP workers alone in 2018–2019 was AUD 36.5 million.

Figure 4: Tonga net earnings from SWP, aid and trade in 2018–2019



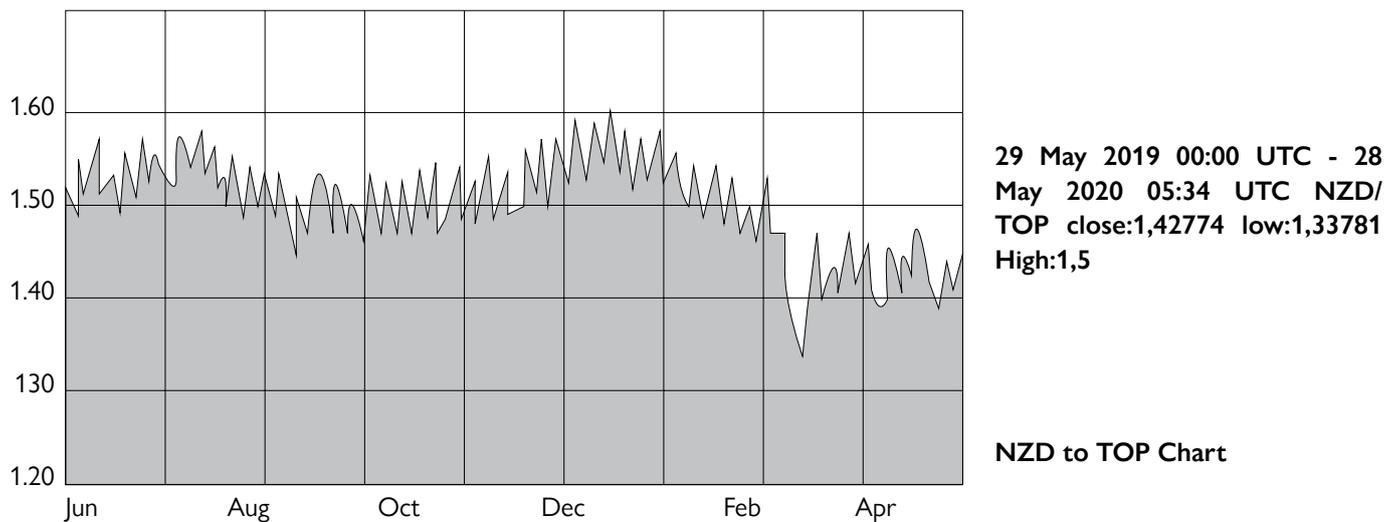
Source: DevPolicy, 2020.

As the scale of the rapidly escalating COVID-19 crisis became apparent in early to mid-March, there was enormous upheaval in global currency movements at the same time as strict lockdowns were being enforced. This resulted in major volatility in Pacific currencies during March and meant that families in Pacific countries were receiving less money during COVID-19 compared to pre-COVID-19 because of unfavourable currency exchange rate.

Prior to the COVID-19 lockdown measures being introduced, a Tongan worker in New Zealand could often expect to see their family receive Tongan Pa'anga (TOP) 450 (USD 200) or more for every New Zealand dollar (NZD) 300 (USD 190) that they send. However, from 8 March 2020 onwards there has been substantial NZD–TOP exchange rate volatility. Any migrant worker able to send money back after 23 March 2020 would have been fortunate to have seen over TOP 400 (USD 175) be received by their family in Tonga when remitting NZD 300.

This reduction in the value of the receiving country's currency would have been immediately felt by Tongan households. This could potentially disrupt bill payments and other commitments that require financial contribution. Despite the lockdowns easing, the value of the NZD has remained lower than at any point since 2015.

Figure 5: NZD to TOP currency markets recorded by xe.com June 2019 to June 2020



To conclude, it is evident that migrant workers and diaspora communities are continuing to send remittances back home to assist family members and communities that are impacted by the global economic downturn. These levels may have dropped during the strictest level of the lockdown period, but they recorded an increase as soon as restrictions were relaxed. It is also noteworthy to mention that lower remittance values have been caused by the volatile exchange rate.

2.3 Food Security

Pacific Islands have a high reliance on imported food items, reflected in the region's negative food trade balance. While imported food constitutes a significant share of urban diets, agriculture and fishing are important subsistence and livelihood activities in rural areas. Some countries, such as Fiji are also food exporters in the region and to neighbouring countries.

According to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce of the Marshall Islands, about 80 per cent of the food stock and 99 per cent of consumer items are imported. Inventory levels of essential items as of early and mid-March were tallied, demonstrating that strategic stockpiles of many essential food and sanitation items were not yet in place. The conclusion was that disruption of global food supply chains, coupled with the strict measures on quarantine and transportation, puts food security potentially at risk. For that reason, local food supplies need to be developed to provide stability (Marshall Islands Economic Impact Assessment Ad Hoc Committee, 2020, Impact of COVID-19 on the Marshall Islands Economy). The Government of the Marshall Islands has included supplemental food banks for outer island communities to prepare for potential lockdown scenario if a case comes to Marshall Islands.

Tuvalu, an atoll country which also relies heavily on imported food items, has introduced similar measures including food

rations on these food items, panic buying controls and price control inspectors – all aimed at ensuring that there is no food shortage in the outer islands.

In Fiji in areas with heavy tourism job losses, the NGO Friend has developed its own food bank, with support from the European Union. People are also encouraged to grow food in their own gardens to help themselves now and in the future (ABC Radio Australia, 2020). There is also an additional FJD 1 million allocation from the Ministry of Agriculture to bolster Fiji's food security (KPMG, 2020).

The Government of Tonga official stimulus package to combat COVID-19 has allocated TOP 3.2 million to food preservation supplements and food security.

In addition to the challenges in importing food imposed by COVID-19, Vanuatu's food security was also affected by TC Harold which destroyed crops and home gardens. A post disaster situation report estimated that over 17,000 hectares of cropland were exposed to the cyclone, which caused substantial damage to staple crops at the outset of the growing season. (FAO, 2020) Humanitarian response to TC Harold, alongside ongoing food security programmes implemented by the Pacific Community (SPC) and other regional and UN organizations have scaled up support to address any potential food shortages arising in the context of the cyclone and COVID-19.

The rapid assessment was not able to determine the impact of COVID-19 on the food security of migrant-sending households. It is assumed that households may be affected in line with the overall macrolevel impacts in Pacific countries. In some cases, reduced remittances may also deplete household income used for purchasing food items and other consumables. Experiences have demonstrated, where women are primarily responsible for procuring and cooking food for the family, the increase in food insecurity as a result of the pandemic may place them at heightened risk of domestic violence. Border closures, quarantines, market, supply chain and trade disruptions could restrict people's access to sufficient or diverse and nutritious sources of food, which disproportionately impacts women in vulnerable or marginalized groups (UN-Women, 2020)

In terms of Pacific migrant and diaspora communities, survey results from Marshallese currently living and working in the United States note that unemployment rates are soaring amongst the communities and some do not or will not have enough money to buy food, if they are not eligible for SNAP and other government welfare benefits. A disproportionately higher percentage of the Marshallese (compared to average) population are also infected with COVID-19. This affects their ability to work, even when they are technically still employed. There are Marshallese community groups who assist with bringing food items to those in need. This is a very useful emergency measure but depends on having community members with the resources to donate.

No issues have so far been noted regarding Pacific migrants' food security in Australia and New Zealand. During lockdown, liaison officers brought food to the workers' accommodation, which was cleaned and evenly distributed. Food vouchers have been distributed where necessary for PLS workers in Australia who are being moved to new roles, and cooking lessons have been organized to provide information on how to stay healthy and cook economically.

2.4 Health Security

In terms of direct COVID-19 health impacts on Pacific diaspora and migrant workers, the low rate of infection in Australia and New Zealand implies at worst, a low number of infected Fijians, Tongans, Tuvaluans and Ni-Vanuatu citizens.

However, in the United States, Pacific islanders overall experience an infection rate up to three times the average across four American states (RNZ, 2020). This includes communities living in California and Hawaii. This has included a spate of cases involving Marshallese workers in the Kona area of Hawaii who contracted the virus from working at restaurants and then spreading the virus onto their family members. Recognizing this

vulnerability, the mayor of Dubuque, Iowa, is advocating that Marshall Islands communities living there should be provided with health insurance or Medicaid coverage. The Marshallese death toll from COVID-19 in Dubuque amounts to 40 per cent of the county's total, despite the Marshallese community making up just 1 per cent of the overall population (The Guardian, 2020). The President and founder of the Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese, Melisa Laelan, noted the combination of housing, food security, employment and (lack of) access to health care as key reasons why Marshallese have been so impacted.

There are further mental health and psychosocial impacts being felt by many Pacific Islanders across the countries of destination who have been unable to attend church given the integral role that the religion often plays across Pacific communities both at home and across the diaspora. The inability to participate in diaspora gatherings, and the lack of community engagement has also had a detrimental impact. At the same time, there are also reports of Pacific temporary and seasonal migrants benefiting from time away from work and using online church services. In Australia and New Zealand, this risk is being mitigated to an extent through counselling and psychosocial support to Pacific labour mobility workers.

Many people feel a strong sense of duty to support their family members in the Pacific and personal economic strain has exacerbated the mental strain that they may already be facing through reduced earnings and the inability to move freely amongst their community and extended family. The Fiji Australian community noted that access to health care and COVID-19 testing may be difficult for non-resident Fijians currently in Australia. Physical health is at risk of being compromised due to the toll of stress, and the lack of access to community sport and gyms.

The rapid assessment also found that some elderly members of the Pacific community who do not speak English as their first language are finding it difficult to access health-care services. They may be reluctant to approach telephone health support. A respondent noted, "It has definitely impacted on their ability to provide for their island domiciled families, who typically include elders with little to no regular income, or earning capacity, and similarly limited government support."

However, some positive impacts are being reported – some households are seeing an improvement in their diets, with less takeaway food and sugary drinks being purchased due to either financial or access reasons. As one respondent noted "more money is being directed to needs, not wants." Furthermore, many families have been enjoying quality time together with children learning new skills.

2.5 Environmental Security

Whilst coping with the economic effects of the pandemic, Pacific Island countries were also severely impacted by TC Harold, a category 5 cyclone which hit Vanuatu on 5 April 2020. It hit the south of Fiji as a Category 4 on 8 April 2020, before reaching Tonga on 9 April 2020, as a Category 5 cyclone.

In Vanuatu, over 159,000 people have been affected by the cyclone. The northern islands were worst hit, with significant damage to schools, agricultural crops, buildings, power, telecommunications and the local boat fleet. (DFAT, 2020). Vanuatu workers interviewed for this assessment stated that they are very concerned about the cyclone damage to their homes and villages. Some could not reach their family by telephone for up to a week and were very concerned. Ni-Vanuatu RSE workers in New Zealand began mobilizing themselves to provide support to their communities back home, as is often the case to respond to a disaster.

More than 180,000 Fijians have had their homes and livelihoods affected. The agriculture sector has been severely impacted, with widespread damage to infrastructure, schools and health centres, particularly to the Kadavu and Lau islands. (DFAT, 2020). In Tonga, reports indicate the western coast of Tongatapu and 'Eua coastal communities have been particularly impacted (DFAT, 2020). Humanitarian response in Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu – both overseas aid and internal support – have been complicated due to COVID-19 related risk prevention measures in-country.

2.6 Personal Security, Community and Political Insecurity Impacts

Through the interviews there have been no accounts of personal security challenges in Australia and New Zealand amongst Pacific migrant workers, other than a desire to remain COVID-19 free. However, feedback from the diaspora community suggests that there are domestic pressures within the islands. While little quantitative data has yet been collected for all countries, with changes to employment as a stressor, restricted freedom of movement, and families in the same house for longer periods of time, this has the potential to increase conflicts in relationships.

As stated by a diaspora interviewee: “The impact of these kinds of pressures are in some ways unique to Pasifika peoples, due to the innate sense of duty to elders, family members. This inevitably leads to escalated tensions, where financial pressure causes inexorable conflict in relationships, families. For those family members in the islands, this compromised security would have similar effects, with the potential of increased conflict in relationships, and the broader community.”

Though the rapid assessment did not aim to uncover this information, gender-based violence is also expected to be affecting women and girls in a disproportionate way, both as migrants and as members of migrant households. Pre-COVID-19 data indicated that more than 68 per cent of women in the Pacific have experienced violence at the hands of their intimate partners. Economic difficulties due to reduced remittances and lockdowns and quarantine measures have left women confined with their abusers, with limited options for seeking help and support (UN-Women, 2020).

Another diaspora (Marshallese) respondent reported that (COVID-19) “personally it did impact my mental health as I began to get really stressed out in situations I cannot control, but not physically. I also believed my community back home are worried about getting COVID-19 back on the islands. “

The Pacific Islands have a very strong community culture. Sub-national groups such as faith-based organizations and religious and community leaders are integral to society. Village life revolves around the church and the community around it acts as a safety net, providing help and relief where necessary, to people in vulnerable situations. The church and wider community are also reliant on remittances to sustain the structures, both physical and social, that make up the fabric of society. Though too early to determine the exact impact, a tentative decrease in remittances could economically impact the wider community as well as the personal remittance receivers.

No primary or secondary research conducted from this rapid assessment has found any political insecurity present in any of the focus countries since the COVID-19 crisis began.

3. COVID-19 SUPPORT MEASURES

All Pacific Governments covered under the rapid assessment have announced general support measures to serve as economic stimulus, strengthen the health system and to scale up social welfare. Australia and New Zealand have also put in place measures that specifically focus on supporting migrants engaged in temporary labour and seasonal work. Similarly, the United States also provides support to Pacific communities from COFA countries. The following section provides an overview of support measures, mainly implemented by both Pacific Governments and countries of destination for Pacific migrants.

3.1 Fiji

On 27 March 2020, the Government of Fiji announced an FJD one billion (USD 500 million) Economic and Social stimulus package. As detailed on the KPMG's Government Stimulus Tracker, Fiji has implemented the following measures:

3.1.1 Superannuation measures

- Effective from 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020 reduction in employee and employer FNPF contribution from 8 per cent and 10 per cent to 5 per cent for all workers;
- Workers in the hospitality sector who have lost their jobs or have had their hours cut since 1 February 2020 are able to access an initial FJD 1,000 from their FNPF accounts. Additional withdrawal might be considered, if required;
- Employees affected by the nationwide physical distancing requirements, along with employees in the Lautoka confined area, who have been placed on leave without pay or had their hours cut, are able to access an initial FJD 500 from their FNPF accounts;
- The Government directly subsidizes any shortfall in FNPF members account balance.

3.1.2 Income support measures

- People working in informal sector employment in the lockdown areas are entitled to a one-off Government relief payment of FJD 150 (USD 70), provided they have a street trader or hawker license;
- Government to fund 21 days COVID-19 leave for employees earning less than FJD 30,000 (USD 13,800) who have tested positive for the virus;
- Fijians in the informal sector who tested positive for the virus to be paid a one-off sum of FJD 1,000 (USD 460);
- Banks and hire purchase companies to offer six-month deferral of loan repayments for Fijians who have lost their jobs or had their hours reduced. Also available to businesses;
- Banks to waive all charges on minimum balances in customer's accounts and remove minimum purchasing requirement for electronic transactions;
- Water Authority Fiji to suspend all disconnections until 31

December 2020;

- Energy Fiji Ltd to match Government's 50 per cent subsidy to its subsidized customers;
- Pensioners monthly travel allowance reduced from FJD 40 to FJD 20.

3.1.3 Food supplies

- The Fijian Ministry of Agriculture has provided FJD 1 million (USD 460,000) to support food security;
- FRIEND in Fiji has set up a food bank, with support from the European Union and is also encouraging sustainability through growing food in people's gardens

3.1.4 Support for Fijians overseas

- The Government of Fiji has organized repatriation from the United States, Australia and New Zealand and returning citizens have been placed in established 28-day quarantine facilities on arrival in Nadi.

3.2 Marshall Islands

- The Marshall Islands Government announced an Economic and Social Stimulus Package which included the following measures:

3.2.1 Income support measures

- Bank of Marshall Islands have issued loan payment holidays for six months;
- No penalty interest;
- No moratorium – no interest free loan;
- Includes mortgage payment holidays – however not many Marshallese people are able to buy land as land is owned through family lineage.

3.2.2 Individual measures

- Income support measures to be provided under the U.S. CARES Act applicable to Marshall Islands under COFA
- Payments are scheduled to be disbursed by mid-June;
- To be eligible for payments:
 - » Need to have work affected from COVID-19, for instance loss of job or reduced hours;
 - » Someone in family has COVID-19;
- Payments of USD 252/week for 39 weeks until 26 December 2020;
- Additional USD 600 for 15 weeks so altogether USD 852 if they have been affected by COVID-19 (had the virus or someone in the family has had it).

3.2.3 Business measures

- An initial USD 6 million Economic Relief package to be disbursed as Pandemic Economic Relief Assistance in the 2020 financial year (up to 30 September 2020) to businesses in Majuro and Kwajalein;
- Programme can be expanded to cover tourism sector suppliers and any other business able to demonstrate COVID-19 economic impact.

3.2.4 Support for Marshallese overseas

- The Government of the Marshall Islands has commenced repatriation of stranded citizens beginning with those stranded in COVID-19 free countries. The first repatriation flight was for Marshall Islands citizens stranded in Federated States of Micronesia, specifically the state of Pohnpei;
- The Marshall Islands repatriation working group has been established to continue to coordinate the repatriation of citizens from COVID-19 free countries, then COVID-19 infected areas once the quarantine and isolation facilities meet national standards and adequate protocols are in place;
- A one-off payment of USD 500 was issued for each eligible citizen caught outside of country (USD 100,000 total budget);
- Marshallese citizens based in the United States to receive access to SNAP during lockdown period;
- Marshallese community and other groups are assisting with donations of food items, masks and other goods. Further groups are assisting with paying rent/bills for qualifying households.

3.3 Tonga

On 26 March 2020, Tonga announced an Economic and Social Stimulus Package, a short-term assistance program of TOP 60 million (USD 26.6 million) which includes the following:

3.3.1 Superannuation measures

- Defer and delay paying of taxes from all sectors, mainly from tourism sector;
- Access to pension funds: civil servant pension funds - already distributed TOP 1,000 (USD 43) per member – just released budget for next year, ready for more assistance;

- Private sector pensions – not provided assistance yet, apart from waiving contributions;
- TOP 1.3 million (USD 570,000) for social support and assistance for vulnerable populations. The government is planning to include support for seasonal workers and households for their second round of support.

3.3.2 Government support measures

- TOP 22.4 million (USD 9.8 million) for supporting businesses in tourism, agriculture, fisheries, construction, manufacture, retail;
- Current rate TOP 535 (USD 235) (one off payment) – the government has almost completed distribution of the subsidy;

3.3.3 Income support measures

- Banks have various deferment plans available depending on the type of loan. These may range from three months principal and interest deferment for home loans with certain lenders, whilst other banks are deferring principal only on loan payments for up to six months;
- TDB is offering a three-month moratorium on loan repayments (principal and fees only, interest still payable) from April to June 2020 – to be further reviewed based on progress with COVID-19 economic recovery;
- Loans and incentives are available to assist in the rebuilding of facilities.

3.3.4 Business measures

- The Government of Tonga has issued a loan of TOP 2.5 million (USD 1.08 million) at a rate of three per cent, which will focus on aiding tourism sectors affected by cyclones.
- Further support has been given by banks offering delayed loan payments for tourism industries affected by the cyclones.
- Australia will be offered opportunities for reskilling through the TVET program along with one off payments of TOP 535 (USD 235) to affected individuals.

3.3.5 Education

- TOP 3.8 million (USD 1.7 million) to cover costs of free education;
- The Ministry of Education has provided pastoral care for all primary school students for 2 weeks in Term 2. This is to ensure that students' fears of COVID-19 are addressed appropriately;
- If parents are experiencing financial hardship, the Ministry is offering free transport for the first three weeks of term 2.

3.3.6 Women and NGO groups

- TOP 1 million (USD 442,000) to support women and NGO groups;
- TOP 1.3 million (USD 575,000) for social support and assistance for vulnerable populations.

3.3.7 Food supplies

- Tongan liaison officer in NZ is arranging food shipments for the families of seasonal workers, along with cleaning products;
- The Tongan Government has allocated TOP 3.2 million (USD 1.4 million) for food preservation supplements and food security.

3.3.8 Support for Tongans overseas

- The Government of Tonga is currently working on creating a policy to open borders. Border quarantine measures and places (for instance hotels) are being evaluated as well as assessing the ability to test people and procure enough testing kits;
- Tonga is also waiting on the delivery of an oxygen generator to assist with potential COVID-19 cases. Tongan nationals have been invited to register their interest in repatriation on a Tongan Government website;²⁰
- The first COVID-19 repatriation flight drill is set for 16 June 2020 to test emergency protocol, surveillance and communication systems. Following the drill, Tonga will determine whether to open borders for stranded migrants in the coming months.

3.4 Tuvalu

Tuvalu announced an economic and financial relief package in response to COVID-19 on 30 April 2020 that include the following measures.

3.4.1 Superannuation measures

- Tuvalu National Provident Fund COVID-19 policy measures worth AUD 1.5 million (USD 1.03 million) will be implemented

from 01 May 2020 to 31 July 2020. This includes:

- Members made redundant can make withdrawals of AUD 500/month (USD 340) for 3 months;
- For those that have reduced hours can withdraw AUD 250/month (USD 170) for 3 months;
- For those who have suffered some loss of income can make a one-off withdrawal of AUD 250 (USD 170).

3.4.2 Financial support payments

- Financial packages to assist people throughout country – (AUD 40 (USD 27) pp per month);
- Help via vouchers for food security to avoid panic shortages; to ensure outer islands also have food supplies.

3.4.3 Income support measures

- These support measures will be implemented by the National Bank of Tuvalu in coordination with development partners worth AUD 1.4 million (USD 962,000);
- Clients can apply to restructure their loans, reduce, or suspend loan repayment and interest payments;
- Concessional loans and credit facilities for those affected by COVID-19.

3.4.4 Social welfare measures

- Financial packages to assist people throughout country – (AUD 40/pp per month) (USD 30);
- Help via vouchers for food security to avoid panic shortages, panic buying controls, imported food rationed and additional price control inspectors to ensure outer islands also have food supplies.

3.4.5 Support to Tuvaluans overseas

- In Tuvalu, repatriation of Tuvaluan citizens overseas will only begin once Tuvalu's COVID-19 quarantine and medical facilities have been established in Funafuti. In particular, the repatriation of students currently studying overseas will be prioritized. Approximately 100 Tuvaluan citizens are currently registered with the Tuvalu High Commission in Fiji for repatriation;
- The Government of Tuvalu is also providing AUD 310,000 (USD 213,000) to students studying overseas. This includes:
 - » Each un-accompanied student sponsored by the Government or others will each receive AUD 100/month (USD 68). This will benefit another 151 persons;
 - » Accompanied students sponsored by the Government or others will each receive 150/month (USD 103). This will benefit 43 students;
 - » Students that are not sponsored and not living with parents or relatives will each receive AUD 200/month (USD 137). Around 200 students, mostly in Fiji will benefit from this;

20 National Emergency Management Response - www.gov.to/press-release/covid-19-online-registration-form-released-to-repatriate-tongans-from-overseas/.

- Several civil servants that are overseas, either on leave or duty travel, will also receive around FJD 120/day/person. Around 40 civil servants will benefit from this;
- Another relevant instruction from the Government of Tuvalu was to encourage those living in the capital and not residents of the capital to temporarily return to their home islands. From end of March to mid-April, around 1,074 people or 17 per cent of Funafuti's population relocated to their home islands.

3.5 Vanuatu

The Government Vanuatu announced a USD 32 million²¹ stimulus package to support the country's economy (RNZ, 2020). This includes:

3.5.1 Financial support

- Department of Finance and Treasury reimbursing employers a part of the wages they pay to their workers;
- Each employer must pay VT 30,000 for each eligible worker. In addition, employers will also receive another 12 per cent of payment for incentives as well as VNPF contributions;
- Payments will be made in arrears for the four months from March to June 2020;
- The Government will carry out a policy review of the stimulus Package at the end of June and any changes to the package will be announced;
- Students to receive tuition fee exemption of VT 42,000 for 2020 academic year (Vanuatu Daily Post, 2020).

3.5.2 Support for overseas Ni-Vanuatu

- Vanuatu has commenced repatriation of its nationals who had been stranded in New Zealand. Fifty eight Vanuatu citizens returned home on 3 June 2020 on a New Zealand Air Force plane delivering supplies after TC Harold. Less than 10 of those who were repatriated on the first phase were RSE Workers;
- Additionally, on 24 June 2020, over 1,500 citizens and residents were able to return to Vanuatu. Prime Minister Loughman advised Vanuatu's Parliament that over 1,000 of those repatriated were seasonal workers that were based in Australia and New Zealand;
- All passengers underwent pre-departure screening prior to boarding, physical distancing was strictly enforced on-board and in accordance with government protocols, all passengers went into managed isolation on arrival in Port Vila.

3.6 Australia

Migrant workers in Australia enrolled in the SWP and PLS have been provided with administrative, logistical, and welfare support measures to enable them to better cope with the challenges emerging due to COVID-19.

COVID-19 administrative and logistical support measures announced for Pacific workers under PLS and SWP on 4 April by DFAT include:

- New visas allowing both PLS and SWP workers to remain legally in Australia and be allowed to work for up to 12 months;
- Support for redeployment of workers to alternative employees due to either being stood down or contract completion where the employer does not have further employment available for the workers;
- For Pacific workers still in Australia, they are able to access their superannuation up to the value of AUD 10,000 per financial year should they not be able to meet immediate needs;
- Further welfare support measures have been made available to Pacific workers in Australia;
- The PLF team has expanded their welfare support team and a 24-hour PLS worker welfare telephone line has been promoted. The PLF also provides additional welfare support to SWP workers in Australia following a request from DESE for the COVID-19 period;
- Multilingual videos (including messages of support) and flyers have been disseminated focusing on key worker concerns – isolation, work safety, necessary additional visa arrangements (including extension);
- Social media messaging has been extended with more focus on health and well-being – particularly via the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF) Facebook page;
- Religious services hosted by Pacific religious figures in Australia have been streamed online. These have been available on the PLF Facebook page;
- For PLS workers undergoing redeployment, the PLF has ensured that workers have had access to food (via food vouchers), accommodation and internet access during redeployment. Workers have been assisted with preparing curriculum vitae preparation and interview training, and physical training to ensure that they are well placed to be accepted for new roles and to maintain their physical health;
- Transport for PLS workers has been covered and income paid through any cross (state) border quarantine periods that have been necessary to undergo.

21 Please note that the total support package for Vanuatu has not been reported on the government website in VUV. It has been reported in media in USD.

Support provided by Pacific Governments to their citizens employed in Australian labour mobility schemes:

Fiji and Tonga, through their High Commissions, also provide support through dedicated liaison officers. These liaison officers assist with welfare support including helping to connect workers with local churches. They provide logistical support (for example visa, redeployment) and also work with employers to build up the reputation of their workers to help encourage future hiring. As Tuvalu migrant workers in Australia are only employed under the PLS, they receive communications from the PLF.

The Government of Australia has also announced the following economic stimulus measures which may or may not cover Pacific migrants:

- Reserve Bank of Australia emergency rate cut to 0.25 per cent in March 2020;
- JobKeeper Payment scheme which provides a temporary subsidy for businesses significantly affected by coronavirus (COVID-19). Eligible employers, sole traders and other entities can apply to receive AUD 1,500 per eligible employee per fortnight. Businesses pay eligible employees AUD 1,500 (USD 1,025) JobKeeper allowance every fortnight until 19 July 2020. Currently Tasmania is the only state to make JobKeeper available for seasonal workers in Australia;
- Pacific seasonal workers are eligible to access their superannuation to the value of AUD 10,000 (USD 6,830) per financial year should they not be able to meet immediate needs.

The Government of Australia has, up until 28 May 2020, approved the movement of 1,989 SWP seasonal workers. Over 2,000 SWP workers had applied or needed to apply for a bridging visa or 408 visa as of 5 June 2020 to stay in the country until border restrictions end and flights resume. Some of these workers have remained with the same employers, whilst others have moved to a different approved employer or host organization

Pacific migrant workers that had been stood down from their work due to their existing employers having to scale back or cease operations have enabled the redeployment of 74 PLS workers to new employers, and in some instances different industries. These workers had been stood down from their work due to their existing employers having to scale back or cease operations. This includes, in particular, hospitality employees.

3.7 New Zealand

Similar to migrants in Australia, RSE employers in New Zealand were able to access the COVID-19 wage subsidy established in New Zealand:

- This provides for up to NZD 585 (USD 378) per employee

per week where the worker is working for 20 hours per week or more;

- Workers can access this wage subsidy if an employer is experiencing a decline of 30 per cent or more in revenue;
- No welfare support is available, if contracts have ended and no further work is available;
- As of 31 March 2020, no employer had applied for the government subsidy.

New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) provides support to RSE workers through their relationship managers across New Zealand.

- They manage the Toso Vaka O Manu (TVOM) programme, which is an MFAT funded, and implemented by MBIE, labour mobility institutional strengthening programme;
- The programme works across the nine Pacific governments included on the RSE scheme, and with New Zealand government departments and RSE employers;
- TVOM is the principal communication source for RSE workers currently based in New Zealand to help them understand the latest COVID-19 updates;
- MFAT will assist the Governments of Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu in communicating forthcoming repatriation flights;
- MBIE has been responsible for managing the visa extension process and has communicated visa extensions with RSE workers. Tongan workers are further supported by a New Zealand based liaison officer;
- MBIE established a coordinated response with a lead person feeding into National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA);
- MBIE helped to provide summaries of key information from the Immigration New Zealand (INZ) website²² to help RSE workers and other migrants understand the key information.

From 24 March 2020 a Vulnerable Communities "network of networks" was established in New Zealand as a national cross government approach. This was part of the NEMA meetings.

- NEMA worked with communities through central government coordination across agencies to support population groups at higher risk of being adversely affected through the COVID-19 crisis;
- Includes those at risk of health, social, economic and age-related issues that may arise from a level 4 lockdown situation;
- Pacific migrants including RSE workers were identified as a vulnerable group and are able to access all support measures;
- RSE employers were sent information by Relationship

²² www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/covid-19/migrant-information.

Managers and the TVOM team. COVID-19 level 4 guidance was translated into Bislama for Ni-Vanuatu workers and Pidgin English for workers from the Solomon Islands and PNG;

- NEMA developed Welfare contact cards once New Zealand entered alert level 3 which are attached. Please see Appendix 1 and 2 for more information;
- Welfare support included a 24-hour helpline, a focus on translated content with a regularly updated website;²³
- NEMA has since been phased out during alert level 2 with a longer term “Caring for Communities” approach which includes regional outreach. It is available for RSE workers if required. This is intended to provide longer term support for those disadvantaged from the COVID-19 crisis and ongoing socioeconomic issues. This will include a focus on relationship building and will include a network of NGOs and service providers that can assist communities as required.

The Ministry for Pacific Peoples (MPP) provided daily updates from 24 March to inform the work being implemented nationally, regionally and locally.

- These identified relevant issues for Pacific migrants, particularly RSE and temporary workers who required welfare support;
- Oversaw COVID-19 messages that were translated into the nine main Pacific languages. These were disseminated online, social media and television;
- The MPP website, www.mpp.govt.nz, and their Facebook and YouTube channels²⁴ have been providing guidance for all Pacific people in New Zealand;
- New Zealand Police also provided language translations of key COVID-19 messages²⁵ including Bislama, Fijian and Tongan translations.

New Zealand’s economic stimulus measures also indirectly affect Pacific migrants engaged in the RSE schemes:

- Reserve Bank of New Zealand (RBNZ) emergency rate cut from 1 per cent to 0.25 per cent on 16 March 2020;
- RSE employers have been able to apply for the wage subsidy (for businesses that are impacted by Covid-19 and can show an anticipated 30 per cent reduction in revenue). This is to a maximum of NZD 585 (USD 370) per week, which must be passed on to the employee. This is only accessible for employers who continue to have workers employed. If contracts have ended, and there is no further work, there is no welfare support available. Furthermore, pastoral care is also provided by employers under the RSE policy;
- Throughout the level 4 lockdown, RSE workers employed in horticulture, viticulture, and fisheries were considered to be essential workers. Nearly 3,342 RSE worker visas that were scheduled to expire April–June 2020; were extended until 25 September 2020.

As of 15 June, over 1,500 RSE workers from the countries covered by the assessment are continuing to work including with alternative employers and half of these have full-time employment opportunities. Around 300 workers²⁶ have been prioritized for repatriation, while an additional 1000 seasonal workers are not working. Around 1,665 workers from Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, and Solomon Islands are also currently based in New Zealand.

For workers prioritized for repatriation, workers must face an urgent or compassionate situation which would warrant exceptional return in normal circumstances. This includes criteria like bereavement leave, sick dependents, pregnancy and childbirth, disaster affected families (such as by TC Harold) and other pastoral or personal care matters.

Table 11: Statistics on RSE workers in New Zealand as of May 28

Worker category	Fiji	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Other Pacific	Total
Prioritized for repatriation	1	67	0	234	151	453
Without employment	62	225	0	657	566	1510
Partially employed	10	129	0	661	413	1213
Fully employed	50	290	11	402	535	1288
Total	123	711	11	1954	1665	4464

Source: MBIE; data aggregated from Employer survey.

23 <https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/resources/COVID-19-Guidelines-for-Community-Organisations-Working-with-Volunteers-Alert-Level-4.pdf>

24 MPP YouTube COVID-19 channel: www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLLyj3ScsPDOYH1vGUU0j_8RF0hzSF29OB&time_continue=53&v=xz09EVtPRug&feature=emb_logo

25 www.facebook.com/pg/CountiesManukauPolice/videos/

26 All figures represent countries covered by the assessment, unless otherwise specified

3.8 United States of America

As identified in the support measures for the Marshall Islands, the United States has introduced the U.S. CARES Act which is applicable both to Marshallese within the United States, but also those based in the Marshall Islands as a COFA country. In addition, additional support provided to migrants and the Marshallese community include;

- Adaptions to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and access whilst in lockdown, where possible;
- Paid sick leave.

Further, economic Stabilization and Assistance to Severely Distressed Sectors of the United States Economy may also indirectly support Marshallese migrants engaged in these sectors.

3.9 Maintaining Pacific remittance flows: COVID-19 measures

- In order to avoid a major fall in remittances sent to all countries particularly during periods of lockdown where movement of Pacific migrants and diaspora communities were curtailed, the following measures were implemented to ensure that remittances flows are maintained across the Pacific region;
- Larger MTOs that operate both cash and digital channels have encouraged their existing customers to switch to sending online wherever possible;

- Dissemination of up to date information on the rapidly changing situation to senders and receivers. SendMoneyPacific has collected and published full corridor data collections, information on MTO agents every week since the onset of COVID-19 restrictions on their website, shared via newsletter and social media;
- Convening discussions between the central banks, regulators and the remittance industry to ensure coordination on activities and sharing of lessons learned. This has been led by the World Bank and Developing Markets Associates Global as part of a global survey focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the Remittances Market;
- Waiving remittance flows. Fiji Vodafone, through a grant from the Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme, waived fees from 15 May 2020 to 14 July 2020 for all domestic and international remittances that are sent to the M-PAiSA mobile wallet. WorldRemit, RIA Money and Thunes (the cross border platform that RocketRemit use for their regional service to Fiji) will participate in the zero fee promotion;
- The promotion will allow customers from all key sending countries for Fiji – Australia, New Zealand, United States and United Kingdom to send for zero fee. The Reserve Bank of Fiji will monitor the impact on mobile money growth from this action.

3.10 International Government and Donors: COVID-19 Support Measures

Aside from support provided by Governments in the Pacific, donors and development partners are also implementing programmes with COVID-19 support measures. Griffith University has developed a COVID-19 Aid tracker:

<https://blogs.griffith.edu.au/asiainsights/tracking-covid-19-aid-assistance-to-pacific-island-countries/>

4. EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORT MEASURES

As detailed above, Pacific Governments and governments in countries of destination for Pacific migrants have put in place general and specific measures to support temporary and seasonal workers, diaspora communities and Pacific Islanders overseas. While the majority of Pacific migrant workers and their households are covered by these measures, an analysis of the effectiveness reveals that while some measures have been important to help overcome specific challenges for seasonal and temporary workers, there are gaps in support across the five focus countries and in the countries of destination.

4.1 Pacific Islands

- The following details challenges identified through the rapid assessment in terms of availability and access to support measures for Pacific migrants unable to depart and remittance-dependent households.

4.1.1 Superannuation support

- Fiji: FNPF measures outlined above may be limited in scope. Many people had already accessed funds from their pension for TC Winston recovery in 2016 and further withdrawals may leave households with little remaining funds available for retirement and the possibility of future economic shock and natural disasters. For migrants that were unable to depart, the Government provided support letters to access their FNPF funds but whether these letters were accepted by FNPF is unclear.

4.1.2 Income support

- Informant interviews found that there was a lack of specific income support measures available for the families of Pacific migrant workers in Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu;
- Further, no specific support measures were available for Pacific migrant workers who were held back home due to travel restrictions. Income support was available for those who had lost their jobs but is not available for those who were scheduled to leave on labour mobility visas to Australia and New Zealand. There are up to 3,200 RSE workers alone unable to travel over to their pre-assigned jobs in New Zealand;
- In Tonga specifically, migrant workers have been left out of income support measures. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is now seeking to address how these workers can

be compensated. Government efforts to date have focused on seasonal workers that are unable to leave Australia and New Zealand. Tonga Development Bank (TDB) stated they are working closely with the Ministry of Internal Affairs for seasonal workers in-country to receive support from the Government;

- While Marshallese citizens should receive income support payments if they have lost employment or have COVID-19, it appears that there is a gap if their only source of income is remittances. In this case, if the sender is sick or unemployed, the sender's income support payment may not be enough to cover their fundamental needs and also remit money;
- Unemployed workers from other countries, including the Philippines, are stranded in the Republic of Marshall Islands and unable to claim unemployment benefits

4.1.3 Remittances

- The families of seasonal workers²⁷ experienced initial problems when they could not receive remittances during the stages of enforced lockdown in both countries of origin and destination. They were also not eligible to receive income support. This could have had an acute effect on vulnerable households such as those headed by single women, because of their increased dependence on remittances and the increased domestic burden restraining their economic participation. Remittance-dependent households will, however, only need payments should the seasonal workers not have enough employment, or a second wave of COVID-19 causes further lockdown measures, which would inhibit the ability to remit;
- As analysis of remittance flows demonstrate, initial periods of lockdown led to a fall in remittance volumes that was overcome with a shift to digital services. This was supported through increased availability of information, and incentives such as fee waivers. However, there is a clear opportunity for employers, governments and labour sending units, to provide enhanced training on how to use digital services. With mobile money use increasing in the Pacific, both the sender and receiver now has a higher capacity to use lower cost digital remittances, which in turn can help to increase remittance receipts for individual transactions over a period when overall remittance flows are likely to fall. At the same time, noting the significance of labour migrant and diaspora remittances to the GDP of Pacific Island countries, Governments in the region should explore means to connect with diaspora and encourage increased investments.

²⁷ Seasonal workers who are caught in Australia or New Zealand.

4.1.4 Social measures

- The analysis of the social impacts of COVID-19 has shown a decrease in food security and mental well-being at present. To address these issues, several measures have been put in place, both by the Governments as well as by non-governmental organizations and diaspora communities to help those in need. However, the assessment found specific data gaps and challenges;
- Aside from Tuvalu, informant interviews did not find that the focus countries have any specific mental health support measures in place to support worker households;
- All countries could benefit from improved sustainable agricultural practices and education on healthy eating practices. The COVID-19 restrictions have presented an unexpected opportunity for households to adopt more nutritional diets. This point was addressed several times in interviews and surveys with Pacific diaspora and seasonal workers;
- No specific measures to prevent the increasing of gender based violence, particularly intimate partner violence and/or to strengthen the support to victims have been identified. Moreover, no specific measures have been identified either to prevent women migrants from sexual exploitation and abuse;
- Some focus countries have acted quickly to ensure subsidized or free education is available in the short term (education is free for Marshall Islands and Tuvalu citizens). Tonga and Vanuatu both currently have temporary measures to ensure free education this year. These measures may need to be extended into 2021, with appropriate partner support.

4.1.5 Repatriation

- All Pacific Island countries have also been exploring opportunities to repatriate their citizens from overseas, including seasonal workers engaged in the labour mobility schemes of Australia and New Zealand. Prior to repatriation efforts, several Pacific Governments are preparing their medical and quarantine facilities and are engaging in bilateral discussions with countries of destination before commencing significant repatriation. This has, in many cases led to a delay of the return of seasonal workers that may be without employment and access to support.

4.2 Countries of Destination

- Pacific seasonal and temporary migrant workers affected by COVID-19 have been supported through welfare payments, some mental health support, and visa extensions. However, analysis in Australia and New Zealand has found that there are some issues facing employers and workers.

4.2.1 Administrative and logistical support

- The imposition of border closures came at harvest time for some employers who were scaling down their operations for the southern hemisphere late autumn and winter seasons. Other employers such as citrus growers, faced the challenge of needing workers to be placed quickly to make up for those that had been scheduled to arrive. In both Australia and in New Zealand, effective coordination amongst employers has ensured that gaps in employment have been mitigated. This sharing of an unexpectedly large labour pool has been permitted by the government and facilitated by employers;
- From the perspective of the employers, while they have moved quickly to coordinate with the Government and PLF to ensure work is available to as many migrant workers in country as possible, it is probable that many employers are experiencing an oversupply of labour. Some employers may also face a reduction in revenue as a consequence of COVID-19 lockdown measures and therefore would be unable to provide employment. The sustainability of this redeployment could be a challenge;
- Primary interviews in Australia found that employers were unhappy with the government bureaucracy involved with arranging visa extensions for workers who could not return. There are reports of long approval and processing times that have left seasonal workers in limbo in locations of their original employer as they wait for these approvals to come through;
- Employers are also facing higher costs to ensure appropriate social distancing. Some employers are covering these costs where redeployment is necessary, while others are deducting the travel costs from workers' earnings. There is also dissatisfaction with the visa extension arrangements whereby workers are being asked to pay AUD 300 (USD 205) for medical certificates, and also required to seek police clearance. In some instances, workers had recently completed both processes as part of their original visa application process;
- In Australia, movement of seasonal workers that needed to be redeployed by a new employer has been compounded by different border controls in each state. For instance, there is freedom of movement between New South Wales and Victoria, but the Queensland border is closed. However, despite this impediment, some approved employers have applied for exemptions from state government quarantine requirements.

4.2.2 Superannuation

- Early access to superannuation for workers in Australia and New Zealand may assist in the short term but presents a longer-term risk with less money in worker funds remaining for future support.

4.2.3 Income support

- Pacific seasonal workers are not eligible for JobKeeper or Jobseeker initiatives;
- A survey conducted for this rapid assessment found that a further difficult issue at present is where residency status may disqualify some people from government support through measures such as the JobKeeper schemes. A vast number of Pacific islanders are known to migrate to New Zealand before moving on to Australia. Previously, New Zealand citizens living in Australia were not eligible for government income support until they had been in Australia as a resident for two years. However, the eligibility requirements had changed earlier this year after a petition to allow New Zealand citizens access to JobKeeper subsidy was allowed;
- In cases where Pacific diaspora communities receive JobKeeper support, this may also mean a continuation in remittance transfers to their communities in Pacific Island countries.

4.2.4 Social measures

- Food security may become a pressing issue as the economic downturn worsens. While the rapid assessment did not reveal any evidence to suggest that seasonal workers in Australia and New Zealand are suffering from lack of access to food, current media reports state that several Pacific migrants awaiting redeployment to a new employer may face food shortages and decreased food intake;
- While members of the Marshallese community have the right to live, work, study and pay taxes in the United States, they are denied a range of benefits, including Medicare or Medicaid coverage. (Babic, 2015) Marshallese migrants in the United States are more at risk in the short term. Access to the U.S. SNAP programme is available to most migrants currently, but this is likely to be a short-term measure and access to food may soon become an issue for this community.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The rapid assessment of the impacts of COVID-19 on labour mobility in the Pacific has found that to date, major detrimental impacts have been contained for Pacific migrant workers either working as scheduled or working on extended visas in Australia and New Zealand. Furthermore, the surveys with Pacific diaspora communities in these countries has not found conclusive evidence that there has been a wide-ranging loss of employment, however the concerns related to bearing the responsibility of supporting stranded Pacific migrants or those unemployed has been raised by other actors examining the impacts of COVID-19 on migration. For the Marshallese diaspora in the United States, the risks are significant, owing to high exposure to COVID-19 across several states, soaring unemployment, and reduced food security and health-care access.

While a large cohort of workers in Australia and New Zealand have benefited economically by continuing to earn money, the lack of specific income support and bureaucratic delays in redeployment leave Pacific seasonal and temporary migrants in a state of suspension.

For Pacific migrant workers who have not been able to leave their home countries, the situation is starker. With no government COVID-19 income relief, these worker households have suffered a major loss of income and may be experiencing further psychosocial pressures and food insecurity. Migrant-sending households were not included within the assessment and it is therefore difficult to quantify the socioeconomic impact on these households. As the Marshall Islands is a COFA country, Marshallese citizens are covered by income support measures and other relief provided by the United States Government. This does not however, extend to international migrants working within the Marshall Islands unless they meet specific criteria.

Although the rapid assessment could not gather any data from households of Pacific migrant workers currently in the countries of destination, it is likely that households of these workers were also able to avert major challenges arising in the context of COVID-19 despite not being explicitly covered by government relief measures. Interviews and a variety of data sources suggest that remittance flows from Pacific migrants have been fairly well maintained so far with seasonal workers in place in Australia and New Zealand largely being able to continue working, however, sometimes on reduced hours. Feedback from central banks and the remittance industry would appear to suggest that remittance volumes after an initial slump, have now stabilized, albeit with reduced remittance values.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the key findings and conclusions from the rapid assessment, the report makes the following recommendations to enhance social protection for migrant workers and their families, and to improve overall migration governance with a view to supporting economic recovery. Several programmes and initiatives are already underway that could be scaled up and replicated.

Short term

1. [Include Pacific seasonal workers who have been unable to depart their home countries and households dependent upon remittances in COVID-19 assistance measures.](#) Many workers who were due to depart prior to COVID-19 pandemic have had no income since March 2020 and with the economic downturn in their countries would not be able to easily seek new employment. Income support should be backdated from when the worker was due to leave and provided until they can travel or have been able to secure alternative employment. Remittance receiving households with no alternative source of income are also at risk.
2. [Ensure adequate support is provided to Pacific seasonal and temporary workers in countries of destination including coverage under government income support schemes, medical insurance and opportunities for repatriation.](#) The rapid assessment demonstrated that while support was provided by employers and other stakeholders to extend visas and ensure redeployment, Pacific seasonal and temporary workers nearing the end of contracts or awaiting new placements did not receive any income support, despite not having any income. Recent news reports indicate that the situation could be worse than initially understood, which emphasizes the importance of ensuring that all migrant workers are supported with relevant support schemes or fast tracked for repatriation.
3. [Provide psychosocial counselling and services to Pacific labour mobility workers and their families affected by COVID-19 border closures.](#) Migrants and policymakers interviewed for this rapid assessment reported increased levels of anxiety by Pacific migrants facing extended periods of family separation and in some cases coupled with disaster recovery. Support should be provided to ensure that migrants and their families receive appropriate counselling and mental health support. Ensure that this psychosocial support integrates specific strategies and actions to

prevent gender base violence within the households and communities, particularly intimate partner violence, and to support the victims.

4. **Ensure support is provided to Pacific diaspora communities in countries of destination.** The rapid assessment demonstrated that in addition to or in lieu of the support provided by governments, informal support networks and responsibility of care for migrants unable to depart lay on Pacific diaspora communities. Specifically, for the Marshallese diaspora, community, medical and nutritional support should be provided, including access to health care and SNAP should be prioritized for community members in the worst affected areas.

Medium term

5. **Convene regional consultations between Pacific Governments and countries of destination to support safe migration for economic recovery.** There is a need, especially following discussions amongst government currently underway on a “pacific travel bubble”, that these discussions should also address how safe migration of Pacific labour mobility workers can support economic recovery. This would be beneficial for both countries of destination by filling critical labour market gaps and countries of origin through provision of employment and remittances. The primary objective however should be ensuring health and safety of citizens. This could include measures such as arranging quarantine facilities and providing financial support for workers in quarantine; ensuring that employers are also supported to provide these services; risk communication information to migrants and their families; waiving of any additional certification costs. The processes around the repatriation and reintegration of the workers after their stay will also be vital to keeping the Pacific islands free from COVID-19. This consultation should be convened at the regional level through coordination with relevant regional organizations such as PIFS alongside UN agencies.
6. **Wherever possible, training and reskilling of Pacific labour mobility workers should take place in each country of origin so that migrants have alternative employment options.** Given that COVID-19 is expected to have far reaching impacts on economies of countries of origin including employers of Pacific labour mobility workers, Pacific Governments through the support of relevant development partners should undertake labour market assessments to determine skills gaps in relation to available job opportunities and should ensure that Pacific migrants receive relevant training and reskilling opportunities. Such

activities are already being implemented by APTC and PLF amongst others. At the same time, Pacific labour mobility workers should also be supported to establish small businesses as an alternative employment option. This may include business training programmes, financial and investment management information. These initiatives when undertaken must ensure that women have equal opportunities to access diverse training that allows them to move to better employment options.

7. **Continuously monitor and frequently evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on labour mobility.** Given the continuously evolving nature of the crisis, it is important to regularly monitor and evaluate experiences of seasonal and temporary migrants and to compile lessons learned and best practices related to resuming labour mobility programmes. This would also include conducting relevant research into determining the impact of COVID-19 on future labour requirements or shortages, the likely additional costs of running the seasonal worker programmes, impact of seasonal workers that require to remain behind for additional seasons. This would also help identifying solutions on how to keep costs of for seasonal workers at a reasonable level²⁸ such as potential additional costs for travel, two weeks paid quarantine, accommodation that meets physical distancing requirements.
8. **Based on regular monitoring and evaluation, review labour mobility schemes to ensure flexibility to reassign and reschedule job placements and enhance portability of seasonal workers across employers.** While several seasonal workers have been given the opportunity to extend their stay in Australia until the pandemic passes, bureaucratic delays have affected the portability of workers from one improved employer to another. At the same time, as some seasonal workers may extend their stay in Australia for an additional season, adequate time should be provided for their rest and recuperation at home which may require delayed deployment or reassigned work placements. For migrants that have not yet departed but that will be able to travel once borders open, their work placement may need to be reviewed.
9. **Scale up provision of information and support to ensure that remittance values and volumes are maintained during the COVID-19 crisis.** Recommendations for policymakers to ensure that remittances continue to flow are encapsulated in the “Call to Action Remittances in Crisis: How to Keep them Flowing” launched by the Governments of Switzerland and the United Kingdom on 22 May 2020,

28 Though not in accordance with international guidelines and best practices on recruitment, including ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment, travel costs are generally paid by the seasonal or temporary worker. If air travel becomes prohibitively expensive, it will not be in the worker's financial advantage to embark on seasonal employment.

in partnership with the World Bank, UNCDF, IOM, UNDP, the International Association of Money Transfer Networks and the International Chamber of Commerce. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Government of Fiji and Government of Vanuatu support the call to action and encourage the implementation of key recommendations. These include recognizing the provision of remittances as an essential services; economic support for migrants and remittance service providers; supporting digital remittance channels; recommendations for regulators to ensure remittance service providers continue to service clients; and for service providers to reduce costs, invest in financial education and awareness, promote and establish migrant-centric financial products.

10. **Increase understanding of social impacts of COVID-19 on migrant sending households, including on education and food security implications for families.** Based on these research studies, ensure that medium-term Government support measures to address household level food security and education is responsive to and inclusive of the needs of migrant families. Upcoming socioeconomic impact assessments related to COVID-19 must sex-disaggregate data, both from secondary and primary sources regarding migrant workers and apply a gender analysis lens.

Long term

11. **Strengthen data collection on remittance corridors to better understand remittance trends and flows.** This would help to provide a more accurate picture on remittance trends that are emerging from the COVID-19 crisis and provide policy makers with a better understanding of how diaspora and seasonal workers provide for their households. Specific corridors that require further data analysis include:

- a. United States–Marshall Islands and other South Pacific countries;
- b. New Zealand–South Pacific countries.

This data should also help increase understanding of remittance sending, receiving and consumption habits by gender; as well as how these remittances are sent (formally versus Informally) and the availability of services amongst existing remittance service providers and rates. Several stakeholders, including the International Monetary Fund Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre, IOM, World Bank, amongst others are currently conducting research and data analysis on these topics.

12. **Provide digital financial education.** The COVID-19 lockdowns have accelerated the uptake of digital remittance services. Ongoing education and awareness-raising will help to support adoption of lower cost remittance services. Remittance service providers traditionally find it hard to transition clients to digital channels due to lack of digital readiness and financial awareness, and lack of identification documents. Higher rates of digital financial inclusion can mitigate this and help keep flows in formal channels. This should also pay specific attention to ensuring that the gender digital divide does not impact women in terms of their possibilities to send and receive remittances. Ongoing programmes support the development of digital financial channels, including digital financial transfers.

13. **Encourage diaspora community investments.** Develop economic strategies which will seek to entice the diaspora community to invest more capital into emerging sectors identified by Pacific Governments. These strategies will look into enhancing the ease of business through streamlined processes, reducing the costs of doing business, creating tax benefits for diaspora community members and moderating business requirements.

14. **Establish long-term safety nets to provide relief during disasters.** Through pilot schemes including Pacific migrant worker contributions, employer contributions and support from destination country Governments, long-term safety nets could provide disaster relief when hazards such as COVID-19 or natural disasters occur in migrants' countries of origin, necessitating remittance flows to support family. (See appendix 2 for further details.)

6. APPENDICES

6.1 Appendix 1

GDP of countries were gathered from World Bank data sets. From secondary data such as (Bedford Studies and World Bank Documents) worker's remitting habits, annual remittance into the pacific countries from Australia and New Zealand, and the number of workers were gathered. The effect of no workers in either Australia or New Zealand to pacific country GDP, was calculated by subtracting the annual remittance outflows from Australia and New Zealand from the specific pacific country.

Australia outflow	Workers	Average Individual Remittance	Overall Money Brought Back Home	Country GDP	Percentage decrease of GDP
Fiji	499	8 850	4 416 150	5 537 000 000	-0.08%
Vanuatu	4 950	9 665	47 841 750	914 301 000	-5.23%
Tonga	2 284	9 546	21 803 064	450 353 000	-4.84%
Tuvalu	27	8 850	238 950	42 588 000	-0.56%

Australia outflow	Workers	Average Individual Remittance	Overall Money Brought Back Home	Country GDP	Percentage decrease of GDP
Fiji	487	9 287	4 522 792	5 537 000 000	-0.08%
Vanuatu	4 237	8 088	34 272 776	914 301 000	-3.75%
Tonga	1 807	10 485	18 946 704	450 353 000	-4.21%
Tuvalu	115	9 287	1 068 010	42 588 000	-2.51%

6.2 Appendix 2: Safety Net - Employee Contribution

Average SWP salary was gathered from World bank documents. To find individual contribution to the fund, the salary was multiplied by the 9.5 per cent superannuation contribution and again multiplied by 1 per cent, as that is the individual contribution. Annual fund contribution by the worker was calculated by multiplying individual contribution by the average number of seasonal workers.

Australia	Vanuatu	Tonga	Tuvalu	Fiji	Total
Total Salary	28 977	29 913	27 656	27 656	114 202
Superannuation (9.5 per cent of Salary)	2 753	2 842	2 627	2 627	10 849
Employee Contribution (1 per cent of superannuation)	28	28	26	26	108
Employer contribution (1 per cent of Salary)	290	299	277	277	1 143
Number of workers	4 950	2 284	27	499	7 760
Total employee contribution to Fund	136 264	64 905	709	13 110	214 988
Total employer contribution to Fund	1 434 362	683 213	7 467	138 005	2 263 047
Total Contribution to Fund	1 570 626	748 118	8 176	151 115	2 478 035

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