PACIFIC LABOR MOBILITY, MIGRATION, AND REMITTANCES IN TIMES OF COVID-19

FINAL REPORT

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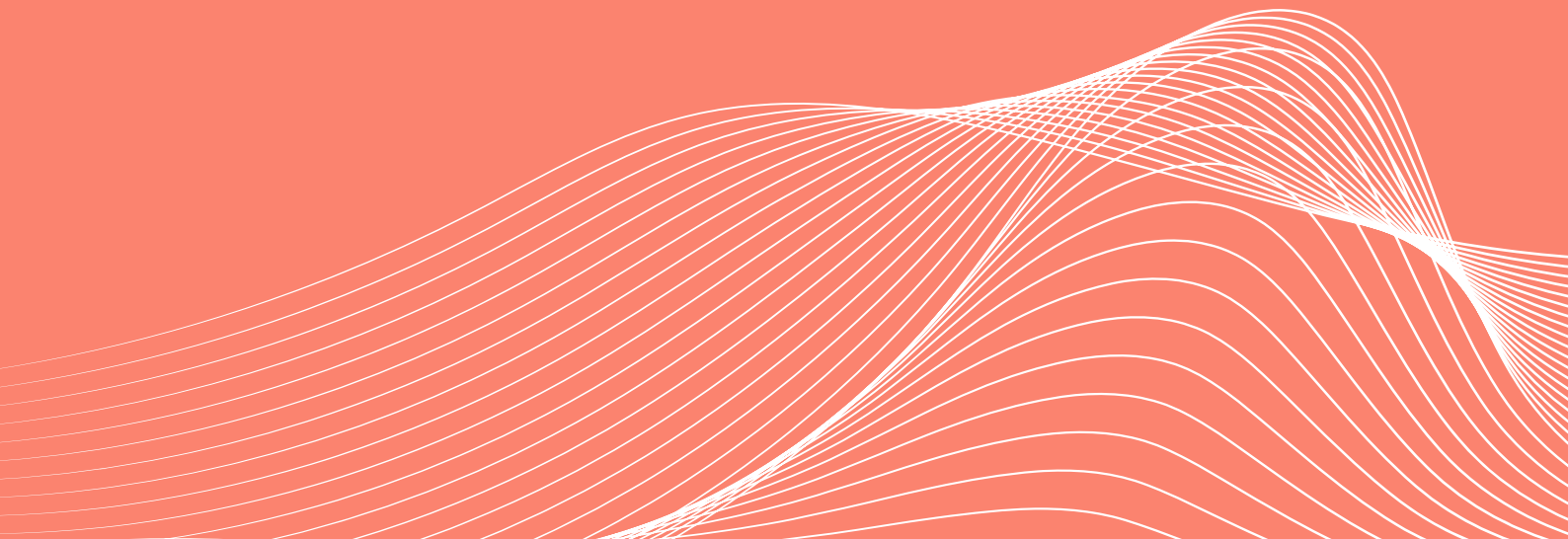
Acronyms

DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EPS	Employment Permit System
FCI	Finance, Innovation and Competitiveness
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
GP	Global Practice
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LSU	Labor Sending Units
MTI	Macroeconomic, Trade, and Investment
MTO	Money Transfer Operator
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OTC	Over-the-counter
PICs	Pacific Island Countries
PLF	Pacific Labour Facility
PLS	Pacific Labour Scheme
PNG	Papua New Guinea
RSE	Recognised Seasonal Employer
SPJ	Social Protection and Jobs
SWP	Seasonal Worker Programme



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Migration and labor mobility have historically played a critical role in providing employment, income, and skill acquisition opportunities for Pacific Islanders. Facing limited formal job opportunities at home, a large and growing number of Pacific Islanders have migrated overseas, mostly to Australia (28 percent of Pacific Islanders living in OECD countries), New Zealand (32 percent) and the United States (30 percent). Although small in absolute numbers, the relative scale of this migration is significant: the Tongan diaspora of 53,247 people is equivalent to half the resident Tongan population (105,139); the Samoan diaspora of 124,400 people in 2019 is equivalent to some 60 percent. In addition, large numbers of seasonal workers from the Pacific participate annually in temporary labor mobility schemes. Australia's Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme engage Pacific Islanders in low-skilled jobs in the agriculture sector under short-term contracts of 6–11 months. In 2019, approximately 25,000 workers found jobs in the schemes. For Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu, seasonal workers employed through these schemes accounted for 6.0 percent, 14.7 percent, and 8.1 percent of the workforce in 2018–19, respectively.

Migrant workers (both temporary and permanent) make an important economic contribution to Pacific Island Countries (PICs). Seven of the top 10 remittance recipients by share of GDP in the East Asia and Pacific region are in the Pacific. Tonga tops the list with remittance inflows equivalent to nearly 40 percent of its GDP in 2019. At a household level, remittances are an important source of income; in Tonga and Samoa, four out of every five households receive remittances from abroad.

The COVID-19 crisis caused significant disruption to Pacific labor mobility and diaspora groups, with adverse consequences on their employment and earnings. Pacific Island workers under long-term visas faced the risk of becoming unemployed as host economies were affected by the pandemic. International travel restrictions aiming to curb the spread of the pandemic have left thousands of seasonal workers stranded in Australia and New Zealand and suspended the arrival of prospective workers for most of 2020. Although travel to Australia and New Zealand under the SWP, PLS, and RSE has recommenced, numbers are significantly lower than the approximately 14,000 RSE workers and 12,000 SWP workers that travelled to New Zealand and Australia in 2018–19.

The analysis in this report employs data collected by the World Bank through a series of phone surveys undertaken in Australia, New Zealand, Timor-Leste, and five PICs. Quantitative data were collected through four structured surveys between June and early September 2020 which covered: (i) seasonal workers working in Australia and New Zealand during the pandemic outbreak ('current workers'); (ii) prospective workers who were forced to remain in their home country due to the suspension of international travel ('cancelled workers'); (iii) households of the seasonal workers; and (iv) employers under the SWP and RSE schemes. The survey covered workers from Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Timor-Leste, and Vanuatu. Data on the Pacific diaspora were collected through semi-structured phone interviews with representatives of diaspora groups between May and August 2020. The report also uses data on PLS workers, collected by the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF), based on a compatible questionnaire during the same time period.

Survey Findings

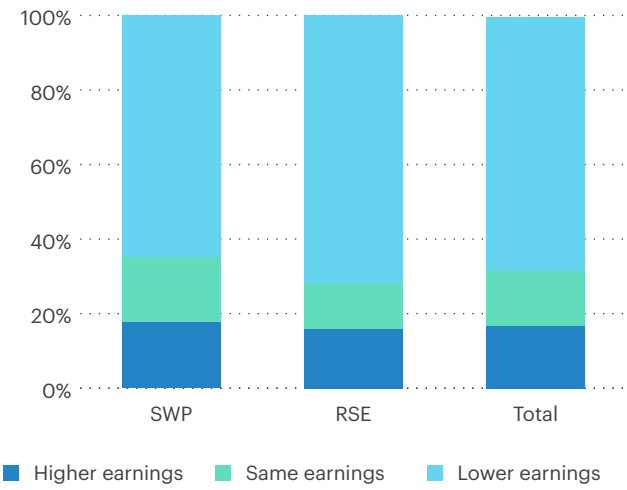
Employment and Income Effects

The pandemic caused disruptions to the employment of many seasonal workers. During the period from March until August 2020, more than 30 percent of SWP workers and 54 percent of RSE workers spent at least one week without any work while more than two-thirds of workers across both schemes reported having fewer work hours than they did during the period of January and February. Those who experienced reduced work hours on average lost 18 hours per week; a 37 percent decrease from 48 hours to 30 hours per week. The overall change across all workers was also negative at 11 hours per week with no noticeable difference across the two schemes.

Consistent with its impact on work hours, the crisis caused a widespread and substantial reduction in seasonal workers' earnings on average. Overall, 68.4 percent of seasonal workers reported that their earnings were lower than during the January–February period, while a minority of 16.7 percent experienced an increase in earnings. The income effects of COVID-19 varied considerably across nationalities. Timorese, Samoan, and i-Kiribati workers were most affected, with approximately 71.4 percent, 87.2 percent and 77.8 percent seeing a decrease in weekly earnings, respectively. Tongan and Fijian workers fared the best, with 57 percent and 62 percent, respectively, experiencing lower earnings.

The crisis disproportionally affected female seasonal workers. Although male workers were more likely to see their earnings drop than their female counterparts, when they did, the extent of reduction in their income was more modest than among females (although it was still substantial) at 48 percent as compared to 58 percent. Part of this gap may be due to the different jobs that women and men typically occupy. This reduction in income represents a heavier burden on female workers because they earned considerably less than male workers despite working roughly the same number of hours, both pre- and post-lockdown.

FIGURE E1: Change in weekly earnings of seasonal workers after lockdown



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

The magnitude of the income loss was also greater for first-timers, team members and those employed by labor hire companies (as compared to returned workers, team leaders, and workers employed by direct employers), although the differences were less pronounced than in the case of the gender gap.

Unlike seasonal workers, semi-skilled Pacific workers employed under the PLS appear to have had a relatively more positive experience during the pandemic. About 36.1 percent of PLS workers reported earning less than they did during the pre-COVID-19 months of January and February, which is considerably lower than the proportion among seasonal workers (68.4 percent).

Satisfaction

Despite the overall negative impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, migrant workers remained fairly satisfied with their experience in Australia and New Zealand. When asked how satisfied they were with the scheme on a scale of 1 'not satisfied at all' to 10 'extremely satisfied', the average score was 8 among PLS workers, 7.8 among SWP workers, and 8.2 among RSE workers (Table E1). The vast majority (nearly 95 percent) of seasonal workers wished to return in 2021 (the survey having been undertaken in mid-2020).

The variation between the two seasonal work schemes is minor when broken down by nationality; the only exception is that Tongan workers in the SWP scheme gave a markedly higher rating than Tongan RSE workers (9.2 compared to 7.1). Across nationalities, Timorese workers gave the lowest average rating at 6.9, which is likely related to the fact that they experienced the most severe reduction in earnings during this crisis. Across demographic groups, those who were hit harder by the crisis – females, first-timers, team members – tended to be less satisfied.

Table E1: Satisfaction rating (out of 10) of working experience in Australia and New Zealand

Nationality	SWP	RSE	SWP 2015*
Overall	7.8	8.2	N/A
Fiji	8.2	8.3	N/A
Kiribati	8.4	8.5	N/A
Samoa	8.8	8.9	8.5
Timor-Leste	6.9	N/A	7.9
Tonga	9.2	7.1	9.9
Vanuatu	7.0	7.9	6.3
Male	7.9	8.3	N/A
Female	7.6	7.6	N/A
Returnee	8.2	8.3	N/A
First-timer	7.1	7.8	N/A
Team member	7.7	8.2	N/A
Team leader	8.1	8.2	N/A

* World Bank (2018)

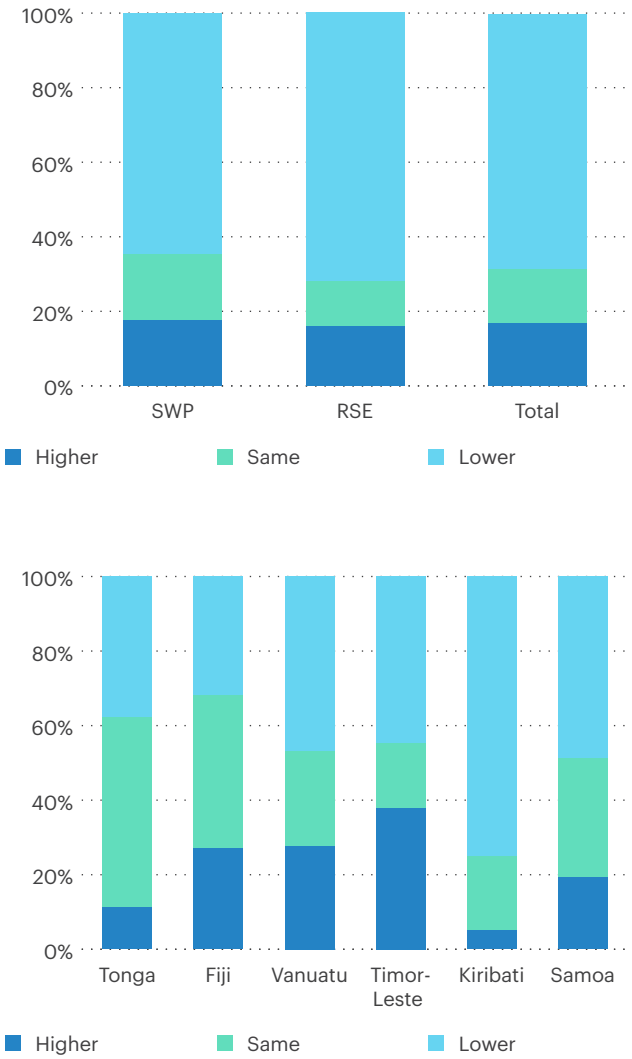
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Note: Compared with data collected by the World Bank on SWP workers in 2015 (World Bank, 2018), satisfaction levels appear mostly similar, with no clear pattern of changes.

Remittances and Household Effects

Remittances from seasonal workers significantly decreased, which is unsurprising given the reduction in work hours and earnings. Nearly half of the surveyed workers reported that their remittances were lower than the pre-lockdown months of January and February, while only about 21.3 percent reported remitting more each time as compared to the pre-lockdown period.

FIGURE E2: Change in remittances among seasonal workers



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

The decrease in remittances, however, was markedly more modest than that in earnings, probably because many workers adjusted their own spending and saving behaviors to cope with income impacts and maintain the level of money sent home. While 68.4 percent of workers saw their earnings fall, only 51.4 percent reported remitting less. Moreover, although workers who earned more tended to remit more and vice versa, the correlation between the changes in earnings and remittances was only moderate; 59.4 percent of those earning less remitted less, and only 30.9 percent of those making more remitted more. In other words, 40.6 percent of workers whose earnings dropped either maintained or increased their remittances. When disaggregated by the change in earnings, the average changes in remittances were also noticeably smaller in both absolute and relative terms, regardless of whether earnings increased or decreased.

The decline in remittances from seasonal workers is a concern given the need among sending households has increased. Income of households that is earned domestically declined since the onset of COVID-19. This could be linked to household members being laid off or having work hours reduced. Overall, 16 percent of households reported that someone in their household had been furloughed or laid off and 38 percent reported that a household member had their work hours reduced. Similarly, 57 percent of households that operate non-farm businesses saw their business income drop and about a quarter (24.4 percent) of households engaging in agricultural activities, such as farming, fishing, or raising livestock, reported their agriculture income this season to be lower or much lower as compared to last season.

Remittances from overseas seasonal employment accounted for a major share of household income. In Timor-Leste, the average remittances received since March amounted to 212 percent of household income in the month preceding the survey. In Vanuatu, where many households reported reliance on subsistence agriculture, and economic activities have been curtailed by COVID-19 impacts on the tourism industry, remittances amounted to 101 percent of household income.

Remittances from SWP/RSE workers were fundamental to financing essential household consumption. The main uses of remittances were for everyday expenses, including food (35 percent of households), school fees and other educational expenses (20 percent), and health care (7.5 percent). Qualitative feedback from surveyed households revealed that some daily expenses such as bus fares and lunches were also related to sending children to school, hence further emphasizing the role of remittances in supporting investment in child education. It is also important to note that in areas where subsistence farming is prevalent and the cash economy is limited, remittances are often the primary source of fiat money to finance goods and services that require monetary payment, such as school fees, health care services, or housing renovation/ construction.

Cancelled Workers

For workers who were due to travel to Australia or New Zealand for employment under labor mobility schemes but were unable to do so due to closed borders, the suspension of seasonal employment during the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant losses of potential income. Household expenditure was 17 percent higher for households with workers currently abroad as compared to the households of cancelled workers.

In addition, more than one-third of the cancelled workers (34 percent) had taken out loans to cover their pre-departure costs, leaving them at increased vulnerability to financial hardship and future shocks. On average, pre-departure costs amounted to 165 percent of workers' average monthly earnings before COVID-19 and 112 percent of household income during the crisis. About 80 percent of those who borrowed (from either family, friends, banks, or commercial lenders) had not paid off their debts at the time of the survey, and of those who were yet to repay debts, only 26 percent had been making regular repayments.

Employers

Border closure and public health measures aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19 created major and on-going disruptions to employers under the SWP and RSE schemes. The suspension of international travel in March 2020 effectively stopped the arrival of prospective workers and left many existing workers stranded.

COVID-19 also led to significant shortages of seasonal labor, especially in New Zealand. Nearly half of surveyed employers – 43.2 percent in Australia and 56.7 percent in New Zealand – reported experiencing at least one month of labor shortages since March 2020. Employers attributed labor shortages to border closures and social distancing measures aimed at limiting the spread of the pandemic. The most common causes pinpointed by both SWP and RSE employers were delays and cancellations of the arrival of prospective workers and decreases in the number of local farm workers and backpackers, who employers in the horticulture sector typically rely on during peak harvest seasons (in addition to seasonal Pacific workers).

While significant and requiring business adjustments, the lack of farm labor appeared to be seasonal. As most existing workers were stranded beyond their seasonal employment, 46 percent of direct employers – both those having experienced labor shortage and those having not – had to reduce hours for their workers, mostly because there was less work available after the harvest season had passed its peak and/or employers wanted to keep their workers employed longer. This explains the apparent paradox of workers being provided with reduced work hours, while employers at other times suffered from worker shortages.

Movement of workers between employers has helped to address over/under-supply of labor, but only partially. Approximately 41 percent of those with stranded workers (or 36.5 percent of all surveyed employers) redeployed at least some of their Pacific/ Timorese employees, with redeployment being moderately more common among RSE employers (44 percent versus 39 percent). Redeployment was organized mostly privately. About two-thirds of the employers redeployed their workers through private arrangements with other employers. Employers incurred the major share of the costs of the contract extension and redeployment.

Providing pastoral care to seasonal workers became more demanding during the crisis. Surveyed employers reported worsening behavioral issues as workers struggled to cope with social isolation and boredom (due to less work), concerns about their families (especially among workers who had children at home), and uncertainties surrounding their employment, income, repatriation, and infection. This was confirmed in discussions with diaspora groups, who reported increased strain and mental health issues among worker groups with which they had contact. Employers voiced dissatisfaction with the lack of support given to workers from governments of both sending and host countries during the pandemic.

The Pacific Diaspora

More than half of the Pacific diaspora members interviewed believed that COVID-19 had impacted their community's employment either through job losses or reduced hours. In the wider Australian population, the biggest job losses by early 2020 were in food and accommodation services (17.2 percent), followed by arts and recreation services (12.7 percent). Census data confirm that in both Australia and New Zealand, a large proportion of Pasifika[1] employment is concentrated in low- and medium-skilled occupations including laborers, machine operators, drivers, sales, clerical, and administrative workers. These occupations have high physical proximity scores and are not easily transitioned to online or work from home settings, meaning they were more likely to be affected by lockdowns and social distancing measures.

Pasifika community members reported that government payments provided some insulation from the real impacts of COVID-19-related job losses. In Australia, the JobKeeper payment was introduced to allow businesses impacted by the pandemic to continue paying their employees' wages. Under JobKeeper, eligible businesses received $A 1,500 per employee every fortnight between 30 March and 28 September 2020, after which slightly lower payments were introduced based on whether employees were employed on a full- or part-time basis (Australian Government, 2020). The JobKeeper payment ended on 28 March 2021.

In New Zealand, the wage subsidy performed a similar function, with employees receiving $NZ 585.80 per week if they normally worked 20 hours or more and $NZ 350 per week if they normally worked part-time.

Diaspora members reported that not all Pacific Islanders were eligible to receive government payments, while other barriers, such as difficulty in understanding the social security system, also presented challenges to accessing COVID-19 welfare payments. Many Tongans and Samoans have migrated to Australia via New Zealand and still hold New Zealand citizenship. Whereas this would once have entitled them to Australian social security benefits, this changed in 2001 when the *Social Security Act 1991* was amended. Now, while New Zealand citizens can still travel to Australia to live and work, they do not have rights as Australian citizens or permanent residents unless they apply for either citizenship or residency (Faleolo, 2019). As a result, many Pacific Islanders in Australia who hold New Zealand citizenship are not eligible to receive government welfare payments. Many people within surveyed communities, particularly Tongans and Samoans, fell into this category and thus could not access the JobKeeper payment.

The impacts of the pandemic on remittances from the diaspora varied across groups. In Fiji and Vanuatu, the economic impacts associated with a lack of tourism, along with the devastation wrought by Cyclone Harold, meant Fijian and ni-Vanuatu communities reported that people were remitting more than in the past. Others noted that remittances had been affected by job losses among the diaspora, with those who were struggling financially reported to be sending 'COVID-remittances'; money was still flowing but the amounts were smaller than they once were.

1. Pacific Islander migrants.

FIGURE E3: Monthly remittance inflows to Fiji and Samoa (2020)

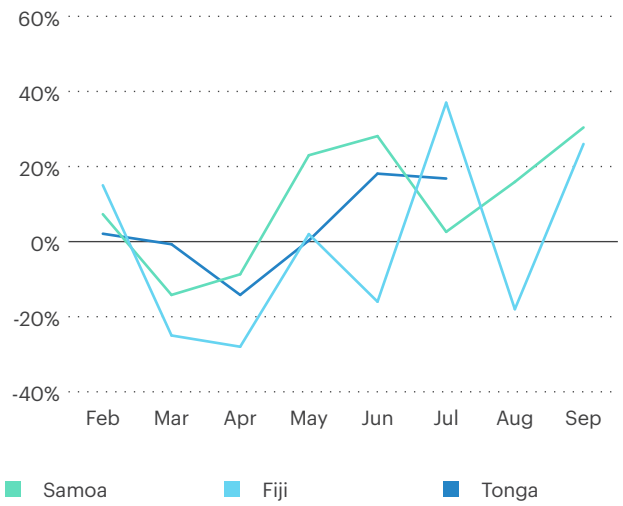
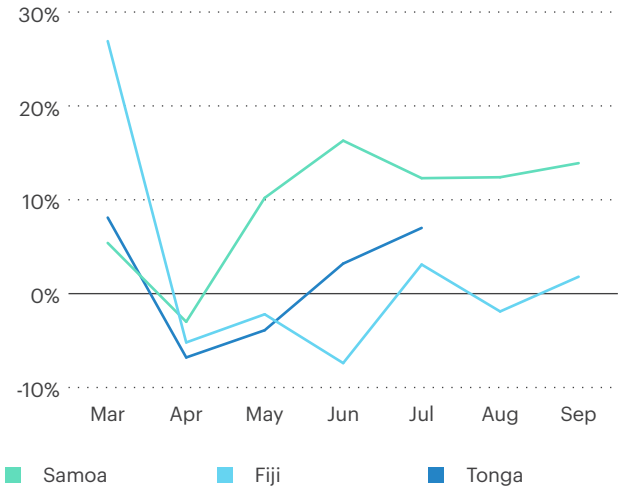


FIGURE E4: Cumulative remittances to Fiji and Samoa in 2020 (year to date)



Source: Reserve Bank of Fiji and Central Bank of Samoa.

Remittances: The Macroeconomic Evidence

At an aggregate level, remittances to Pacific Island countries have been more resilient than expected, despite a severe and abrupt decrease when the pandemic first affected the region. A sharp drop in aggregate remittance inflows was observed in Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga during February–April 2020; yet between May and September 2020, inflows recovered with year-to-date and monthly remittances returning to positive year-on-year growth (Figures E3 and E4). World Bank estimates of the reduction in remittances to the Pacific region were consequently revised downwards from 16.9 percent in April 2020 to 4.3 percent in October 2020.[2] This better-than-expected performance is not unique to the region, having also been observed across Asia, Latin America, and Africa (Caron & Tiongson, 2021; Lopez-Calva, 2021; Oxford Economics, 2021).

Three major factors could explain why remittances have remained steady despite the pandemic and its economic impacts: (i) migrants abroad have not suffered from extensive job losses to the degree expected, and some have actually benefitted temporarily as a result of COVID-19 stimulus payments from host governments; (ii) remittances tend to be driven by altruism, increasing when the situation in the migrants' country of origin worsens – as is clearly the situation in PICs as a result of the pandemic; (iii) a diversion from physical transportation of cash across borders to sending through remittance service providers could have also contributed to the sustained remittance flows. The latter explanation is certainly plausible given existing evidence from Pacific seasonal workers, whose practice of carrying a large amount of cash home at the end of a working season is well documented (Maclellan & Mares, 2006; Brown et al., 2015; World Bank, 2017b).

2. Data on aggregate remittance flows to the Pacific region during the second half of 2020 were unavailable at the time of this report.

Prospects for Labor Mobility

The study concludes that migrant labor could play an important role in supporting Pacific Island economies recover in the aftermath of COVID-19. The devastated tourism industry and the broader economic slowdown from the pandemic have further tightened the already limited supply of formal jobs in Pacific Island countries, making employment overseas an even more important source of income and livelihood. In Tonga and Vanuatu, for instance, the total number of workers employed under the SWP, RSE, and PLS schemes in 2018–19 well exceeded the number of formal jobs created annually, which were roughly 325 and 1,260 respectively (World Bank, 2017a). In Kiribati, seasonal and PLS employment in 2018–19 was equivalent to nearly a quarter of the number of formal jobs created domestically per year.

There are reasons to be optimistic about prospects for Pacific Island migrant workers despite ongoing travel restrictions. The Australian, New Zealand, and US economies are slowly recovering from the crisis and now have moderate growth prospects. In the absence of lockdowns, employment in Australia has recovered faster than anticipated and demand for labor is expected to more than offset the potential job losses that could result from the withdrawal of the JobKeeper benefit. The country's GDP growth is forecasted to be 4.75 percent over 2021 and 3.5 percent over 2022. New Zealand has also recorded a stronger than anticipated rebound, with positive growth of 0.4 percent in Q3 2020 and labor shortages emerging in some sectors by May 2021. In the United States, real GDP increased at an annual rate of 6.4 percent in Q1 2021, up from 4.3 percent in Q4 2020. In the medium term, vaccination of populations in host countries coupled with the fact most PICs remain 'COVID free' means that there is some prospect of renewed travel between the Pacific and major migrant hosting countries.

There is also reason to be optimistic about Pacific labor mobility programs. Demand for seasonal labor in the horticulture and viticulture industries in Australia and New Zealand has remained strong despite the pandemic. Significant shortages of seasonal labor have been reported in both Australia and New Zealand, with an estimated shortage of 25,000 workers in 2021 in Australia and 11,000 over March–April 2021 (the apple season) in New Zealand.

The demand for Pacific seasonal workers in Australia in particular is likely to remain robust in the foreseeable future, given the fact that the annual cohort of 140,000–200,000 working holiday-makers, who make up about three-quarters of the seasonal workforce in Australia, has largely left the country due to the pandemic. It was reported in February 2021 that only around 40,000 working holiday-makers remain in Australia. Incentives put in place by governments in Australia and New Zealand to encourage domestic workers to take up seasonal work appear to have had limited success in easing the shortage. Affirming these trends, about 98 percent of employers surveyed by the World Bank expressed the intention to continue employing SWP/RSE workers in 2021, with about half of them wanting to increase recruitment. In the Australian context, the absence of working holiday-makers, if prolonged, could potentially set the foundation for Pacific labor mobility schemes to expand should numbers not be restricted as a result of travel restrictions (and related quarantine issues). In the short term, nonetheless, numbers will remain below pre-COVID-19 levels, with challenges relating to ongoing travel restrictions, limited quarantine places, flights, and testing arrangements needing to be addressed.

Potential Policy Responses

Policy interventions to protect Pacific migrant workers from the impacts of COVID-19 have been limited in both home and host countries. Most (though not all) labor sending countries have provided no support to migrant workers or their households. In Tonga, targeted financial support to families of seasonal workers unable to return home was provided, however, it appears that coverage at the time of the survey was low, with fewer than 10 percent of those interviewed having received the benefit. In other sending countries, migrant households had received some form of social assistance as part of broader social assistance programs, yet this varied widely, from 86.7 percent of surveyed Timorese households receiving some assistance from the government, to 7.5 percent in Vanuatu (the latter primarily taking the form of school fee waivers). None of the sending households in Fiji, Kiribati, or Samoa reported receiving any social assistance.

A number of potential policy responses are outlined by this study, drawing on global experience and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. These include:

Social safety nets: Destination governments should, where possible, extend social assistance to migrant workers and diaspora populations that have lost employment or livelihoods as a result of COVID-19. Migrant sending countries can also support populations stranded overseas. This has occurred to a limited extent in PICs in response to the pandemic. Tonga, for instance, provided one-off payments to students, seasonal workers and seafarers who are overseas.

Employer retention and promotion: Such support should extend to employer retention (for example, wage subsidies) and employment promotion. Extension of employment retention and promotion services to low-skilled temporary and seasonal migrant workers could address a number of ongoing challenges, such as the risk of absconding and illegal employment. More broadly, employer promotion services could facilitate the efficient reallocation of labor between employers and sectors. In Australia and New Zealand, permission to switch employers was granted to workers under the SWP, PLS, and RSE schemes. However, results from the survey of employers (Section 5.2) suggests that in the case of the SWP and RSE, redeployment has largely been arranged by employers themselves. Additional support such as that provided under the PLS (and internationally, under the Korean Employer Permit Scheme) could help facilitate such job matching.

Social and health services: There are a range of social and health services that should be available to migrant workers. These include: (i) access to COVID-19 testing and treatment; (ii) support for the provision of COVID-19-compliant accommodation and workplaces; (iii) outreach activities aimed at migrant communities; (iv) support for mental health services; and (v) paid quarantine for newly arriving low- and semi-skilled migrant workers. In addition, given the 'COVID free' status of many PICs, there is a strong case for waiving quarantine periods for workers and/or enabling on-farm quarantining with testing. In October 2021, New Zealand was set to begin quarantine free travel for RSE workers arriving from Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu.

Repatriation support measures: Many Pacific seasonal workers remain stranded in Australia and New Zealand. Looking forward, as labor mobility resumes at a meaningful scale, coordination between labor sending and host countries is needed to establish repatriation protocols and ensure adequate quarantine capacity for returning workers. In some PICs, limited quarantine capacity acted as a bottleneck for both the return of current workers and sending of new workers. Some countries have been able to utilize existing infrastructure (such as hotels for repatriation quarantine), however, others have not had this option. The expansion of quarantine facilities in such cases should therefore be a priority, and is potentially an area where development partners can provide support.

Reintegration support: The return of migrant workers as a result of COVID-19 could present an additional source of pressure on the domestic labor market in PICs. At the same time, the suspension of overseas employment for migrant workers is detrimental for the economic wellbeing of their households, given that remittances are a major source of income. Employment support and income such as one-time cash benefits, loans, and provision of employment in public construction projects could help returning workers and their families to cope with these changes. Improved understanding of what kinds of migrant workers are returning home could help governments design adequate and appropriate assistance.

Worker registry: Establishing a database with contact information for current and prospective temporary migrant workers, along with their families, would help to facilitate regular communication and outreach efforts, particularly during times of crisis. Policy interventions targeting seasonal and PLS workers by either the host or sending governments, such as repatriation, taking stock of workers' employment status, and providing mental health and economic supports, would benefit from such a database. The database would also support future sub-population studies that are of interest to Pacific labor sending countries. At the moment, a centralized registry does not exist.

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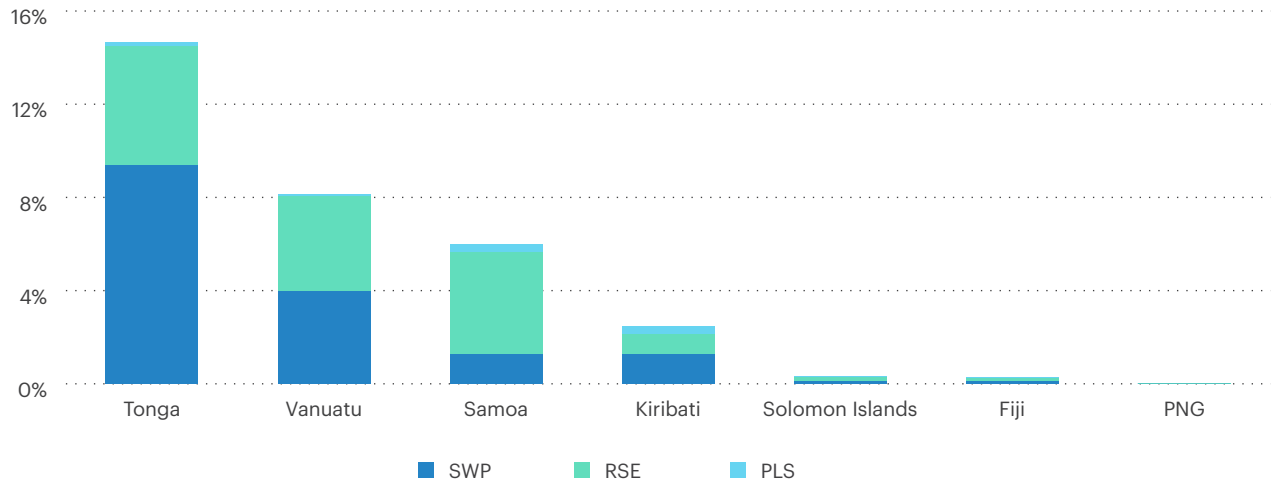
I. INTRODUCTION

Labor mobility has played a critical role in providing employment, income, and skill acquisition opportunities for Pacific Islanders. Facing limited formal job opportunities at home, a large and growing number of seasonal workers from the Pacific have participated in Australia's Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) or New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, engaging primarily in low-skilled jobs in the agriculture sector under short-term contracts of 6–11 months. In 2019, approximately 25,000 workers found jobs in the schemes. For Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu, seasonal workers employed through these schemes accounted for 6.0 percent, 14.7 percent, and 8.1 percent of the workforce in 2018–19, respectively (Figure 1).

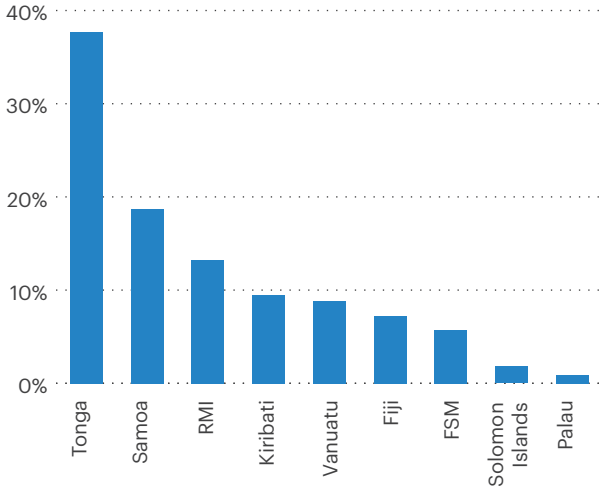
The number of Pacific seasonal workers in Australia or New Zealand at any given time varies, influenced by the harvest seasons for different products. In May 2020, there were approximately 8,300 Pacific seasonal workers in Australia under the SWP, and 9,300 in New Zealand under the RSE scheme. Since mid-2018, a growing number of semi-skilled Pacific Islanders have also worked under Australia's Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS), which provides employment for up to three years in industries such as meat processing, aged care, and tourism.

FIGURE 1: Seasonal workers/labor force ratio (2018–19)



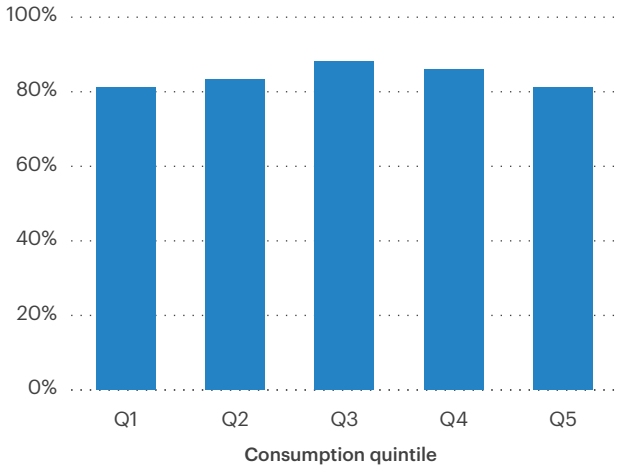
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment; Pacific Labour Facility; Immigration New Zealand; and World Development Indicators database.

FIGURE 2: Remittance inflows as share of GDP (2020)



Source: Migration Data Portal.

FIGURE 3: Percent of households receiving remittances in Tonga by welfare status (2015–16)



Source: Tonga Household income and expenditure survey 2015–16.

In addition to temporary migrant workers, many PICs have large diaspora groups in OECD countries, mostly Australia (28 percent of Pacific Islanders living in OECD countries), New Zealand (32 percent) and the United States (30 percent). The size of the diaspora living in OECD countries relative to the domestic population is particularly large among Polynesian countries. In contrast, Melanesian countries tend to have smaller migrant populations (Section 6.1).

Migrant workers – both temporary and permanent – make an important economic contribution to PICs via remittances. Seven of the top 10 remittance recipients by share of GDP in the East Asia and Pacific region are in the Pacific. Tonga tops the list with remittance inflows equivalent to nearly 38 percent of its GDP in 2020 (Figure 2).[3] More importantly, at a disaggregate level, remittances are a common source of income for Pacific households. In Tonga and Samoa, for instance, four out of every five households receive remittances from abroad, with a similar share of households across the consumption distribution benefitting (Figure 3). Nationally representative household data in Tonga indicates that remittances are equivalent to approximately 30 percent of household consumption, while in Samoa they are equivalent to 8 percent of household consumption.

The COVID-19 crisis caused significant disruption to Pacific labor mobility and diaspora groups, with adverse consequences on their employment and earnings. Pacific workers under long-term visas faced the risk of becoming unemployed as host economies were affected by the pandemic. International travel restrictions, aiming to curb the spread of the pandemic, left thousands of seasonal workers stranded in Australia and New Zealand and suspended the arrival of prospective workers for most of 2020.[4]

3. The other three countries are the Philippines (9.6 percent), Timor-Leste (8.7 percent), and Vietnam (5.0 percent).
4. The RSE was suspended between March and December 2020 while the SWP scheme was suspended between March and September 2020, when pilot arrangements brought a small number of ni-Vanuatu workers to work in the mango industry in Australia's Northern Territory.

Although travel to Australia and New Zealand under the SWP, PLS, and RSE has recommenced, numbers are significantly lower than the approximately 14,000 RSE workers and 12,000 SWP workers that travelled to New Zealand and Australia in 2018–19, respectively.[5] Compliance with quarantine and COVID-19-related public health requirements has also increased costs for employers, workers, and sending governments.[6] In addition, COVID-19 resulted in income loss among migrant workers due to reduced work hours and loss of employment. Uncertainties related to repatriation remain for many seasonal workers who have been stranded since the outbreak of the pandemic.

The crisis affected flows of remittances to the Pacific. Changes in the frequency and volume of remittances as a result of income losses could manifest into considerable impacts on the livelihoods of labor sending households and the Pacific economies that they support. The impact of social distancing measures on the availability of money transfer services and fluctuation in exchange rates also has the potential to affect the amount and frequency with which Pacific households receive remittance income.

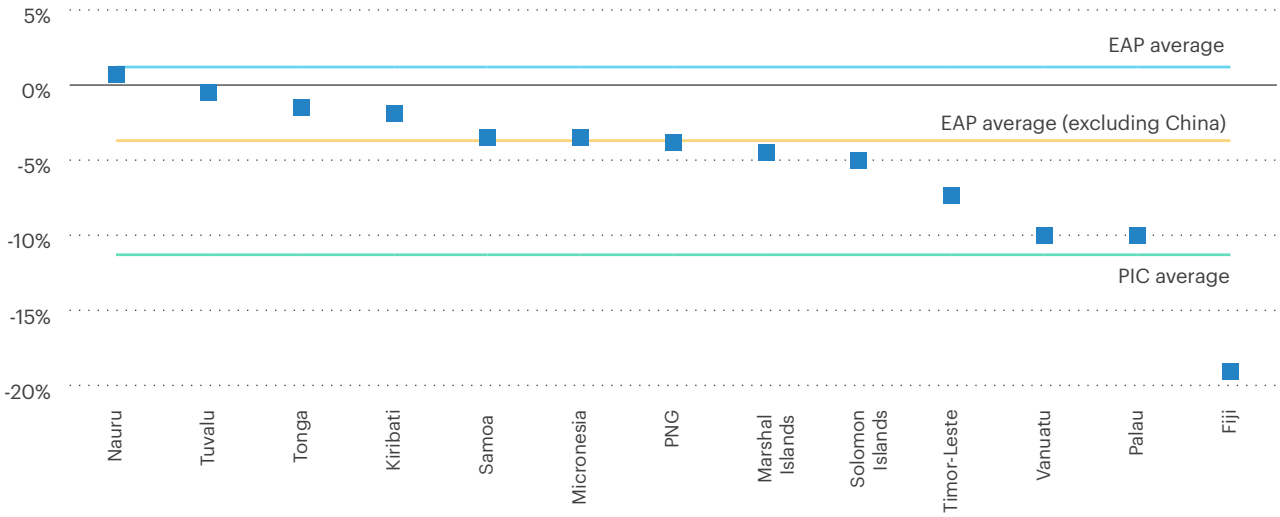
Pacific Island economies, while largely avoiding the pandemic (with the notable exception of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Fiji), have been devastated by the collapse of international travel and tourism, as well as the disruption of donor-financed infrastructure activities and lower commodity prices. Economic activities in Pacific Island economies fell well below their pre-pandemic projected level, with the cumulative output loss over 2020–22 estimated to be around 10 percent of the 2019 level, hit harder than other countries in the East Asia and Pacific Region (Figure 4) (World Bank, 2021a). GDP contracted in 2020 in all PICs, except a mild positive growth of 1.2 percent in Nauru (World Bank, 2021b). Fiji and Vanuatu, the two countries most dependent on tourism, saw double-digit contraction in their GDP at an estimated -19.0 percent and -10.0 percent in 2020, respectively. The GDP of Solomon Islands, Samoa, and Tonga fell by an estimated 5.0 percent, 3.5 percent, and 1.5 percent, respectively (Figure 4).

The economic downturn was accompanied by unprecedented job losses across the region, especially in tourism-dependent countries. Tourism-related employment plummeted by approximately 64 percent in Vanuatu in April 2020 and unemployment claims in June 2020 nearly tripled relative to their 2019 total in Fiji. Job advertisements in PNG decreased by 76 percent between February and May 2020 as a result of lockdowns and travel restrictions (World Bank, 2020a). Flow-on effects to other industries, including retail and food services, together with reductions in commodity prices and remittance inflows, have added to significant economic hardship across the region.

Preliminary modelling by the World Bank projects that in a 'moderate' scenario, poverty rates among households involved in tourism, food, or accommodation could increase by 9.3 percent in Fiji, 10.2 percent in Tonga, and 12.7 percent in Samoa[7] (World Bank, 2020b).

5. New Zealand allowed only 2,000 RSE workers to enter between January and March 2021 and will allow up to 2,400 more to enter between June 2021 and March 2022, whereas Australia has allowed approximately 7,000 SWP and PLS workers to enter since September 2020.
6. Flight and quarantine arrangements for the SWP have varied between states and employers. Ni-Vanuatu SWP workers in the Northern Territory undertook 14 days of hotel quarantine. The cost of this quarantine and the charter flight that brought them from Port Vila was met by the mango industry (https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2020-09-03/vanuatu-workers-arrive-in-darwin-to-pick-mangoes/12621234). Tongan workers in Emerald, Queensland undertook on-farm quarantine and were able to work while isolating. Approved employers covered the cost of charter flights (https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2020-11-20/tongan-seasonal-workers-emerald-complete-on-farm-quarantine/12897008). In New Zealand, RSE workers undertook 14 days of managed isolation, during which time they were paid for 30 hours work per week. Employers covered the cost of this quarantine (https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/politics/government-to-let-in-2000-fruit-pickers-from-pacific-but-with-living-wage-catch/VU4E6FEPJUC6XOUSOQQM74JWWI/). From October 2021, New Zealand began to allow quarantine free travel for RSE workers arriving from Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. In PNG, the cost of additional quarantine of workers undertaken prior to departure from PNG has been met by the national government.
7. Based on the US$5.50 per capita per day poverty line.

FIGURE 4: Estimated GDP growth in PICs (2020)



Source: World Bank (2021b).

The near-term outlook for the region remains highly uneven and uncertain. Economic recovery is expected to be uneven and fragile; the forecasted GDP growth in 2021 for Fiji and Solomon Islands, for instance, is modest at 2.6 and 3.2 percent, respectively (World Bank, 2021). However, remittance-dependent Samoa and Tonga are projected to continue seeing negative economic growth in 2021. Sluggish domestic demand is likely to be persistent, while prolonged unemployment and education disruptions – which have weakened investment and human capital accumulation – could have long-lasting impacts on productivity and output potential.

This report aims to explore the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on employment and remittances of Pacific and Timorese migrant workers and diasporas in Australia and New Zealand. The report is comprised of an introductory section, followed by Section II which describes the collection of primary data upon which this report is based. Section III presents findings related to Pacific and Timorese workers under the RSE, SWP, and PLS schemes. It first considers the experiences of workers who were stranded in Australia or New Zealand in terms of employment, income, savings, and remittances.

The section goes on to examine the impacts of COVID-19 on 'cancelled' seasonal workers in terms of their employment, earnings, and coping strategies. Section IV reports on the impacts of COVID-19 on the households of seasonal workers, examining their labor market activities, remittance receipt and use, and coping mechanisms. Section V examines the experiences of Australian and New Zealand employers of seasonal workers during the crisis, investigating challenges faced by employers and likely future demand for seasonal labor under Pacific labor mobility schemes. In Section VI, the impacts of the crisis on Pacific diasporas in Australia and New Zealand are examined through a mixture of qualitative interviews with community leaders and analysis of existing census data. Likely effects of the crisis on employment, access to social assistance, remittances, and social impacts are examined. Section VII brings together issues raised in previous sections and outlines potential policy interventions that the host and labor sending governments could consider.

Photo by © World Bank

II. SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

The analysis in this report employs data collected by the World Bank through a series of phone surveys in Australia and New Zealand. Quantitative data on Pacific and Timorese workers under the SWP, RSE, and PLS schemes, their households, and seasonal employers were collected through four structured surveys between June and early September 2020. Data on the Pacific diaspora were collected through semi-structured phone interviews with representatives of diaspora groups between May and August 2020.

The quantitative surveys cover four distinct groups of respondents: (i) seasonal workers working in Australia and New Zealand during the pandemic outbreak ('current workers'); (ii) prospective workers who were forced to remain in their home country due to the suspension of international travel ('cancelled workers'); (iii) households of seasonal workers; and (iv) employers under the SWP and RSE schemes. The survey of current workers covers six countries of widely different population sizes, economic conditions, and extents of participation in labor mobility schemes: Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Timor-Leste, and Vanuatu. The survey of cancelled workers covers the two major labor sending countries: Tonga and Vanuatu, as well as Kiribati. Survey data presented in this report were collected by the World Bank, with the exception of data on PLS workers which were collected by the PLF based on a compatible questionnaire and during the same time period.

A representative, quantitative survey of diaspora groups was not feasible as part of this study. Instead, qualitative interviews of community leaders and representatives from eight Pacific Island countries were undertaken (specifically, from the Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu diasporas). The respondents included 42 members and leaders from Pacific Islander communities across Australia and New Zealand.

Due to the lack of formal counterfactuals, the analysis combines both self-reported changes and constructed changes in quantitative wellbeing indicators and behaviors of respondents between the pre- and post-lockdown periods to infer about impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. The period of January and February 2020 is used as the 'baseline' period, and March 2020 – when lockdowns were imposed across both host and labor sending countries – is used as the cut-off point after which COVID-19 impacts are assumed to appear.

2.1 Quantitative Surveys

2.1.1 Sampling Strategy

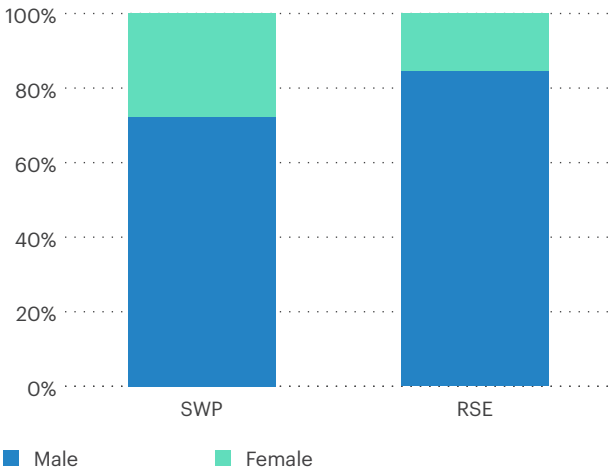
Current Workers

A conventional sampling frame is not available for seasonal workers and their households due to the lack of an extensive worker registry. Information on workers in Australia and New Zealand, including their name, contact number, location, and demographic details, is fragmented; so is information on prospective workers. This renders designing a sample representative of seasonal workers impractical. Instead, the samples were selected in such a way as to balance the need for meaningful statistic inferences, the feasibility of identifying and reaching respondents, as well as time and resource constraints.

The sample was determined to reflect the distribution of workers' nationalities and the diversity of their demographic characteristics. These characteristics included gender, age, marital status, working location, and recruitment status – for example, whether a worker was a first-time participant in the schemes, whether they were a team leader of their working group, or whether they were employed by a direct employer or a labor hire entity. Due to the small proportion of female workers participating in the labor mobility schemes, especially under the RSE scheme (26 percent under the SWP scheme in 2019–20 and 11 percent under the RSE scheme in 2016–17), the survey oversampled women to ensure reliable female-specific statistics (Figure 5). The sample size by nationality was first determined by probability proportional to size method. However, due to the large disparity in the size of the population of workers across nationalities, the survey oversampled i-Kiribati and Fijian workers and set a minimum sample size at 35 workers for each nationality in each scheme to ensure reliable scheme- and country-specific statistics while keeping the cost of the survey manageable (Figure 6).

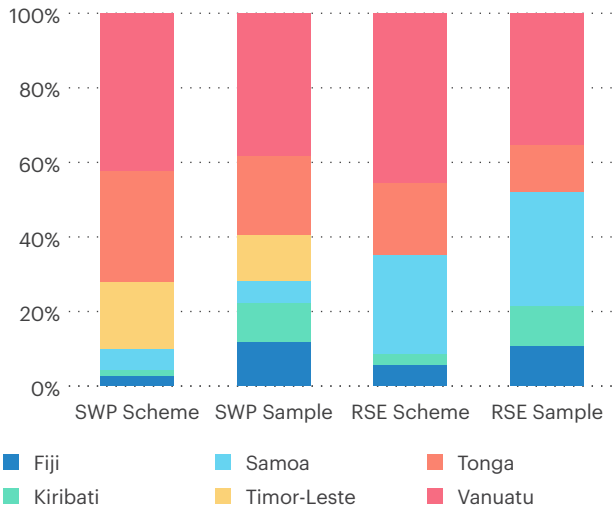
Potential respondents were identified through various channels, including: (i) sending countries' labor sending unit and embassies in Australia and New Zealand; (ii) approved employers under the SWP and RSE schemes; (iii) recruitment agents (for ni-Vanuatu workers); (iv) civil groups in Australia that provide support to seasonal workers; and (v) the social networks of workers.

FIGURE 5: Sampled current workers by gender



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 6: Sampled current workers by nationality



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

The combination of these channels helped to minimize potential selection biases that might have occurred through recommendations by employers or workers' networks.

Response rates, while varying across nationalities of the workers, were relatively high by international comparison. The response rates among contacted current workers ranged between 66.7 percent (Tonga) and 86.7 percent (Vanuatu) (Table 19). Previous phone surveys conducted by the World Bank during the Ebola pandemic, for instance, had a response rate of 51.9 percent in Liberia (Himelein et al., 2020) and 51 percent over three rounds in Sierra Leone (Himelein et al., 2015). Similarly, the World Bank Listening to LAC pilot phone survey in Peru had a response rate of 51 percent in its first wave (Gallup, 2012).

Cancelled Workers

Cancelled workers were randomly selected from lists provided by labor sending units and recruitment agents. The list of i-Kiribati workers included all those whose trip had been cancelled – that is, the population of i-Kiribati cancelled workers – whereas the lists of Tongan and ni-Vanuatu workers covered a large part of the population.

Households of Seasonal Workers

Household-level data were collected through two surveys: one was a household survey administered on nominated household contacts of the current workers and the other was the cancelled worker survey in which the workers responded to both questions on their experience and questions related to their households. While most current workers voluntarily provided contact information of an adult member in their household during their interviews (often their spouse, parent, or sibling), some were either unwilling or unable to do so, often because their household did not have access to a workable phone or internet connection. Refusal to participate by household respondents and poor phone and internet connection also contributed to the attrition between the current workers survey and the survey of their households. Attrition varied across countries, ranging from 34 percent among Timor-Leste respondents to 56 percent for Samoa.

As a result, Samoan representation dropped from 19 percent in the current worker sample to just 8 percent in the household sample (Annex 2).

Employers

The employer sample involved mixed sampling approaches. On the one hand, all SWP employers who had active seasonal workers as of May 2020 were contacted; 56 percent of them participated in the survey. On the other hand, a sample frame for RSE employers could not be constructed due to lack of information. Instead, they were approached through labor sending units of sending countries and industrial associations in host countries. Interviewed employers were not necessarily the employers of those seasonal workers who were surveyed as part of this exercise. This helped to increase the diversity of responses and allowed for better triangulation of the reported experiences of workers and employers during the crisis.

2.1.2 Sample Description

Seasonal Workers

The current worker sample included 586 workers with diverse demographic characteristics and experience of labor mobility schemes. The surveyed workers were between 20–68 years old, with 20–39 years old being the major group. Most of them were married or in a de-facto relationship (Figure 7 and Figure 8) at the time of the survey. A quarter of the sample (25.4 percent) were first-time workers, while one-third had participated in the schemes for five years or more. Team leaders, who lead working groups at their place of employment and serve as a direct link between individual workers and their employer and government's labor sending unit, made up 27 percent of the sample. Moreover, the sample spanned across regions, largely consistent with the geographical distribution of the population of seasonal workers in Australia and New Zealand (Figure 9 and Figure 10). This composition allowed the sample to capture an extensive range of responses from seasonal workers during the COVID-19 crisis. The number of respondents by scheme and nationality was sufficiently large (at least 35 observations per country and scheme) for reliable scheme- and country-specific statistics (Annex 2).

FIGURE 7: Surveyed current workers by age

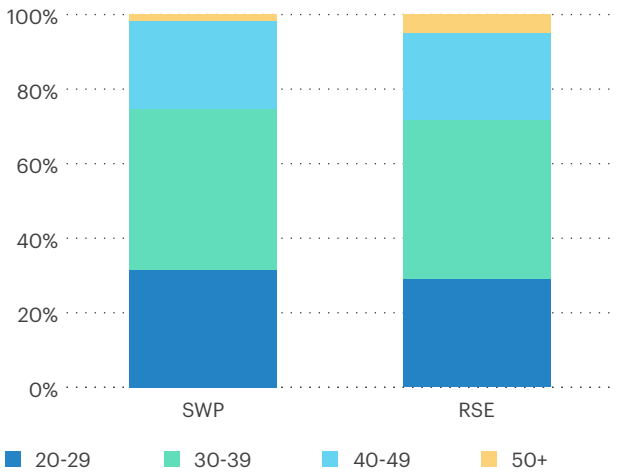
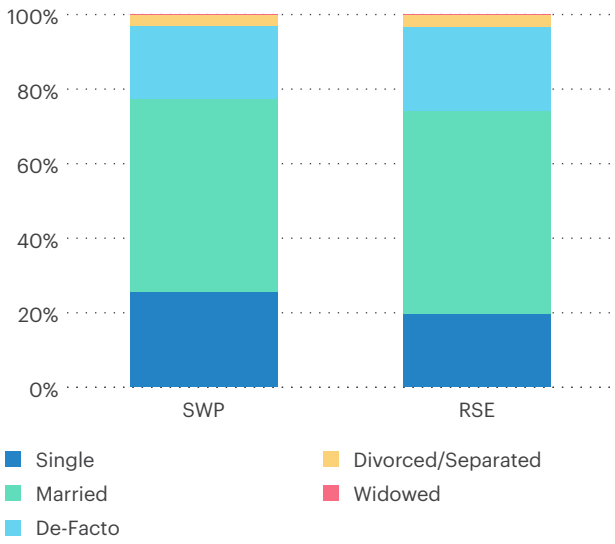


FIGURE 8: Surveyed current workers by marital status



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 9: Surveyed current SWP workers by location

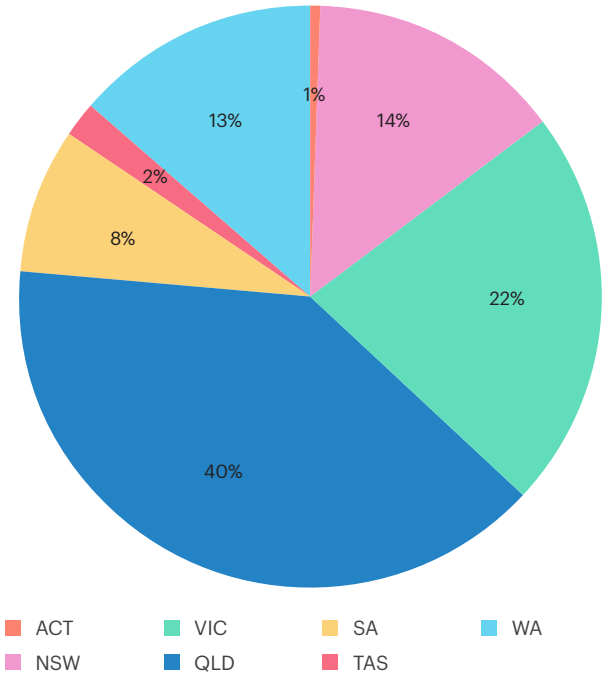
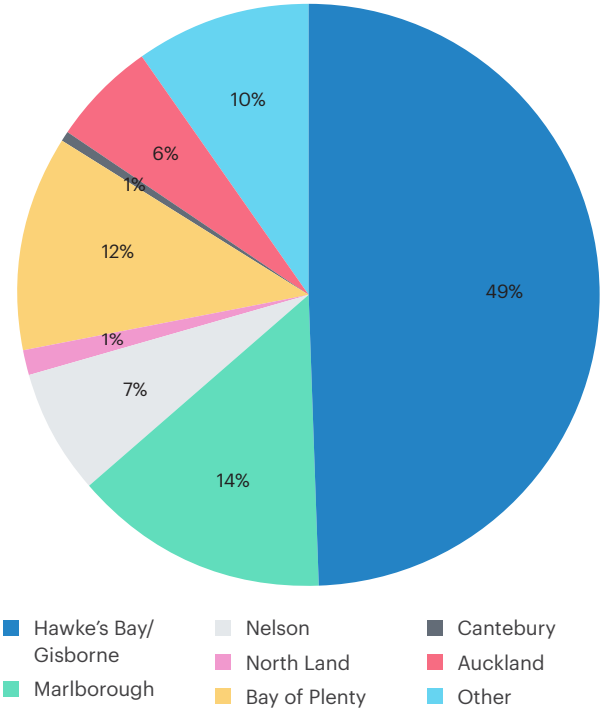
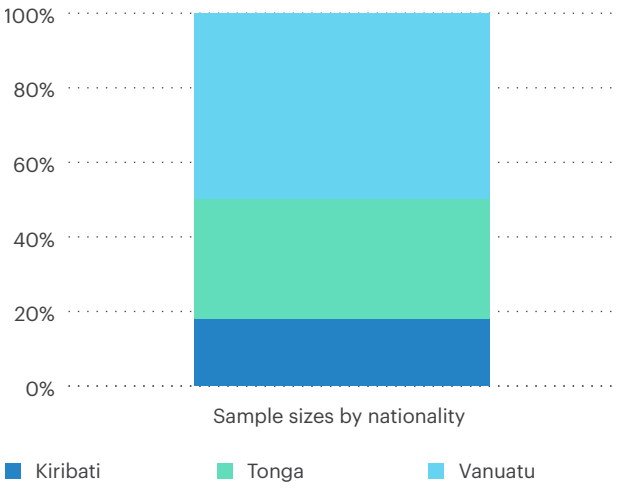


FIGURE 10: Surveyed current RSE workers by location



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 11: Surveyed cancelled workers by nationality



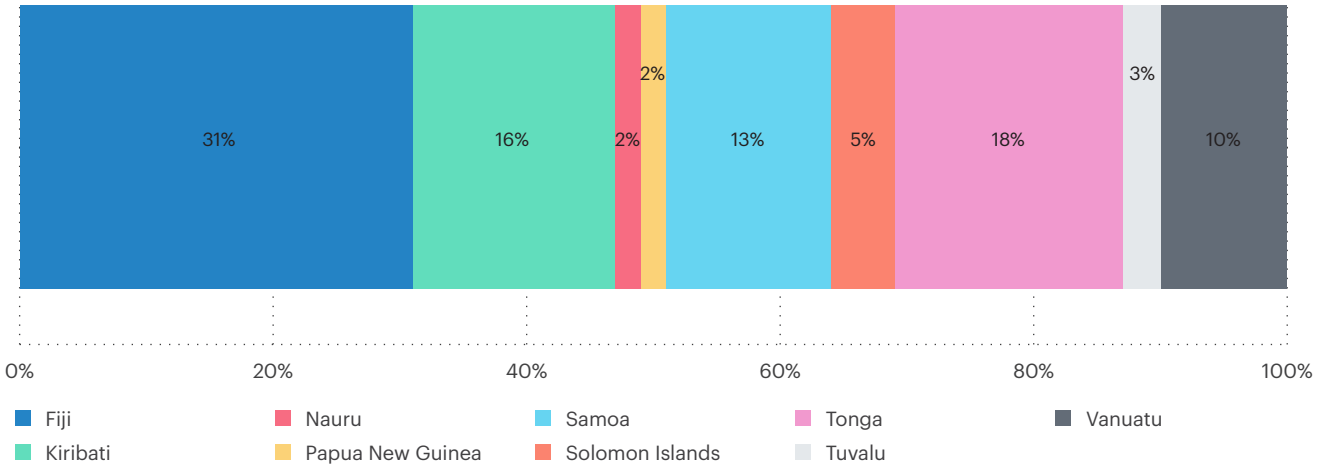
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Similar to the sample of current workers, surveyed cancelled workers had diverse demographic characteristics including gender, age, marital status, and level of experience. The cancelled worker sample (195 respondents) covered a significant portion of i-Kiribati, Tongan, and ni-Vanuatu workers whose scheduled travel was cancelled due to COVID-19, across various locations within each country (Figure 11). The sample covered 25 percent of all i-Kiribati cancelled workers, and 48 percent, and 41 percent of the lists of cancelled Tongan and ni-Vanuatu workers provided by the countries' labor sending units, respectively (see Annex 2). About 19 percent of surveyed cancelled workers were female, 77 percent were married, and 80 percent were returning workers (workers who have participated in labor mobility programs more than once). The number of respondents was sufficient (at least 35 observations per country) for reliable country-specific statistics (see Annex 2). In contrast with the current worker sample, the cancelled worker sample included slightly more SWP participants than RSE participants, with 60 percent of workers scheduled to travel to Australia and 40 percent scheduled to travel to New Zealand.

PLS Workers

The PLS dataset included 61 PLS workers from nine Pacific countries: Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu (Figure 12). As with the seasonal worker samples, most surveyed PLS workers were between 30–39 years old. The workers were located in the eastern part of Australia. About 52 percent of surveyed PLS workers were married and 23 percent were female, slightly higher than the 20 percent among all PLS workers in 2019–20. Due to the small sample, summary statistics on female PLS workers should be interpreted with caution.

FIGURE 12: Surveyed PLS workers by nationality

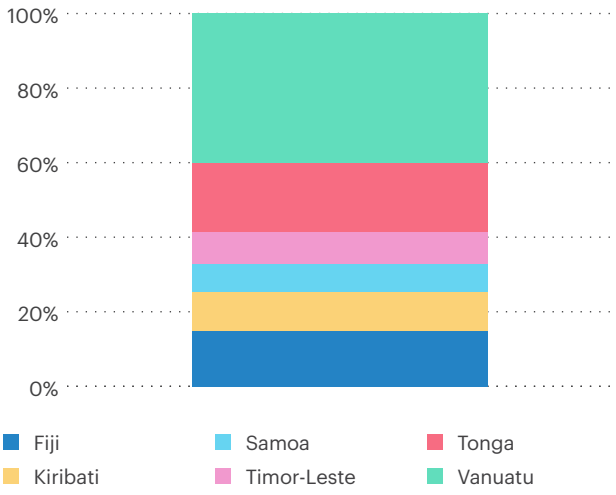


Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Households of Seasonal Workers

Despite attrition, the household survey included 271 labor sending households with a nationality composition that largely corresponded to the current worker sample. Ni-Vanuatu households made up the largest share at 40 percent (compared to 37 percent in the current worker sample) (Figure 13). Nearly two-thirds (64.5 percent) of the respondents to the household survey were the spouse of the current workers interviewed. Consequently, in converse to the worker survey, the household sample had a larger proportion of female respondents at 75.5 percent. It is important to note that subsequent household analysis in this report uses both data from this household survey and household-level data from the cancelled workers survey; distinction between two groups of households in the analysis is made as appropriate.

FIGURE 13: Surveyed households by nationality

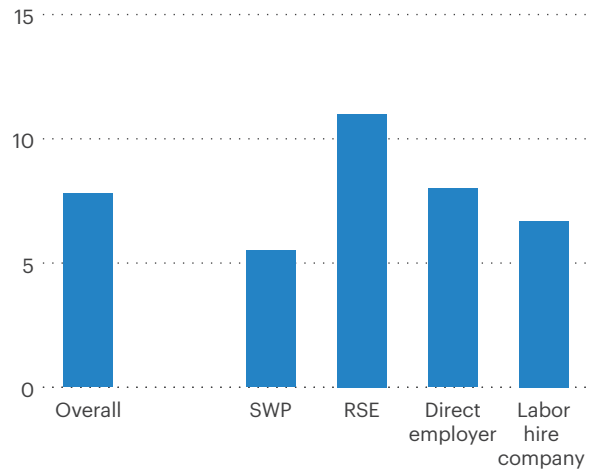


Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Seasonal Employers

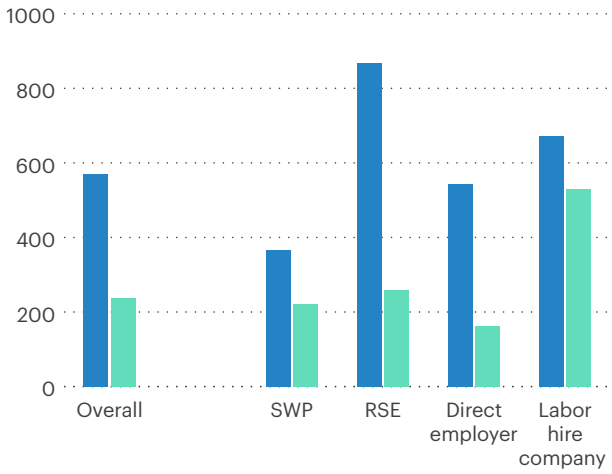
The employer sample included 74 direct employers and labor hire companies and was diversified in terms of the employer's experience with the scheme, business size, location, and number of seasonal workers. On average, the surveyed RSE employers had participated in the scheme for 11 years. Employers under the newer SWP scheme had participated for an average of 5.5 years (Figure 14). Given that the two schemes were established in 2007 and 2012, respectively, this meant that most of the surveyed employers had been involved for most, if not the whole duration of the schemes' operation, thus likely having extensive knowledge and experience to share. The surveyed employers came in different sizes: 41 percent of the sample employed less than 100 seasonal workers in a season, while 20 percent had over 1,000 seasonal workers. Pacific workers made up a significant part of their workforce (Figure 15). The nationality profile of workers of the surveyed employers was largely consistent with the profiles of all workers on the SWP and RSE schemes. The diversified sample ensured the data reflects the impacts of the pandemic on a broad range of employers under the two schemes.

FIGURE 14: Average number of years participating in labor mobility schemes



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 15: Average number of seasonal workers employed per season



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

BOX 1:

Data collection under social distancing and information shortage

Between June and September 2020, the World Bank conducted a series of four structured surveys on seasonal workers, their households, and seasonal employers in the RSE and SWP schemes. The surveys covered a wide range of respondents located across Australia and New Zealand, as well as five Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste. In the context of a rapidly evolving pandemic and its economic fallouts, the surveys were envisioned to be a rapid exercise to capture just-in-time impacts of the crisis on the key stakeholders in Pacific labor mobility schemes, namely the workers, their employers, and remittance-receiving households.

The implementation of the surveys faced three major challenges: lack of information on respondents; language and cultural barriers; and difficulties in contacting the respondents amidst social distancing and respondents' limited access to communication channels. In the absence of an extensive administrative registry of seasonal workers, the survey team engaged with various counterparts to identify potential respondents and design the survey samples. These included the Ministry of Employment or equivalent ministries in labor sending countries; embassies and liaison officers in Australia and New Zealand; employers, industrial associations, and non-government organizations involved in labor mobility schemes; as well as governmental partners in Australia and New Zealand. In addition, outreach efforts were made through social media channels that migrant workers frequently use to expand the sample coverage. Proactive liaison with identified team leaders and respondents proved useful to reach new potential respondents and encourage participation in the survey.

As mobility restrictions and public health measures rendered face-to-face interviews impractical, phone-based interviews were identified as the best alternative.

Online surveys were ruled out given (i) the required complexity of the topics being examined; (ii) limited internet access among seasonal workers and their households; and (iii) potential selection bias. To ensure the effectiveness of phone-based interviews, the questionnaires were designed to feature short and easy-to-remember options, while taking into consideration the sensitivity of topics such as remittances, savings, and consumption.

To overcome language and cultural barriers, the recruitment and training of enumerators followed rigorous criteria and all interviews with seasonal workers and their households were carried out in their respective languages. Enumerators were mostly Pacific language/Tetum native speakers and, in two cases, Australians fluent in the relevant language with experience in direct engagement with seasonal workers. Strict field protocols regarding interview procedure and engagement with respondents were in place and information on labor mobility schemes and the study's objectives were featured in the training of enumerators. Moreover, regular team meetings were organized to facilitate experience and knowledge sharing among enumerators and to help them address issues that arise during fieldwork.

Communication with workers and their households was difficult due to several factors: limited access to phones and computers; poor phone and internet connections; and restricted time availability. The connectivity to households in Kiribati and Vanuatu was also worsened by Tropical Cyclone Harold, which in April 2020 destroyed many phone/internet towers. To reach respondents amidst these challenges, interviews were undertaken through several communication means, including phone, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger. Data collection was done through Computer-Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) software.

TABLE 1: Cultural representation of diaspora groups contacted

PIC	Australia	New Zealand
Fiji	7	4
Kiribati	3	3
PNG	8	2
Samoa	11	8
Solomon Islands	1	0
Timor-Leste	3	0
Tonga	7	10
Tuvalu	2	2
Vanuatu	2	3
Mixed	14	5
Unknown	0	1
Total	**58**	**38**

2.2 Qualitative Interviews

Interviews were conducted online and via the phone with 42 Pacific Islander community representatives across Australia and New Zealand. The sampling frame was designed to capture the variety of experiences of different cultural groups residing in various geographical locations. Respondents were identified via internet searches for Pasifika community groups and organizations, and snowballing from existing contacts. In order to capture the diversity of Pacific communities, groups and individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds were contacted, including 10 gatekeepers, 58 organizations in Australia, and 38 organizations in New Zealand (Table 1). The contacted groups and individuals were located in different regions of Australia and New Zealand (Table 2), reflecting the diverse migration pathways and settlement patterns of Pacific Islanders and allowing the sample to capture a wider variety of Pacific diaspora group experiences during the crisis.

TABLE 2: Locations of diaspora groups contacted in Australia and New Zealand

Location of diaspora groups contacted in Australia	
ACT	1
NSW	11
NT	3
QLD	12
SA	5
VIC	21
WA	4
Unknown	1
Total	**58**

Location of diaspora groups contacted in New Zealand	
Auckland	19
Canterbury	1
Christchurch	2
Dunedin	2
Hawkes Bay	1
Otago	5
Wellington	2
Unknown	6
Total	**38**

TABLE 3: Cultural background and representation of in-depth interview participants

Cultural background of interview participants	Number of participants
Fijian	6
i-Kiribati	2
ni-Vanuatu	3
Papua New Guinean	4
Samoan	6
Samoan-Niuean	1
Samoan-Niuean-Tongan	1
Solomon Islander	2
Tongan	6
Tuvaluan	1
Total	**32**

Pacific Island communities represented in interviews	Number of interviews
Fijian	3
i-Kiribati	2
Mixed nationalities	8
Papua New Guinean	3
Samoan	6
Solomon Islander	1
Tongan	4
Tuvaluan	1
ni-Vanuatu	2
Total	**30**

The final qualitative sample included 30 in-depth interviews which were conducted with 32[8] community representatives (Table 3). Most interviews were carried out over the phone and lasted between 40 minutes to one-hour. One community representative from Vanuatu responded to interview questions via email. Topics covered related to the impacts of COVID-19 on diaspora communities' economic and social lives.[9] In addition, one group interview was held with ten representatives from the Pacific Leadership Forum and the Pacific COVID Recovery Team, both based in Auckland. This meeting was attended by representatives from the Cook Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Samoa. This raised the total number of community representatives interviewed to 42. Of the in-depth interview participants who represented organizations, most of these groups were involved in cultural promotion and events or advocacy. Five groups were religious organizations (churches).

8. Most interviews referred to here were attended by a single community representative, however two interviews were attended by two members of the community group/organization in question.
9. Full details of participant recruitment, data collection, the topic guide and a list of Pacific community organizations who participated in this research can be found in Annexes 3–5.

The geographical spread of interviews reflected the size of Pacific Islander communities, the number of organizations in each location, the strength of inter-organizational networks and the severity of the pandemic (Table 4). Strong inter-organizational networks allowed for easy snowballing between diaspora groups, while communities that were the most impacted by the pandemic were generally keen to speak about their experiences. Hence, in Australia most interviews came from Victoria where the Pacific Islander community is large and represented by many different community organizations, and where the number of COVID-19 cases were the highest and associated lockdowns during 2020 were both strict and long.[10]

It is important to emphasize the dynamic and changing nature of the pandemic and recognize that data collected through interviews reflect the state of the pandemic at the time of the survey. Interviews were conducted between 16 June and 26 August 2020. Thus, interviews with members of the Papua New Guinean community occurred before July 2020 when COVID-19 had begun to spread in PNG. Community members' perception that PNG had fared quite well during the pandemic was a reflection of this. Interviews in Victoria were completed during early July at the beginning of the state's second outbreak, and while community representatives expressed concern over a second lockdown, the toll of a second stricter set of restrictions had not yet hit. Interviews in New Zealand straddled the end of the first outbreak (June 2020) and the beginning of the second (11 August 2020) and this was reflected in the more positive outlook expressed in earlier interviews. The impacts of the pandemic on communities are far from static and will continue to evolve and change.

Semi-structured interviews allow for in-depth insights into sensitive issues and are particularly useful in generating hypotheses. In this instance, the data generated from qualitative interviews has also been used to complement and triangulate findings related to seasonal workers and their households from the quantitative survey. Despite this diverse sample and efforts to ensure satisfactory data quality, two caveats inherent to qualitative interviews should be noted. One is that results related to diaspora groups are based on a small sample and informants may choose to respond to questions selectively. The other is that qualitative analysis cannot establish causal relationships and can pose challenges in terms of the generalization of findings.

TABLE 4: Location of communities represented in interviews

Location	Number of interviews
NEW ZEALAND	
Auckland	6
Dunedin	1
AUSTRALIA	
NSW	3
NT	1
QLD	7
SA	1
VIC	10
WA	1
Total	**30**

10. Two interviews took place with community leaders who technically lived in rural Victoria (1) and NSW (1), however as these communities and their representatives straddle the border, the classification of these interviews/communities as belonging to one state or the other is largely arbitrary.

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III. SEASONAL AND PLS WORKERS

The COVID-19 crisis imposed serious challenges on migrant workers, both those working in host countries and those due to take up their overseas employment when the pandemic broke out. International border closures left thousands of seasonal workers from the Pacific and Timor-Leste stranded in Australia and New Zealand and many prospective workers have seen their trips cancelled. Early concerns related to the legality of the stranded workers' stay were addressed by visa extensions and redeployment options, however lack of work remained an issue in some areas given the seasonal nature of employment under the SWP and RSE schemes. Domestic border closures and the dependence of workers on their employers to apply for visa extensions (in Australia), as well as redeployment and transportation to new workplaces (in both Australia and New Zealand), presented additional challenges to the continuation of workers' employment and exposed them to risks of exploitation and mental distress. This section explores both economic and non-economic impacts of the crisis on seasonal workers under the SWP and RSE schemes and semi-skilled workers under the PLS.

3.1 Current Seasonal Workers and PLS Workers

3.1.1 Visa Extension and Redeployment

The pandemic caused disruptions to the employment of many seasonal workers. In May 2020, there were approximately 8,300 Pacific and Timorese seasonal workers working in Australia and 9,300 in New Zealand. As international borders closed, many found themselves stranded when they reached the end of their contract and visa validity. Thanks to the visa extension and permission to switch employers granted by the Australian and New Zealand governments, stranded workers could remain legally in the host countries. By early September, two-thirds of the surveyed workers (65.9 percent) had extended their visa and more than one-fifth (21.7 percent) had moved to a new employer as their original employers ran out of work.

The seasonal workers were highly dependent on their employers to navigate these changes in visas and employment. Of those who had their visa extended, 84.5 percent received help from either their current or previous employers to make the application. Similarly, 88.2 percent of redeployment cases were arranged by employers – almost all were either the original employers or labor hire companies that had recruited workers and facilitated their travel to Australia.

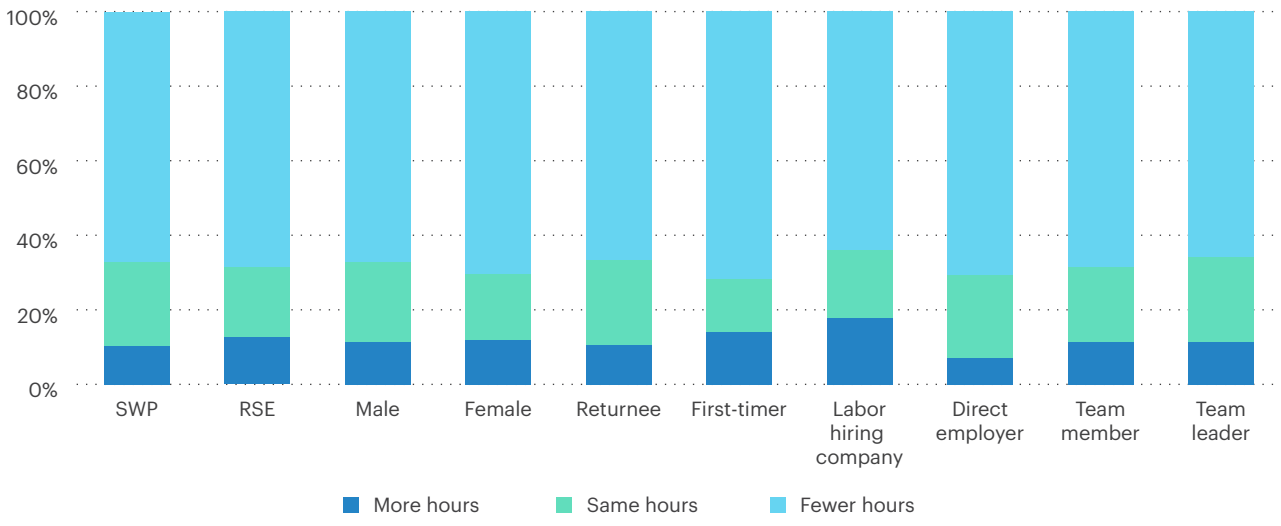
Recruitment agents in labor sending countries played a much smaller role, supporting only 14 percent of visa extension cases and 3.2 percent of redeployment cases. Only a handful of workers reported either applying for visa extension or changing employers by themselves. The significant role of employers not only highlights the reliance of workers on employers for administrative matters, but also points to the operational burdens that the crisis placed on employers.

3.1.2 Employment

The pandemic led to broad-based and significant decreases in employment for both SWP and RSE workers. During the period from March until August 2020, more than 30 percent of SWP workers and 54 percent of RSE workers spent at least one week without any work while more than two-thirds of workers across both schemes reported having fewer work hours than they did during the period of January and February (Figure 16). Those who experienced reduced work hours on average lost 18 hours per week or a 37 percent decrease from 48 hours to 30 hours per week. The overall change across all workers was also negative at 11 hours per week with no noticeable difference across the two schemes (Table 5).

Females, first-time workers, workers who are ordinary members of their working groups (as opposed to team leaders), and those employed by direct employers were more vulnerable to having their work hours reduced. Not only were these groups moderately more likely to experience work hour cuts, but when they did, the extent of reduction was larger. Most notably, work hours of female workers on average declined by 16 hours per week as compared to only nine hours among their male counterparts. Part of this gap could be attributed to the different tasks typically taken up by the sexes; female workers are more likely to be employed in packhouses while male workers are more likely to work in the field. As the COVID-19 outbreak coincided with winter months in Australia and New Zealand, when there was relatively less indoor work (due to social distancing requirements in indoor workplaces and in some cases closure of canning factories) but greater need for field-based work such as winter pruning, male workers might have been better placed to cope with the impacts of the crisis. I-Kiribati and Timorese workers also suffered heavier cuts than workers from other PICs (Table 5).

FIGURE 16: Changes in work hours of seasonal workers after lockdowns



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

TABLE 5: Average change in weekly work hours of seasonal workers after lockdowns

		Pre-lockdown (hours)	Post-lockdown (hours)	Absolute changes (hours)	Percentage change (percent)
Overall		46	35	(11)	(23.5)
Scheme	SWP	47	36	(11)	(23.1)
	RSE	46	35	(11)	(23.9)
Sex	Male	46	36	(9)	(20.6)
	Female	48	32	(16)	(33.6)
Experience	Returnees	46	36	(10)	(22.5)
	First-timers	46	34	(12)	(26.3)
Recruitment Type	Labor hire company	47	37	(10)	(21.0)
	Direct employer	46	34	(12)	(25.3)
Role within the team	Member	47	36	(11)	(23.9)
	Leader	45	35	(10)	(22.4)
Nationality	Fiji	42	42	(0)	(0.3)
	Kiribati	52	35	(17)	(32.8)
	Samoa	41	28	(13)	(31.8)
	Timor-Leste	51	31	(20)	(39.7)
	Tonga	46	36	(10)	(21.5)
	Vanuatu	48	38	(10)	(21.1)

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

A minor but considerable proportion of seasonal workers benefited from the pandemic-induced labor shortage. Approximately 10.2 percent of SWP workers and 12.6 percent of RSE workers reported working more hours than they did pre-lockdown. Their average increase was 8.3 hours per week for SWP workers and 16.2 hours per week for RSE workers.

An explanation for this is that demand for seasonal labor remained strong during the pandemic. About half of interviewed SWP and RSE employers reported experiencing labor shortages for at least one month since March 2020. The cancellation of incoming Pacific workers and decreases in the number of backpackers, international students, and local farm labor was the main reason. The shortage appeared more widespread in New Zealand, with 56.7 percent of RSE employers reporting the issue as compared to only 43.2 percent among SWP employers, potentially because the demand for farm labor in New Zealand typically spikes during the period from March until June, while in Australia it is relatively more evenly distributed throughout the year.

Pandemic-induced labor shortages appeared to be locally based and seem to have primarily benefited those working below full capacity pre-lockdown (likely with employers who had yet reached peak season). This is evidenced in several factors that are associated with whether a worker experienced income gain during the crisis. Across the schemes, those reporting higher earnings originally worked considerably fewer hours and made less money pre-lockdown than those reporting lower or unchanged earnings. In addition, while there is little difference in the likelihood of changing employers between these two groups, those who witnessed increased income were significantly less likely to have their visa extended (Figure 17). Since contracts of seasonal workers are typically aligned with the seasonal demand for labor of their employers, workers approaching the end of their contracts around the time of the lockdown were highly likely to be employed on farms which had passed or were about to pass their peak seasons. When their contracts were extended, they likely either remained with their existing employers who no longer had much work to offer or moved to a new employer, which took time, leading to lower earnings than pre-lockdown.

FIGURE 17: Change in earnings after lockdown by workers' profiles

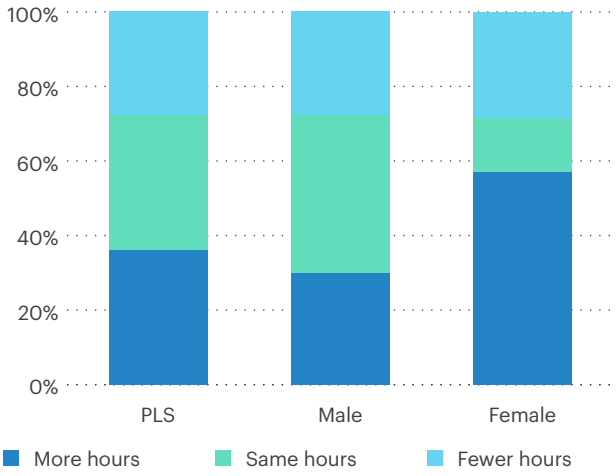
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Unlike seasonal workers, semi-skilled Pacific workers employed under the PLS fared relatively better after the onset of the pandemic, and the overall impact of the crisis on PLS workers was mixed. Among surveyed workers, about 36 percent reported working more hours after the lockdown in March 2020 whereas another 28 percent reported the opposite (Figure 18). The corresponding figures among seasonal workers were more sobering at 11 percent and 68 percent, respectively. On average, PLS workers worked three more hours per week (Figure 19), mainly driven by the increased work hours among females.

Female PLS workers seem to have had a largely positive experience post-lockdown, with 57 percent working longer hours than the January–February period (as compared to 30 percent among their male counterparts). The average increase in work hours among females was also significantly higher at 12 hours per week while males saw only a one-hour increase. However, due to the small number of female observations in the sample, generalizing this gender difference across all PLS workers might be premature.

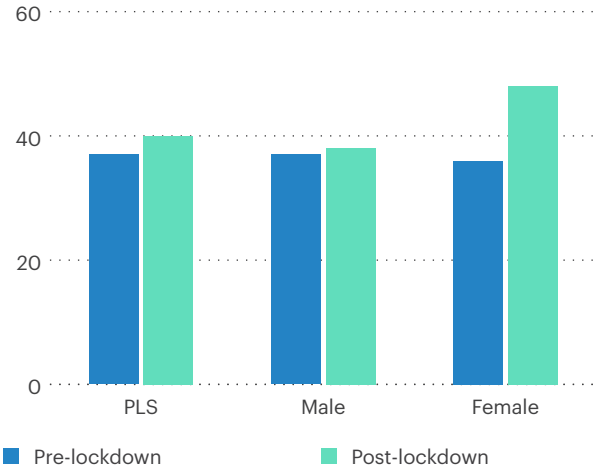
The more positive experience of PLS workers during this crisis as compared to seasonal workers could be attributed to two factors. One is the longer duration of their employment contracts. While the SWP and RSE schemes only offer short-term employment for up to 9 months in a 12-month period, the PLS provides longer-term employment between one and three years. PLS workers, thus, were less likely to have their contracts expire amidst the pandemic and suspension of international travel. The other factor is the concerted intervention of the PLF, to support displaced workers during the crisis. As the managing agency of the scheme, the PLF either redeployed or repatriated almost all PLS workers that were stood down due to COVID-19, and provided support to those that could not be redeployed or repatriated (PLF, 2020). Redeployment and repatriation of seasonal workers, in contrast, were largely arranged privately among employers and hence might not have been as effective.

FIGURE 18: Change in weekly work hours of PLS workers since lockdown



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 19: Average weekly work hours of PLS workers before and after lockdown



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

3.1.3 Income

Consistent with its impact on work hours, the crisis caused a widespread and substantial reduction in seasonal workers' earnings, although some benefitted. Overall, 68.4 percent of seasonal workers reported that their earnings were lower than during the January–February period, while 16.7 percent experienced an increase in earnings. Interestingly, RSE workers were more likely to see their earnings fall (71.9 percent) than their SWP peers (64.8 percent) (Figure 20 and Table 6). Among those reporting income losses, the reduction was approximately 49.5 percent (or $A 398/week) among SWP workers and 50.6 percent (or $NZ 400/week) among RSE workers. The magnitude of income gain, however, was moderately larger among SWP workers.

The income effects of COVID-19 varied considerably across nationalities, with Timorese, Samoan, and i-Kiribati workers most affected, with approximately 71.4 percent, 87.2 percent and 77.8 percent, respectively, seeing a decrease in weekly earnings. Tongan and Fijian workers fared the best, with 57 percent and 62 percent, respectively, experiencing lower earnings (Figure 21). The magnitude of the impacts was varied (Figure 22), with i-Kiribati workers among those worst affected, together with Timorese and Samoan workers, while Fijian workers, on average, experienced the smallest earnings decrease (a 35 percent cut). It is however unclear what drove this divergence across nationalities; labor mobility scheme, geographical location of workplace, participation status (first-timer versus returnee), gender composition, and employment duration did not appear to be contributing factors.

The crisis disproportionally affected female seasonal workers. Although male workers were more likely to see their earnings drop than their female counterparts, when they did, the extent of reduction in their income was more modest than among females (although it was still substantial) at 48 percent as compared to 58 percent. Part of this gap may be due to the different jobs that women and men typically occupy, as referred to earlier.[11]

FIGURE 20: Change in weekly earnings of seasonal workers after lockdown

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

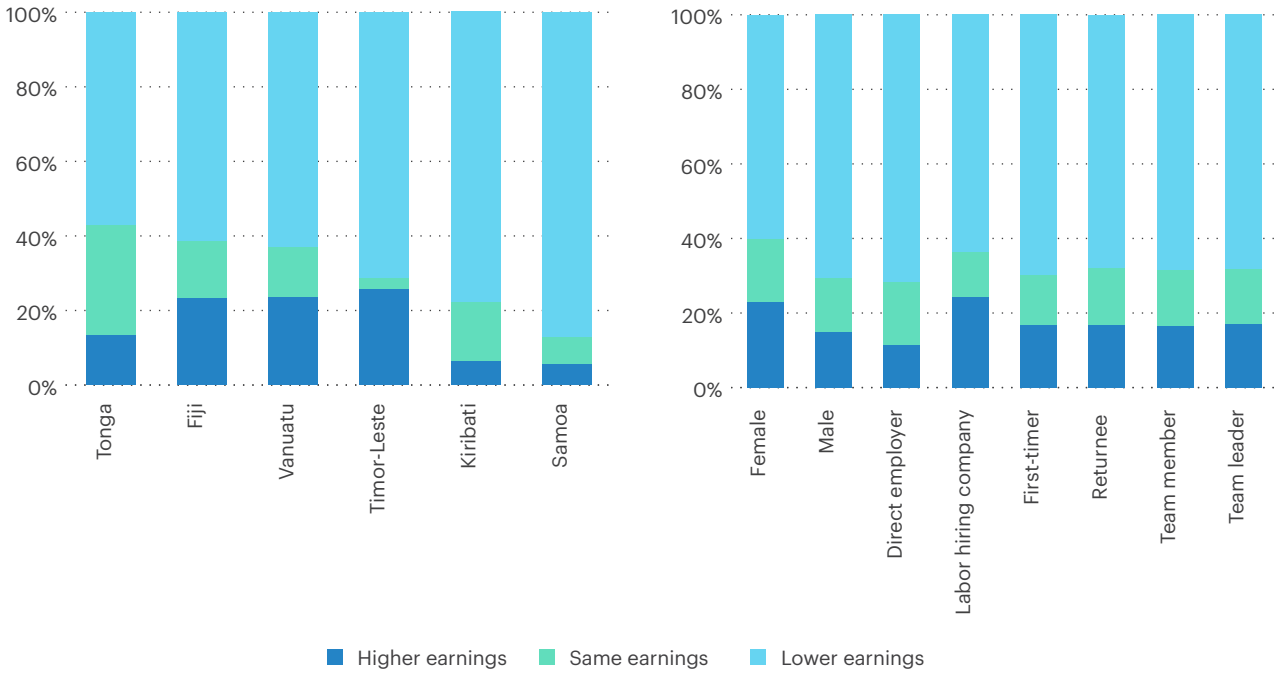
TABLE 6: Income changes of seasonal workers compared to the period of January–February (2020)

Average change in weekly earnings		Higher earnings	Lower earnings
SWP	Absolute ($A/week)	209.2	397.8
	Relative (%)	68.7	49.5
RSE	Absolute ($NZ/week)	306.4	399.8
	Relative (%)	60.9	50.6

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

11. Feedback from employers suggested that some female workers refused to take field tasks during winter months, despite work in packing sheds becoming less available.

FIGURE 21: Changes in weekly earnings of seasonal workers by workers' profiles



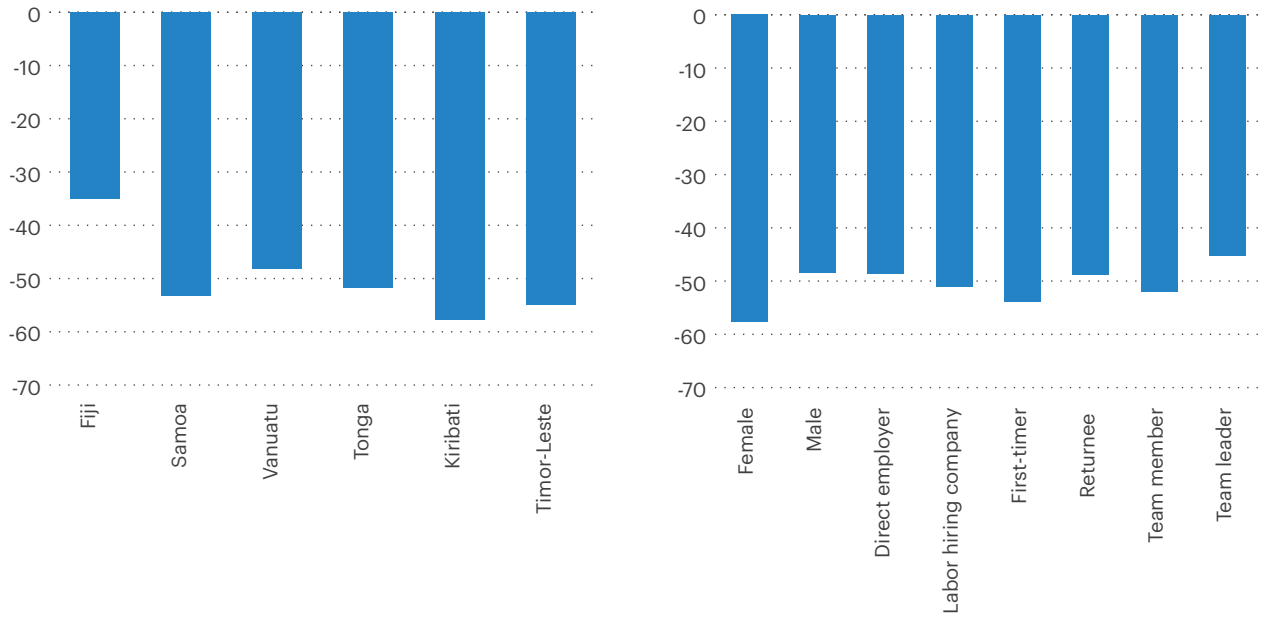
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Note: The figure displays average decreases in earnings among workers who reported experiencing earnings reduction between the pre-lockdown period of January–February 2020 and the month preceding their interview date.

This reduction in income represents a significantly heavier burden on female workers because they earned considerably less than male workers despite working roughly the same number of hours, both pre- and post-lockdown.[12] The magnitude of the income loss was also greater for first-timers, team members and those employed by labor hire companies (as compared to returned workers, team leaders, and workers employed by direct employers), although the differences were less pronounced than in the case of the gender gap.

12. The gender pay gap among seasonal workers has been documented in previous studies during pre-COVID-19 times (World Bank, 2017b).

FIGURE 22: Percentage reduction in weekly earnings of seasonal workers



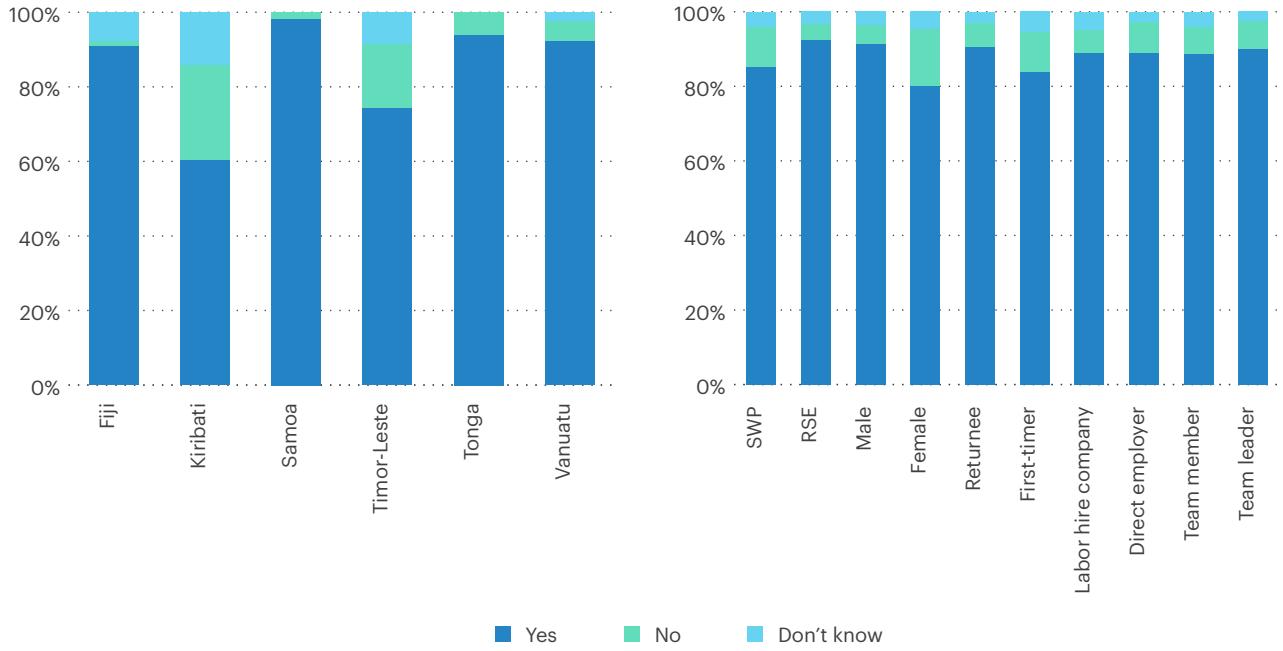
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Note: The figure displays average decreases in earnings among workers who reported experiencing earnings reduction between the pre-lockdown period of January–February 2020 and the month preceding their interview date.

Those hit hardest in terms of income loss were more likely to expect that their total earnings from this work season would be insufficient to cover their pre-departure costs. Not surprisingly, lack of confidence in being able to cover pre-departure costs was substantially higher among those that experienced larger income loss: females, first-time workers, and team members. For instance, while 15.1 percent of female respondents expected their earnings to be insufficient to cover pre-departure costs, just 5.2 percent of male respondents shared the same concern (Figure 23). Across the nationalities, i-Kiribati and Timorese workers had the lowest expectation, consistent with the magnitude of their loss in earnings.

Earnings data on PLS workers suggest again that they fared better than seasonal workers during this crisis, although the net overall income impact on them was unclear. About 36.1 percent of PLS workers reported earning less than they did during the pre-COVID-19 months of January and February, much lower than the proportion among seasonal workers (68.4 percent) (Figure 24). Female PLS workers again appeared more likely to see higher earnings after lockdown than their male counterparts, with almost 43 percent of female workers reporting higher weekly earnings as compared to 32 percent of male workers (Table 7). Also, among PLS workers with lower earnings post-lockdown, female workers appeared to experience a smaller reduction in weekly earnings than their male counterparts. Due to the small sample of PLS workers however, further data are needed to confirm these gender differences.

FIGURE 23: Expectation that total earnings of the work season can cover pre-departure costs



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 24: Change in weekly earnings of PLS workers after lockdown

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

3.1.4 Saving and Consumption in Response to Reduced Income

Income losses were strongly associated with substantial decreases in savings and, to a lesser extent, consumption among seasonal workers. Across the board, workers who saw their earnings fall were noticeably more likely to lower their savings (Figure 25). Of the workers whose earnings declined, two-thirds reported reduced savings, while only one-third reported reduced expenditure. The relatively lower propensity to cut down expenditure is not surprising as workers needed to maintain their basic consumption, such as food and accommodation, even when unemployed. In addition to lower income, higher living costs also reportedly played a role in keeping workers' expenses up and depleting their savings.

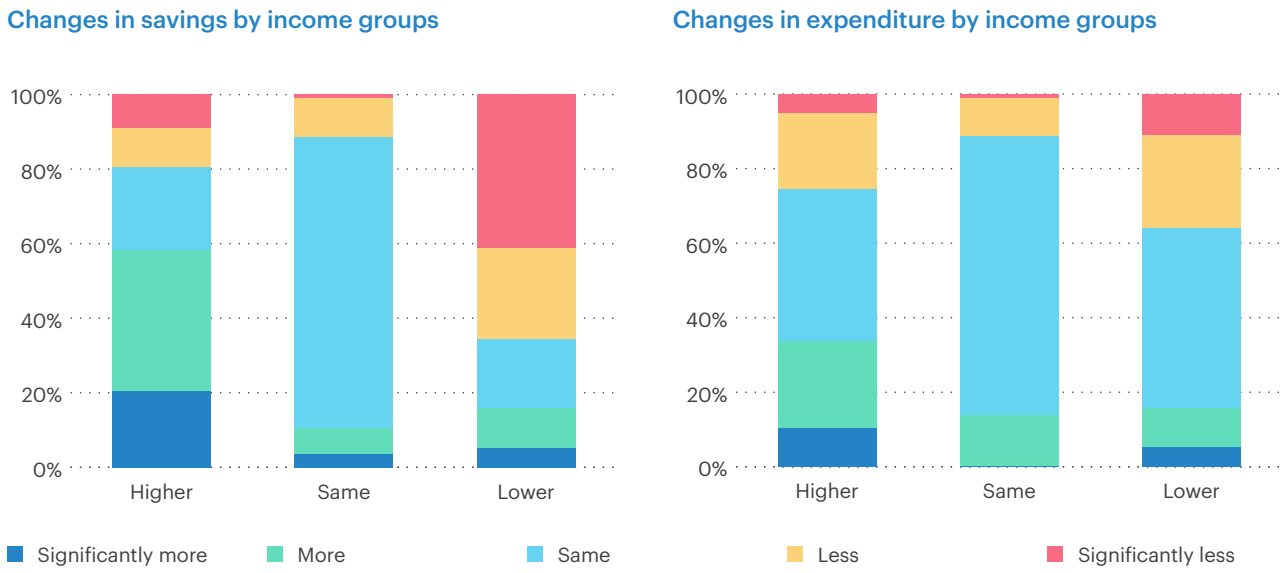
A number of surveyed workers reported the costs of their accommodation and food increased due to COVID-19 mobility restrictions, being deployed to more expensive areas, or more job seekers coming into regional areas and putting pressure on local food prices. Adjustments in consumption behavior were part of the workers' coping strategies. Some workers opted for less frequent grocery shopping, for example, buying two weeks' worth of supplies instead of one. One group of workers reported buying a whole pig to share among themselves as it was considerably cheaper than buying meat at the local butchers.

TABLE 7: Change in weekly earnings of PLS workers since lockdown by gender

	Higher earners			Same earners			Lower earners		
	Pre-lockdown (USD)	Post-lockdown (USD)	% change	Pre-lockdown (USD)	Post-lockdown (USD)	% change	Pre-lockdown (USD)	Post-lockdown (USD)	% change
PLS	318	556	75%	477	477	0%	443	310	(-30%)
Male	405	791	95%	645	645	0%	608	408	(-33%)
Female	496	667	34%	650	650	0%	564	472	(-16%)

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 25: Changes in savings and expenditure of seasonal workers



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Changes in savings and consumption across nationalities were consistent with what was reported in terms of work hours and earnings. The most severe shifts in saving and spending patterns were found among i-Kiribati and Timorese workers, with nearly two-thirds of respondents reducing their savings and over half cutting down their consumption. The decreases in savings and spending were less drastic among Fijian workers, with 36.9 percent reporting reduced savings and 7.7 percent reporting reduced consumption.

Among PLS workers, savings and consumption were largely maintained, reflecting milder adverse impacts of the crisis on their economic wellbeing. About two-thirds of surveyed PLS workers (66.7 percent) reported their consumption was unchanged post-lockdown while the proportions of workers who reported increased and decreased consumption were 17.5 percent and 15.8 percent, respectively. Also, 49.2 percent maintained their savings, 34.4 percent increased and only 16.4 percent decreased. The less severe income decreases during the crisis apparently helped PLS workers to stay more resilient than their seasonal peers.

3.1.5 Remittances

Given the reduction in work hours and earnings, remittances from seasonal workers, unsurprisingly, decreased. Nearly half of the surveyed workers reported that their remittances were lower than the pre-lockdown months of January and February, while only about 21.3 percent reported remitting more each time as compared to the pre-lockdown period (Figure 26). Among those reporting a reduction in remittances, the average amount sent each time dropped by 53 percent (or $A 478 per transaction) for SWP workers and 48 percent (or $NZ 305 per transaction) for RSE workers (Table 8). Overall, the average reduction in remittance amount across all workers in the two schemes was $A 73 per transaction and $NZ 66 per transaction, respectively. Across nationalities, the reduction is between 35 percent (Fijian RSE workers) and 61 percent (Timorese SWP workers). Additionally, for those who reported sending larger amounts per transaction, part of the increase could be attributed to the fact that they remitted less frequently. The high percentage increase in their remittance amount was also partly mechanical – during the pre-lockdown period these workers used to send much less than those who reported lower remittances, hence the percentage change in their remittances was larger.

TABLE 8: Changes in remittances among seasonal workers

		SWP	RSE
Workers remitted more	Absolute change (dollar)	A$ 550.6	NZ$ 404.6
	Relative change (%)	181.7	207.1
Workers remitted less	Absolute change (dollar)	- A$ 478.3	- NZ$ 305.1
	Relative change (%)	- 53.3	- 48.1
Fiji	Absolute change (dollar)	- A$ 337.5	- NZ$ 264.3
	Relative change (%)	45.1	-35.0
Kiribati	Absolute change (dollar)	- A$ 196.7	- NZ$ 210.6
	Relative change (%)	-54.8	-42.7
Samoa	Absolute change (dollar)	- A$ 118.0	- NZ$ 247.1
	Relative change (%)	- 38.4	-48.1
Timor-Leste	Absolute change (dollar)	- A$ 787.5	N/A
	Relative change (%)	- 60.8	N/A
Tonga	Absolute change (dollar)	- A$ 593.5	- NZ$ 302.2
	Relative change (%)	- 48.0	-52.7
Vanuatu	Absolute change (dollar)	- A$ 590.2	- NZ$ 427.4
	Relative change (%)	- 57.1	-50.9
All workers	Absolute change (dollar)	- A$ 72.5	- NZ$ 66.2
	Relative change (%)	17.5*	15.0*

* The positive average percentage change is mostly driven by some outliers whose remitting amount increased drastically post-lockdown.

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 26: Change in remittances among seasonal workers

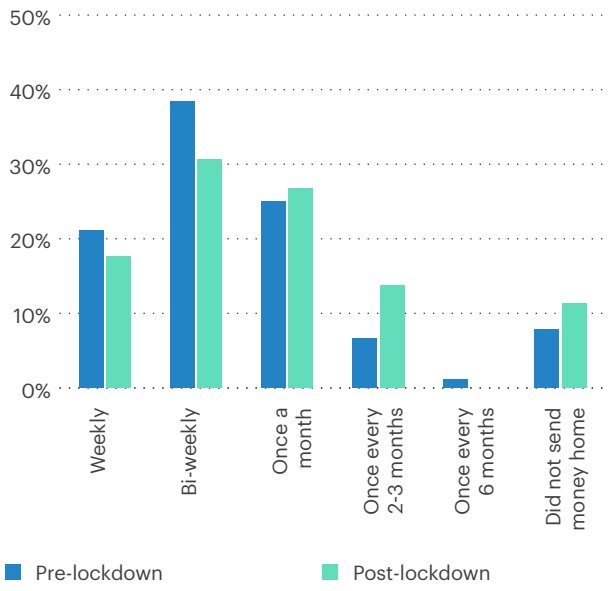
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

The decrease in remittances, however, was markedly more modest than that in earnings, likely because many workers had adjusted their own spending and saving behaviors to cope with income impacts and maintain the level of money sent home. While 68.4 percent of workers saw their earnings fall, only 51.4 percent reported remitting less (Figure 26). Moreover, although workers who earned more tended to remit more and vice versa, the correlation between the changes in earnings and the changes in remittances was only moderate – approximately 59.4 percent of those earning less remitted less, and only 30.9 percent of those making more remitted more. In other words, 40.6 percent of workers whose earnings dropped either maintained or increased their remittances. When disaggregated by the change in earnings, the average changes in remittances were also noticeably smaller than those in earnings in both absolute and relative terms, regardless of whether earnings increased or decreased.

Frequency

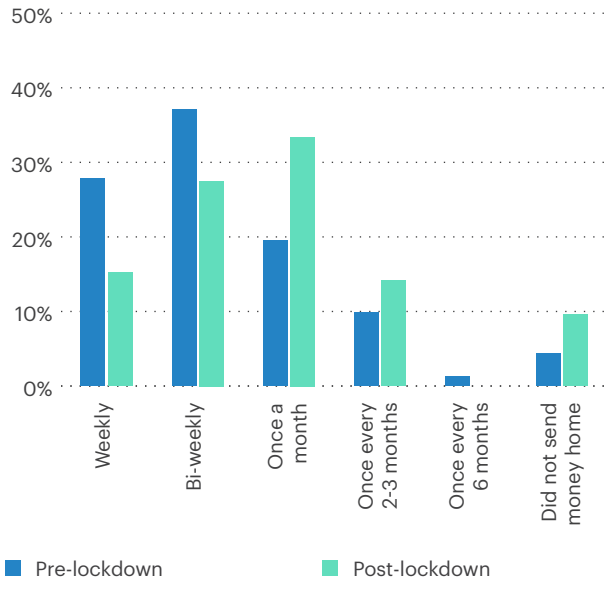
Remittances also became less frequent among seasonal workers. Comparing remitting behaviors before and after lockdowns, the share of workers remitting on a weekly or bi-weekly basis fell sharply by 17 percentage points from 62.3 percent to 45.4 percent, compensated by an increase in the share of workers remitting once a month or less frequently (Figure 27 and Figure 28). The switch to less frequent remitting was more noticeable among SWP workers. Notably, at the time of the survey, 10.4 percent had not sent any money back since March, more than half of whom said this was due to not earning enough to do so, with about one-third intending to bring back cash in person at the end of the season. This indicates both a critical fall in income for their remittance-receiving families and a dynamic adjustment in remitting behaviors in response to the availability of different remittance services.

FIGURE 27: Change in remitting frequency among SWP workers



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 28: Change in remitting frequency among RSE workers



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

13. Source: https://www.rbf.gov.fj/international-remittances-and-fijis-unsung-heroes-abroad-24-december-2020/

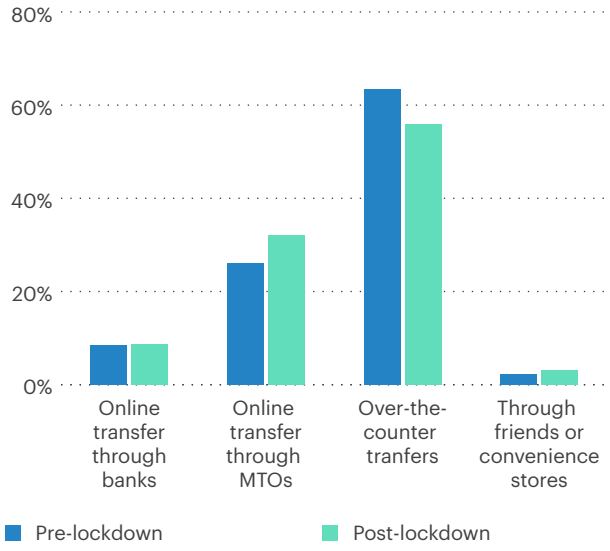
Remitting Channel and Remitting Costs

Although most Pacific workers continued to opt for over-the-counter money transfer operators (MTOs), there was a slight shift towards the use of online transfers (Figure 29 and Figure 30). This transition towards the use of online services was likely due to social distancing measures and restrictions on in-person interactions to curb the spread of COVID-19 in both remittance sending and receiving countries. For example, in Samoa and Fiji some remittance service providers suspended operation during lockdown while lack of liquidity was reported in Kiribati. Online services not only allowed workers to remit money without the risk of going into town during the pandemic, but also often come with lower fees than previously preferred MTOs. The shift was slightly more visible in New Zealand, where the usage of over-the-counter (OTC) services fell by 8.5 percentage points as compared to 7 percentage points in Australia. While Western Union remained the most popular choice of MTO, the transition to online services resulted in a slight decline in its domination as workers gravitated towards digital services like MoneyGram.

The transition toward digital transfers among seasonal workers was part of a broader increase in usage of digital remittance services across the PICs, with monetary authorities recording a surge in digital crediting in both bank accounts and other digital wallets. For instance, in December 2020, the Reserve Bank of Fiji reported that from January to October 2020 there was a 278.6 percent increase in remittances through mobile money platforms to F$50.4 million.[13] Similarly, in April 2020 crediting remittances in money wallets from the US, UK, New Zealand, and Australia to Fiji increased by 39, 32, 14 and 11 percent, respectively.

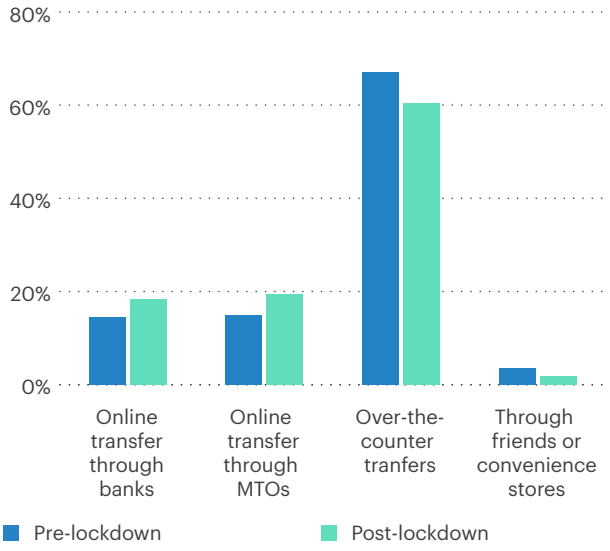
It is also important to note that the choices of MTOs varied widely across nationalities, possibly correlated to the availability of remittance receiving services in each sending country. Fijian, Samoan, and Tongan workers were exposed to the most diverse pool of providers, while those from Timor-Leste were confined to only Western Union and ANZ (Figure 31). The pool of MTOs used and their relative dominance remained largely unchanged before and after lockdown within each nationality. Thus, the digital transition toward online remittance services is likely unequal across different worker groups, limited by their access to different services providers.

FIGURE 29: Change in remitting channels among SWP workers (in percent)



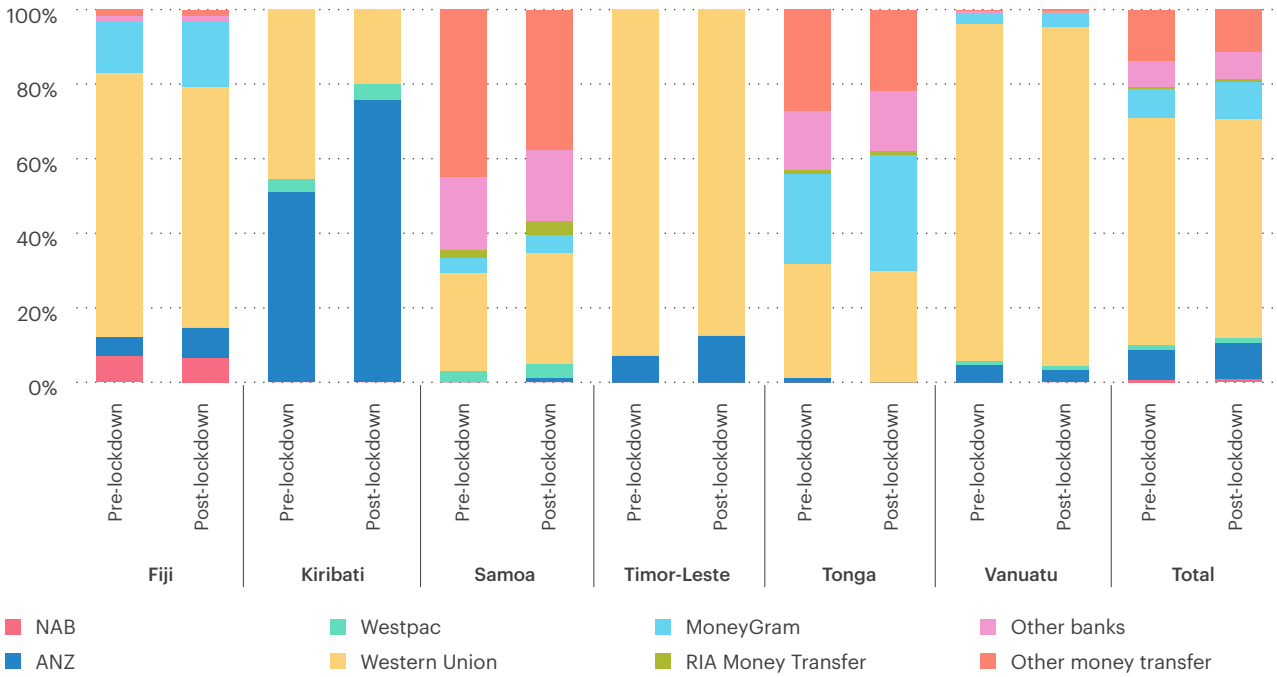
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 30: Change in remitting channels among RSE workers (in percent)



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 31: Money transfer operations used before and after lockdown (in percent of workers)



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

In contrast to the substantial and negative changes in remittances from seasonal workers, most PLS workers (71.2 percent) reported no change in terms of amount, frequency, and money transfer services. Only 18 percent of surveyed PLS workers lowered the amount sent home each time. Moreover, while a decrease in remitting frequency was observed, the extent of the decrease was significantly smaller than among seasonal workers. In particular, the proportion of workers remitting twice a month or more fell by 5 percentage points from 41 percent to 36.1 percent; and only 3.3 percent had not sent any money home since March 2020. It appears that the milder disruption in employment and income under the PLS translated into more stable remittances in times of COVID-19.

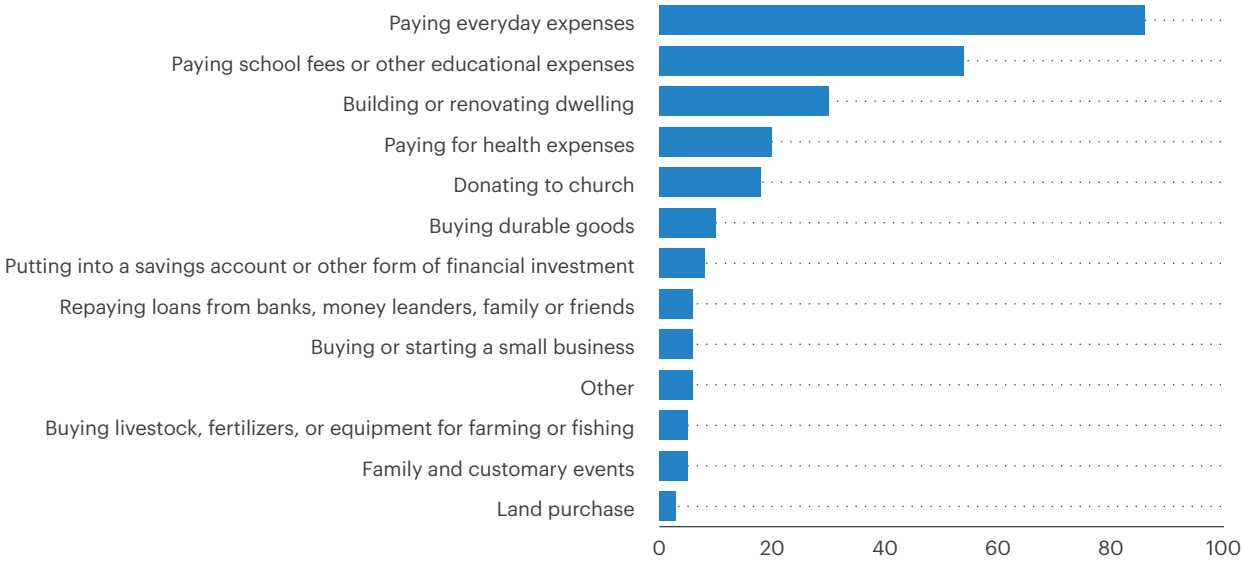
Online money transfer services were significantly more popular among PLS workers than seasonal workers, and the prevalence remained virtually unchanged during the pandemic. Respectively, 67.8 percent and 66.7 percent sent money home using online services pre- and post-lockdown, nearly double the post-lockdown prevalence rate among seasonal workers (39.2 percent). The absence of a shift toward online services among PLS workers could be due to the already high prevalence before the pandemic hit. Going forward, it would be useful for future studies to explore what determines this difference across the two groups of workers and whether improvement in pre-departure training and support services for seasonal workers during employment periods could help to narrow the gap.

The shift in choices of MTOs among PLS workers, however, was comparable to the pattern among their seasonal counterparts. Western Union and MoneyGram remained the two most common choices although MoneyGram gained a moderate share post-lockdown. Before the pandemic hit, 59.3 percent of PLS workers used Western Union and 27.1 percent used MoneyGram. Post-lockdown, the figures were 50 percent and 35 percent respectively, while the market share of other MTOs – ANZ, Westpac, Bendigo bank, and World Remit – remained small and largely unchanged.

Intended Use of Remittances

Data on intended purposes of remittances by seasonal workers confirm their significance for the livelihoods of recipient families and communities. About 90 percent of the respondents remitted to cover their family's living expenses, followed by education for children (more than 50 percent) (Figure 32). Remittances were also used for building or renovating houses and spending on health care goods and services. Ni-Vanuatu workers were most likely to highlight the importance of the seasonal income in re-building or purchasing new plots of land to build family homes after the volcanic eruption on Ambae in 2018 and the devastation of Tropical Cyclone Harold in 2020. Workers mainly remitted to spouses and parents, followed by siblings (Figure 33). Disruption to remittance inflows in terms of either amount or frequency could have damaging impacts both on household wellbeing in the short term (through lower daily consumption) and on longer-term investment in education and health of household members (through lower spending on schooling and health care and delayed dwelling improvement).

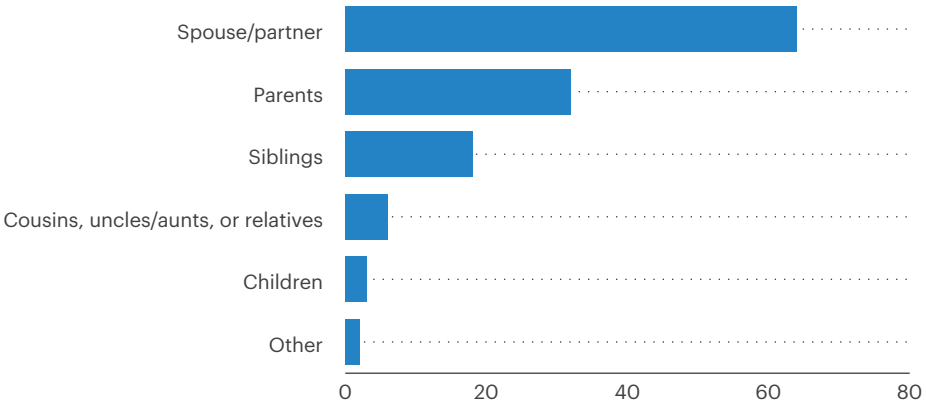
FIGURE 32: Intended use of remittances (in percent of workers)*



* The options are not mutually exclusive.

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 33: Recipients of remittances (in percent of workers)*



* The options are not mutually exclusive.

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

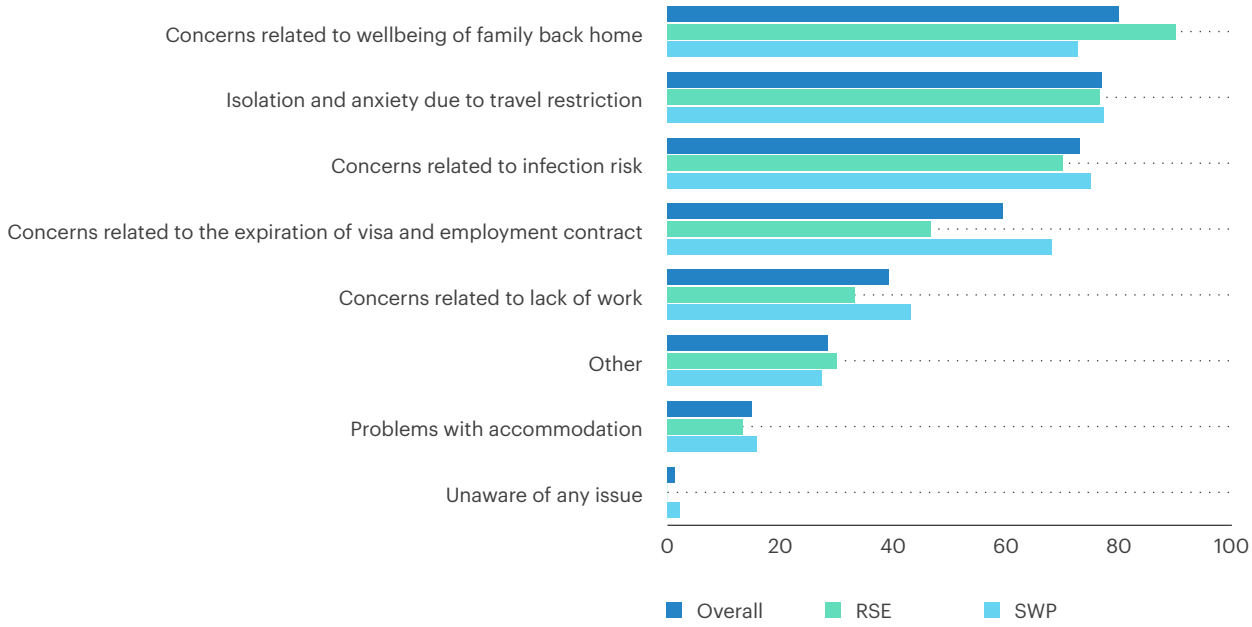
3.1.6 Satisfaction, Intention to Return Next Year, and Issues During COVID-19

Beyond economic impacts, lockdown and social distancing were detrimental to seasonal workers' mental wellbeing. Feedback from 98 percent of surveyed employers and Pacific diaspora groups in both Australia and New Zealand flagged that the situation had negatively affected welfare in some way. The predominant issues that workers faced were isolation and anxiety during lockdown, worries about their families back home, and fears of infection (Figure 34). Negative feelings were also reported by workers[14] for reasons related to redeployment and changes in their work environment, including dissatisfaction with their new workplace, workplaces being overcrowded due to multiple teams being on site, and workloads having to be shared.

Some workers reported receiving food and money donations from diaspora community members but not being supported by their recruitment agency while unemployed. In some instances, stressful and socially restrictive situations led to undesirable behavior such as excessive drinking, drink driving, violence, absconding, refusing to work, and extra-marital affairs, even among workers who had no history of engaging in such activities before.

14. In addition to quantitative data, the surveys on workers, employers and their households also gathered qualitative feedback from respondents through both open-ended questions and unprompted comments or remarks respondents voluntarily shared. While such feedback could not be presented in quantitative terms, it provides useful and in-depth insights into the experience of the respondents during the crisis.

FIGURE 34: Issues faced by seasonal workers during the COVID-19 crisis



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

TABLE 9: Satisfaction rating (out of 10) of working experience in Australia and New Zealand

Nationality	SWP	RSE	SWP 2015*
Overall	7.8	8.2	N/A
Fiji	8.2	8.3	N/A
Kiribati	8.4	8.5	N/A
Samoa	8.8	8.9	8.5
Timor-Leste	6.9	N/A	7.9
Tonga	9.2	7.1	9.9
Vanuatu	7.0	7.9	6.3
Male	7.9	8.3	N/A
Female	7.6	7.6	N/A
Returnee	8.2	8.3	N/A
First-timer	7.1	7.8	N/A
Team member	7.7	8.2	N/A
Team leader	8.1	8.2	N/A

* World Bank (2018).

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Despite the overall negative impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, migrant workers remained fairly satisfied with their experience in Australia and New Zealand. When asked how satisfied they were with the scheme on a scale of 1 'not satisfied at all' to 10 'extremely satisfied', the average score was 8 among PLS workers, 7.8 among SWP workers and 8.2 among RSE workers (Table 9). The vast majority (nearly 95 percent) of seasonal workers wished to return in 2021 (the survey having been undertaken in mid-2020). The variation between the two seasonal work schemes was minor when broken down by nationality; the only exception was that Tongan workers in the SWP scheme gave a markedly higher rating than Tongan RSE workers (9.2 compared to 7.1). Across nationalities, Timorese workers gave the lowest average rating at 6.9, which was likely related to the fact that they experienced the most severe reduction in earnings during this crisis. Across demographic groups, those who were hit harder by the crisis – females, first-timers, team members – tended to be less satisfied.

Compared with data collected by the World Bank on SWP workers in 2015 (World Bank, 2017b), satisfaction levels appeared mostly similar, with no clear pattern of change. One noticeable change was among Timorese workers, who saw a decrease from 7.9 to 6.9, although the large time gap and different survey samples made it difficult to pinpoint what might have driven such changes. The high proportion of workers wanting to return in 2021 might also be partly driven by the detrimental impacts of COVID-19 on their families and domestic labor markets, which could strengthen their incentive to continue working in the schemes. This also highlights the demand for and the role of labor mobility in supporting employment and livelihoods among Pacific workers.

In addition to challenges related to loss of employment and income, non-economic factors likely played a role in determining satisfaction levels. Qualitative data from the surveys revealed a wide range of issues related to daily living and working conditions as well as personal circumstances. Some workers reported feeling taken advantage of by their employers due to the current circumstances and said they were not being treated the same as in previous seasons. One diaspora member who works closely with SWP workers suggested that the workers who had the highest debts (often to finance their pre-departure costs) were the most stressed about losing work.

Loneliness, bullying in the workplace, poor working conditions, having to work while feeling sick, training cancellation in new workplaces, uncertainty, and inability to go home were also reported with varying degrees of prevalence. While these problems do not appear to be widespread based on feedback from the surveyed workers, they highlight the complexity of the challenges that seasonal workers have faced during this crisis. It is also important to acknowledge that these problems might have existed before the pandemic instead of being a result of the crisis, yet their impacts have likely been amplified by the current situation.

3.2 Cancelled Seasonal Workers

3.2.1 Income Losses and Pre-departure Costs

The suspension of seasonal employment during the COVID-19 pandemic represented significant losses of potential income. As Australia and New Zealand closed their borders to international travellers in March 2020, many workers who were due to travel under the SWP and RSE schemes[15] were forced to remain in their home countries. On average, the workers were contracted for 6.7 months of employment and earnings in Australia or New Zealand, with two-thirds (66.2 percent) expecting 6–7 months, and more than one-fifth (22.0 percent) expecting 8–9 months. This could be translated into significant income losses, and potentially foregone savings, inability to meet expenditure costs, and potential default on loans or purchases made on credit in anticipation of future earnings (Table 10). Many respondents reported investing in home improvement or land purchases based on expected income from SWP/RSE wages.

15. Due to the small number of PLS workers and implementational constraints, this study did not collect data on PLS workers whose trips were cancelled during the pandemic.

TABLE 10: Loss of potential income by cancelled seasonal workers

		Average length of contract (months)	Average monthly earnings pre-lockdown in domestic market (USD)	Average amount remitted during last working season (USD/ month)	Estimated losses in total remittances due to cancellation (USD)
	Overall	**6.7**	**216.9**	**388.4**	**2602.5**
Scheme	SWP	6.6	259.1	431.1	2845.6
	RSE	7	153.4	322.7	2258.7
Nationality	Kiribati	8.5	175.8	266.5	2265.2
	Tonga	6.4	393.2	641.9	4107.9
	Vanuatu	6.3	115.8	265.3	1671.4
Sex	Male	6.9	196.4	375.7	2592.1
	Female	6.2	303.7	442.3	2742.0

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Losing their prospective employment overseas, cancelled workers faced the challenge of finding alternative income-earnings options in tight domestic markets. The economic fallout from COVID-19 has caused unprecedented job losses across PICs. In Vanuatu, for instance, the economy is projected to lose roughly 21,000 jobs overall;[16] the country's tourism sector, which accounts for 35 percent of total employment is estimated to see a 70 percent reduction in full-time employment and a 33 percent reduction in part-time employment (Vanuatu Tourism Office, 2020). In August 2020, only 21 percent of tourism businesses were still fully functional. In Tonga, new recruitment intentions in March 2020 fell by 60 percent on a Y-o-Y basis.[17]

In this bleak context, cancelled seasonal workers could be disadvantaged in finding wage/salary jobs at home as their skills and experience are often oriented toward seasonal jobs in the horticulture and viticulture industries overseas. Four in five cancelled workers had worked in the SWP/RSE schemes for at least one season before their trip in 2020 was put off, and 40.5 percent had worked for at least three seasons. While the experience and skill set that they gain overseas might help them in some agricultural activities, many workers do not engage in the type of large-scale commercial activities where such skills are applicable. Certain informal work that could have helped to sustain their living in a normal time, such as selling foods at local markets, has also been limited due to mobility restrictions, leaving many cancelled workers with little earning capacity (Box 2).

16. https://www.islandsbusiness.com/breaking-news/item/2764-fiji-faced-with-a-potential-us-608-million-tourism-loss.html
17. https://www.businessadvantagepng.com/tourism-takes-a-tumble-report-finds-90-per-cent-of-2020-bookings-wiped-out-in-papua-new-guinea/

BOX 2:

The effects of cancelled trips on wellbeing

Feedback from surveyed cancelled workers across countries consistently highlighted bleak situations where they struggled to make ends meet and generate alternative incomes. For these workers, the cancellation of their trip was associated with a severe decline in their wellbeing, which included lower family consumption, disrupted schooling and health care for their children, depleted savings, postponed loan repayments, and deferred plans to improve dwelling conditions.

Luke* from Tonga did not hear any further information regarding his employment overseas after he was told that the trip was postponed. His passport was kept at the labor sending unit. Luke was not working at the time of the interview because he had to look after his one-year-old child, who had a heart disease. His wife's work hours had been reduced due to COVID-19. They were barely making ends meet.

Alex, also from Tonga, had to pull his children out of school because he had no land and no other means of earning an income to pay for school fees or to sustain his livelihood. Another Tongan worker reportedly harvested his kava prematurely for sale as he needed money.

Thomas, a ni-Vanuatu worker, used all of his savings to pay the pre-departure costs for himself and four other workers. The arrangement was made under the expectation that the other workers would repay him from their income overseas. Thomas's own family depended entirely on his remittances and savings; no other member in the family earned any income.

Tim, another ni-Vanuatu worker, gave up waged employment to join the RSE program for the first time in 2020. He used his savings to pay for the significant pre-departure costs. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, he had resorted to selling kava to support his family.

Sam, also from Vanuatu, had hoped to cover the cost of his recent marriage with the earnings from his overseas work, which was cancelled. During off-season he usually worked as a bus driver in Port Vila but because there were no longer any tourists, he had remained on his home island where life is based around subsistence agriculture. His wife's usual job – selling food at the local market – had also stopped due to COVID-19. While Sam's frugal lifestyle on the island did not require much cash, he was using his savings to pay for his financial needs.

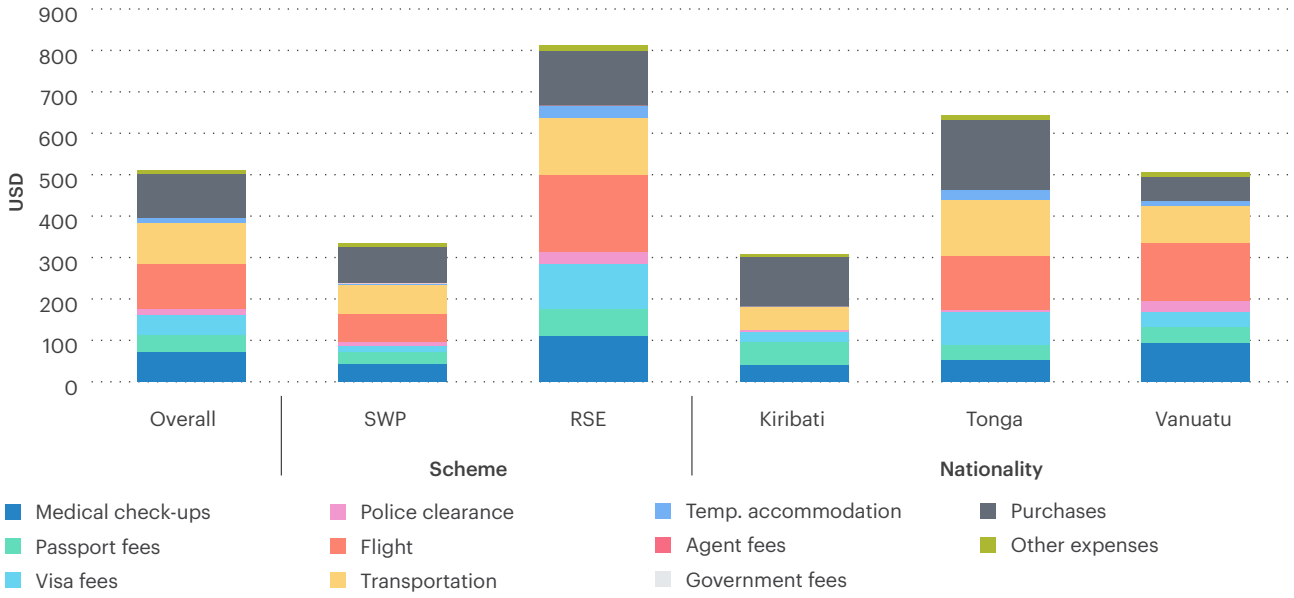
In Kiribati, several workers reported that their households' only income source was copra cutting while one reported their major source of household income since March 2020 was the Senior Citizen's Benefits that their elderly family members received from the government.

* All names are pseudonyms.

In addition to missing income, cancelled workers were left with substantial yet unrecovered pre-departure costs. They paid an average of US$348 out-of-pocket in preparation for their trips, with flight tickets, domestic transportation, and purchases of personal items to bring to Australia or New Zealand accounting for 61 percent of this total.[18] The costs were more than twice as much for those who were due to work in the RSE scheme (US$537) as compared to those expecting to work in the SWP scheme (US$237), driven mainly by more expensive airfares and higher fees for visa and medical check-ups (Figure 35).[19] Across both schemes, on average, pre-departure costs amounted to 165 percent of workers' average monthly earnings before COVID-19 and 112 percent of household income during the crisis.

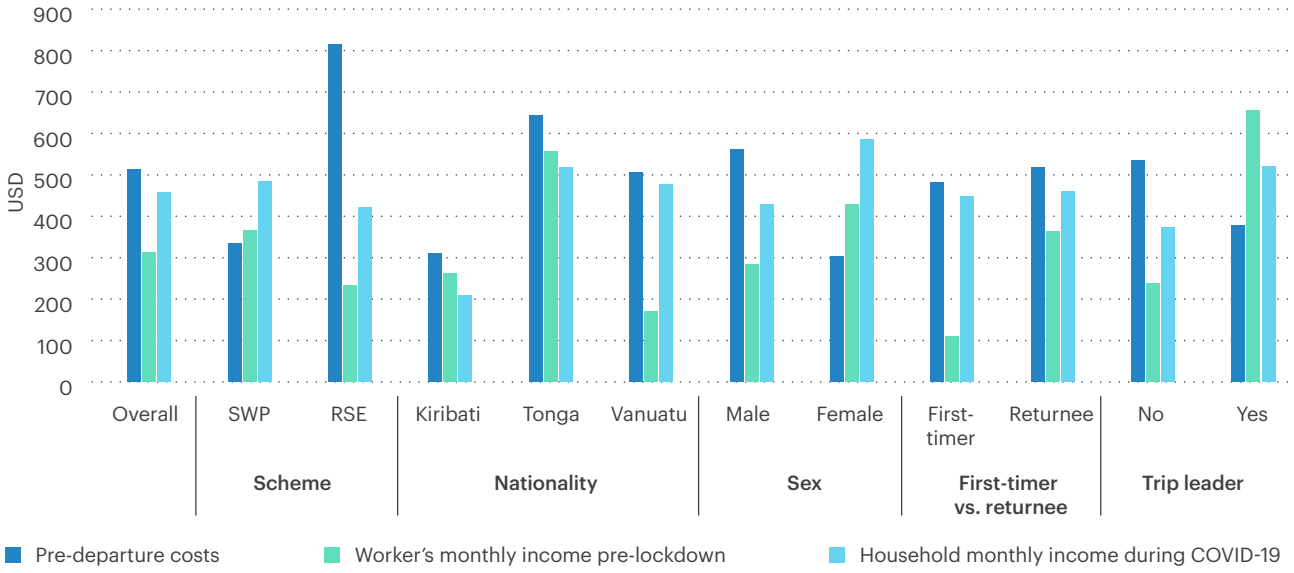
18. This figure is likely an underestimation of the total pre-departure costs that workers would have incurred if their trips had not been cancelled, as they might have had purchases still to make. Also, i-Kiribati workers reported lower overall costs than those from Tonga or Vanuatu, but this is mostly due to the fact that they did not report any out-of-pocket payments for airfares. Interestingly, female workers in Vanuatu and Kiribati reported considerably lower pre-departure costs than their male counterparts.
19. Requirements vary across schemes and countries. For example, among Tongan seasonal workers, those participating in the RSE must receive a medical clearance from an approved panel doctor prior to departing, whereas for those participating in the SWP, there is no such requirement (there is for SWP workers from other nationalities, but not in the case of Tongans).

FIGURE 35: Pre-departure costs incurred by cancelled seasonal workers



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 36: Pre-departure costs compared to household and individual monthly incomes



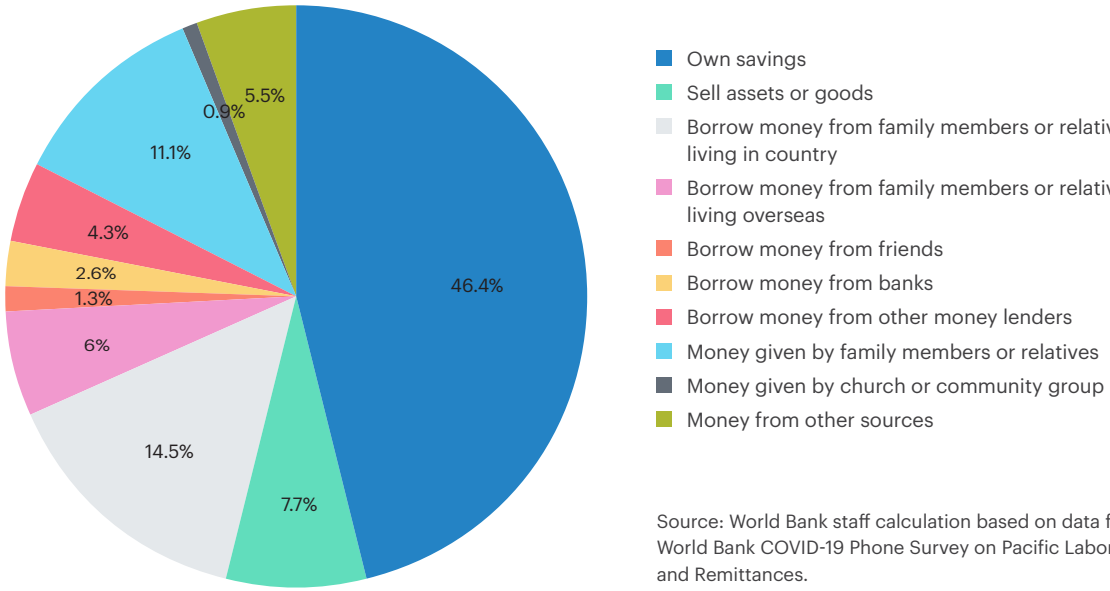
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

The costs, when compared to the pre-COVID-19 income of workers, were particularly burdensome for first-time workers and members of their working groups. Workers who had previously been group leaders had higher average monthly earnings pre-COVID-19 (and relatively lower pre-departure costs) than other workers. Returning workers also had higher incomes on average than first-time workers.

Of the cancelled workers interviewed, only one respondent reported receiving a refund for expenses paid in preparation for the trip. The respondent, an SWP returnee worker from Tonga, reported receiving a total refund of $A 181 (about 75 percent of their total pre-departure costs, which included fees for medical checks, police clearances and personal items they intended to bring to Australia for their own use).

More than one-third of the cancelled workers (34 percent) took out loans to cover their pre-departure costs, leaving them at increased vulnerability to financial hardship and future shocks. About 80 percent of those who borrowed (from either family, friends, banks, or commercial lenders) had not paid off their debts and of those, only 26 percent had been making regular repayments. Financing pre-departure costs also consumed the savings of 55 percent of the cancelled workers, which could have been used for more productive purposes (Figure 37).

FIGURE 37: Financing pre-departure costs



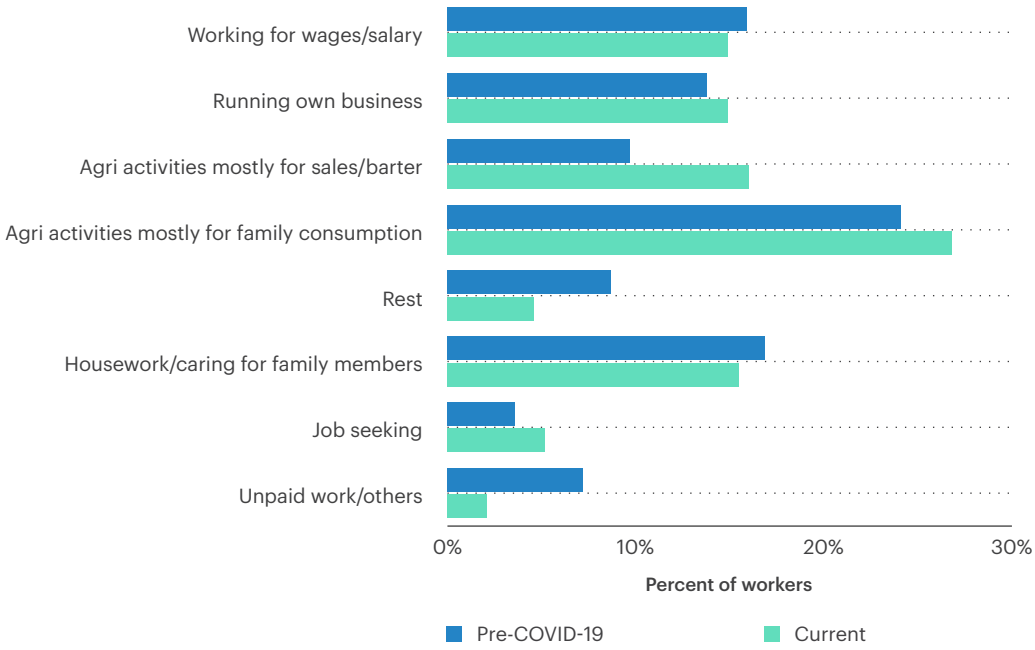
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

3.2.3 Labor Market Activities and Earnings

Workers became more economically active, mostly in agricultural activities, to cope with the loss of potential employment and income overseas. Compared to the period of January–February, the proportion of cancelled workers engaging in non-earning activities (such as unpaid work, housework, taking care of family members, and resting) fell by more than 10 percentage points from 32.8 percent to 22.2 percent (Figure 38). This was largely offset by an increase in participation in agricultural activities (farming, fishing, raising livestock, or making handicrafts) for commercial sale (from 9.7 percent to 16 percent), and to a lesser extent, for family consumption (from 24.1 percent to 26.8 percent). Cancelled workers were also more likely to seek jobs or run their own businesses after not being able to travel overseas, but were less likely to have wage/salary jobs, which was likely an outcome of deteriorating domestic labor markets and/or the completion of the employment that they had engaged in while waiting to travel overseas for work.

While the buffering role of the agricultural sector in absorbing redundant labor during a crisis has been documented before, the return to agricultural activities by Pacific cancelled workers was not associated with an urban-to-rural exodus. Experience during the 1997–98 Asian Financial Crisis, for instance, showed that millions of urban workers – laid off from construction, manufacturing, and services – returned to villages from which they had earlier migrated in search of better jobs (Warr, 2020). India during the COVID-19 pandemic also witnessed a huge reversal of rural-urban migration as cities entered lockdowns. In the case of cancelled workers, however, about 92 percent of respondents had not changed their location since their trip cancellation.

FIGURE 38: Labor market activity on which most time was spent before and after lockdown



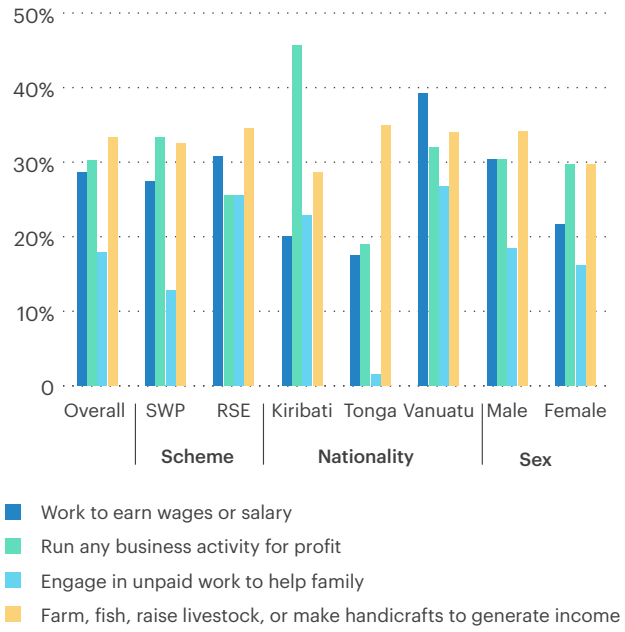
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

This weak domestic mobility could be attributed at least partly to occupational stickiness in non-wage jobs, particularly among those who worked in the agricultural sector. Of those workers who farmed, fished, raised livestock, or made handicrafts to generate income post-lockdown, 64.6 percent engaged in the same activity before the pandemic (Figure 39). The corresponding figure was considerably lower among those who ran a business (54.2 percent), engaged in unpaid work to help their family (51.4 percent), and worked in wage or salary jobs (44.6 percent). Data, however, were insufficient to ascertain whether the weak mobility was also because most workers were already in rural areas before the pandemic.

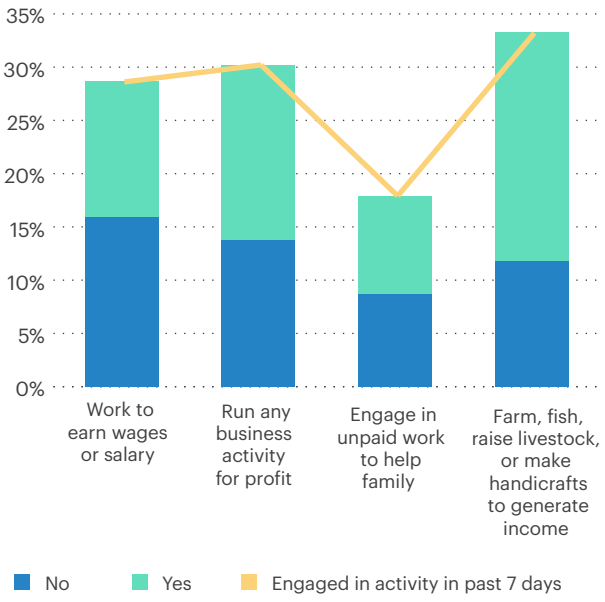
Despite higher labor force participation rates, cancelled workers experienced no clear improvement in their earnings and might emerge as a new vulnerable group (Figure 40). While the pandemic might have contributed to this sobering outcome, the occupational stickiness and stagnant income level also indicate the limited ability of seasonal workers to find quality job opportunities at home should their overseas employment end abruptly. Together, the loss of prospective income and pre-departure expenses suggests that cancelled workers may be under financial strain and need better government support to access welfare services in their home countries. This is corroborated by qualitative feedback from Pacific diaspora members in Australia and New Zealand, who maintain contact with seasonal workers, as well as a recent report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2020).

FIGURE 39: Current labor market activities of cancelled workers

Percent of workers engaged in labor market activities in the week preceding the interview

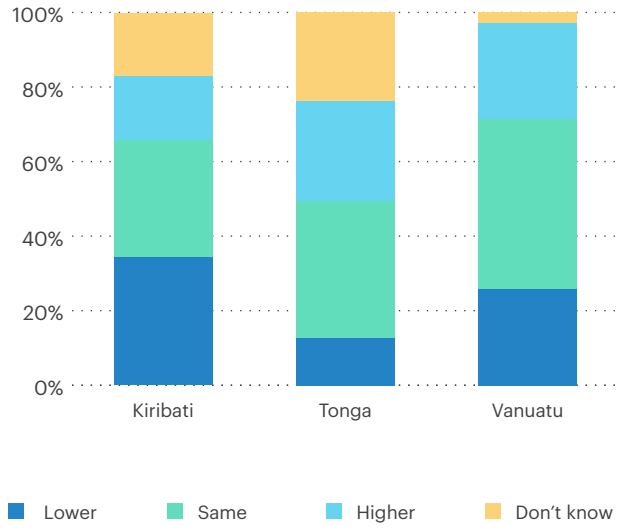


Did you engage in this same activity in January–February?



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 40: Changes in monthly earnings of cancelled workers



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

The cancellation of seasonal employment due to COVID-19 may have also exacerbated gender gaps in labor market activities. Analysis of the disaggregated distribution of labor market activities reveals stark differences between male and female workers in terms of responsibility for housework and caring for family members. Thirty-five percent of female workers reported spending most of their time in January–February doing housework or caring for family members, as compared to just 13 percent of male workers. The gap widened after trip cancellation with 38 percent of female workers and 10 percent of male workers reporting this as their main activity since March.

3.2.4 Satisfaction

Despite the cancellation, the majority of cancelled workers who had participated in the labor mobility schemes still expressed strong satisfaction. Four out of five cancelled workers (81.5 percent) had worked under the schemes before, most for more than one season (61.5 percent or 75.5 percent among those returnees). When asked how satisfied they had been with the experience in Australia and New Zealand on a scale from 1–10, with 1 being 'extremely dissatisfied' and 10 being 'extremely satisfied', their average response was 9. This is higher than the average of 8 among the current workers who have gone through the crisis while working under the schemes. Furthermore, 100 percent of respondents stated that they wished to work in Australia or New Zealand in 2021, compared to 95 percent among the current workers.

The more upbeat responses of the cancelled workers could be attributed to two factors. One is that they did not experience being stranded in the host countries and undergoing the associated uncertainty and income and employment losses during this crisis. Two is their incentive to join the schemes in 2021 which in turn might be at least partly motivated by the adverse impacts of the pandemic on the domestic labor market and their household's wellbeing. This incentive might explain their responses to the question while at the same time highlighting the demand for participation in labor mobility schemes.

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IV. HOUSEHOLDS

The COVID-19 crisis imposed a duel set of challenges on migrant sending households; the economic fallouts in their home economy and the disruption to the overseas employment of their migrating members. For households of the workers stranded overseas as the pandemic broke out, the impact of the latter was channeled through changes in the remittance inflows that help support their livelihoods. As documented in Section 3, remittances from migrant workers largely decreased and became less frequent during the crisis. For households of the workers whose trips were cancelled due to mobility restrictions, they lost not only potential remittance income but also the money that they might have spent to fund the worker's participation in the labor mobility scheme. This section explores impacts of the crisis on households of both the current and cancelled seasonal workers under the SWP and RSE schemes.

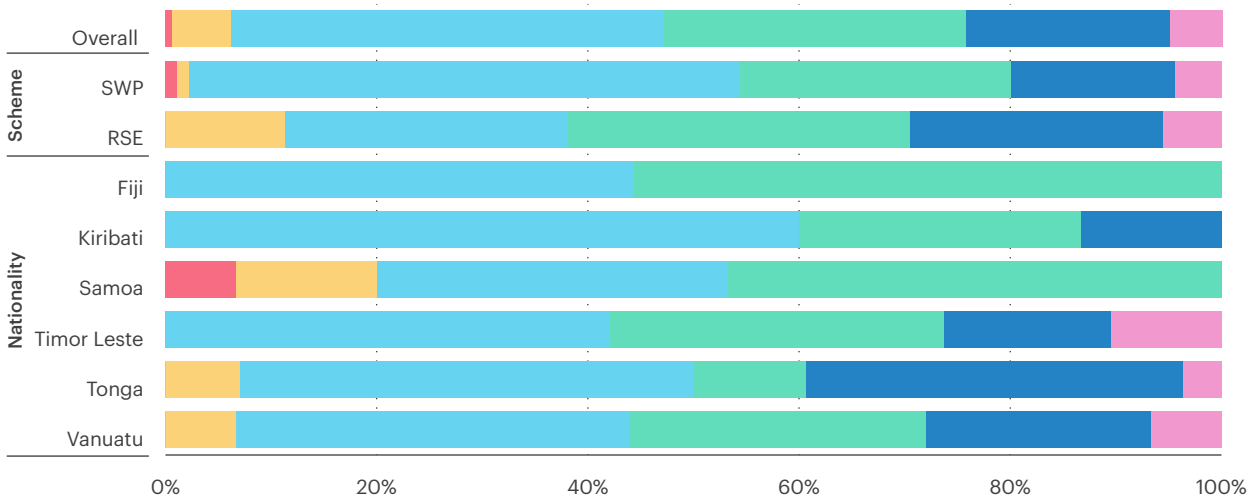
4.1. Income and Livelihood

Households of current seasonal workers experienced lower domestic income since the onset of COVID-19. When asked to compare current income from different economic activities to the income generated by those same activities at the beginning of the year, the majority of respondents stated that income was lower. Of the households that had at least one member working a wage/salary job, 47.9 percent reported this income had fallen (Figure 41). This could be linked to household members being laid off or having work hours reduced – overall, 16 percent of households reported that someone in their household had been furloughed or laid off and 38 percent reported that a household member had their work hours reduced. Similarly, 57 percent of households that operated non-farm businesses saw income drop, and about a quarter (24.4 percent) of households engaging in agricultural activities, such as farming, fishing, or raising livestock, reported their agricultural income this season to be lower or much lower as compared to last season. Most strikingly, more than half (52.3 percent) reported gaining no money from their usual agricultural activities, despite most of them (89.8 percent) still being able to perform such activities. A similar prevalence of no agricultural income was also observed among households of cancelled workers at 48 percent (Figure 41). While agricultural income could be irregular, depending on timing, quantity, and quality of harvests, this likely reflects the subsistent nature of agriculture in which households produce for their own consumption in the absence of monetary earnings.

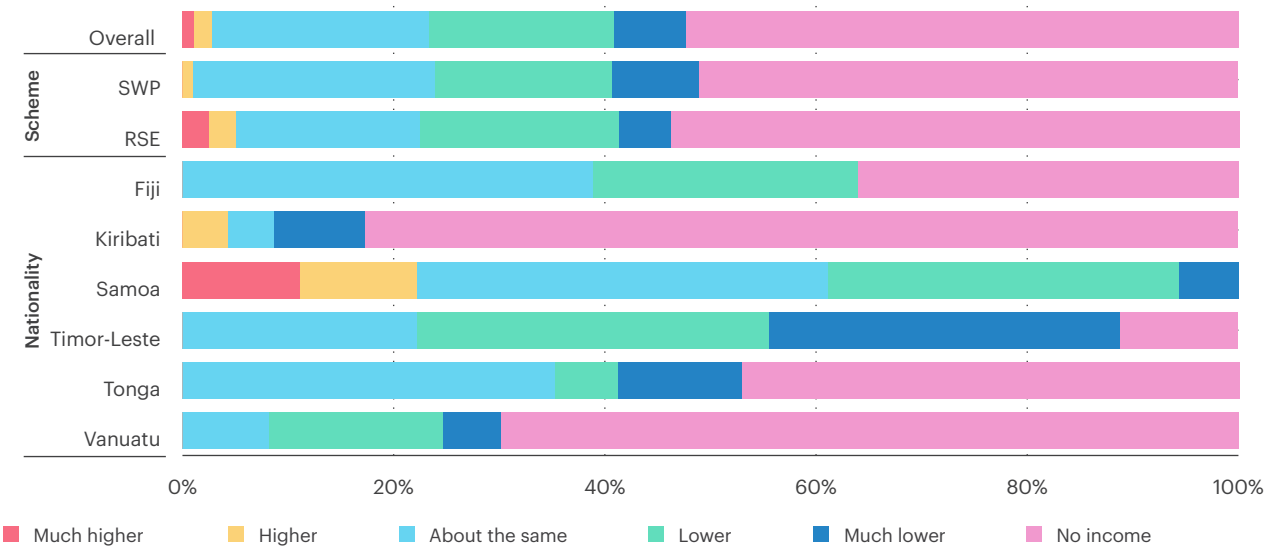
COVID-19 appears to have had a negative but relatively milder impact on the income of households of cancelled workers. Compared to current worker households, they were considerably and consistently more likely to report that income from different economic activities remained about the same or even increased (Figure 42). Still, the proportions of households that reported earning less than they did pre-COVID-19 were considerable at 31.8 percent for wage/salary income, 48 percent for business income and 16.7 percent for agricultural income. It is also noteworthy that cancelled worker households were more likely to experience total loss of labor earnings following the pandemic onset, especially in Kiribati – overall 19.8 percent reported no wage/salary income, much higher than 5 percent among current worker households.

FIGURE 41: Income reduction associated with COVID-19 among households of current seasonal workers

Changes in income from wages and salary



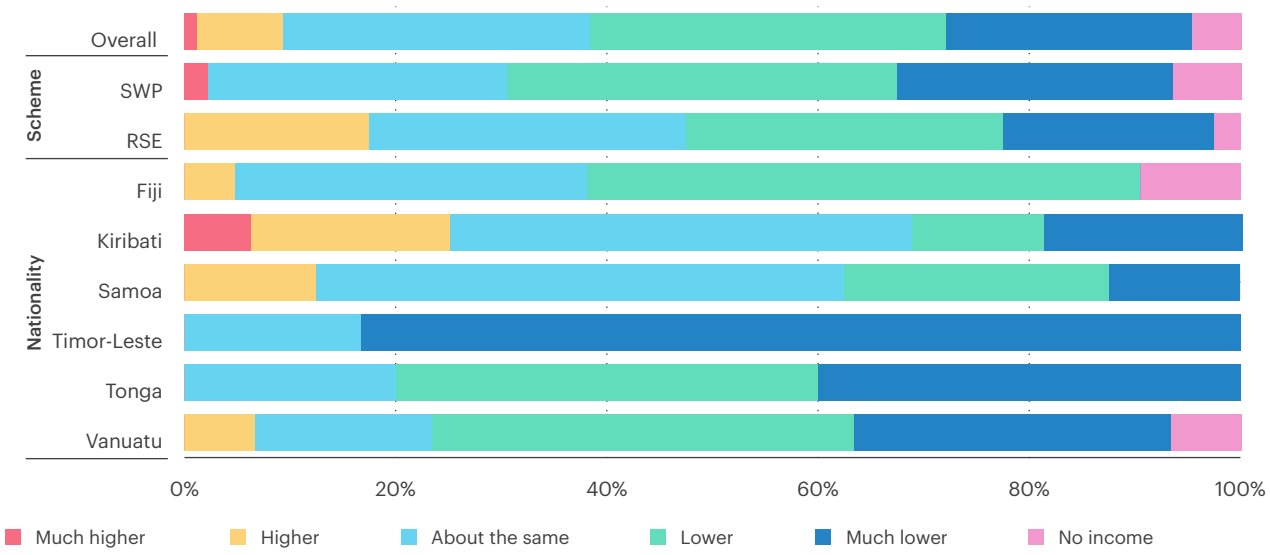
Changes in income from farming, fishing, or raising livestock



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 41: Income reduction associated with COVID-19 among households of current seasonal workers (continued)

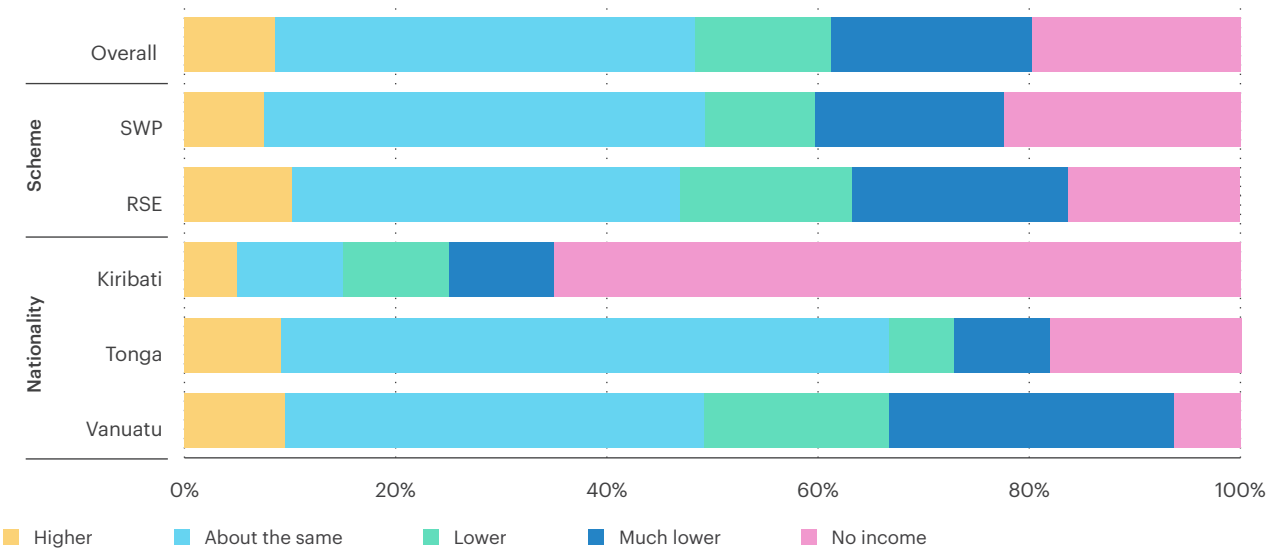
Changes in income from household business



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 42: Cancelled workers impact of COVID-19 on performance of household economic activities

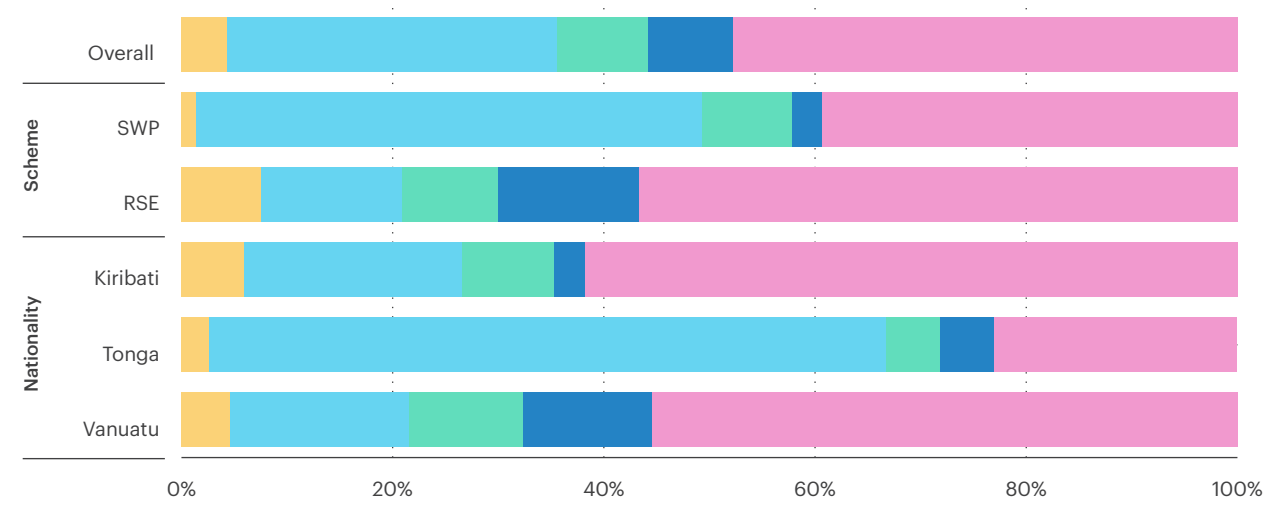
Changes in income from wages and salary



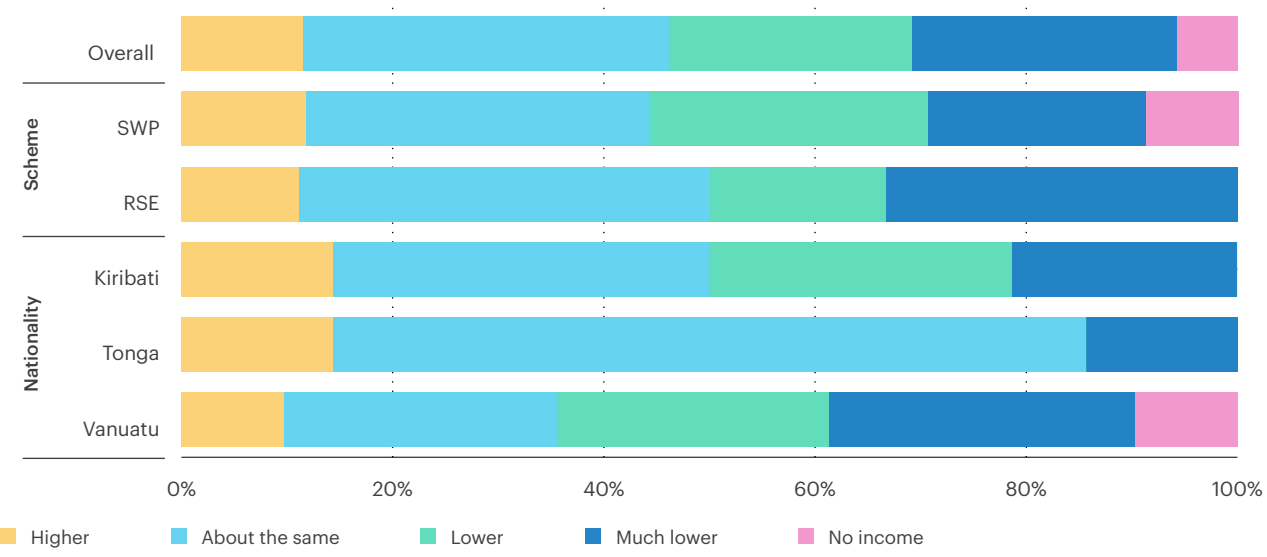
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 42: Cancelled workers impact of COVID-19 on performance of household economic activities (continued)

Changes in income from farming, fishing, or raising livestock



Changes in income from household business



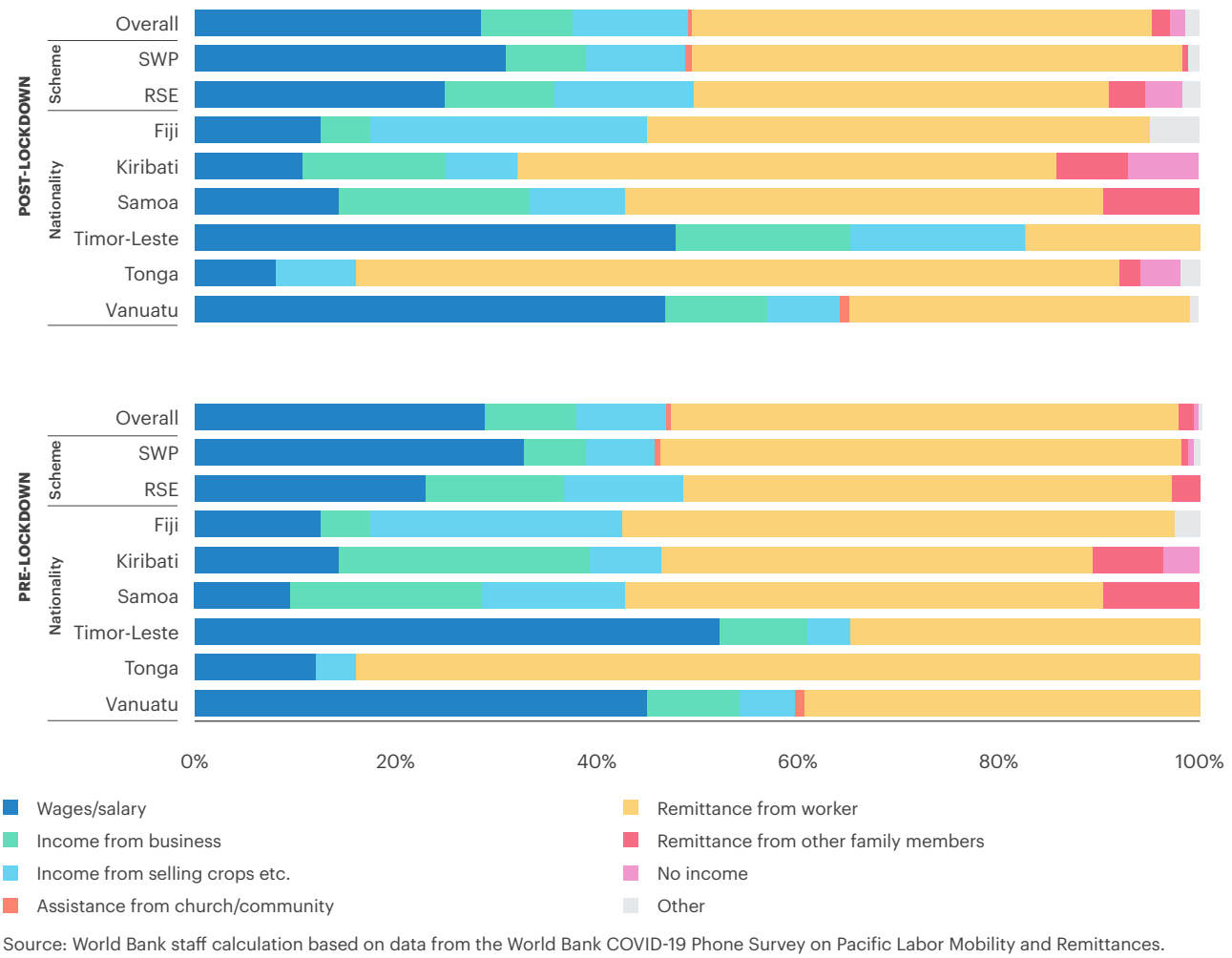
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

The decline in income earned domestically elevates the significance of remittances from labor migration. Among current worker households, the proportion that identified remittances as their main income source rose by 5 percentage points since the onset of COVID-19. The increase was most salient among Timorese households at 17.4 percentage points or a twofold increase (Figure 43). Tongan households, who have historically been more reliant on remittance income from seasonal employment under labor mobility schemes, also reported a considerable increase of 8 percentage points from 76 percent in January–February to 84 percent after COVID-19 broke out.

Without expected remittances, cancelled worker households were markedly more dependent on income from domestic sources, notably family businesses and selling home produce, both pre- and post-lockdown. Interestingly, the share of cancelled worker households that had no income dropped slightly from 10.8 percent in January–February to 7.7 percent since March. This was compensated by an increase in the share of households relying on family businesses as the main source of income from 17.9 percent to 22.1 percent. The increase was largest among i-Kiribati households, from 17.1 percent to 37.1 percent. It seems that households turned to local earning opportunities to cope with the loss of prospective employment overseas and/or the economic downturn.

FIGURE 43: Main source of household income

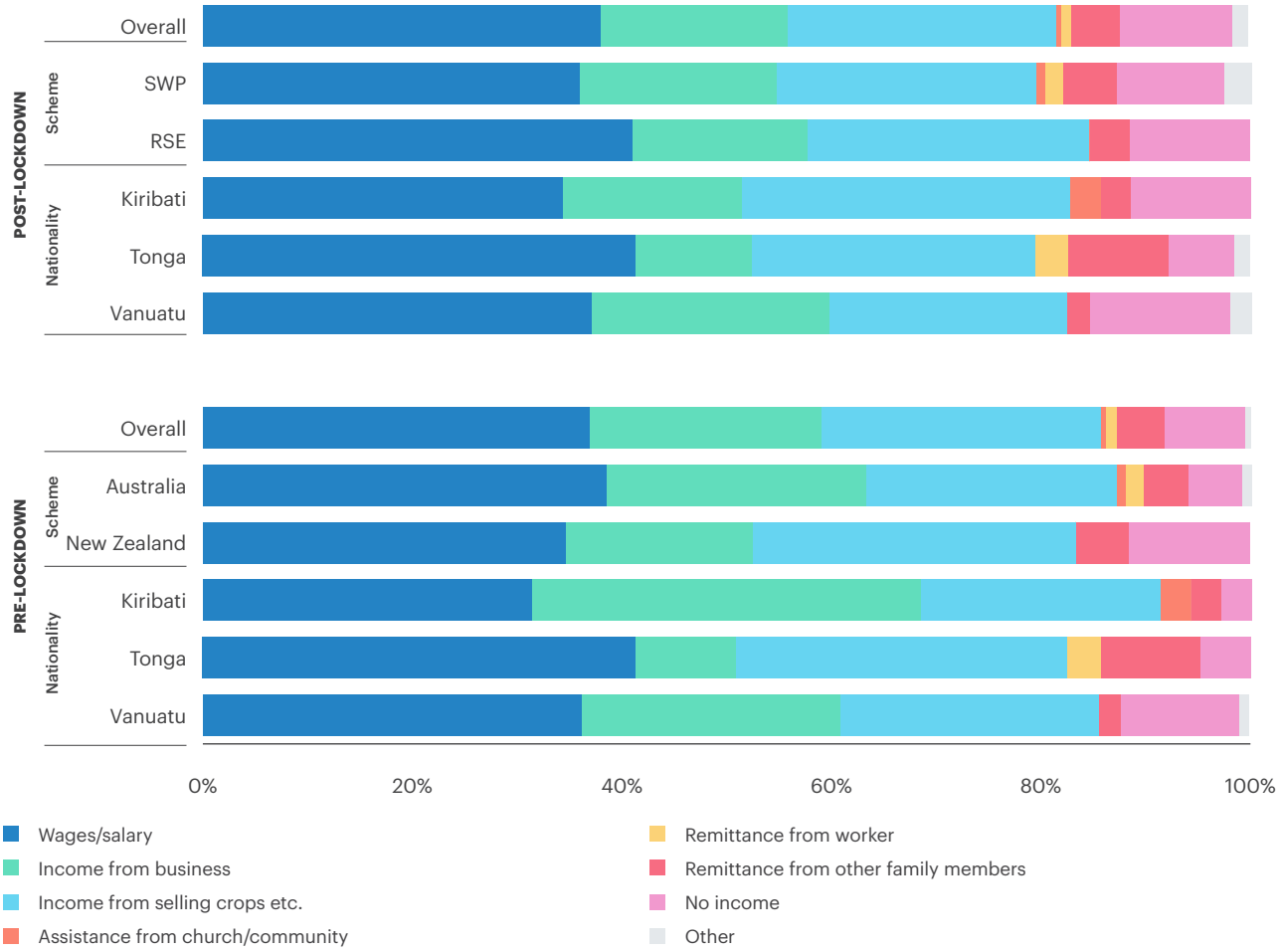
Current workers



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 43: Main source of household income (continued)

Cancelled workers



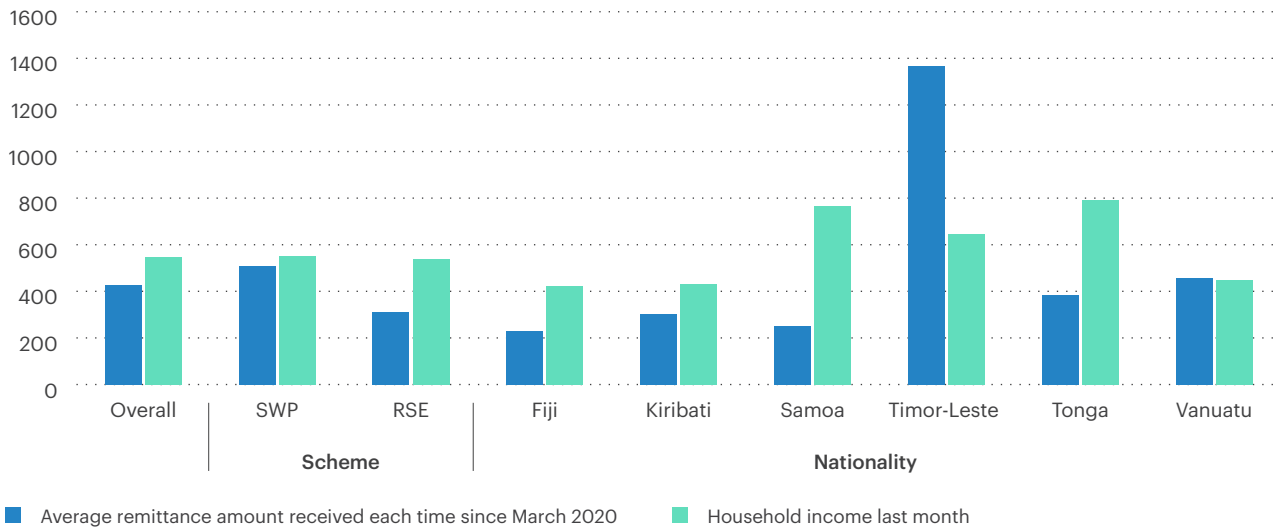
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

The role of remittances in supporting livelihoods of migrant sending households was also reflected in the differences in household income between the two groups during the pandemic. The average monthly income of current worker households was about 52 percent and 35 percent higher than that of cancelled worker households in Kiribati and Tonga, respectively. The difference however was minor in Vanuatu, with average income of cancelled worker households nearly 5 percent higher.

4.2 Remittances

Remittances from seasonal employment overseas accounted for a major share of household income. In Timor-Leste, the average remittances received since March amounted to 212 percent of household income in the month preceding the survey. In Vanuatu, where many households reported reliance on subsistence agriculture and economic activities that were curtailed by COVID-19 impacts on the tourism industry, remittances amounted to 101 percent of household income (Figure 44).

FIGURE 44: Average remittance amount as compared to household income



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Remittances from SWP/RSE workers were fundamental to financing essential household consumption. The main uses of remittances were for everyday expenses, including food (91 percent of households), school fees and other educational expenses (51 percent), and health care (19 percent)[20] (Table 11). Qualitative feedback from surveyed households revealed that some daily expenses such as bus fares and lunches were also related to sending children to school, hence further emphasizing the role of remittances in supporting investment in child education. It is also important to note that in areas where subsistence farming is prevalent and the cash economy is limited, remittances were often the primary source of fiat money to finance goods and services that require monetary payment, such as school fees, health care services or housing renovation/construction. Consequently, when the remittance inflow is disrupted, as documented in Section 3, Pacific households face great challenges to make ends meet. Feedback from surveyed diaspora members in Australia and New Zealand also suggests that tension arose between some workers and their remittance receiving families as they did not understand why remittances from the workers had decreased or stopped during the pandemic.

A large share of households reported receiving either less or much less remittances from their seasonal workers, with wide variation across schemes and nationalities. RSE households were significantly more likely suffer from remittance income losses than their SWP counterparts (50 percent as compared to 35 percent, respectively). Also, while about half of i-Kiribati and Tongan households reported decreases in remittance income, 40 percent of Timorese households reported receiving more, leading to a significant increase in the average amount that they received per remittance transaction (Figure 45).[21]

20. The uses of remittances are not mutually exclusive.

22. For Timorese households, the increase in average remittance amount received may be due to a lack of remittances in January–February. Comparison of remittance amounts received by households in Timor-Leste before and after the lockdown shows a significant increase that differs from the realities of other countries. This is further reflected in responses comparing remittances received since March to those before the lockdown, in which 40 percent of Timorese households reported that remittances were more or significantly more than before, as opposed to an overall average of less than 10 percent reporting the same opinion. However, analysis of data regarding the frequency at which these remittances were received reveals that a larger share of Timorese respondents reported not receiving any remittances before March, possibly accounting for the jump in numbers between the two periods.

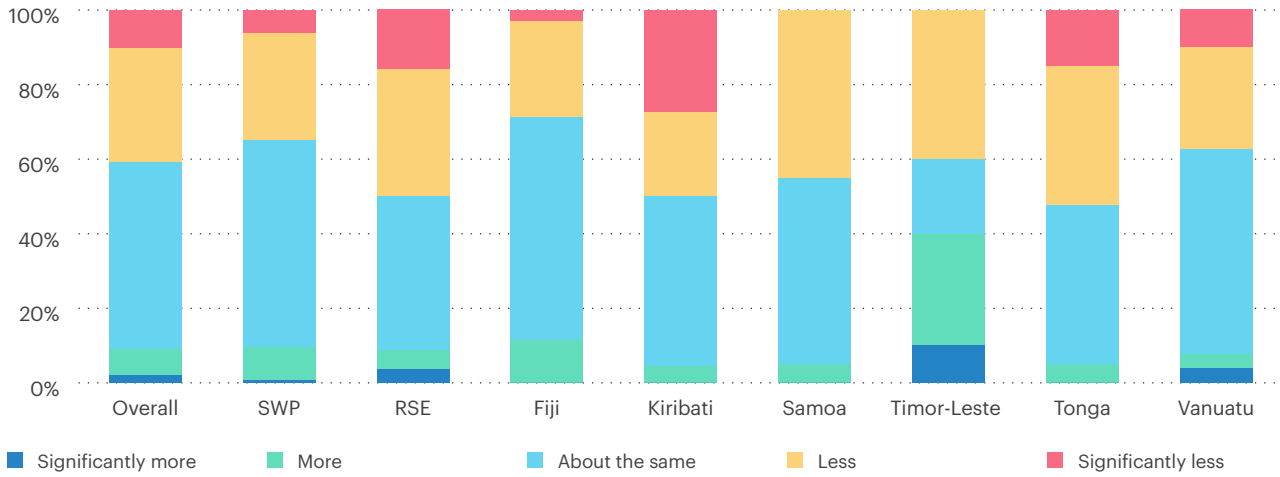
TABLE 11: Main use of remittances received

	Share of household
Purchase durable goods	5%
Buy or start a business	6%
Loan repayment	8%
Other expenses	9%
Purchase farming/fishing inputs	10%
Savings or financial investments	12%
Church donation	16%
Health expenses	19%
Build or renovate dwelling	29%
School fees, other educational expenses	51%
Foods and other daily expenses	91%

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

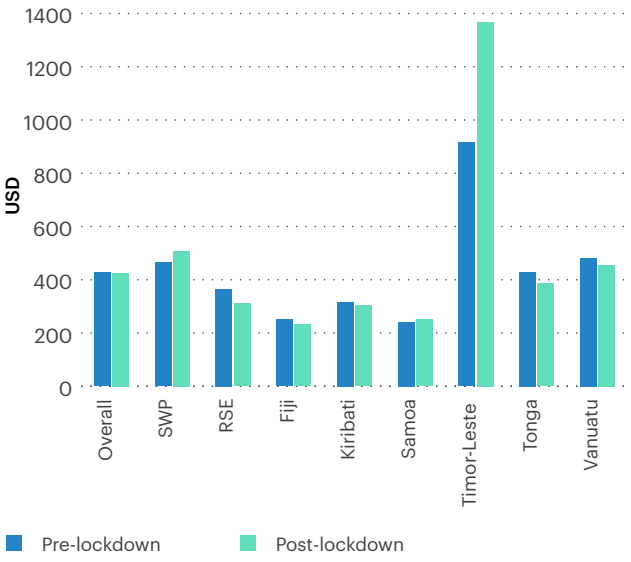
FIGURE 45: Changes in remittances received

Remittances received since March 2020 (compared to January—February 2020)

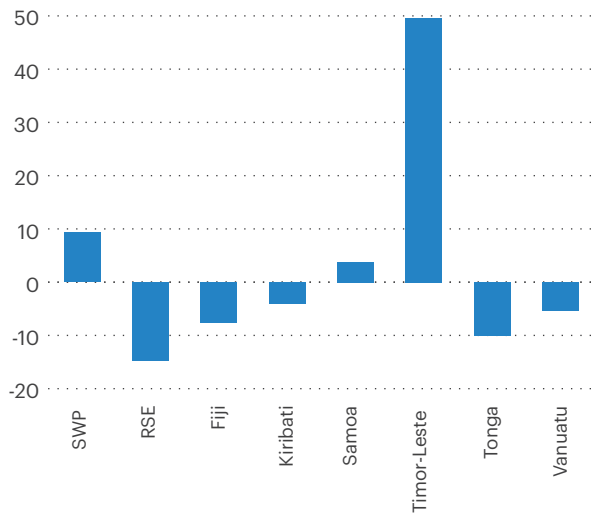


Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Average amount remitted per transaction



Percentage change in remittance amount remitted per transaction

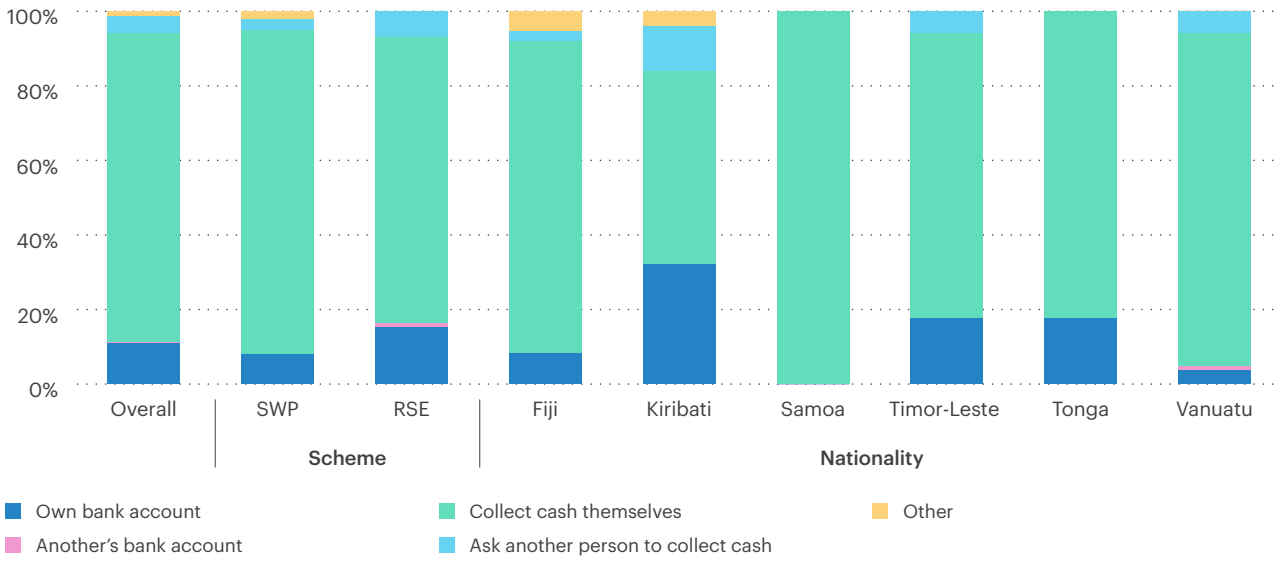


Not only disrupting the inflows of remittances, COVID-19 also made it harder for remittance-receiving households to get the funds. After March 2020, about 29 percent of households had difficulty receiving remittances or were unable to receive remittances in the same way they did pre-lockdown. This was in large part due to the low coverage of digital transfers. Only 11 percent received the funds directly into their own bank account as opposed to 83 percent who collected cash in person from money transfer locations. The use of bank accounts for receiving remittances was highest in Kiribati (32 percent) whilst every Samoan respondent cited collecting cash in person and by themselves (Figure 46). Surveyed households pointed to several factors that hindered their remittance reception, including advice to stay home/movement restrictions by government, money transfer operators being closed due to social distancing restrictions, or not having enough liquidity for disbursement.

4.3 Expenditure

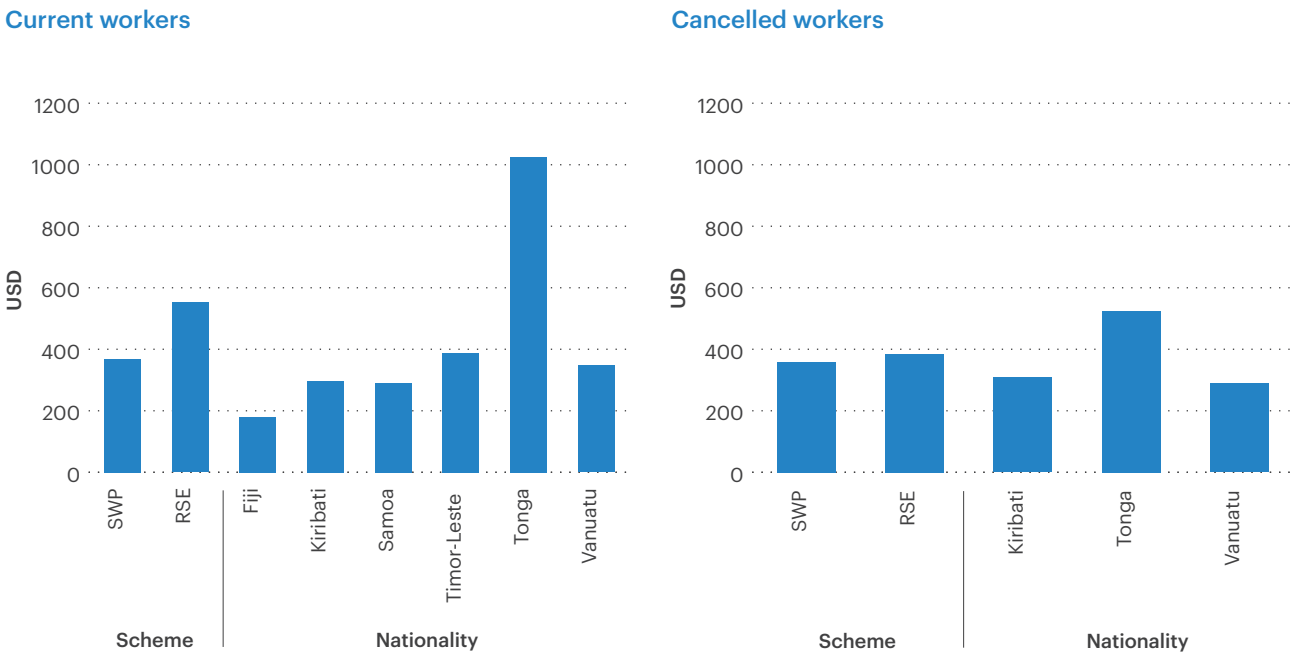
Households of cancelled workers tended to have lower total expenditure despite having the worker at home, likely driven by their income losses. Household expenditure was 17 percent higher for households with workers currently abroad as compared to the households of cancelled workers. This may be due to shifts towards subsistence farming for family consumption and the fact that many households actively reduced expenditure once they were informed of trip cancellations (Figure 47). This disparity was more pronounced for Tongan households, with households of current workers spending 50 percent more than those of cancelled workers. In Tonga, cancelled workers commented that trip postponement impacted those living in main towns more than rural households who were able to farm and fish to feed their families – prompting some respondents to move back to rural areas.

FIGURE 46: Remittance channel (before lockdown)



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 47: Total household expenditure in last month



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

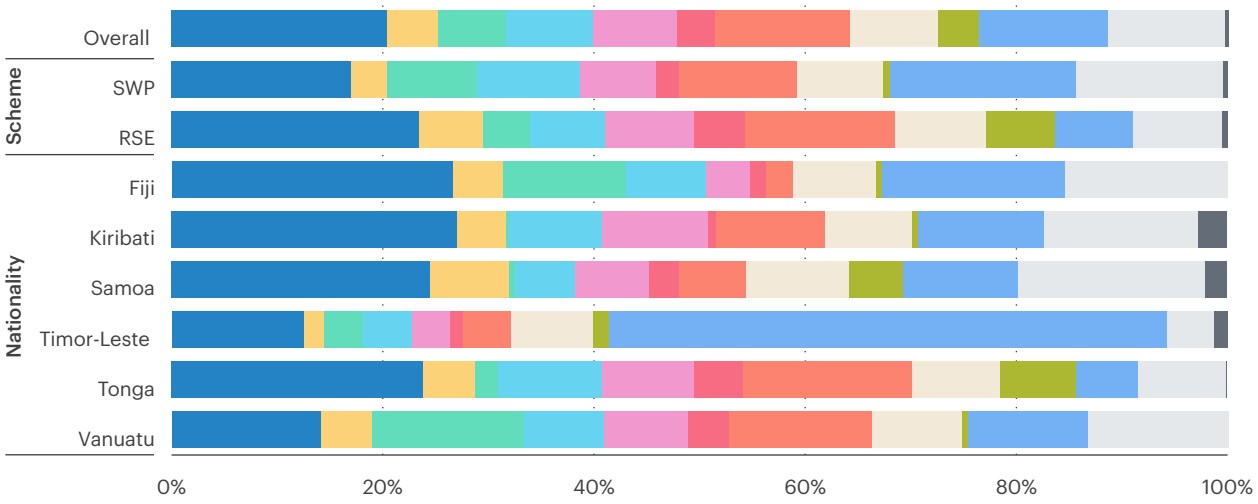
For households without access to productive land, food costs accounted for a large share of total expenditure. The importance of owning land for subsistence agriculture was highlighted throughout the survey interviews, with respondents across all countries commenting on the value of self-production for household consumption. One respondent from Fiji stated that the biggest lesson learned from COVID-19 was that the future is in farming and went on to explain that the best way to confront the present circumstances was to work the land rather than rely on formal employment.

Even in the face of reduced earnings and income, community obligations remained a responsibility for households. Expenditure in this category was slightly higher for households of current workers, possibly because having a household member working abroad is associated with higher income and therefore increased obligation (Figure 48).

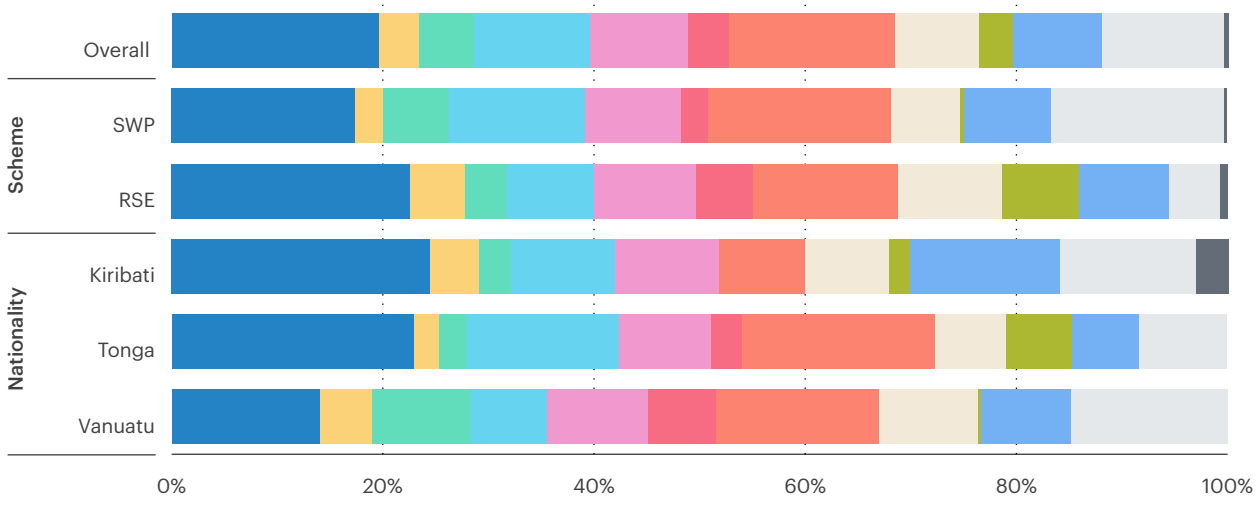
This was evident in comments made by respondents who explained how difficult it was to save because of the responsibility to use remittances received to help community members or relatives. This was echoed throughout the survey interviews, with respondents also commenting on the fact that these costs could change at any time due to events like weddings or funerals, and many cancelled workers said their wives were weaving to meet these community obligations in the absence of SWP/RSE income. Expenditure in this category was particularly high for Timorese households, accounting for over half of total household expenditure.

FIGURE 48: Household budget share

Current workers



Cancelled workers



Food
Fuel
Vehicle
Community
Other daily needs
Non-durable goods
Communication
Loan repayment
Housing
Health
Recreation
Lottery

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

TABLE 12: Percentage of households with financial anxiety score of 5 or above*

Country	Current worker households	Cancelled worker households
Fiji	32.5%	N/A
Kiribati	64.3%	91.4%
Samoa	76.2%	N/A
Timor-Leste	52.2%	N/A
Tonga	82.0%	71.4%
Vanuatu	61.5%	89.7%

* On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being 'not worried at all' and 10 being 'extremely worried'.

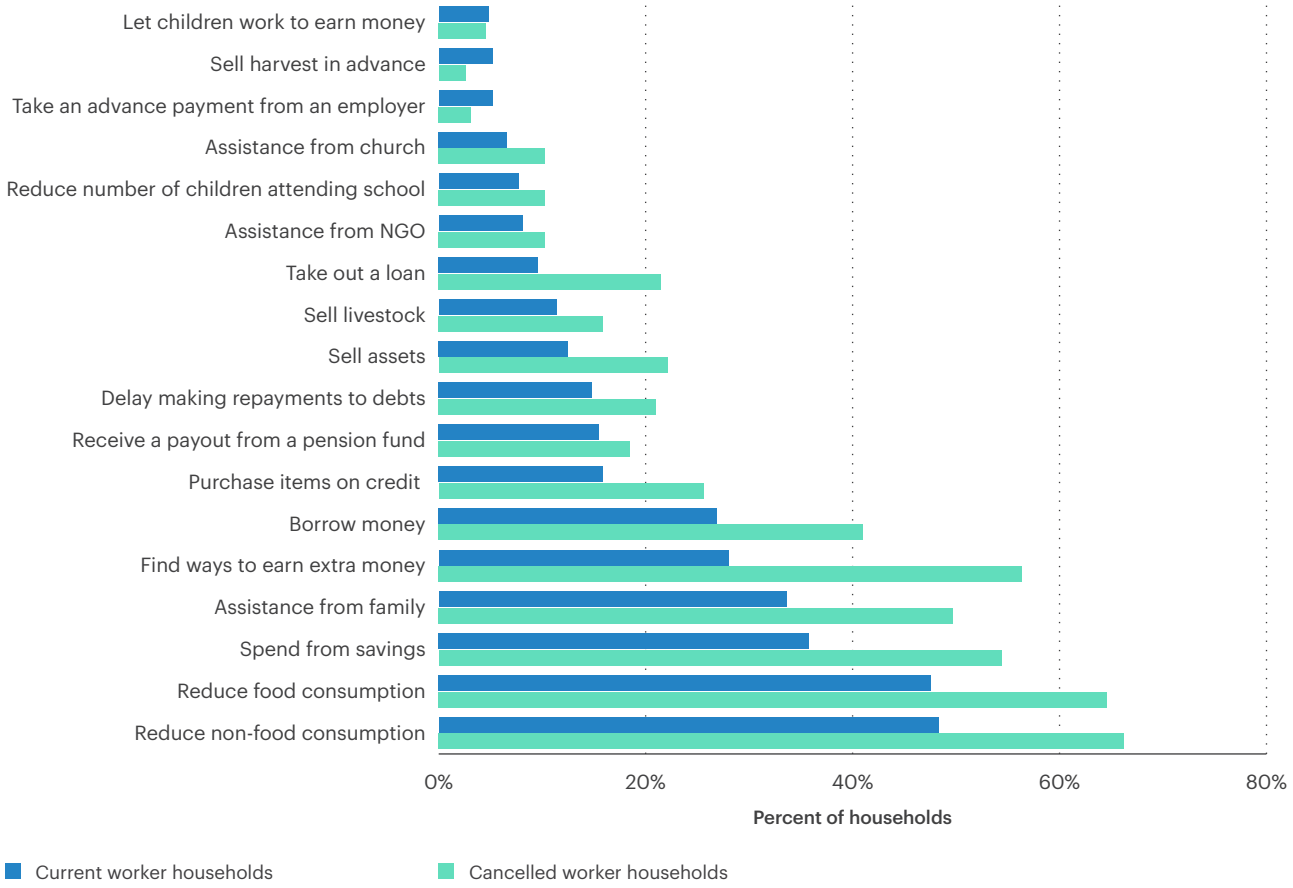
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

4.4 Financial Anxiety and Coping Mechanisms

The economic fallout from COVID-19 led to excessive financial anxiety among migrant sending households. On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being 'not worried at all' and 10 being 'extremely worried', most households reported an anxiety level of 5 or above when asked about their finances in the next month. Excessive anxiety was acute among households of cancelled workers – 91 percent in Kiribati, nearly 90 percent in Vanuatu, and 71 percent in Tonga (Table 12). Among households of current workers, the figure was well above 50 percent in all countries except Fiji.

The taxing situation drove households to adopt various coping strategies that could damage their long-term wellbeing and earning prospects. The three most common coping strategies were cutting down non-food consumption, reducing food consumption, and drawing down savings (Figure 49). Borrowing (from either formal or informal lenders) and making purchases on credit were also common. A smaller but non-trivial share of households also opted to sell their livestock and/or assets and take their children out of school. These strategies, while helping households to make ends meet in the short term, could be detrimental to their health, disruptive to their children's education, and drain their capital for productive activities. It is also important to acknowledge that while patterns of coping mechanisms were similar between the two groups of households, the incidence of almost all of the reported strategies were significantly higher among those of cancelled workers, which indicates their higher vulnerability in the absence of remittances.

FIGURE 49: Coping strategies taken by households since March 2020



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Note: The coping strategies are not mutually exclusive; a household could report more than one coping strategy.

Household coping mechanisms also highlight the importance of the informal social safety net in Vanuatu, Tonga, and Kiribati. About 26.9 percent of current worker households and 41 percent of cancelled worker households borrowed or received cash from family or friends. In addition, about 35.8 percent of current worker households and 49.7 percent of cancelled worker households received other kinds of assistance from their informal networks. However, the incidence of informal assistance varied widely across countries, ranging from only 5 percent in Fiji, to nearly 55 percent in Vanuatu for non-cash assistance, and 5 percent again in Fiji to 52.2 percent in Timor-Leste for cash assistance. Assistance from NGOs and churches played a much smaller role, reaching roughly one in ten households overall.

The coverage of social assistance from governments also varied. Approximately 86.7 percent of Timorese households reported receiving some social assistance from the government, followed by 7.5 percent in Vanuatu (in the form of a school fee waiver) and 9.7 percent in Tonga. No households from Fiji, Kiribati, and Samoa reported receiving any social assistance.

Photo by © World Bank

V. EMPLOYERS

Border closures and public health measures aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic created major and on-going disruptions to employers under the SWP and RSE schemes. The suspension of international travel in March 2020 effectively stopped the arrival of prospective workers[22] and left many existing workers stranded. Social distancing requirements caused challenges for employers to ensure compliance among their existing workers and take care of their wellbeing under limited social interactions, while limiting the ability to redeploy stranded workers to where they were needed. Looking forward, uncertainty with respect to international travel, compliance with quarantine and public health requirements, and allocation of approved places to recruit seasonal workers impose challenges to the resumption of the schemes as well as the operation of businesses that rely on the workers. This section explores these issues.

5.1. Labor Shortages During COVID-19

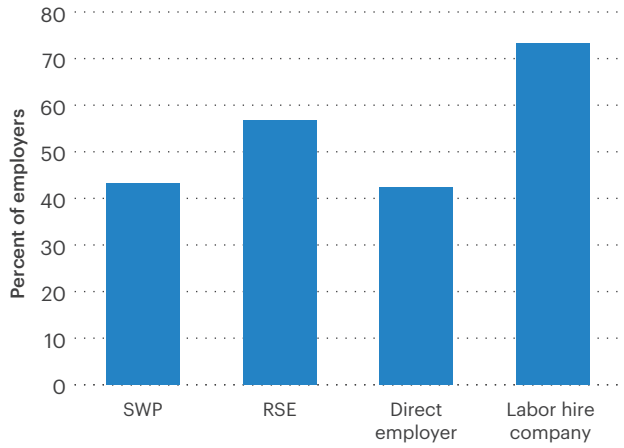
The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant shortage of seasonal labor, especially in New Zealand. Nearly half of surveyed employers – 43.2 percent in Australia and 56.7 percent in New Zealand – reported experiencing at least one month of labor shortages between March 2020 and the survey period (Figure 50). The more prevalent shortages among RSE employers could be attributed to the timing of their seasonal recruitment, which is more concentrated between March and May (the winter season) and unfortunately coincided with the first round of lockdowns in the country (Figure 51). Across both countries, labor hire companies (that often recruit workers in larger numbers) seemed more severely affected than direct employers (73.3 percent as compared to 42.4 percent).[23]

The shortages were associated with the increase in working hours among a minority of workers, especially those who had worked below full capacity pre-COVID-19 (as discussed in Section 3.1.2).

The labor shortages were a direct consequence of border closures and social distancing measures aimed at limiting the spread of the pandemic. The most common causes pinpointed by both SWP and RSE employers were delays and cancellations of the arrival of prospective workers and decreases in the number of local farm workers and backpackers, who employers in the horticulture sector typically rely on during peak harvest seasons (in addition to seasonal Pacific workers) (Figure 52). The departure of existing Pacific and Timorese workers due to COVID-19 and the higher cost of recruitment during the pandemic also played a role, although to a lesser extent. In addition, social distancing measures restricted employers' ability to reallocate stranded workers from where they were in surplus to where they were needed. Difficulties in crossing the New South Wales–Victorian border in Australia, in particular, not only hindered the transportation of workers to new employment sites but also limited access to workplaces of workers who were accommodated on one side of the border yet worked on the other. None of the surveyed employers reported that their labor shortages were due to weather or market conditions.[24]

22. Since September 2020, seasonal workers have been allowed to enter Australia under a special arrangement. By June 2021, about 7,500 workers have reportedly arrived in Australia to work under the SWP and PLS schemes. New Zealand is only allowing 4,400 Pacific RSE workers to arrive between January 2021 and March 2022 to address the shortage of seasonal labor.
23. Statistics on labor hire companies are based on 15 observations, and hence, should be treated with caution.
24. Only one respondent – a labor hire company – reported that their labor shortage was due to an increase in demand for their business. Another respondent reported competing demands for workers with a neighboring farm.

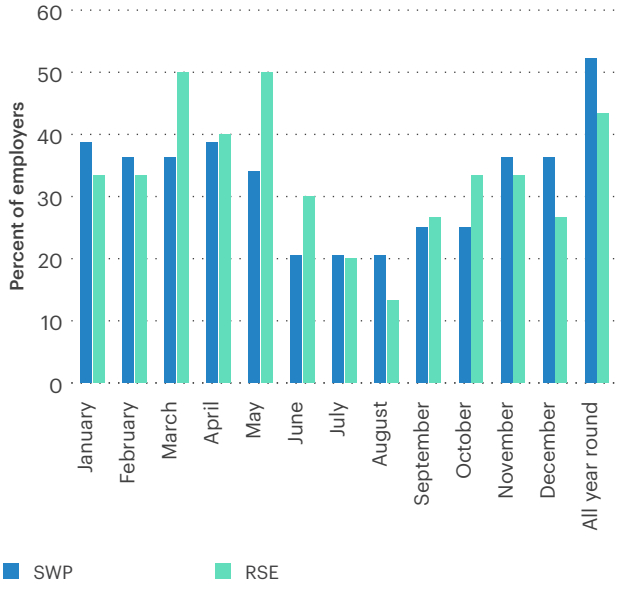
FIGURE 50: Labor shortages experienced by employers



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Note: Statistics on labor hire companies are based on 15 observations, and thus, should be treated with caution.

FIGURE 51: Demand for Pacific seasonal workers during a calendar year



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Note: Statistics on labor hire companies are based on 15 observations, and thus, should be treated with caution.

The crisis also highlighted a heavy reliance on backpackers in Australia's horticulture sector, who are cheaper, easier to hire, and vastly outnumber SWP workers in farm work by a ratio of 3 to 1.[25] (Curtain & Howes, 2020). SWP employers were more likely to identify "fewer backpackers/local seasonal workers" and "increased recruitment costs" as contributors to the labor shortage – 42.1 percent and 26.3 percent, respectively, as compared to 35.3 percent and 11.8 percent among their RSE counterparts, respectively (Figure 52).

Responding to this supply shock, employers resorted to a range of coping strategies. These included seeking additional workers from new sources, increasing work hours, and extending contracts for their existing workers.[26] Data unfortunately were insufficient to identify which strategy was more common.

While significant and requiring business adjustments, the lack of farm labor appeared to be seasonal. As most existing workers were stranded beyond their seasonal employment, 46 percent of direct employers – both those having experienced labor shortage and those having not – had to reduce work hours for their workers, mostly because there was less work available after the harvest season had passed its peak and/or employers wanted to keep their workers employed longer. Unfavorable market conditions and bad weather hardly explain the reduced work hours – each of these two factors was mentioned by only two surveyed employers. This highlights the heterogeneous and evolving challenges that the COVID-19 crisis forced upon seasonal employers, from lack of labor during the peak harvest months to maintaining employment and management of stranded workers in the following period.

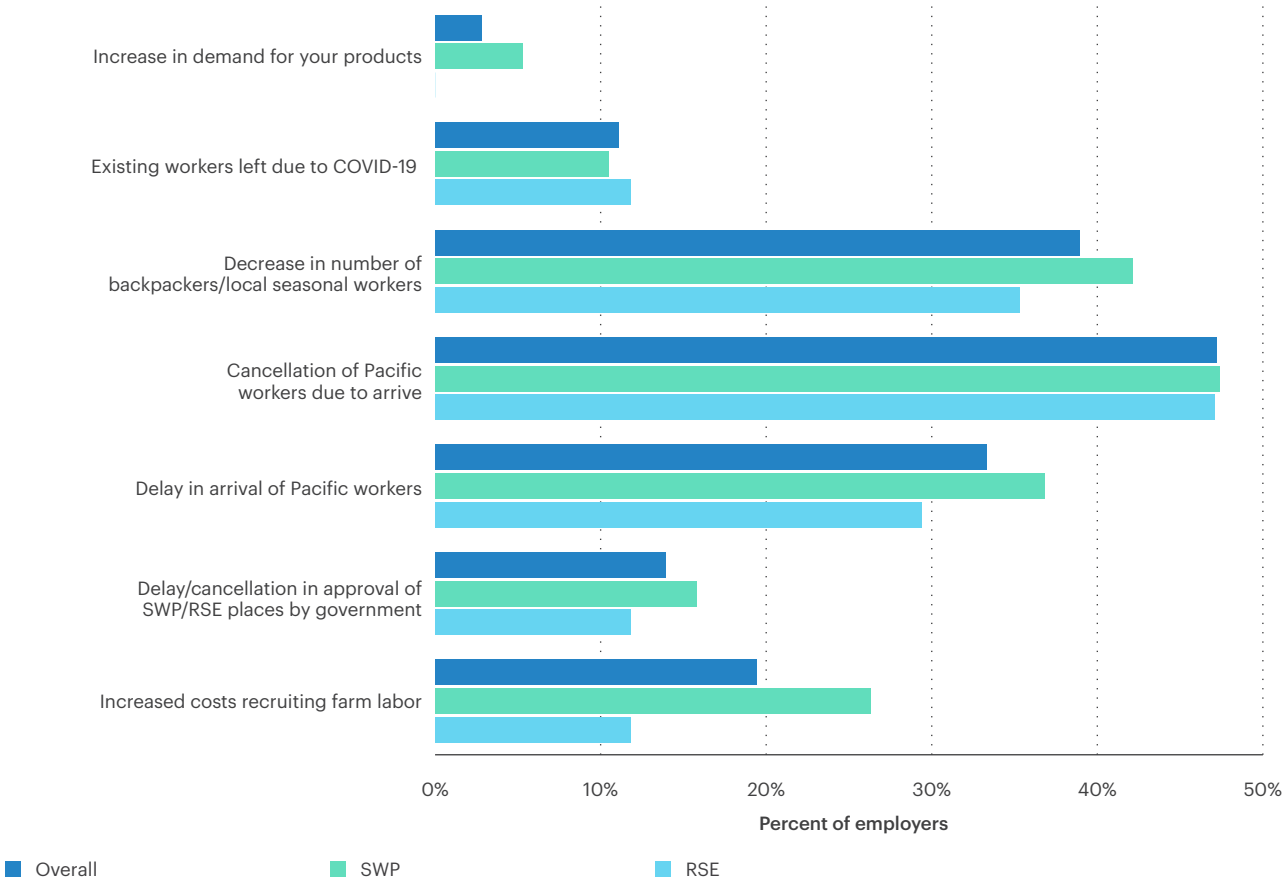
25. Every year, about 30,000 backpackers in Australia get a second-year visa for working in agriculture for three months in their first year. The total number of SWP workers in 2019–20 was 12,200 (Curtain and Howes, 2020).
26. Based on responses from 10 surveyed employers.

5.2. Contract Extensions and Redeployment During COVID-19

The pandemic not only disrupted the employment of seasonal workers but also created considerable burdens on employers in managing their stranded workers. Among the surveyed employers, 89 percent had seasonal workers unable to return home at the end of their original contract (Table 13). Approximately 92 percent of these employers extended contracts for at least some of their workers. The number of contracts extended by one employer ranged from under ten, up to 900. About 21 percent of employers, including both labor hire companies and direct employers, extended contracts for 100 workers or more.

A considerable proportion of employers unable to offer their workers further work redeployed them to other employers, contributing to the labor reallocation in response to labor shortages. Approximately 41 percent of those with stranded workers (or 36.5 percent of all surveyed employers) redeployed at least some of their Pacific/Timorese employees, with redeployment being moderately more common among RSE employers (44 percent vs. 39 percent) (Figure 53). Redeployment was mostly organized privately. About two-thirds of the employers redeployed their workers through private arrangements with the workers' new employers; and approximately a quarter utilized collective arrangements among several employers within the scheme. In contrast, the government, industrial associations, and overseas recruitment agents played a minor role in facilitating such redeployment.

FIGURE 52: Perceived reasons for labor shortage



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

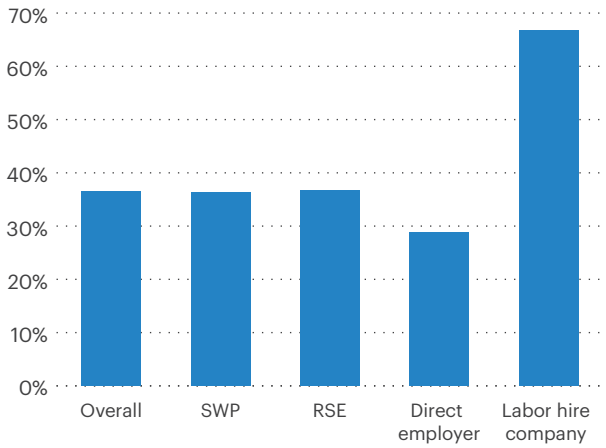
TABLE 13: Contract extension for seasonal workers

	Share of employers that had stranded workers	Share of employers that extended contracts for their stranded workers
SWP	93.2%	95.1%
RSE	83.3%	88.0%
Direct employer	88.1%	92.3%
Labor hire	93.3%	92.9%
Overall	89.2%	92.4%

Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Note: Statistics on labor hire companies are based on 15 observations and thus, should be treated with caution.

FIGURE 53: Share of employers redeploying their stranded workers



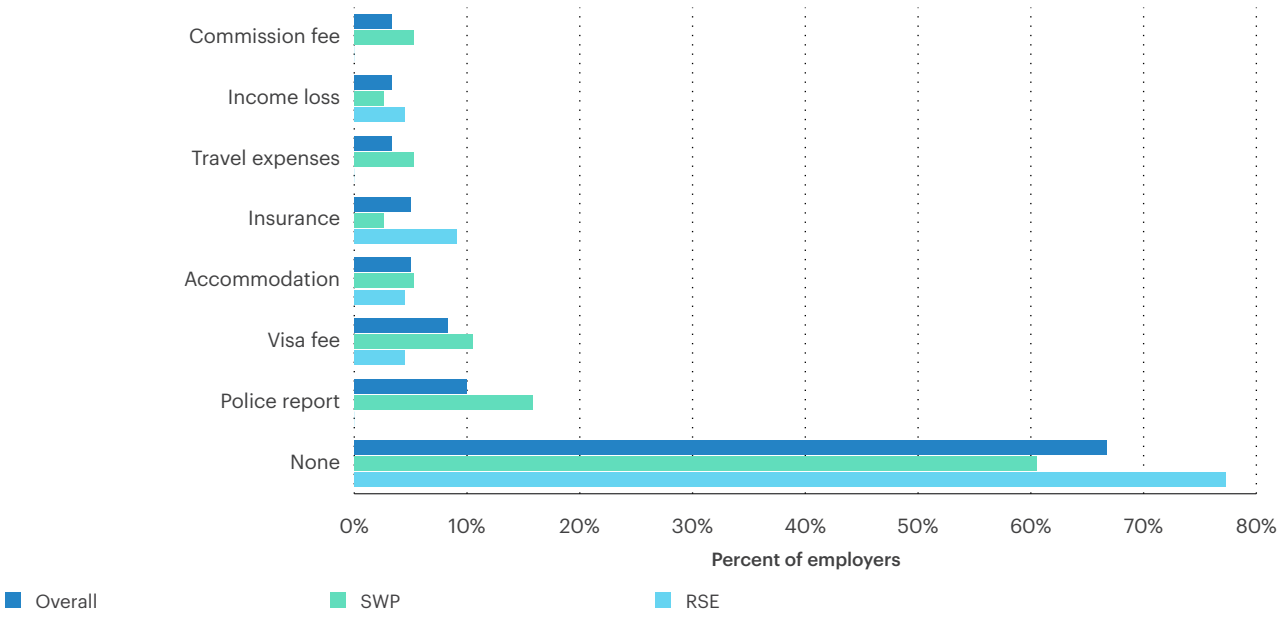
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Employers incurred the major share of the costs of the contract extension and redeployment. About 66.7 percent of employers reported that their workers did not need to pay anything to have their contracts extended while 55.6 percent reported that workers incurred no cost to be redeployed (Figure 54). SWP employers seemed more likely to pass at least part of the costs to their workers.[27] About 77.3 percent of RSE employers reported that their extended workers incurred no costs, markedly higher than SWP employers (60.5 percent).

There were some distinctions in terms of the type of costs paid by employers and workers. For contract extension, employers reportedly contributed to not only expenses directly related to contract extensions, such as visa and administrative fees, and commission to recruitment agents or labor hire companies (in the case of direct employers), but also workers' travel expenses and welfare support (Figure 55). Training, medical and insurance costs, and upgrading or extending accommodation were also mentioned by some employers, but were much less common. Although the majority of workers did not incur any cost to have their contract extended, if they did, they most often paid for police reports and visa fees. For redeployment, employers commonly paid for transporting workers to their new workplace, approval from governments to change employers, as well as visa extension. Workers, when they did contribute, mostly paid for transportation to new workplaces and finding accommodation in the case of redeployment.

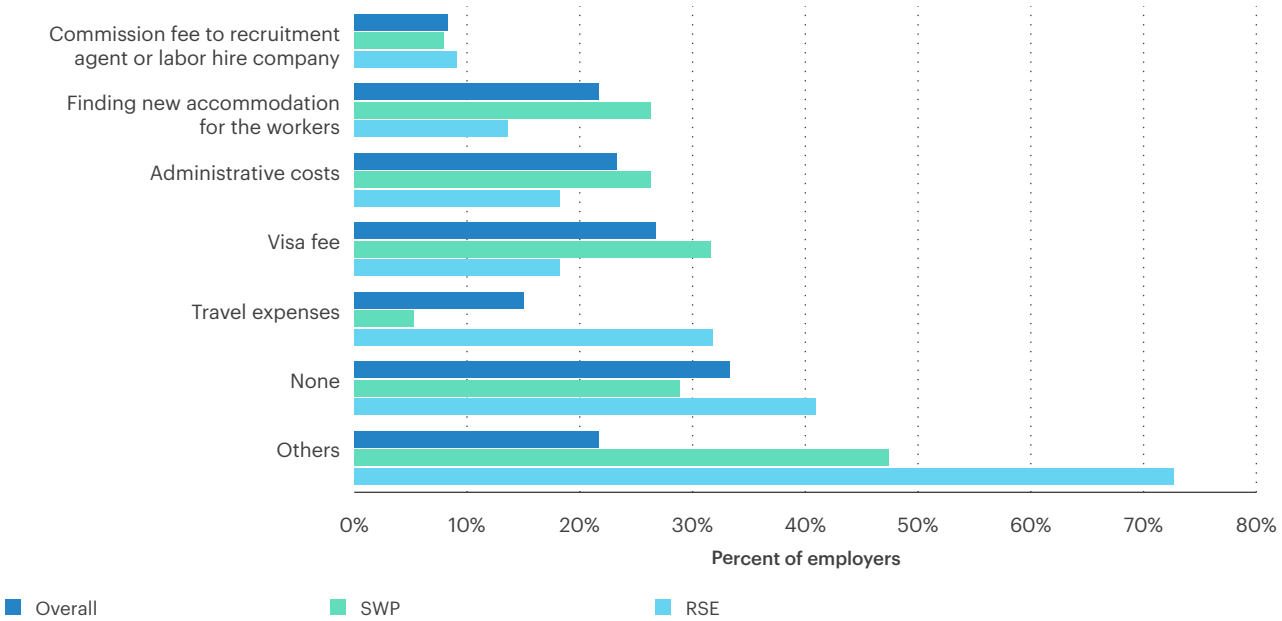
27. Due to small sample size, statistics by labor mobility schemes related to redeployment cost are not presented.

FIGURE 54: Workers' contribution to contract extension costs (as reported by employers)



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 55: Employers' contribution to contract extension costs



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

5.3. Challenges Faced by Employers During COVID-19

The pandemic and associated public health measures aimed at limiting infection risks adversely affected business operations and production for seasonal employers. Seventy-three percent of surveyed employers said social distancing requirements issued by the government affected the day-to-day operation of their businesses, with only a modest difference across the schemes – 70.5 percent in Australia and 76.7 percent in New Zealand. As agriculture work generally cannot be performed remotely, this is not a surprise. What is more critical is that 18.6 percent of direct employers reported that these requirements reduced their outputs – the effect appeared more acute in New Zealand at 22.2 percent as compared to 15.6 percent in Australia (Figure 56).

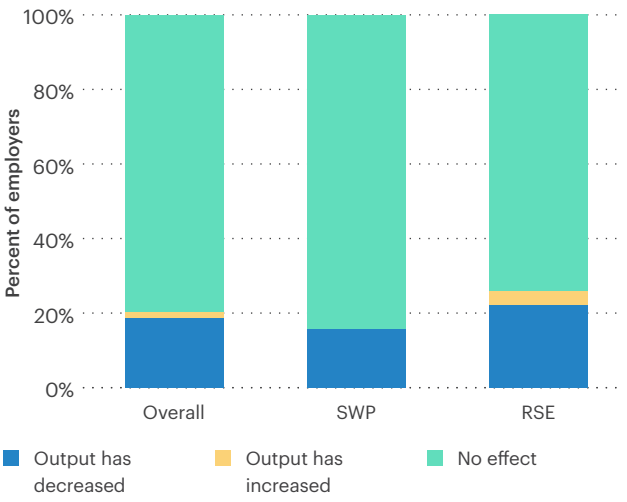
Recruiting and managing seasonal workers during the pandemic was also difficult. Across the schemes, the most prominent challenges were the processes for extending working visas, finding enough workers to meet business needs, and enforcing compliance with social distancing requirements among workers (Figure 57). Consistent with the less severe labor shortage in Australia, as well as more complex guidelines on visa extensions that were issued late, employers under the SWP scheme were more concerned about seeking approval for visa extension and providing enough work to their existing workers. In contrast, RSE employers were more concerned about seeking government approval to redeploy workers. Qualitative feedback from RSE employers also highlighted challenges related to providing pastoral care to workers under social isolation.

Complying with social distancing requirements was another issue faced by employers, with the vast majority introducing new safety and hygiene protocols in their workplaces. Almost all surveyed employers (96 percent) supplied hand sanitizer and soap; 85.1 percent provided personal protective equipment such as gloves, masks, and goggles; 82.4 percent increased physical distance in the workplace; and nearly two-thirds (63.5 percent) provided COVID-19-related information to their workers.

Apart from the provision of sanitizer and soap, the other responses were all more prevalent among RSE employers than among SWP ones. SWP employers, nevertheless, were more likely to provide virtual pastoral care and assist workers in finding or moving to less crowded accommodation (Figure 58).

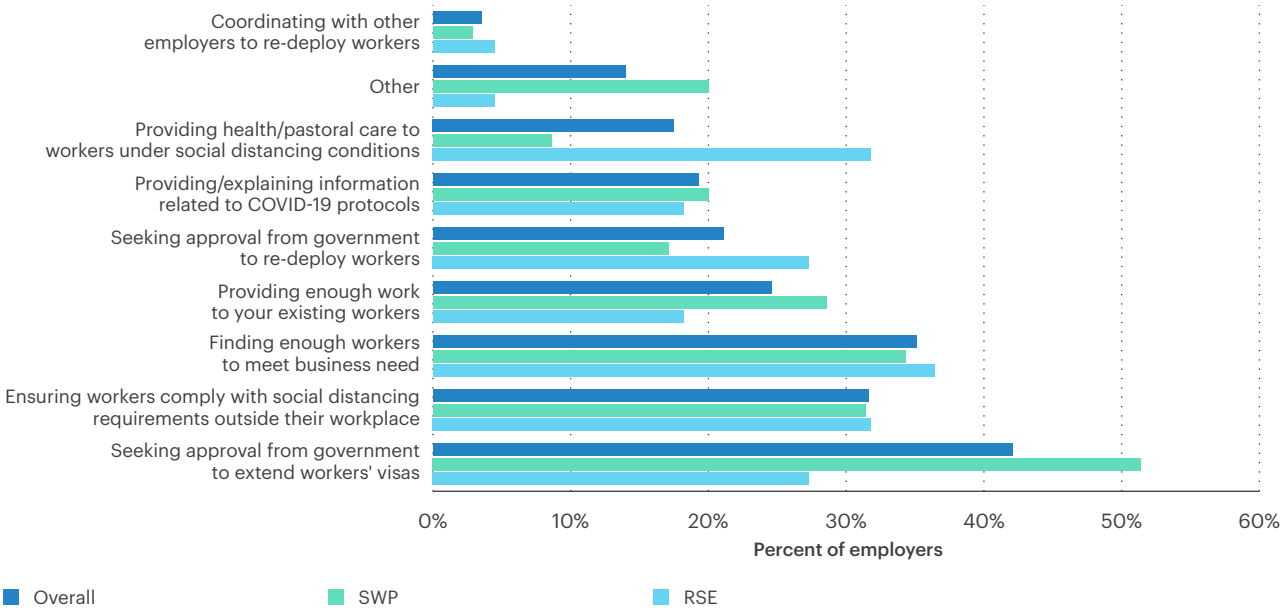
Providing pastoral care to seasonal workers became more demanding during the crisis. On the one hand, surveyed employers reported worsening behavioral issues as workers struggled to cope with social isolation and boredom (due to less work), concerns about their families (especially among workers who had children at home), and uncertainties surrounding their employment, income, repatriation, and infection. The issues most commonly flagged by employers were drinking, violence, and deteriorating mental health. While alcohol abuse among seasonal workers has been documented before and also acknowledged by some employers as a pre-existing problem, the pandemic appears to have aggravated it.

FIGURE 56: Effect of social distancing on output



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

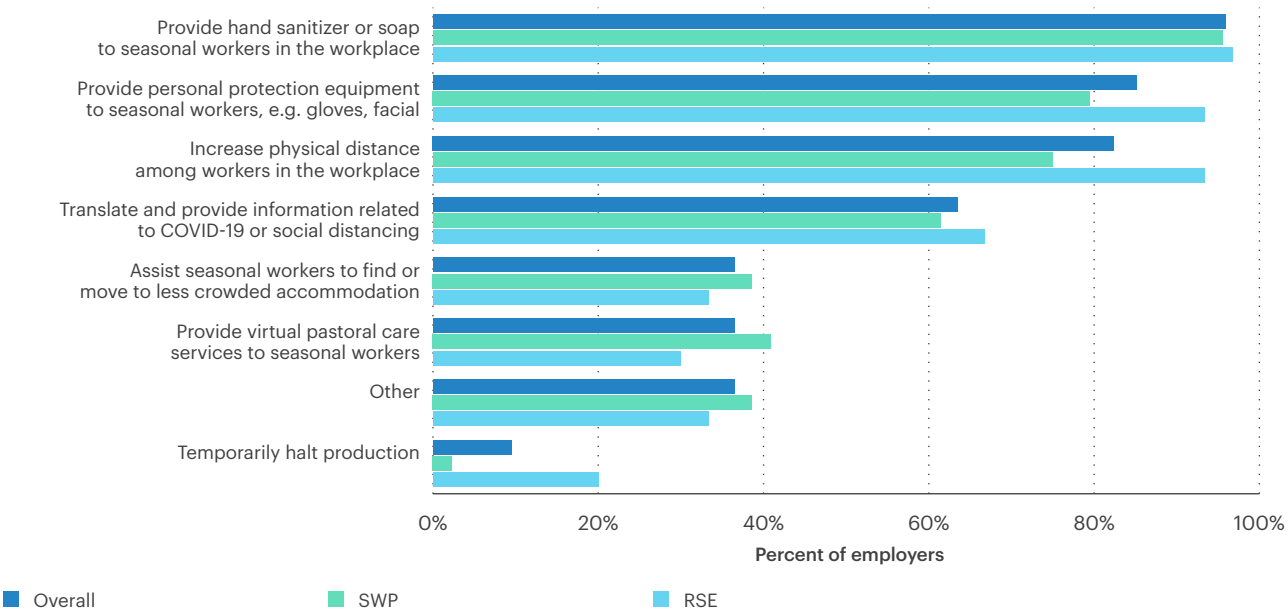
FIGURE 57: Challenges in hiring and managing SWP/RSE workers during the pandemic



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Note: Multiple choices are given, and this percentage is that of the employers who chose each answer out of the total valid respondents.

FIGURE 58: Actions taken by employers in response to COVID-19 safety protocols



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

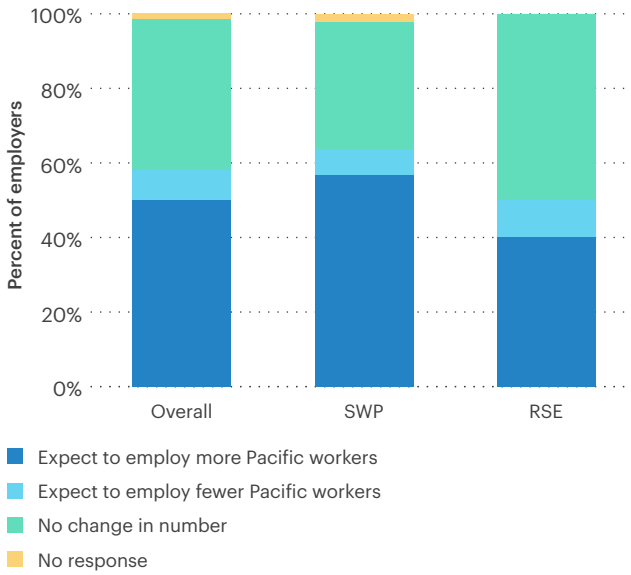
The suspension of international flights also made pre-existing behavioral and welfare problems more apparent because workers engaging in problematic behaviors or having welfare issues (for example, pregnancy) could not be sent home. One employer of Timorese workers reported that absconding and refusal to work had become more frequent during the crisis, but partly attributed the problems to the influence of people outside the workplace. Some employers also raised the potential impact of prolonged stays in the host country and extended exposure to Western culture on workers' reintegration with their own cultures.

Employers also voiced dissatisfaction with lack of support from governments of both sending and host countries to workers during the pandemic. The ni-Vanuatu government was pointed out by several employers for lack of support and communication related to stranded workers and repatriation plans. In some cases, employers reported inconsistency between the information on repatriation coming from the Australian government and the Vanuatu High Commission. Insufficient pre-departure training and lack of 'ownership' when workers behaved poorly were also raised.

5.4. Future Demand for Seasonal Labor, Challenges and Government Support

Demand for seasonal workers remained strong. The vast majority of employers (98 percent) wanted to employ seasonal workers from the Pacific/Timor-Leste again; about 50 percent of all employers wanted to increase recruitment – demand was particularly strong among labor hire companies (with 80 percent hoping to increase their intakes). This is likely to be partly the result of a reduction in the number of backpackers, who account for about three-quarters of seasonal farm labor in Australia. Robust demand from seasonal employers presents a reason to be positive about the future of Pacific labor mobility (Figure 59). The same advantage might be evident in other areas, such as semi-skilled work under the PLS, although higher domestic unemployment will likely dampen this prospect in certain industries and in regional centers.

FIGURE 59: Employers' intention to recruit seasonal workers in 2021

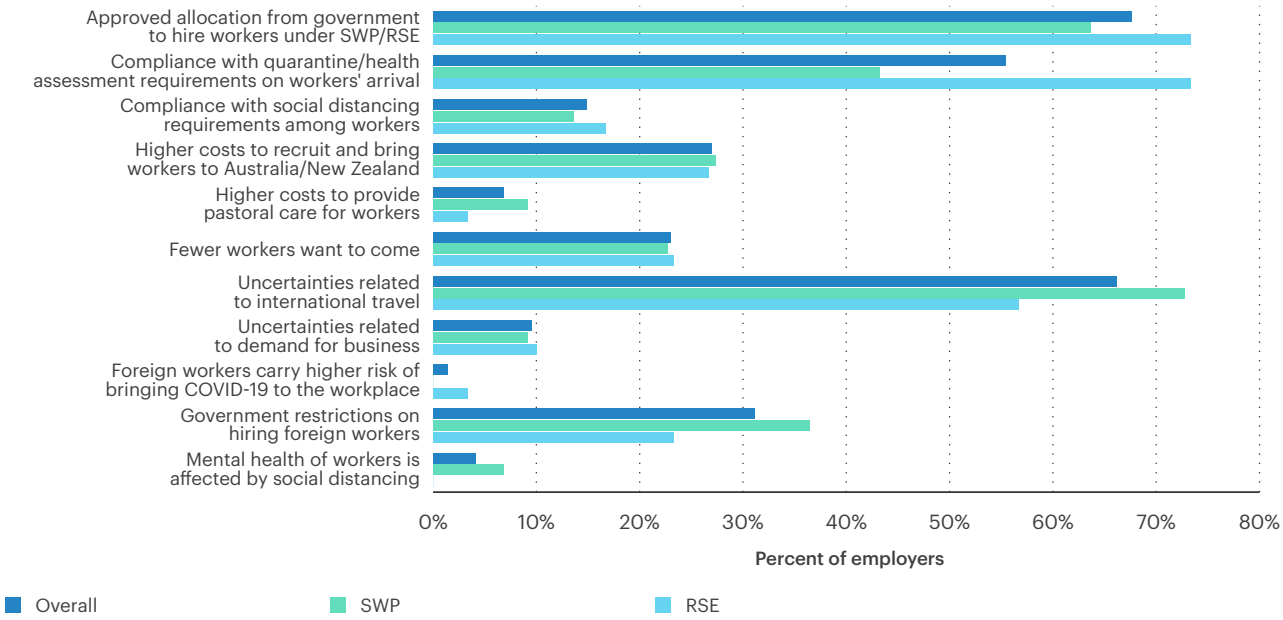


Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Challenges remain if Pacific labor mobility programs are to resume at meaningful scales. Uncertainties surrounding borders opening and international travel, obtaining approval from the host country's government to hire seasonal workers, as well as testing and quarantine requirements for arriving workers were the top three challenges that employers were worried about. Also high on the list were concerns about increased costs to bring seasonal workers to host countries, weaker participation by workers, and potential restrictions on hiring foreign workers in favor of domestic ones (Figure 60).

The pilot arrangements that brought Fijian, Tonga, and ni-Vanuatu workers to Australia between September and December 2020 set the foundation for further batches of workers as the effects of the pandemic continue. It remains to be seen what arrangements will be made in term of cross-border logistics and financing flights, quarantine, testing, repatriation, and medical care should workers become infected with the virus when the number of workers and diversity of their job placements increase and return to pre-pandemic levels.

FIGURE 60: Challenges for businesses to employ Pacific or Timorese workers next year



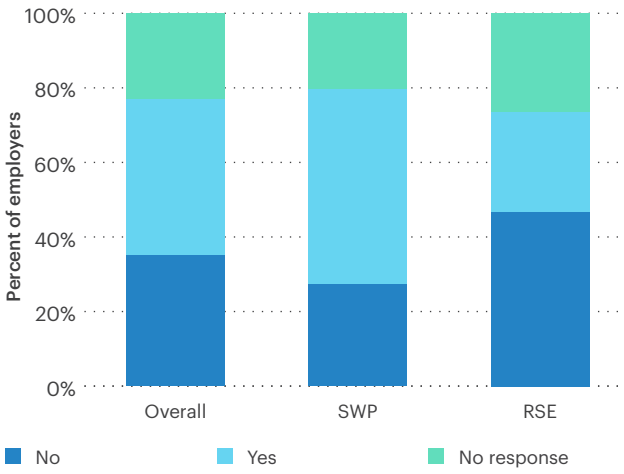
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

In addition to new challenges that the pandemic introduced to labor mobility, the crisis also highlighted existing weakness in the management of the schemes. This is particularly acute in Australia where more than 52 percent of SWP employers agreed that the crisis exposed existing issues of the scheme, nearly double the figure among their RSE counterparts (27 percent) (Figure 61). The most prominent issues identified by employers related to the timeliness of government actions; nearly three-quarters flagged slow approval processes to hire seasonal workers, while about two-thirds pointed to slow and inflexible guidelines in response to recruitment needs (Figure 62). Lack of transparency in the allocation of recruitment slots and lack of training and support to workers to help them manage their finances while in host countries were also highlighted, especially by SWP employers.

To a lesser extent, lack of effective briefings to workers before, during, and after their employment seasons – which employers perceived as essential to helping workers manage their expectations and life away from home – were also flagged. The largely similar patterns of responses between SWP and RSE employers in terms of the relative prominence of these issues are striking, highlighting areas for potential policy interventions.

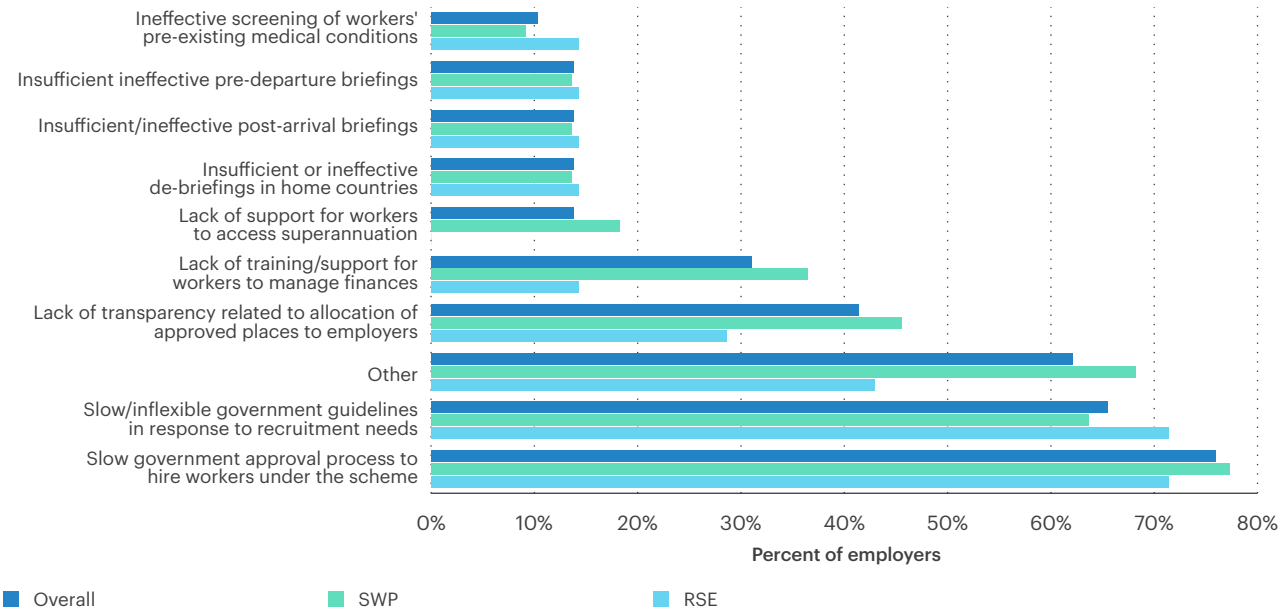
In line with these challenges, employers voiced strong demand for government support. The top three areas where the vast majority of surveyed employers expressed the need for support were: (i) timely and consistent guidelines related to visa and redeployment conditions; (ii) facilitation of communication with governments of sending countries to recruit workers; and (iii) transparent and fast processes to apply for recruitment approvals (Figure 63).

FIGURE 61: COVID-19 has highlighted various weaknesses in the SWP/RSE schemes



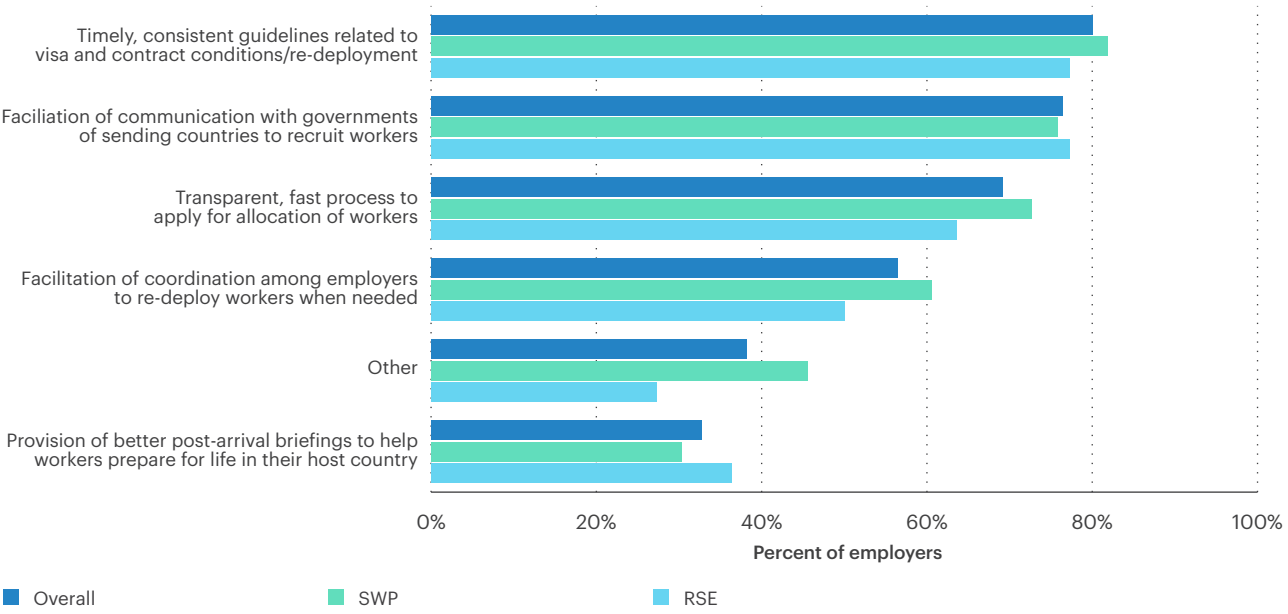
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 62: Issues with labor mobility schemes perceived by employers



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

FIGURE 63: Support businesses wish to receive from the government



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on data from the World Bank COVID-19 Phone Survey on Pacific Labor Mobility and Remittances.

Photo by © darrenjamesphotography.com

VI. PACIFIC DIASPORA

Remittance flows to PICs from Pasifika populations in Australia and New Zealand are significant and are likely to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Australia and New Zealand are home to large Pacific Islander populations, many of whom are employed in low and unskilled occupations. This includes occupations that have been the most susceptible to COVID-19-related job losses. Poor employment outcomes for Pasifika populations will likely impact remittance flows to PICs. The following sections examine the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Pasifika populations in Australia and New Zealand, and the flow-on effects for remittance sending to PICs.

6.1 Pacific Diasporas in Australia and New Zealand

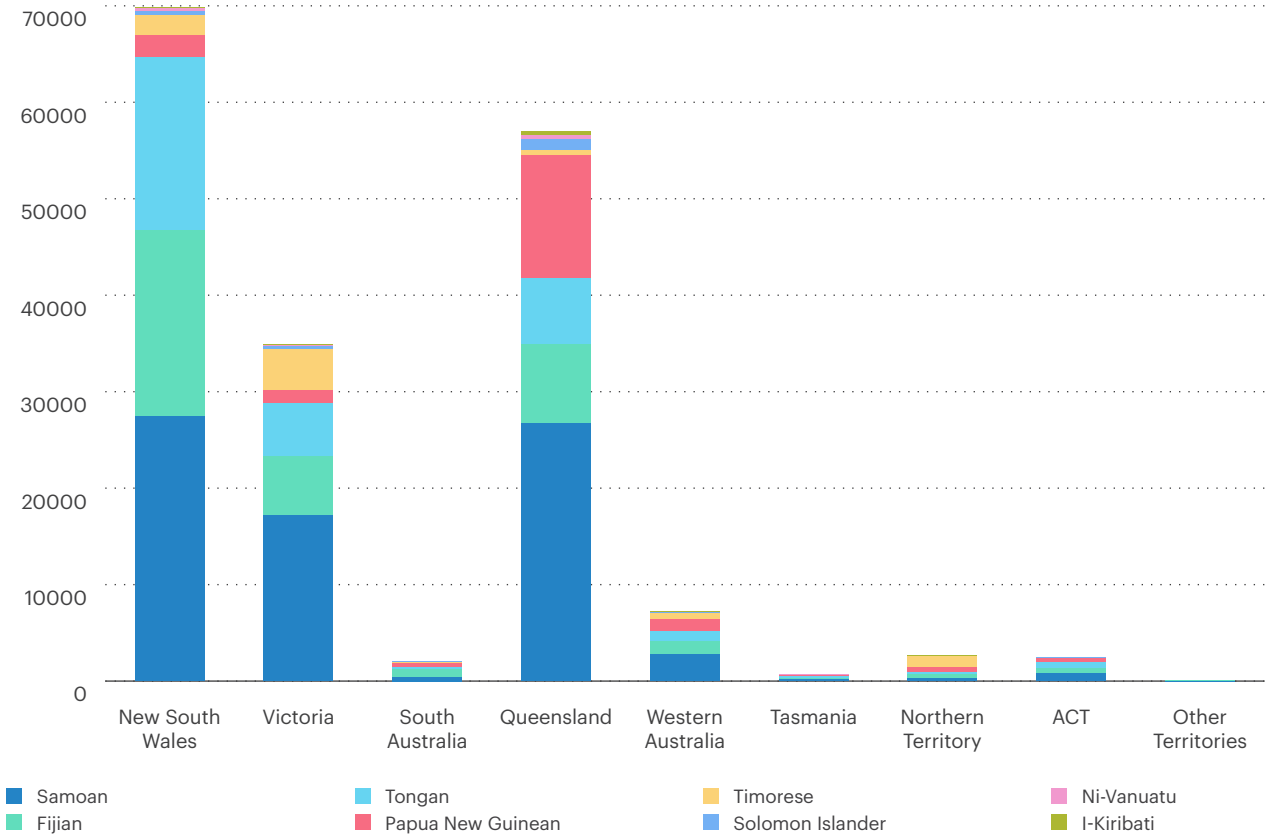
Many PICs have diaspora populations living overseas, including large communities in OECD countries such as New Zealand (32 percent), the United States (30 percent), and Australia (28 percent). However, the size of these diaspora populations varies widely between PICs. Micronesian and Polynesian countries have the highest rates of outmigration; emigrants are equivalent to 50.6 percent of Tonga's resident population and 39.2 percent of the population of the Federated States of Micronesia.

By contrast, and with the exception of Fiji, the Melanesian states have low rates of emigration ranging from the equivalent of 0.2 percent of the resident population in PNG, to 0.9 percent for Vanuatu. These differences are largely the result of preferential migration pathways available to the Micronesian and Polynesian states.

According to the 2016 Census, Pasifika populations in Australia are largest in New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria. Australia's largest Pasifika populations originate from Samoa (75,755), Fiji (37,001), and Tonga (32,697), and are geographically concentrated in New South Wales (Samoans, Fijians, and Tongans), Queensland (Samoans and Papua New Guineans), and Victoria (Samoans). Nonetheless, Pasifika migrants can be found in almost every state and territory in Australia (Figure 64).

In New Zealand, Pacific populations are concentrated in the North Island, primarily in Auckland with other significant populations in Canterbury, Wellington, and Waikato. In 2013, 93 percent (274,806) of Pacific Islanders lived in the North Island whereas only 7 percent (21,135) lived in the South Island (Figure 65).

FIGURE 64: Selected Pacific diaspora groups by location in Australia (2016)

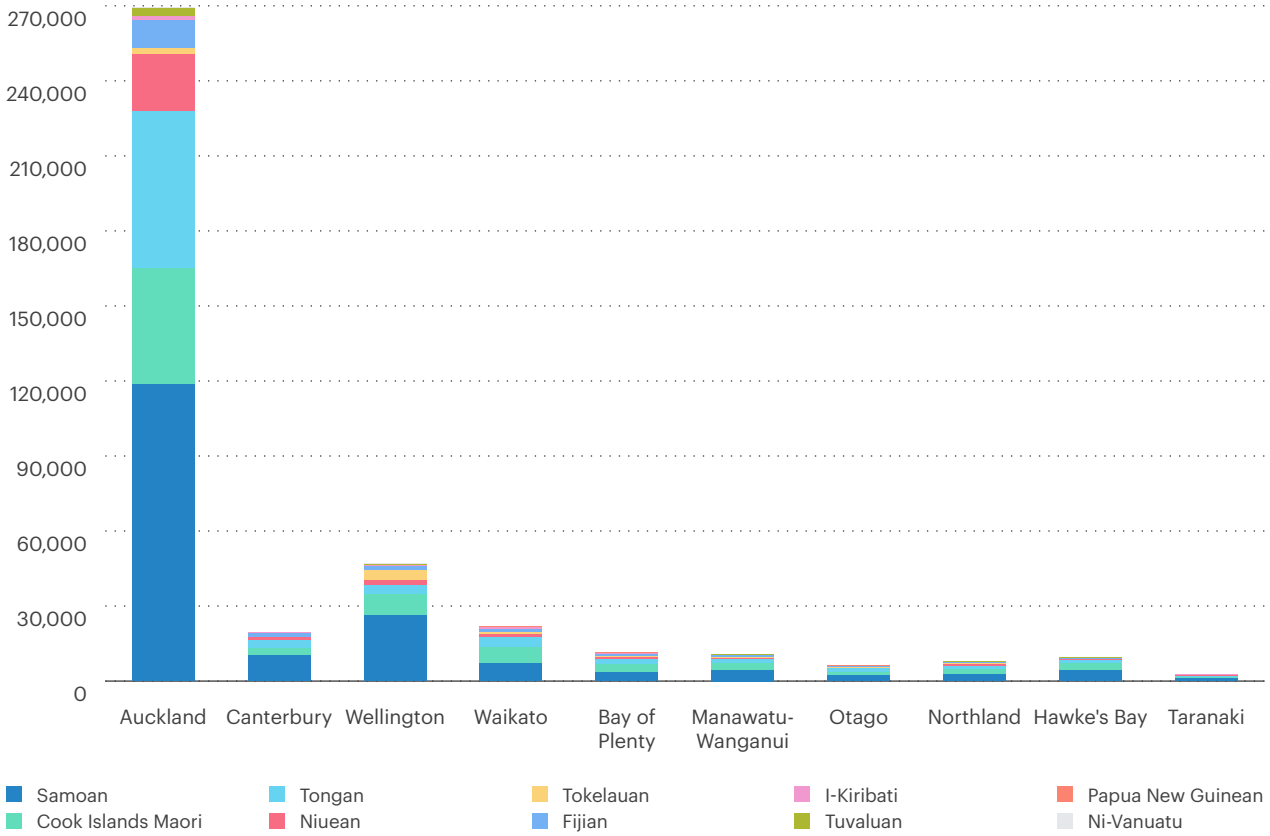


	New South Wales	Victoria	South Australia	Queensland	Western Australia	Tasmania	Northern Territory	ACT	Other Territories
Samoan	27,429	17,184	416	26,740	2,752	161	284	790	8
Fijian	19,368	6,093	760	8,188	1,367	206	429	532	51
Tongan	17,888	5,557	286	6,812	1,105	114	237	686	5
Papua New Guinean	2,237	1,275	339	12,768	1,187	122	511	341	15
Timorese	2,132	4,352	175	538	633	18	1,057	54	-
Solomon Islander	382	213	51	1,059	81	12	37	44	-
Ni-Vanuatu	264	108	24	467	40	9	24	17	10
I-Kiribati	188	138	27	390	51	6	49	25	-

Source: World Bank staff calculations based on the Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder. Place of Usual Residence. Ancestry, multi-response. Copyright Commonwealth of Australia, 2018. ABS data licensed under Creative Commons.

Note: No reliance should be placed on small cell frequency count (e.g., cells with less than 20 counts).

FIGURE 65: Pacific diaspora groups by selected location in New Zealand (Census 2018)



	Auckland	Canterbury	Wellington	Waikato	Bay of Plenty	Manawatu-Wanganui	Otago	Northland	Hawke's Bay	Taranaki
Samoan	118,503	10,092	26,208	6,972	3,354	4,458	2,286	2,487	4,215	1,092
Cook Islands Maori	46,668	3,132	8,712	6,702	3,552	2,535	1,281	2,238	3,069	579
Tongan	62,403	3,192	3,330	3,606	1,965	1,785	1,437	1,257	1,053	255
Niuean	23,088	915	1,995	1,590	687	492	240	834	252	231
Tokelauan	2,406	213	4,185	444	546	312	129	114	135	48
Fijian	11,202	1,701	1,557	1,560	729	735	420	663	297	267
I-Kiribati	1,410	90	309	576	273	123	57	48	171	42
Tuvaluan	3,231	57	447	120	147	87	222	144	132	39
Papua New Guinean	372	165	111	120	75	63	78	54	27	12
Ni-Vanuatu	150	45	48	63	30	21	201	15	231	9

Source: World Bank staff calculations based on 2018 Census Dataset. Extracted from NZ.Stat 29 June 2020. Area: Regional Council/SA2.

Note: No reliance should be placed on small cell frequency count (e.g., cells with less than 20 counts).

Many Pacific Islanders living in Australia and New Zealand send remittances to PICs, and in so doing play an important role in providing informal social protection. PICs tend to have limited formal social protection systems, and instead rely heavily on informal and traditional systems of social protection. International remittances, equivalent to a significant proportion of GDP in most PICs (Figure 2), can thus contribute considerably to the welfare of recipient households.[28]

According to census data, Pasifika populations in Australia and New Zealand tend to work in industries susceptible to COVID-19 job losses, with possible implications for their ability to continue remitting to PICs. In both Australia and New Zealand, a large proportion of Pasifika employment is concentrated in low- and medium-skilled industries including laborers, machine operators, drivers, sales, clerical, and administrative workers. These occupations have high physical proximity scores and are not easily transitioned to online or work-from-home settings. In addition, roles such as personal service workers may be associated with high exposure to disease and infection. From this data, it seems likely that Pasifika populations are more vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19 on employment and livelihoods than the general Australian population, a fact that will have implications for remittances.

6.2 Pasifika Demography and Living Arrangements

Among Pasifika communities, those with smaller populations, access to affordable housing, and/or those who faced higher barriers to migration, tended to live in smaller households. In both Australia and New Zealand, the community representatives interviewed generally reported that community members lived in nuclear households when there were fewer relatives to support, and their incomes were higher. This association applied to many Melanesian communities, particularly those originating from PNG, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands. Tuvaluan and i-Kiribati families in Australia also tended to live in nuclear households. In Darwin and Adelaide, where Pasifika populations are smaller and housing is more affordable, the Samoan (Darwin) and Pacific Islander (Adelaide) populations in the study tended to live in nuclear households. Fijian households in both Australia and New Zealand varied in size and could be either nuclear or quite large.

Within participating communities, Pacific Islanders tended to live in large households in areas where housing was limited or expensive, employment and income levels were lower, and communities were large or recently established. In New Zealand, 2013 Census figures indicate that Pacific Islanders tended to live in more crowded housing than the general population; 40 percent of Pacific Islanders lived in crowded housing compared to 4 percent of the European population, 20 percent of the Maori population, and 18 percent of the Asian population.[29] In Australia, Pasifika families are significantly larger than the general population, and are eight times more likely to live in a house with eight or more people. Yet the average Pacific Islander house in Australia contains only three bedrooms, and Pacific Islanders are thus probably more susceptible to living in overcrowded conditions than the general population (Ravulo, 2015). Large household sizes allow families to pool resources to pay rent, support one another, and help new migrants until they can establish themselves.

28. https://devpolicy.org/the-pacific-remittances-boom-its-for-real-20201105/
29. https://www.mpp.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Contemporary-Report-Web.pdf

This is consistent with traditional social support practices in the Pacific that rely on extended kin networks and systems of reciprocity and exchange (Mohanty, 2012; Monsell-Davis, 1993; Ratuva, 2006). In this study, within larger Polynesian communities in Australia and New Zealand, households contained as many as 10–15 people sharing a three-bedroom, one-bathroom house. This overcrowding seemed to be particularly prevalent in Auckland. Several community representatives described how garages in Auckland were not used for cars, but rather, provided an extra bedroom for large families.

A lack of government support for newly arrived migrants seemed to contribute to overcrowded housing. Community members reported that in New Zealand, migrants who arrive through the Pacific Access Category[30] do not receive government support to establish themselves. This, along with housing shortages and high housing prices were key contributors to overcrowded housing in Auckland. Community representatives raised concerns about what might happen should COVID-19 start to spread through these crowded households, as it had done in some Pasifika communities in the United States.[31]

6.3 Pacific Diasporas and Employment

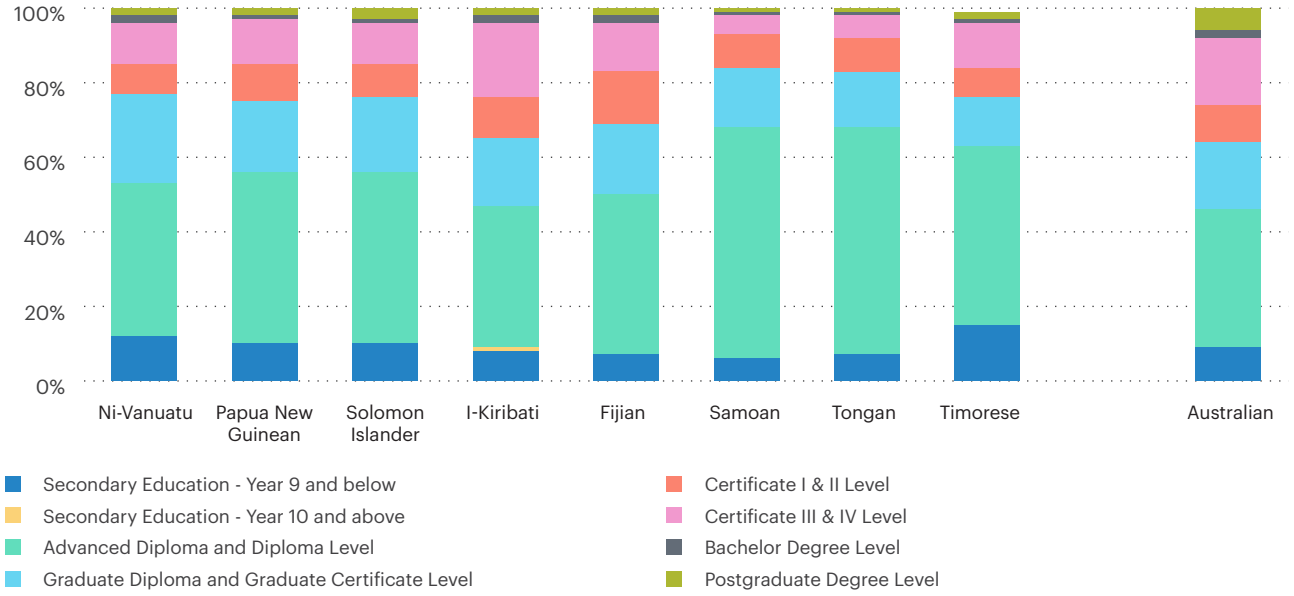
Within Pasifika communities, higher skilled employment seemed to depend on migration pathways and community size. The study's qualitative interviews indicate that Pacific diaspora members tend to work in higher skilled jobs when barriers to migration are high, and their migration is linked to skills. This is consistent with the literature on networks and migration; those with lower incomes are more likely to restrict their migration to areas where they have social support networks. Based on qualitative interviews, the study found that, in Australia, migrants from Melanesia (excluding Fiji), Tuvalu, and Kiribati generally fell into this category. Similarly, in places such as Darwin and South Australia, where Pasifika communities are smaller, and there are fewer people to support new migrants, employment tended to be higher skilled. Many Samoans and Tongans migrate to Australia via New Zealand and thus face relatively lower barriers to migration than other Pacific Islanders (Faleolo, 2019).

As a result, Samoans and Tongans in the study commonly worked in industries such as manufacturing, construction and laboring, aged care, cleaning, and agriculture. This was true of communities in Australia and New Zealand and is consistent with census data from both countries.

Diaspora members indicated that Pacific Islanders' occupations in Australia and New Zealand were not always commensurate with skills or education levels. This is consistent with the broader literature on migrant workers who tend to work in jobs below their skill levels due to language barriers, lack of working experience in host countries, and biases against foreign degrees and migrant status (CEDA, 2021; Visintin et al., 2015).[32] According to 2016 Australian Census data, trends around Pasifika qualifications and industry of employment vary by PIC. For example, compared to the wider Australian population, Papua New Guineans have a lower proportion of adults working in employment commensurate with their education levels (Figure 66 and Figure 67). By contrast, Fijians, ni-Vanuatu, Tongans, Timorese, and Samoans, have a comparatively higher proportion of individuals in employment per their education levels. Nonetheless, Tongan diaspora members interviewed described how community members often did not work in the fields they were qualified for. In Tonga, schools follow the New Zealand syllabus and there is a strong cultural emphasis on obtaining an education. However, upon arrival in New Zealand or Australia, the need to earn money immediately and establish themselves quickly means many Tongans accept low-skilled jobs in industries such as manufacturing, rather than pursuing the longer-term goals of finding work in their areas of skills or expertise.

30. The Pacific Access Category Resident Visa grants New Zealand residence to Pacific Islanders aged 18–45 via a ballot system. Only citizens of selected Pacific Islands are eligible to apply, and a quota is set for each country; Kiribati (75 visas per year), Tuvalu (75), Tonga (250), Fiji (250).
31. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/27/system-is-so-broken-covid-19-devastates-pacific-islander-communities-in-us
32. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics_-_over-qualification

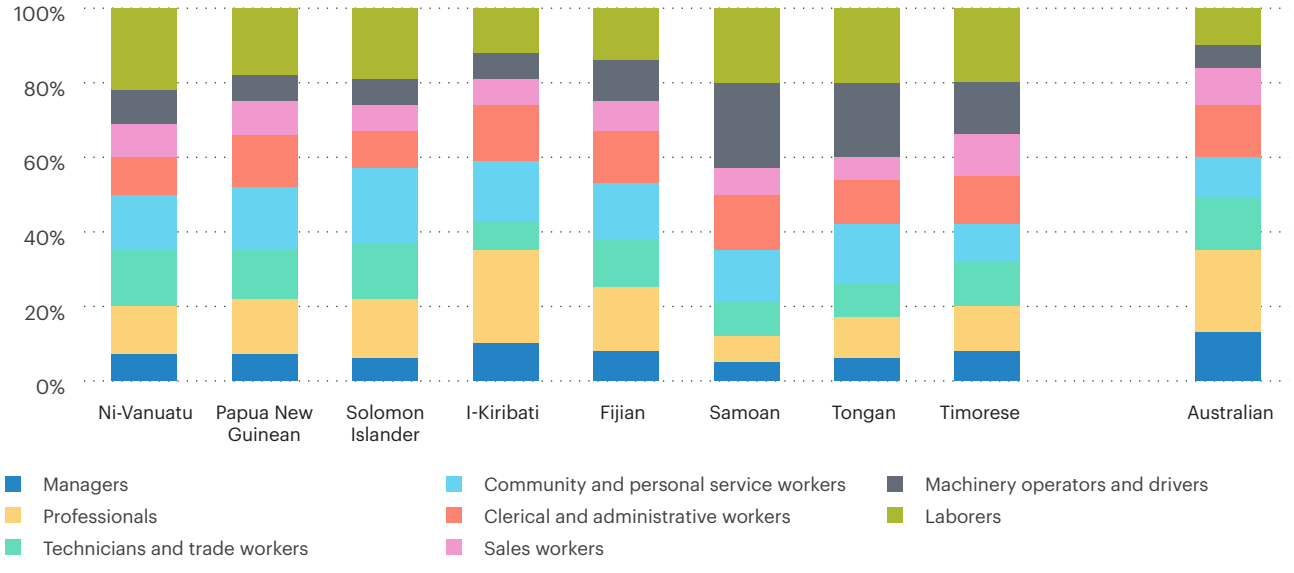
FIGURE 66: Australian and Pacific diaspora groups by level of highest educational attainment (2016)



Source: World Bank staff calculations based on the Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder. Place of Usual Residence. Ancestry, multi-response. Copyright Commonwealth of Australia, 2018. ABS data licensed under Creative Commons.

Note: Calculations excluded persons under 15 years of age, those with no educational attainment, not stated and inadequately described. No reliance should be placed on information for Solomon Islanders, ni-Vanuatu and i-Kiribati Graduate Diploma, Postgraduate degree, and Certificate level I and II due to small cell frequency count.

FIGURE 67: Australian and Pacific diaspora by main occupations (2016)



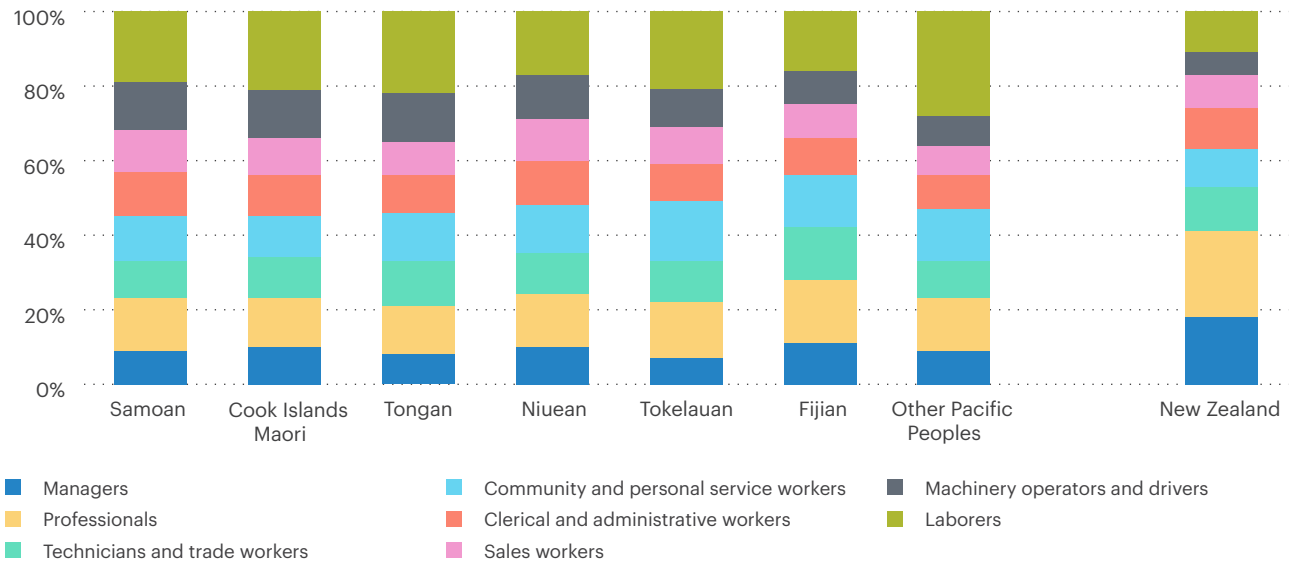
Source: World Bank staff calculations based on the Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder. Place of Usual Residence. Ancestry, multi-response. Copyright Commonwealth of Australia, 2018. ABS data licensed under Creative Commons.

Note: Occupations using ANZCO occupation list. Calculations excluded persons under 15 years of age, unemployed persons looking for either full-time or part-time work, persons not in the labor force, persons with labor force status not stated and inadequately described.

Many Pacific Islanders work in low-skilled or casual employment and community representatives believed these individuals were vulnerable to job losses under COVID-19-related downsizing and restructures. In both Australia and New Zealand, laborers, machine operators and drivers, and sales and service workers comprise a significant proportion of the main occupations of Pacific diaspora groups (Figure 67 and Figure 68). Many workers in these industries cannot easily transition to work from home environments, and were thus highly impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, making them vulnerable to job losses. For Pacific Islanders, this was true even where individuals had worked in their position for many years. Community representatives in Auckland reported that such job losses were already happening within their communities, and would likely worsen as government wage subsidies, aimed to support individuals and business during periods of lockdown, came to an end.

Education is culturally important in Pasifika communities, yet while youth are often under pressure to excel in education, parents are not always able to provide practical support due to their own low education levels, language barriers, or cultural beliefs around education. Research suggests that while Pasifika parents want their children to do well in education, they believe that learning occurs at school and not at home. This is in conflict with the Australian education system that places emphasis on parental involvement and the home learning environment (Lee et al., 2019; Ravulo, 2015). Such findings are consistent with issues raised by diaspora members in the study. For example, in the Sunraysia Mallee district, Pasifika youth are expected to attend university and not follow their parents into agricultural work, one of the main employment industries in the region. However, one community leader noted that parents often worked long hours and were not able to provide a supportive home learning environment for their children, for example, by assisting with homework.

FIGURE 68: New Zealand and Pacific diaspora groups by main occupations (2018)



Source: World Bank staff calculations based on 2018 Census dataset extracted from NZ.Stat 29 June 2020. Area: Regional Council/SA2. Resident population aged 15 years and above, full-time and part-time employed.

These barriers may make it difficult for children to pursue higher education or training. Others noted that young Pacific Islanders had low expectations of what they could achieve and while they dreamed of working in industries such as engineering, youth tended to aim for more technical or vocational occupations – a trend more prevalent among young men than young women, with the latter more likely to access university or vocational education. This is consistent with findings from Logan, Queensland where 80 percent of Pasifika students in Year 12 are female.[33] In some pockets of the Tongan community in New South Wales and the Samoan community in Auckland and Queensland, the younger generations were employed in similar or higher skilled work than their parents. Anecdotally, this seems to be linked to parents' education; those with parents who had obtained higher levels of education were more likely to pursue education themselves.

Pasifika youth sometimes drop out of education so that they can financially contribute to their household, and this issue was exacerbated by COVID-19. In Pacific communities, where young people belong to large households, the older children may be under pressure to provide financial assistance to the household. This can lead to early school leaving (Ravulo, 2015). Community representatives in Australia and New Zealand described how they often heard of young people who needed to end their schooling and find work to help pay the bills. Youth generally moved straight into low-skilled jobs such as process or laboring work. As COVID-19 increased financial strain on some households, community representatives noted that more youth were dropping out of formal education or training to help support their family financially (Box 3).

33. https://theconversation.com/pacific-islanders-and-education-is-australia-an-unlucky-country-21920

BOX 3:

Parental health, financial strain, and school dropout rates for Pacific Islanders in Australia and New Zealand

Compared to the general population, Pacific Islanders are more likely to suffer from health issues such as obesity and diabetes. In New Zealand, two out of three Pacific Islander adults are obese, as compared to one in three people from the total population. Pacific Islander adults also have a high burden of chronic disease such as diabetes and heart disease.[34] In Australia too, Pacific Islanders are more likely to be hospitalized than the general population and carry a higher burden of chronic conditions such as coronary heart disease and diabetes.[35] Comorbidities such as these make Pacific Islanders more susceptible to adverse health outcomes should they contract COVID-19. Pasifika communities were very aware of these health issues. With many Pacific Islanders working in industries such as retail and personal service (Figure 67 and Figure 68), diaspora members reported many Pasifika youth were concerned their relatives may be at high risk of exposure to COVID-19. In order to protect older relatives from COVID-19, some youths were dropping out of school to find work themselves.

> *The majority of our parents and our grandparents are Type 1, Type 2 diabetic. Or they have high blood pressure. It's a very common thing in our community, especially with our parents, so we've taken the lead to find some work because...with COVID-19 happening, if we happen to catch COVID-19 it will be more easy for us to fight rather than our parents.*
>
> **– POLYNESIAN COMMUNITY MEMBER, AUSTRALIA**

In New Zealand, Manurewa High School, which has a high population of Pasifika students, reported that 200 senior students did not return to school after the first COVID-19 lockdown.[36, 37] Pasifika community members interviewed said that financial pressures related to parents losing jobs, along with the availability of construction and similar work – perfect for young healthy students but not suitable for their parents – and concerns over parents' health, were leading some young people to abandon their studies and seek employment. Talking about this school dropout rate, one community leader observed:

> *That's probably the worst thing I can see out of this [pandemic] is the future of some of our young people has been taken away.*
>
> **– POLYNESIAN COMMUNITY MEMBER, NEW ZEALAND**

This is consistent with wider findings that the pandemic is impacting hard won human capital gains in education (World Bank, 2020b). More research is needed to quantify the extent of this trend among Pasifika youth, however it is likely that targeted policy interventions will be required to ensure human capital is not affected over the longer term.

34. https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/pacific-health/tagata-pasifika-new-zealand
35. https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0034/388447/hlth-status-pac-isl.pdf
36. https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/childrens-commissioner-says-too-many-kiwi-kids-leaving-school-help-wh-nau-covid-19-financial-burdens
37. https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/saturday/audio/2018766737/aigagalefili-fepulea-i-tapua-i-speaking-up-for-south-auckland-students

More than half of the diaspora members interviewed believed that COVID-19 had impacted their community's employment either through job losses or reduced hours. In the wider Australian population, the biggest job losses by early 2020 were in food and accommodation services (17.2 percent), followed by arts and recreation services (12.7 percent).[38] New Zealand experienced job losses in similar industries, as well as construction (Stannard et al., 2020). In this study, communities where members' employment was concentrated in higher skilled jobs (including administration, IT, accounting, and engineering), and community members could easily work from home or claim government subsidies, were the least likely to believe COVID-19 had impacted community employment. This was common to communities from PNG, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. The i-Kiribati community in Australia also fell into this category. Consistent with data from the wider Australian population,[39] communities located in cities or regions where COVID-19 restrictions had been limited, were the least likely to report adverse employment impacts. The Samoan communities in Darwin and Perth provide two examples of this 'regionalism'. Within studied communities, Pacific Islanders working in the essential services were sometimes working reduced hours but often still had employment. In industries such as manufacturing and agriculture, community representatives mentioned that work had sometimes increased due to higher demand (manufacturing) (Box 4) or a smaller pool of available workers (agriculture).

Many Pacific Islanders employed in skilled or professional roles had the opportunity to work from home. Mirroring trends from the wider Australian and New Zealand populations, Pacific diaspora members employed in more 'hands on' jobs such as manufacturing, retail, or trades, were generally unable to work from home. By contrast, those working in finance and insurance, communications, administration, and support services were very likely to work from home (Roy Morgan, 2020).[40] For some Pacific Islanders, the transition to working from home was relatively easy. However, for those living in overcrowded housing or with limited or no access to technology such as computers, laptops, or internet signals, working from home proved difficult.

> *Some of us are working from home, a lot of us with corporate jobs. And one [community] member was telling me, the fact that she had to work from home...it's like put everyone on edge because now there's about three or four people working from home at home, having to share one computer, the internet is slowing down.*
>
> – MELANESIAN COMMUNITY MEMBER, AUSTRALIA

38. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/weekly-payroll-jobs-and-wages-australia/latest-release
39. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/weekly-payroll-jobs-and-wages-australia/latest-release
40. https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/four-in-10-employed-new-zealanders-work-from-home-during-lockdown

BOX 4:

COVID-19 and the potential issue of youth de-skilling

In Auckland, the COVID-19 pandemic led to increased production of medical supplies at the local Fisher and Paykel factory, resulting in a number of new temporary jobs. While competition for these positions was high – Fisher and Paykel are known to be a good employer – and the work was sometimes specialized, these positions did provide employment opportunities for some Pacific Islanders who had lost jobs elsewhere. One Polynesian community member described how a few of her family members, who were new graduates, had lost skilled jobs and were working at the Fisher and Paykel factory. While she appreciated that they were able to earn money and support their family, she expressed unease at the thought that these family members might not return to their skilled positions

[They] ended up working in a factory because the money was there. So I'm a little bit nervous right now, I want them all to go back to normal, go back to their real jobs, but some have lost it. And obviously the factory work gets them money which, yeah, does the trick...They need to support their family, their parents lost their jobs...And we don't want to discourage them but I just don't want them to get comfortable, you know easy money in the factory. I do want them to go back to uni[versity] when semester starts back. So I'm a little bit nervous about that.

– POLYNESIAN COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE, NEW ZEALAND

This issue of potential youth de-skilling, and the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on employment outcomes were raised by a number of community representatives in both Australia and New Zealand. Diaspora members spoke about the tension between the immediate need for income and the potential longer-term impacts of moving into lower skilled work.

Our grandparents migrated to get the hell out of a factory and now we are back! But it makes ends meet.

– POLYNESIAN COMMUNITY MEMBER, NEW ZEALAND

Due to the qualitative nature of the research, it is not possible to gauge how widespread this potential de-skilling might be. However, if youth and others do not 'get out' of factory work after the pandemic, there are potential long-term implications for human capital development within Pasifika communities (World Bank, 2020b).

6.4 Government Assistance and Social Safety Nets

6.4.1 Government Assistance

Pasifika community members reported that government payments had provided some insulation from the real impacts of COVID-19-related job losses. In Australia, the JobKeeper payment was introduced to allow businesses impacted by the pandemic to continue paying their employees' wages. Under JobKeeper, eligible businesses received $A 1,500 per employee every fortnight between 30 March and 28 September 2020, when slightly lower payments were introduced based on whether employees were employed on a full- or part-time basis (Australian Government, 2020). The JobKeeper payment ended on 28 March 2021. In New Zealand, the wage subsidy performed a similar function, with employees receiving $NZ 585.80 per week if they normally worked 20 hours or more and $NZ 350 per week if they normally worked part-time.[41] One diaspora member interviewed between New Zealand's first and second wave of infections described how the approaching wage subsidy end date was beginning to create financial strain on Pasifika households. Many members from his community, who were employed in the horticultural industry, were working reduced hours and while they had been told by their employer that they could look for other work, with many small businesses closing, alternative employment was unavailable. These concerns about government payments ending were echoed by many community members regardless of cultural background or country of residence.

> *Thankfully there's a wage subsidy…so an employer could apply for the wage subsidy from the government and that's actually going to end in three weeks. So we have yet to see the real impact when the subsidy ends.*
>
> **– POLYNESIAN COMMUNITY MEMBER, NEW ZEALAND**

6.4.2 Financial Difficulties

Diaspora members reported that not all Pacific Islanders were eligible to receive government payments, while other barriers, such as difficulty in understanding the social security system, also presented challenges to accessing COVID-19 welfare payments. Many Tongans and Samoans have migrated to Australia via New Zealand and still hold New Zealand citizenship. Whereas this would once have entitled them to Australian social security benefits, this changed in 2001 when the *Social Security Act 1991* was amended. Now, while New Zealand citizens can still travel to Australia to live and work, they do not have rights as Australian citizens or permanent residents unless they apply for either citizenship or residency (Faleolo, 2019). As a result, many Pacific Islanders in Australia who hold New Zealand citizenship are not eligible to receive government welfare payments. Many people interviewed, particularly Tongans and Samoans, fell into this category and thus could not access the JobKeeper payment. This was not the only barrier to accessing COVID-19 welfare services however, and in both Australia and New Zealand, some community members simply did not know what services were available. This inability to access government welfare payments and support could lead to stress and mental health issues such as anxiety, and a reliance on informal community support instead.

In Australia, diaspora members reported that some Pacific Islanders had accessed their superannuation (retirement) savings to ease financial strain. In Australia, people who were adversely impacted by COVID-19 had the option to access up to $A 10,000 worth of superannuation.[42]

40. https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/covid-19/wage-subsidy/payments-and-processing-times.html#null
41. Source: https://www.ato.gov.au/individuals/super/in-detail/withdrawing-and-using-your-super/covid-19-early-release-of-super/

Community representatives noted that for some New Zealand citizens living in Australia, this provided a valuable form of financial support when they could not access JobKeeper payments. Access to this kind of financial assistance varied geographically and depended on community expertise; one Polynesian community member observed that once someone in the community learned about something such as how to apply for superannuation or government payments, they shared the knowledge with others in their community.

In Australia, some members of the studied communities could not access JobKeeper payments because they were casual employees, or because their employers had not registered for the JobKeeper scheme. Casual employees were only eligible for JobKeeper payments if they had been "employed on a regular and systematic basis since 1 March 2019".[43] This condition on casual employment seems to have impacted Pasifika communities, and most community representatives associated difficulties accessing JobKeeper with migration status, casual employment, or small businesses that had not applied for the payment. In addition, for some Pacific Islanders working in industries where work from home was not possible (for example, aged care or meat processing), the need to quarantine either due to their own travel or positive COVID-19 cases at their workplace resulted in periods of no income. Community representatives attributed this to casual employment and the individual workers probably being ineligible to receive government payments.[44]

According to community representatives, Pasifika students and temporary visitors such as tourists, who could not return home or apply for government payments, relied on kin for support and sometimes resorted to risky coping strategies such as working illegally. International students sometimes had access to emergency relief funds through their universities, however there were no regular government payments available to these students.[45] Many informants knew of Pacific Islanders who had travelled to Australia or New Zealand as tourists, and were unable to return home when borders closed. While these individuals were granted visa extensions, they could not legally work in Australia or New Zealand. Tuvaluans were offered financial support from their own government, but most other nationalities were reliant on family members to support them.

This presented problems when the person 'stuck' in Australia or New Zealand was the main breadwinner for households in PICs. In some instances, these individuals decided to work illegally to support themselves and contribute financially to the cost of their stay.

For some diaspora households, the need to support extra family members with irregular migrant status placed financial strain on already stretched household budgets. In New Zealand, there are several thousand visa overstayers from the Pacific Islands. It is estimated that Tongans (2,498) account for the largest proportion of this population, followed by Samoans (1,549), Fijians (434), Tuvaluans (358), and i-Kiribati (96) (Immigration New Zealand, 2018). In Australia there are roughly 60,000 visa overstayers, however statistics for Pacific Islanders are unavailable.[46] In New Zealand, community representatives emphasized that many overstayers were not new arrivals but had been living and working in New Zealand for years. Regardless of how long they had been in the country, in both Australia and New Zealand, overstayers were unable to access government payments and some who did not work during the pandemic relied on family members to support them during this time. In New Zealand, concerns over the possible health implications of overstayers not accessing COVID-19 testing resulted in a petition to parliament, led by the Pacific Leadership Forum, to grant amnesty to visa overstayers. In response, the New Zealand government announced that overstayers would not be penalized or deported for accessing COVID-19 testing or health facilities during the pandemic.

43. Source: https://www.ato.gov.au/General/JobKeeper-Payment/In-detail/Employees--frequently-asked-JobKeeper-questions/
44. Certain states and territories in Australia introduced payments for periods of self-isolation or quarantine, but it was not clear if these were available at the time of the incidents described in interviews.
45. https://www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/English/Study-in-Australia-student-support/financial-support
46. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-16/federal-election-you-ask-we-answer-visa-overstayers/11110750

6.4.3 Cultural Barriers to Accessing Assistance

Most community representatives highlighted that cultural factors, such as shame, could act as a barrier to accessing formal support services. Writing about debt and financial strain, The Families Commission (2012) describes how Pacific Islanders are often ashamed to admit when they cannot afford to participate in community activities such as church tithings, as doing so would result in a loss of face. This was consistent with the study's qualitative findings, with interviewed community representatives emphasizing that Pacific Islanders were often ashamed to ask for help or admit to financial distress. Community representatives noted that the older generation were often more susceptible to this shame. During COVID-19, this reluctance to ask for help meant that community members might not access government or other formal support services that were available.

The impacts of COVID-19 on Pasifika employment outcomes and economic wellbeing are likely to be felt for many years to come and will potentially have long-term impacts on human capital. As wage subsidies end, it is probable that financial strain and hardship will worsen for Pacific diaspora communities. This may lead to more young people dropping out of education and training in order to support their families financially. Economic recovery from COVID-19 will take time.

6.5 Remittances

Pasifika community members explained that for many Pacific Islanders, remitting money back to PICs is culturally important. For Pacific Islanders, remitting plays a culturally important role in reinforcing kinship ties and can bring social status and prestige (Brown & Connell, 2015; Grieco, 2003; Petrou, 2020). Diaspora members emphasized that remitting to help family in the Pacific is not necessarily viewed as a burden, but rather can represent a privilege. For example, community members from Melanesia spoke about how lucky they were to be living in Australia or New Zealand, and how they wanted to help family back home if they could. Tongan community members spoke about how deep their connection to Tonga was, and how remittances were a manifestation of this enduring connection to home. For many diaspora members, remitting held cultural importance, and COVID-19 had not changed this.

> *[Migrants are] the ones that have been kind of blessed by the family to go and get a better life and then help us from where you are. That's part of it. And so those who have come [to Australia or New Zealand] feel that responsibility...and it's not a burden for them. It is definitely something that they feel is their contribution to the family...of getting that sense of blessing and then sharing that with the families.*
>
> – POLYNESIAN COMMUNITY MEMBER, AUSTRALIA

However, not all diaspora members remitted regularly to the Pacific, and this seems to be related to having fewer close family members living in PICs, migrant generation, and personal arrangements with family. Literature on remittances in the Pacific suggests that those with fewer family members in PICs tend to remit less (Brown & Connell, 2015; Muliaina, 2003; Grieco, 2003). In addition, there is evidence that second generation migrants who feel disconnected from home may resent the expectation to remit (Lee, 2007). This was consistent with youth attitudes to remitting reported by community members in the study. Similarly, diaspora members with few close family members, such as parents living in PICs, tended to remit less. A few community members explained how they had let their families know that money was not always available in Australia or New Zealand. These individuals felt they were able to say no when faced with unwanted or unaffordable requests. Thus, while remitting is a strong social norm, in practice it varies based on personal circumstances and relationships. As a result, not all community members interviewed had been remitting during COVID-19, but this lack of remittances was not necessarily related to the pandemic.

In some communities, diaspora members reported that COVID-19 restrictions in PICs meant events that would normally attract large remittances had been cancelled, leading to a temporary decrease in the expectation to remit. Diaspora members commented that in some communities in Samoa, lockdowns and the associated attendance limits placed on weddings, funerals, and similar events had led to a reduction in remittance requests. Community members described this as a 'blessing' and the 'best thing' to have come out of COVID-19, as the cultural expectation to remit had virtually disappeared. This in turn reduced financial strain on diaspora households. Nonetheless, most diaspora members believed that this was a temporary arrangement, and indeed within New Zealand during the brief reprieve between the first and second wave of infections, funerals within the Samoan community were reported to have returned to their former size.

> *We did have a few funerals that occurred during COVID-19, and usually they're quite big, you know large events and...it can cost quite a bit of money...And I think with COVID it kind of alleviated the financial pressure of those kinds of events...I do anticipate going back to somewhat normal [after the pandemic] but I think we've learnt a lesson that things can be done in a much smaller capacity.*
>
> – POLYNESIAN COMMUNITY MEMBER, AUSTRALIA

Most diaspora members reported that people were still remitting during the pandemic, however this was influenced by digital literacy. While many diaspora members remit online using Western Union or bank transfers, some prefer to remit in person at the MTO or bank branch. During the pandemic, some community members – particularly the older generation – did not have access to or understand how to remit online. Diaspora members explained that younger family members or those with digital literacy skills often helped facilitate online remitting. Social distancing and lockdowns had impacted people's remitting practices and diaspora members estimated this had probably forced a small shift to online transfers. From the qualitative data however, it is difficult to determine the accuracy of this speculation. Nonetheless, community members commented that if money needed to be sent, people would find a way to do it, and interviewees generally believed that social distancing requirements had not impacted remitting significantly.

Community members agreed that MTOs and bank transfers can involve high fees, and many appreciated that Western Union had waived these fees early in the pandemic. Globally, the average remitting cost is 7.5 percent, however the cost of sending remittances to the Pacific from Australia and New Zealand averages 11.5 percent.[47] Community members thus enjoyed not having to pay these high fees for a period.

Diaspora members agreed that financial ability influenced their household's remittance activities during the pandemic, and community members sometimes made sacrifices to meet remittance requests. This is consistent with research (Brown & Connell, 2006) which demonstrates financial ability influences how much diaspora members remit back to PICs. Many diaspora members explained that only people 'who could afford to' were remitting during the pandemic. Those who were struggling financially joked that they were sending 'COVID-remittances'; money was still flowing but the amounts were smaller than they used to be. Nonetheless, community members from Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Melanesia explained that it was not possible to say no to remittance requests, and that people would sometimes make sacrifices to meet these requests. As a result, remittances continued to flow during the pandemic.

> *No is not a word in the vocabulary. It's yes, yes, yes and even if you're in financial strife they'll still give money. They'll give the clothes on their back if they could...People in our community will still give. Even if they're struggling, they'll still give.*
>
> **– POLYNESIAN COMMUNITY MEMBER, AUSTRALIA**

In Fiji and Vanuatu, the economic impacts associated with a lack of tourism, along with the devastation wrought by Cyclone Harold, meant Fijian and ni-Vanuatu communities were remitting more than in the past. In Fiji, it is estimated that 115,000 people – roughly one-third of the Fijian workforce – either lost jobs or were working reduced hours because of the pandemic.[48] A similar trend is evident in Vanuatu.[49] In April 2020, Cyclone Harold hit the region, and impacted the housing and livelihoods of roughly 180,000 people in Fiji, with Kadavu and Lau islands particularly affected by infrastructure losses. In Vanuatu, Cyclone Harold affected more than 159,000 people, with Santo and other northern islands receiving the brunt of the damage. Houses, subsistence agricultural gardens, telecommunications, and other infrastructure were decimated.[50] Fijian diaspora members explained that Fiji's reliance on tourism meant relatives at home were more in need of remittances than ever. No one in the study reported that Fijians were receiving more remittance requests, rather they felt it was their duty to give more during this difficult time. In Vanuatu too, the loss of jobs in tourism coupled with the impacts of Cyclone Harold meant many ni-Vanuatu in Australia and New Zealand felt they should remit more than they would normally. Melanesians often work in higher skilled jobs, and it is possible that this influenced their ability to continue remitting during the pandemic.

47. https://devpolicy.org/the-persistently-high-cost-of-pacific-remittances-20151117/
48. https://www.fijivillage.com/news/PM-confirms-115000-Fijians-have-lost-their-jobs-or-have-had-their-hours-cut-as-a-result-of-COVID-19-8fxr45/
49. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-12/vanuatu-feeling-the-pinch-as-covid-19-keeps-tourists-away/12438252
50. https://www.dfat.gov.au/crisis-hub/Pages/tropical-cyclone-harold

Community members indicated that social distancing had a small impact on how people received remittances in PICs. Most diaspora members believed that social distancing either had not occurred in home countries or was not being observed as strictly as in Australia or New Zealand. Nonetheless, a minority of community members believed that in some communities in Fiji and Samoa, reduced business opening hours made it harder for people to receive remittances. Overall, however, it seems that COVID-19 had not significantly impacted remittance receipt in home countries.

In addition to monetary remittances, diaspora members highlighted how COVID-19 disrupted other flows of goods and people to PICs. As well as money, Pacific Islanders often remit goods in-kind, such as food and other items, to families in PICs (Alexeyeff, 2004; Besnier, 2004). Diaspora members described how various in-kind remittances had stopped during the pandemic. In Australia, the i-Kiribati community often sends goods (such as clothing and backpacks) to Kiribati when community members travel. With borders closed, this was no longer occurring. In Australia, one member of the PNG community described how they often collect goods for different causes and ship them to PNG in containers. Diaspora members then travel to PNG to ensure items make it to their destination. In June 2020, a container of goods intended for the hospital had arrived in PNG but was unable to be distributed because no one could travel from Australia to attend to this. In Tonga, July and August are the months of big church conferences when Tongan diaspora members descend on the country bringing money and other items. In 2020 these conferences were cancelled. In the Samoan community, family reunions in Samoa have become fashionable, and diaspora members travel from around the world to meet in Samoa but these could not occur in 2020. Just as for financial remittances, the disruption that COVID-19 caused to these in-kind remittances will likely have an impact on PIC economies.

There was a general perception among diaspora members that PICs were somewhat insulated from the financial impacts of COVID-19, as they could fall back on subsistence agriculture if needed. Early evidence from Solomon Islands indicates that food systems in rural villages have significant capacity to adapt to the pandemic. However, the ongoing nature of the pandemic may eventually place strain on these food systems (Eriksson et al., 2020). Diaspora members recognized this capacity for resilience in the way they spoke about PICs; even as they acknowledged the economic difficulties facing PICs, diaspora members from Melanesia and Polynesia believed that the ability of people to turn to subsistence gardening was a blessing. Some diaspora members even commented that this perceived return to subsistence lifestyles was a positive that had come out of the pandemic. Similarly, many community members thought that families in PICs were lucky to be living where they were, as most PICS had no recorded cases of COVID-19 at the time of interviews.

6.6 Other Impacts of COVID-19

6.6.1 Impacts on Individuals and Households

Many diaspora members reported that their communities required food relief during the pandemic. In Auckland there was a general increase in the need for food relief, and in August 2020 there were 29 registered food banks as compared to five prior to the pandemic.[51] Within studied communities, the need for food relief was less common when community members worked in higher skilled employment and/or lived in smaller households; Tuvaluan, Papua New Guinean, ni-Vanuatu, and Solomon Islander households generally did not require food relief. In large households, food can represent a huge expense, and communities from Polynesia and Fiji, where members tended to live in larger households, were thus the most likely to require food relief.

51. https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/423952/thousands-of-aucklanders-turning-to-food-banks

Food relief varied from informal food sharing within the community, to the distribution of food boxes by Pacific Islander community organizations, to accessing formal food bank services. As the pandemic progressed, the need for these services increased. In Auckland, for example, one community member sat on the board of a community trust that provided food relief services. He described how during the first outbreak, they had provided food relief from a single location. During the second wave, they were operating in 'overdrive' from two locations. Nonetheless, and as for accessing government payments, community members were often reluctant to ask for food assistance due to shame and pride.

> *I network with other organizations and try and get the families to go [to the food bank], but a lot of them feel ashamed to go. And I said, 'Look, pride does not come before you feeding your family.'*
>
> – MELANESIAN COMMUNITY MEMBER, AUSTRALIA

Some diaspora members enjoyed the opportunity to slow down during lockdown, while others reported large households provided a source of tension and stress. Different cities and regions have been subject to varying levels of social distancing and lockdown restrictions during the pandemic. In New Zealand, where lockdown was particularly strict, one Polynesian community member described Pacific Islander households as 'huge bubbles' where extended family members could spend time together and help each other out. Some diaspora members described how Pasifika communities used lockdown to do things like learn traditional storytelling techniques, while others simply enjoyed the opportunity to drink kava and relax. Positive accounts of lockdown were more likely to come from communities where people lived in less crowded housing. By contrast, some community representatives reported that lockdown was having a negative impact on their community's wellbeing.

Such experiences were more likely to come from Polynesian and Fijian communities where large households are more common. In addition, some diaspora members believed pandemic-related financial stress was leading to increased family violence and inter-generational tension. Young people, who are expected to respect their elders and not talk back, often struggled with being confined to their house. The pandemic has had both positive and negative social impacts on Pasifika households.

> *There's been a common trend with the impacts, especially with young people...the high levels of mental health and the high levels of anxiety that's been created during this isolation process. A lot of our young people...don't normally speak or voice their [opinions] to their parents...whenever there's tension at home...the young person would go... somewhere that's not inside the house. But then now, because we're in isolation and we're in a lockdown...these young people are feeling they can't go anywhere just to breathe.*
>
> – POLYNESIAN COMMUNITY MEMBER, AUSTRALIA

Pasifika community members believed that social media provided an important outlet for connecting with others during the pandemic, but online communication was considered inferior to face-to-face interactions. In Australia, Pacific Islanders tend to have a similar level of internet access as the general population (Ravulo, 2015). However, in New Zealand, Pacific Islanders are less likely to have access to an internet connection than households of Asian, European, or Maori ethnicity.[52] Within the communities in the study, online communication was not an option for those without the technical knowledge or access to reliable internet signals, laptops, and other equipment.

52. http://archive.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/households/household-access-to-the-internet.aspx#gsc.tab=0

One Polynesian community representative in Auckland noted that the shift to online technologies had exacerbated existing inequalities around access to and knowledge of ICTs. In both Australia and New Zealand, elderly people were particularly unsure of online communication, whereas youth relied heavily upon social media as an outlet to socialize. Some community leaders expressed concern and unease over not knowing what young people were 'really' doing on social media.

Concerns over the long-term mental health impacts of the pandemic, particularly for children and young people, were raised by many Pasifika communities. In New Zealand, Pacific Islanders are more likely to suffer from mental health issues than the wider New Zealand population; in a twelve-month period, 25 percent of Pacific Islanders will suffer from mental health issues as compared to 21 percent of the total New Zealand population. Yet only 25 percent of Pacific Islanders who experience mental health issues will access professional help as compared to 58 percent of the total New Zealand population.[53, 54] Consistent with this, diaspora members explained that mental health issues are often stigmatized in their communities, and consequently many people will not seek professional help. Some diaspora members raised concerns over potential increases in suicide rates as a result of rising mental health issues linked to the pandemic. In Victoria, a young Pacific Islander boy was stabbed to death in June 2020[55] and the community was trying to move forward and learn from the tragedy in a positive way under social distancing restrictions. This loss, along with the lockdown situation had led to a perceived rise in youth suicides; one community member in Victoria described how they had lost three young Tongan men to suicide in a two-week period. Similar concerns were raised in New Zealand, and a Polynesian community member noted that because the focus of COVID-19 responses had been on physical needs – for example food, warm clothes, and blankets – dealing with the mental and emotional toll of the pandemic had not been a priority.

53. http://pasifikafutures.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/PF_HowAreWeDoing-RD2-WEB2.pdf
54. Analogous statistics for Pasifika communities in Australia are unavailable.
55. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-17/charges-laid-over-solomone-taufeulungaki-stabbing-death/12363088

6.6.2 Impacts on Communities

Many community members emphasized the strength and resilience of Pasifika communities during the pandemic as they were able to draw on informal community support networks. Informal social safety nets are traditionally a feature of Pacific communities (Mohanty, 2012; Monsell-Davis, 1993; Ratuva, 2006), and include ceremonial exchange, reciprocity of goods and services, and philosophies based on generosity and selflessness (ILO, 2006). Community members described how dropping off food boxes and knowing who to check up on were an important part of informal community support during the pandemic. Community representatives reported various strategies for checking in on one another and different ways of providing assistance including creating rosters to ensure everyone in the community received a phone call, or checking up on people via social media. One Tongan church established a task force to informally assess every family in the congregation to determine who was most in need, and offered a small amount of financial assistance to those deemed to be facing financial hardship. Community representatives commonly emphasized the importance of this 'communal culture' in dealing with the impacts of the pandemic.

> *And that's the beauty of our culture which I think other cultures didn't get to enjoy during COVID. Because we are naturally family oriented so right before COVID, in our communities, we're all checking in on each other. And during COVID, we don't wait for government help, we just got shit done... we already know who the old people are in our church, and we just sent the message around...'Who's got an old person in their street that needs help?'...We fired off emails to like supermarkets...We were doing food packages. So I think we're very lucky in that sense because it's just natural for us to work together.*
>
> **– POLYNESIAN COMMUNITY MEMBER, NEW ZEALAND**

For most of the Pasifika communities in the study, being unable to gather together and interact with other members of the community face-to-face was the most difficult part of the pandemic. The church plays an important role in Pacific Islander social life, and performs a central role in coordinating pastoral care and support for its members.[56] One Micronesian community member described how the cancellation of in-person church services had made it difficult for some people to access adequate pastoral care. For all communities, social distancing and the inability to gather as a community were particularly difficult during funerals and other events that would usually involve emotional support from the extended community. This was true of communities in both Australia and New Zealand. In addition, many community members struggled when illness or death befell family back in PICs. One member of the ni-Vanuatu community described how it has always been important to travel back to Vanuatu to mourn with the family and take part in traditional ceremonies. Not being able to do so has taken an emotional toll on community members.

> *And there has been that sense of struggle that we aren't able to gather. We aren't able to come together at least and do community in the ways in which we are so used to. All our events, all our ceremonies, they involve the community.*
>
> – POLYNESIA COMMUNITY MEMBER, AUSTRALIA

In Australia, some Pasifika community organizations played a key role in translating information about COVID-19 and social restrictions into Pacific languages. There has been some criticism in the Australian media about the speed and quality of translations about COVID-19 related information.[57] Some of the diaspora members interviewed in Australia described how documents and information about COVID-19 had either been unavailable in Pacific languages, or were too technical for their community members to understand. In general, communities in the study, such as those from PNG where people worked in higher skilled positions, felt they did not need these translations. However, communities from Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa were more likely to need translations. As a result, some of the Australian-based community organizations interviewed had performed translations for their members, while some drew upon resources from New Zealand. By contrast, Pacific peoples in New Zealand generally felt the government had done a good job of providing context appropriate translations in Pacific languages.

Lack of funding meant many Pasifika community organizations were limited in the financial help they could provide to members during the pandemic. When asked what their communities needed to help recover from the pandemic, many interviewees highlighted the financial constraints that their organizations faced in trying to assist community members. Most organizations were reliant on fundraising and while many applied for grants, these were generally one-off amounts rather than ongoing funding. Those who worked in community service roles emphasized the need for more outreach workers to stop people 'falling through the gaps'. Some community representatives believed that small organizations such as churches and community groups often have a better understanding of, and are better placed to access, community members in need than some of the larger organizations that receive relatively more funding.

56. https://teara.govt.nz/en/pacific-churches-in-new-zealand
57. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-13/coronavirus-messages-translated-to-nonsense-in-other-languages/12550520

Photo by © Rachel Anna Skeates/World Bank

VII. DISCUSSION AND POTENTIAL POLICY RESPONSES

The COVID-19 crisis resulted in reduced incomes and employment for many Pacific Islanders both at home and overseas. Impacts were felt at home as remittance flows were disrupted and job opportunities in the domestic market affected. In PICs, international remittances conventionally play an important role as an informal safety net for many households. In the absence of strong formal social protection programs, any disruption to inflows of remittances from overseas is concerning. In addition, temporary labor mobility to Australia and New Zealand has provided employment and earning opportunities for thousands of Pacific Islanders. In countries like Tonga, Vanuatu, and Samoa, between 6 to 15 percent of the total labor force is engaged in these schemes.

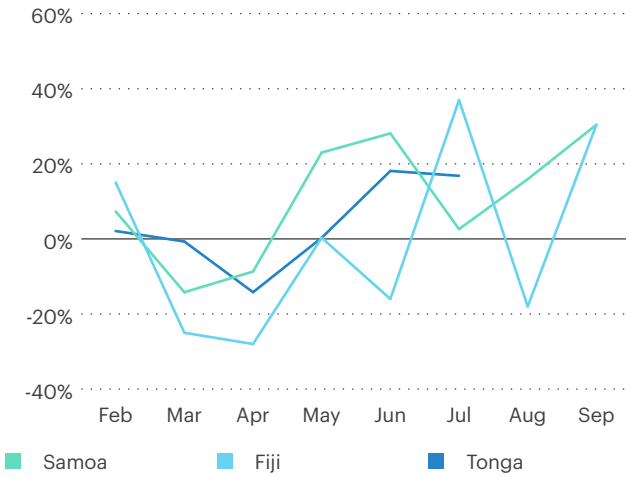
The suspension of labor mobility schemes and their limited resumption means that considerably fewer workers will be able to access these opportunities. Uncertainties regarding international travel, coupled with reduced income, resulted in stress and anxiety among seasonal workers, their families, and Pasifika communities. Drawing upon available data and projections, this section discusses the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on remittances, migrant workers, their households, and Pacific diaspora communities, as well as the outlook for the Pacific labor mobility schemes over the medium and long term.

7.1 Remittances

At an aggregate level, remittances to Pacific Island countries have been more resilient than expected, despite a severe and abrupt decrease when the pandemic first affected the region. A sharp drop in aggregate remittance inflows was observed in Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga during February–April 2020; yet between May and September 2020, inflows recovered with year-to-date and monthly remittances returning to positive year-on-year growth (Figures 69 and 70).

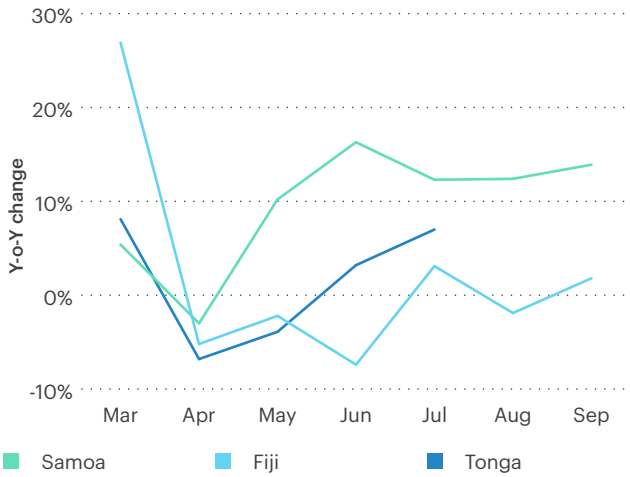
World Bank estimates of the reduction in remittances to the Pacific region were consequently revised downwards from 16.9 percent in April 2020 to 4.3 percent in October 2020.2 This better-than expected performance is not unique to the region, having also been observed across Asia, Latin America, and Africa (Caron & Tiongson, 2021; Lopez-Calva, 2021; Oxford Economics, 2021).

FIGURE 69: Monthly remittance inflows to Fiji and Samoa (2020)



Source: Reserve Bank of Fiji and Central Bank of Samoa.

FIGURE 70: Cumulative remittances to Fiji and Samoa in 2020 (year to date)



Source: Reserve Bank of Fiji and Central Bank of Samoa.

TABLE 14: Annual remittance inflows (2019–20)

Country	Remittance inflow (nominal USD million)		Estimated Y-o-Y change in remittance inflow 2020
	2019	2020e	
Tonga	190	194	1.7%
Samoa	147	150	2.2%
RMI	31	31	-1.4%
Kiribati	20	19	-5.0%
Vanuatu	75	76	1.3%
Fiji	287	312	9.0%
FSM	23	23	0.0%
Solomon Islands	25	28	8.0%
Palau	2	2	0.0%
Timor-Leste	100	155	54.9%

Source: KNOMAD (2020), KNOMAD (2021), Migration Data Portal.

Three major factors could explain why remittances remained steady despite the pandemic and its economic impacts:

(i) Migrants abroad have not suffered from extensive job losses to the degree expected, and some actually benefitted temporarily as a result of COVID-19 stimulus payments from host governments, leading to increases in income for some (though certainly not all) migrant workers. While Pacific seasonal workers, concentrated in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, have had limited access to such payments, diaspora members interviewed in the study indicated that government welfare payments in Australia and New Zealand helped to insulate them from the adverse income effects of the pandemic. In addition, the economies of major host countries have slowly but steadily recovered, with unemployment in Australia and New Zealand declining since April 2020.[58]

(ii) Remittances tend to be driven by altruism, increasing when the situation in the migrants' country of origin worsens. In the past, when the Pacific suffered crises such as tropical cyclones, remittances from unaffected host countries rose as migrants remitted more to help family through times of hardship. Given the collapse of international tourism, the broader economic fallout from COVID-19, as well as the devasting impact of Tropical Cyclone Harold on many PICs in 2020 (Fiji and Vanuatu in particular), altruistic and countercyclical behavior is likely to have played a role in sustaining remittance inflows to the region. This argument is supported by evidence from the Pacific diaspora and migrant workers. While migrant workers, both temporary and longer term, tend to remit less as their earnings decrease, many adjusted their own savings and consumption to maintain or even increase the money sent home in response to the crisis, as discussed in Sections 3.1.5 and 6.5. Some diaspora members even explicitly emphasized the cultural importance of remitting.

(iii) A diversion from physical transportation of cash across borders to sending through remittance service providers could have also contributed to the resilience of remittance flows observed in the region. The practice of carrying a large amount of cash home at the end of a working season has long been documented among seasonal workers from the Pacific (Maclellan & Mares, 2006; Brown et al., 2015; World Bank, 2017b). Yet travel restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19 made it more difficult to carry hard cash across borders, likely causing an increase in remittances through formal channels and masking a decrease in the total amount being remitted. A recent study on remittances from the US to Mexico (Dinarte et al., 2021) for instance shows that the rise in remittances by Mexican migrants during the pandemic has been driven mostly by remittances originating from municipalities close to a US–Mexico border crossing. The study also finds a large and disproportionate increase in the number of new accounts at financial institutions among municipalities along the border since the US implemented lockdown measures. Earlier studies have also illustrated that the global boom in remittances to developing countries in the 2000s was more an artefact of data collection than reality as electronic transfers became more popular and a crackdown on money laundering post 9/11 led to more remittances being sent through formal channels (McKenzie, 2014; Clemens & McKenzie, 2018).

At a more disaggregate level, the dynamic nature of remittance flows across different remittance corridors makes it difficult to pinpoint the extent to which different factors have influenced remittances to the different PICs. While the frequency and volume of remittance transfers dropped among seasonal workers, it is noteworthy that they account for only a small fraction of total flows. Interviews with community leaders and representatives from the diaspora suggest that COVID-19 impacted the incomes of the diaspora and demand for remittances from home communities differently for different groups. Unfortunately, there were no quantitative data on remittances from the Pacific diaspora.

58. In Australia, the unemployment rate dropped from 6.4 percent in April 2020 to 5.1 percent in May 2021. In the US, it was down to 5.8 percent in May 2021 from a staggering 14.8 percent in April 2020. In New Zealand, unemployment has remained relatively stable between 4.2 percent in Q1 2020 and 4.7 percent in Q1 2021. Source: Australia Bureau of Statistics, New Zealand Statistics, and US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Regardless, the observed resilience of the aggregate remittance flows should not completely dispel concerns regarding the potential adverse impacts of disrupted remittances on households of seasonal and temporary migrant workers, most of whom have low incomes. The data collected in this study suggest that decreases in both the amount and frequency of remittances among seasonal workers, as well as the loss of prospective remittances by cancelled workers, were associated with high levels of financial stress, lower levels of consumption, and decreases in investment in human capital.

Looking forward, the long-term prospects for remittances to the region will depend in large part on the evolution of migration patterns and on the employment prospects of migrant workers, both seasonal and longer term. These in turn will be influenced by several factors; one of them is the risk of recurring COVID-19 outbreaks that could impede migration, especially in the absence of widely available vaccinations. Another factor is that host countries might not provide the same level of fiscal stimulus as they did in 2020. Finally, the shifts from cash to digital remittances and from informal to formal channels may also slow down, unless solutions are found for improving access to banking and new money transfer options for migrant workers.

7.2 Labor Mobility During and in the Aftermath of COVID-19

Labor mobility could play an important role in supporting Pacific Islands economies recover in the aftermath of COVID-19. The devastated tourism industry and the broader economic slowdown from the pandemic have further tightened the already limited supply of formal jobs in Pacific Island countries, making employment overseas an even more important source of income and livelihood. In Tonga and Vanuatu, for instance, the total number of workers employed under the SWP, RSE, and PLS schemes in 2018–19 well exceeded the number of formal jobs created annually, which were roughly 325 and 1,260 respectively (World Bank, 2017a). In Kiribati, seasonal and PLS employment in 2018–19 was equivalent to nearly a quarter of the number of formal jobs created domestically per year.

As observed during the pandemic, remittances from seasonal workers and the diaspora helped to finance essential consumption by labor sending households as they coped with the domestic economic fallouts. The benefits of remitted funds could also flow on to boost aggregate demand and local economies. Ensuring continued access to labor migration opportunities and low-cost money transfer channels will be key to helping Pacific Island households maintain their living standards and make productive investments in an era of depressed domestic economic activity.

There are reasons to be optimistic about prospects for Pacific Island migrant workers despite ongoing travel restrictions. The Australian, New Zealand, and US economies are slowly recovering from the crisis and now have moderate growth prospects. In the absence of lockdowns, employment in Australia has recovered faster than anticipated, with the number of people in employment in early 2021 surpassing the pre-COVID-19 level and demand for labor expected to more than offset the potential job losses that could result from the withdrawal of the JobKeeper benefit. The country's GDP growth is forecasted to be 4.75 percent over 2021 and 3.5 percent over 2022.[59] New Zealand also recorded a stronger than anticipated rebound, with positive growth of 0.4 percent in Q3 2020[60] and labor shortages emerging in some sectors by May 2021. In the United States, the Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates that real GDP increased at an annual rate of 6.4 percent in Q1 2021, up from 4.3 percent in Q4 2020.[61]

59. Source: Statement of Monetary Policy – May 2021, Reserve Bank of Australia. https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/smp/2021/may/pdf/statement-on-monetary-policy-2021-05.pdf
60. Source: Monetary Policy Snapshots February 2021 and May 2021, Reserve Bank of New Zealand. https://www.rbnz.govt.nz/-/media/ReserveBank/Files/Publications/Monetary%20policy%20statements/2021/Monetary-Policy-Statement-snapshots-feb-2021.pdf?revision=f6301d0f-02ab-4057-9a73-49b218e04921
61. Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis. https://www.bea.gov/news/2021/gross-domestic-product-first-quarter-2021-advance-estimate#:~:text=BEA%2021%E2%80%9418-,Gross%20Domestic%20Product%2C%20First%20Quarter%202021%20-(Advance%20Estimate),the%20Bureau%20of%20Economic%20Analysis

Economic recovery in these host countries would bode well for the employment prospects of migrant workers, including Pacific Islanders. In the medium term, vaccination of populations in host countries coupled with the fact most PICs remain 'COVID free' means that there is some prospect of renewed travel between the Pacific and major migrant hosting countries.

There is also reason to be optimistic about Pacific labor mobility programs. Demand for seasonal labor in the horticulture and viticulture industries in Australia and New Zealand has remained strong and is likely to remain robust in the foreseeable future. In fact, significant shortages of seasonal labor have been reported in both countries, with an estimated shortage of 25,000 workers in 2021 in Australia[62] and 11,000 workers over March–April 2021 (the apple season) in New Zealand.[63] A key contribution to this shortage is that backpackers and international students, a major source of seasonal labor, have largely left due to the pandemic. In Australia, in particular, the annual cohort of working holiday-makers is about 140,000–200,000 people, making up about three-quarters of the seasonal workforce. In February 2021 only around 40,000 reportedly remained.[64] Incentives put in place by the Australian and New Zealand governments to encourage domestic workers to take up seasonal work appear to have had limited success.[65] Affirming these trends, about 98 percent of employers surveyed by the World Bank expressed the intention to continue employing SWP/RSE workers in 2021, with about half of them wanting to even increase recruitment. The absence of working holiday-makers, if prolonged, could potentially set the foundation for Pacific labor mobility schemes to expand.

Risks and challenges remain, such as ongoing travel restrictions, limited quarantine places, and issues relating to flights and testing arrangements. This means that employment under the seasonal SWP and RSE schemes is unlikely to increase to pre-COVID-19 levels in the short term. Recommencement of the RSE scheme was especially slow. In June 2021, the number of RSE workers allowed to enter New Zealand between January 2021 and March 2022 was capped at 4,400 (compared to a pre-COVID-19 annual cap of 14,400). In Australia, 7,444 SWP and PLS workers arrived September 2020 and June 2021, about half of the pre-COVID-19 annual level. Number since then have risen rapidly.

The source of workers was also highly concentrated, with Vanuatu responsible for sending the majority of new workers since the pandemic. By June 2021, Kiribati and Tonga had not mobilized any RSE workers since international borders were closed in March 2020.

Australia and New Zealand have addressed seasonal labor shortages differently. In Australia, state governments have been involved in the SWP's approval and allocation process, determining the number of workers that can enter their state, and where and how the workers will serve their quarantine period - an arrangement that has since changed in some states as travel restrictions are relaxed. This decentralized approach appears to have provided more flexibility for the scheme to bring in workers and contributed to the significantly larger number of seasonal workers arriving since the recommencement of the scheme. In contrast, RSE workers entering New Zealand were quarantined in centralized facilities in Auckland, with a fixed number of places allocated to accommodate RSE workers per fortnight. From late 2021, new arrangements permitted quarantine free travel for RSE workers arriving from Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu. In addition, until recently only veteran RSE workers were permitted to participate in the re-start of the RSE, with new workers ineligible.

62. Source: https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/farmers-accuse-premier-of-ignoring-letter-after-letter-on-worker-shortage-20210119-p56vc6.html

63 https://www.nzherald.co.nz/the-country/news/worker-shortage-a-dire-situation-for-horticulture-sector/SMOX6KANYNWA2K67NTA3DFDPS4/

64. Source: https://www.theland.com.au/story/7139912/farmers-back-fruit-picker-plan/

65. For instance, an incentive by New Zealand Ministry for Social Development intended to attract unemployed New Zealanders to work in the horticulture sector had attracted just 339 people by mid-April 2021. Source: https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/124982177/scheme-that-offered-1000-to-relocate-to-pick-fruit-attracts-just-339-people?utm_source=Devpolicy&utm_campaign=830aaeb2ac-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_04_19_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_082b498f84-830aaeb2ac-312087937

Arrangements to mobilize seasonal workers in the context of COVID-19 created additional costs to employers, especially in New Zealand. In both countries, employers are required to bear part of the chartered flight costs and the full quarantine costs, including wages for workers during the isolation period and transportation to move workers to their work sites once quarantine is completed. New Zealand has also raised the minimum wage for RSE workers to about 17 percent above the national minimum wage for adults. The increased costs to employers to bring in seasonal workers could threaten high levels of demand for workers.

Smaller employers are disadvantaged in this context, not only by the increasing costs but also by worker allocation requirements. In an attempt to maximize the benefits to workers and industries amidst labor shortages, the recommencement of the RSE scheme required employers to share workers either across regions or with another employer as part of a joint venture. In other words, employers could not bring workers in and keep them employed solely for their own enterprise. The SWP has also launched a Worker Portability Pilot, effective between January 2020 and June 2022, in which employers in four regions in the states of New South Wales and Victoria can share seasonal workers. Large corporates, grower cooperatives, and large labor hire companies are better positioned to adapt as they tend to have arrangements in place with other approved employers, are experienced at sharing workers around to meet their seasonal peaks during the pandemic, and operate in multiple regions.

Pacific diaspora members may continue to feel the adverse effects of COVID-19 impacts despite a promising economic recovery. The Pacific diaspora is predominantly employed in low- and semi-skilled jobs with high physical proximity and limited capacity for remote work. These jobs were hit particularly hard by social distancing measures. Evidence from qualitative interviews suggests that by mid-2020, new employment opportunities remained limited for Pasifika community members who had experienced reduced hours or unemployment as a result of the crisis. As social assistance measures phase out – Australia's JobKeeper wage subsidy, for example, concluded in March 2021 – employment and income of diaspora members has the potential to suffer despite a broader economic recovery.

Migration programs that are conditional on employment, such as the Samoa Quota and Pacific Access category in New Zealand, will also continue to be impacted by the suspension of international travel.

Risks associated with the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic also have the potential to impact Pacific migrant workers, the diaspora, and remittance flows to the Pacific. In Australia and New Zealand, the repeated resurgences of COVID-19 highlight great uncertainty associated with the pandemic's economic tolls, as do the evolution of more virulent strains of the virus. In many other regions of the world, infection levels are yet to plateau. In the Pacific, while most countries have remained largely 'COVID free' (with the important exception of PNG and Fiji), the risk of an outbreak will increase with any resumption of travel and the appearance of new and more infectious strains of the virus. It will be important that adequate testing, quarantine arrangements and public health measures are in place to address such risks.

7.3 Potential Policy Responses

Policy interventions to protect migrant workers from the impacts of COVID-19 have been limited in both home and host countries. Most labor sending countries have provided no support to migrant workers or their households. In Tonga, targeted financial support to families of seasonal workers unable to return home was provided, however, it appears that coverage at the time of the survey was low, with fewer than 10 percent of interviewed Tongan sending households reporting having received the benefit. In other sending countries, migrant households have received some form of social assistance as part of broader social assistance programs, yet the incidences vary widely, from 86.7 percent of surveyed Timorese households receiving some government assistance to 7.5 percent of households in Vanuatu (the latter primarily taking the form of a school fee waiver). None of the sending households in Fiji, Kiribati, or Samoa reported receiving any social assistance.

In Australia and New Zealand, assistance to seasonal workers was largely confined to visa extensions and permission to change employers. Seasonal workers in New Zealand and in the Australian state of Tasmania were able to access cash benefits in cases where they were required to isolate, fell ill, or were unable to work due to lockdowns. RSE workers, together with other foreign nationals stranded in New Zealand, between July and December 2020 were given access to financial assistance to pay rent and power bills as well as in-kind support including food vouchers, medicine, and warm clothing through the Visitor Care Manaaki Manuhiri scheme. In Australia, foreign workers who do not hold permanent residency are ineligible for most government support. Pacific Island community leaders reported that limited government assistance was compounded by a lack of materials available in Pasifika languages, which led to a lack of awareness about available benefits and created difficulties in navigating the welfare system for some diaspora members. Informal assistance to seasonal workers was provided in some cases by employers (such as an accommodation fee waiver) and the diaspora (such as essential goods), but this has occurred on an ad hoc basis and is of limited scale.

Lack of awareness of available support appeared to be a prominent issue. During the crisis, the Australian government granted special permission to SWP and PLS workers, as well as migrant workers under other visa schemes, to withdraw their superannuation if facing financial difficulties. However, 40.9 percent of SWP workers and 65.6 percent of PLS workers surveyed were unaware of this program. Among those who were aware, many did not understand the details of the program nor how to access such funds.

The challenging situation that Pacific migrant workers faced during this pandemic is unlikely to be resolved in the short term. Pacific diaspora members will continue to face a weakened labor market in their host countries, limiting their income-earning options should they return home. Large numbers of seasonal workers remain stranded in host countries as both repatriation flights (often chartered) and quarantine facilities in their home countries are limited. New and increasing arrivals of returning workers will require careful management to minimize the risk of infection as the pandemic continues.

A number of issues and potential policy responses are outlined below for the benefit of policymakers in both Pacific Island countries and in Australia and New Zealand. Many of these responses draw on global experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, and are designed to support migrant workers (including the diaspora) and their families through actions undertaken in both sending and host countries. Naturally, the relevance and appropriateness of each response varies depending on the country and visa status/labor mobility program concerned.

7.3.1 Social Safety Nets

Where possible, the extension of social assistance to migrant workers and diaspora populations that have lost employment or livelihoods as a result of COVID-19 should be considered. Such assistance could take various forms, such as cash transfers, vouchers, or in-kind support. A number of migrant destination countries have extended social assistance to resident migrant populations in response to the pandemic. In Japan, for example, a cash transfer was provided to all registered populations who had resided in Japan for three months or more during the COVID-19 crisis. The state of California made a similar payment to undocumented migrants who were ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits and other disaster relief measures (Moroz et al., 2020). In Korea, the repatriation cost insurance scheme and departure guarantee insurance (which is similar to severance pay) were in place under the Employment Permit System (EPS), allowing EPS workers to withdraw funds should they terminate their employment and return home. EPS workers who had signed up to Employment Insurance (which is voluntary) were also eligible for unemployment benefits and training during periods of unemployment. Targeted support can also focus on vulnerable or more affected migrant worker groups. The survey findings presented in 3.1.3 suggest that female and first-time workers were disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Migrant sending countries can also support populations stranded overseas. This occurred to a limited extent in PICs in response to the pandemic. Tonga, for instance, provided a one-off payment to students, seasonal workers, and seafarers who were overseas. Tuvalu also provided payments to citizens stranded overseas as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the longer term, a more comprehensive strategy would see existing and permanent social safety net arrangements incorporated into labor migration policies, with a view to reducing risks faced by migrant workers and their households. Ideally, such support would target workers overseas and their sending households, as well as workers who have upcoming travel cancelled, given the fact that workers typically invest in participation in labor mobility prior to departure. The results of the survey of seasonal workers presented in 3.2.1 establishes that such costs are significant as a proportion of local income for participants in the SWP and RSE and their households.

7.3.2 Employment Retention

Migrant workers, especially low-skilled workers, tend to complement domestic workers, creating new jobs for high-skilled native workers and promoting task specialization (Dadush, 2014; World Bank, 2015). There are therefore benefits from a whole-of-labor market perspective from migrant workers being covered by employment retainment policies in their host countries, such as can occur through wage subsidies and reductions or deferrals in social insurance contributions. Paid sick leave should also be available for migrant workers affected by COVID-19 given the significant externalities associated with compliance/non-compliance with COVID-19 isolation and quarantine rules. Such support has been extended by host governments to migrant workers in a number of cases. Kuwait, for example, mandated that employers pay salaries, food, and shelter to all migrant workers while in quarantine (KNOMAD, 2020). New Zealand undertook a similar action, with RSE employers required to provide accommodation and pastoral care to RSE workers in self-isolation, and with workers also able to access wage subsidies should they be unable to work due to COVID-19. In contrast, employers were critical of the exclusion of SWP workers from the JobKeeper program in Australia.

7.3.3 Employment Promotion

Given the ongoing threat to job security and economic changes resulting from COVID-19, extension of employment promotion services to low-skilled temporary and seasonal migrant workers would help to improve their employment prospects, while also reducing the risks of absconding or take-up of illegal employment, and more broadly, facilitating the efficient reallocation of labor between employers and sectors. In Australia and New Zealand, permission to switch employers was granted to workers under the SWP, PLS, and RSE schemes. At the same time, the existence of worker shortages that coincide with periods of lack of work for seasonal workers suggests that movement of workers between employers could be more efficient. Results from the survey of employers presented in 5.2 suggests that re-deployment was largely arranged by employers themselves. Additional support to increase the efficiency of such re-deployment could include:

(i) Facilitation of job matching by authorities, as has effectively occurred in the case of PLS workers and is also undertaken under the Korean EPS scheme.

(ii) The provision of incentives to firms to arrange and participate in job-sharing schemes for migrant workers.

(iii) Provision of language training, upskilling, or reskilling opportunities to migrant workers who are unemployed or underemployed, as has been provided in Sweden and Korea, and in New Zealand where RSE workers have had the opportunity to undertake additional training during times of reduced work hours.

(iv) Promotion and facilitation of traineeships and other further study or upskilling opportunities for diaspora members (particularly youth) who may have dropped out of education or training to support their families financially.

Beyond such support, permanent changes to the design of labor mobility schemes to facilitate the movement of workers between employers could both contribute to improved productivity of workers and reduce risks of worker exploitation associated with visas which are tied to individual employers. Such changes would need to be designed and implemented with consideration in order to ensure pastoral care and other employer obligations were not adversely impacted.

7.3.4 Social and Health Services

Equitable Access to COVID-19 Testing and Treatment

COVID-19 is a global public health crisis. Free prevention, testing, and treatment should be available for the entire resident population, regardless of migration status. This agenda has been implemented in Australia and New Zealand, with both countries aiming to vaccinate the entire resident population regardless of visa or migration status. Australia has prioritized vaccination for workers in certain high-risk industries that employ PLS workers, including aged care and meat processing. The *US Families First Coronavirus Response Act* mandates that COVID-19 testing is free to anyone in the US, including the uninsured, but patients can incur significant bills for treatment. For RSE and SWP workers, whose medical insurance fees are deducted from their wages, there may be additional health risks if employment contracts end and workers cannot afford or are unaware of how to continue paying medical insurance while still residing in their host countries. The pandemic presents an opportunity to review medical insurance arrangements for workers under the RSE, SWP, and PLS to ensure adequate coverage is provided should they become unemployed during their stay in the host countries.

Accommodation and Workplace Compliance with Social Distancing Requirements

Several countries have offered housing services to facilitate compliance with social distancing requirements among migrant workers. For instance, Portugal set up numerous quarantine houses for seasonal agriculture workers who needed to isolate; Canada mandated that housing complies with social distancing requirements (KNOMAD, 2020; Moroz et al., 2020); and local governments of Korea provided free disinfection services to migrant housing estates upon request. Under the SWP and RSE schemes, where employers are responsible for providing accommodation to seasonal workers, adjustments have reportedly been made by employers under guidance from authorities to enable workers to limit contact outside of the workplace with the aim of reducing COVID-19 risks. During COVID-19 lockdowns in New Zealand, RSE workers were required to remain in their 'bubble' on their worksites and in their daily travel to and from work. Similar requirements were put in place in Australia, and both countries required employers to abide by social distancing requirements and provide a health management plan to prevent transmission of COVID-19. In areas where accommodation facilities are limited, such as certain locations in rural Australia, it can nevertheless be challenging to enforce adequate social distancing measures. The COVID-19 pandemic may provide an opportunity to examine pre-existing supply issues around crowding, suitability, and availability of accommodation used by seasonal workers.

Scale Up Outreach Activities to Keep Migrant Communities Informed

Low-skilled migrant workers may face information disadvantages due to their limited social networks, remote living and working locations, or language constraints. Diaspora members interviewed as part of this study highlighted concerns about the lack of information about COVID-19 and welfare payments available in Pasifika languages in Australia. For this reason, there is a need to increase outreach targeting migrant populations to ensure effective delivery of COVID-19 information and social support. In Australia and New Zealand, additional support for employers of RSE, SWP and PLS workers could assist them to keep their workers informed.

To date, such initiatives appear to have been limited – only about two-thirds of SWP and RSE employers that were surveyed translated and provided information to their workers in response to social distancing requirements. Pacific diaspora communities that were interviewed were already playing an important role in supporting SWP and RSE workers. Incorporating diaspora communities into official pastoral care arrangements could be an effective way of providing culturally appropriate support services while also taking some of the burden off employers. In Australia, the Salvation Army has recently become involved in the pastoral care provision and support services for SWP workers.

Free Tests and Paid Quarantine for Newly Arriving Migrant Workers

As countries look to reopen borders for labor mobility, it is important that health and safety arrangements to limit the spread of COVID-19 do not increase the costs incurred by low- and semi-skilled migrant workers, who tend to come from low-income backgrounds. The restart of the SWP and RSE schemes has seen employers bearing the major share of transportation and quarantine costs. When borders reopen to larger numbers of workers, it will be important to continue to ensure that extra costs relating to quarantine and travel are not borne by low-income workers.

State governments in Australia have played a significant role in arrangements for quarantine and work allocation for seasonal workers, consistent with the country's COVID-19 response more generally. While this is difficult to avoid, continued coordination among state and federal authorities aimed at harmonizing approaches as much as possible will help to reduce administrative burdens associated with movement of workers. The issuance of guidelines to employers can be of assistance, as occurred in New Zealand.

Given the 'COVID free' status of many PICs, there is a strong case for waiving quarantine periods for workers and/or enabling on-farm quarantine. This will be of particular benefit where crops need to be harvested immediately. However, such arrangements are to some extent dependent on the facilities and layout of places of employment. By June 2021, only the state of Queensland, Australia allowed SWP workers to isolate at accommodation at their work sites and work during their quarantine period. Similar on-farm quarantine arrangements have been successfully used in Germany. At the time of writing, a pre-departure quarantine trial was underway for nations such as Vanuatu that already have a quarantine program. From late 2021, quarantine free travel to New Zealand was permitted for RSE workers arriving from Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu.

Access to Culturally Appropriate Mental Health Services

Beyond the immediate financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pacific seasonal workers and diaspora members experienced a range of mental health challenges such as stress and anxiety arising from, but not limited to, financial pressure, isolation, family separation, social distancing, and general uncertainty about the future. Community leaders from the diaspora reported that culturally, migrant workers and members of the diaspora can be reluctant to seek help for mental health issues. It is therefore important that culturally and language appropriate mental health services are available to such groups, and that their availability and importance is communicated.

7.3.5 Repatriation Support Measures

As migrant workers worldwide have been stranded by border closures, many countries – both sending and destination countries – have supported flights (Norway, New Zealand, Bangladesh, and Vanuatu) and repatriation services (Qatar and UAE). In the case of PICs, many seasonal workers remain stranded in Australia and New Zealand. Looking forward, as labor mobility resumes at a meaningful scale, coordination between labor sending and host countries is needed to establish repatriation protocols and ensure adequate quarantine capacity for returning workers. In some PICs, limited quarantine capacity has acted as a bottleneck for both the return of current workers and sending of new workers. For example, as part of the RSE restart in 2021, New Zealand mandated that all participating countries must have adequate quarantine facilities available for repatriating workers. Some countries, such as Vanuatu, have been able to utilize existing infrastructure, such as hotels, for repatriation quarantine. However, others have not had this option. The expansion of quarantine facilities in such cases should therefore be a priority, and is potentially an area where development partners can provide support.

7.3.6 Reintegration Support

The return of migrant workers as a result of COVID-19 potentially presents an additional source of pressure on the domestic labor market in PICs. At the same time, the suspension of overseas employment for migrant workers is detrimental for the economic wellbeing of their households, given that remittances are a major source of income. Income and employment support can help returning workers and their families to cope with these changes. Examples of such support include one-time cash benefits (as in the Philippines and Bangladesh), loans (India and Nepal), and provision of employment in public construction projects (India). Improved understanding of what kinds of migrant workers are returning home could help governments design adequate and appropriate assistance. In this vein, the Philippine Department of Labor and Employment launched a tracking system to provide appropriate government assistance to returned Filipino workers who had lost employment (support includes testing, pick-ups, and transfers to quarantine hotels).

7.3.7 Worker Registry

An improved understanding of workers participating in temporary labor mobility programs is also useful while workers are employed overseas. Establishing a database of current, prospective, and past temporary migrant workers, along with their families' details and their contact information would facilitate regular communication and outreach efforts, particularly during times of crises. Policy interventions targeting seasonal and PLS workers by either the host or sending governments, such as repatriation, taking stock of workers employment status, and providing mental health and economic supports, would benefit from this database. Such a database would also support future studies of a sub-population that are of interest to Pacific labor sending countries. At the moment, a centralized registry does not exist.

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Annex 1. Quantitative Survey: Data Collection Procedure

Due to movement restrictions under COVID-19 protocols, the surveys were conducted as phone interviews. The team of 11 enumerators worked remotely from Australia's eastern states, New Zealand, and Samoa interviewing respondents from all sample groups across Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, and Timor-Leste. Interviews for all sample groups were between 30–45 minutes in length and were carried out from 26 June 2020 through to 6 September 2020. A total of 1126 interviews were conducted. In New Zealand, Samoan RSE workers were interviewed in person.

For the worker surveys, their households and cancelled workers, an introductory SMS was sent to initiate contact followed by an introductory call to each potential respondent. Enumerators followed a script (in the native language) to introduce the survey, the purpose of the call and a brief about the World Bank. Respondents were reassured responses would be kept private and confidential and a time arranged for the interview (if it could not be conducted at that time). Since enumerators all spoke the native language, they were able to build a rapport with each respondent which was beneficial since some details in the interviews were sensitive and personal. Outreach efforts to inform workers about the survey and to encourage their voluntary participation were conducted through the sending countries' labor sending units, as well as employers and governmental partners in Australia and New Zealand.

Worker interviews were held outside of work hours, so as not to disrupt business and to ensure the enumerator and respondent were in a quiet space where they could not be overheard to protect the privacy of the respondent. Interviews with Samoan RSE workers were held in person. Data was recorded by hand on paper following cultural etiquette. Employer respondents were initially contacted via email and an appointment made to suit their availability.

In all sample groups, attempts to contact a respondent from the contact list were made up to five times before declaring them a non-respondent. Enumerators kept a diary of each call attempt to keep track of the progress with each contact on their list. While phone surveys can be carried out over a variety of platforms, enumerators were mindful not to create any costs for the workers or their families, and as such phone calls were made through network providers and not internet-based apps.

Current Worker Sample: Contact lists were obtained through a variety of sources to encourage a diverse sample pool, representative of each scheme. This included lists provided by government Labor Sending Units (LSU) in Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu; country liaison officers within Australia and New Zealand; SWP and RSE employers with current workers; the enumerators own network; and team leaders working on the schemes in Australia and New Zealand.

Annex 2. Sample Size of Quantitative Surveys

TABLE 15: Sample of current seasonal workers

SWP sample	Fiji	Kiribati	Samoa	Timor-Leste	Tonga	Vanuatu	Total
Total number of workers	206	132	453	1448	2398	3407	8044
Completed interviews	33	30	17	35	60	109	284
Completed interviews as share of total population	16.0%	22.7%	3.8%	2.4%	2.5%	3.2%	3.5%
Completed interviews as share of sample	11.6%	10.6%	6.0%	12.3%	21.1%	38.4%	100.0%

RSE sample	Fiji	Kiribati	Samoa	Timor-Leste	Tonga	Vanuatu	Total
Total number of workers	460	268	2234	na	1607	3849	8418
Complete interviews	32	33	92	na	38	107	302
Completed interviews as share of total population	7.0%	12.3%	4.1%	na	2.4%	2.8%	3.6%
Completed interviews as share of sample	10.6%	10.9%	30.5%	na	12.6%	35.4%	100.0%

TABLE 15: Sample of current seasonal workers (continued)

Household sample	Fiji	Kiribati	Samoa	Timor-Leste	Tonga	Vanuatu	Total
Number of current seasonal workers interviewed	65	63	109	35	98	216	586
Number of household contacts provided by interviewed workers	49	49	45	30	77	154	404
Completed interviews	40	28	21	23	50	109	271
Completed interviews as of share of sample	14.8%	10.3%	7.7%	8.5%	18.5%	40.2%	100.0%

TABLE 16: Household summary statistics

		Frequency	Percent
Households of current workers			
Average household size	6.78		
No. of working adults	0	82	30.26
	1	100	36.9
	2	54	19.93
	3	21	7.75
	4-8	14	5.17
Dependency ratio	≤0.25	29	10.7
	0.26-0.5	42	15.5
	0.6-0.75	39	14.39
	0.76-1.0	47	17.34
	1.1-1.5	29	10.7
	1.6-2	47	17.34
	2.1-3	23	8.49
	3.1-6	15	5.54
Location	Fiji	40	14.76
	Kiribati	28	10.33
	Samoa	21	7.75
	Timor-Leste	23	8.49
	Tonga	50	18.45
	Vanuatu	109	40.22

TABLE 16: Household summary statistics (continued)

		Frequency	Percent
Households of cancelled workers			
Average household size	7.23		
No. of working adults	0	32	16.41
	1	82	42.05
	2	53	27.18
	3	19	9.74
	4-8	9	4.62
Dependency ratio	≤0.25	28	14.36
	0.26-0.5	33	16.92
	0.6-0.75	32	16.41
	0.76-1.0	37	18.97
	1.1-1.5	28	14.36
	1.6-2	20	10.26
	2.1-6	17	8.72
Location	Kiribati	35	17.95
	Tonga	63	32.31
	Vanuatu	97	49.74

TABLE 17: Sample of cancelled workers

Cancelled workers	Kiribati	Tonga	Vanuatu	Total
Total number of workers	141	131	237	509
Completed interviews	35	63	97	195
Completed interviews as share of population	24.8%	48.1%	40.9%	38.3%
Completed interviews as share of sample	19.9%	32.3%	49.7%	100.0%

TABLE 18: Cancelled workers summary statistics

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	158	81.03
	Female	37	18.97
Participation status in labor mobility schemes	First-timer	39	20
	Returnee	156	80
Work position	Team member	120	75.47
	Team leader	39	24.53
Age group	19-29	67	34.54
	30-39	80	41.24
	40-49	43	22.16
	50-59	4	2.06
Marital status	Single	36	18.46
	Married (legally or customary)	150	76.92
	Divorced, separated, or widowed	9	4.62

TABLE 19: Response rates*

Country	Current workers	Cancelled workers	Households of current workers
Kiribati	71%	20%	56%
Fiji	89%	N/A	87%
Samoa	N/A^	N/A	50%
Tonga	67%	50%	65%
Timor-Leste	71%	N/A	77%
Vanuatu	87%	49%	73%

* Defined as the number of completed interviews divided by the number of contacted workers/households.
^ Samoan respondents were interviewed both by phone and face-to-face.

TABLE 20: Sample of employers

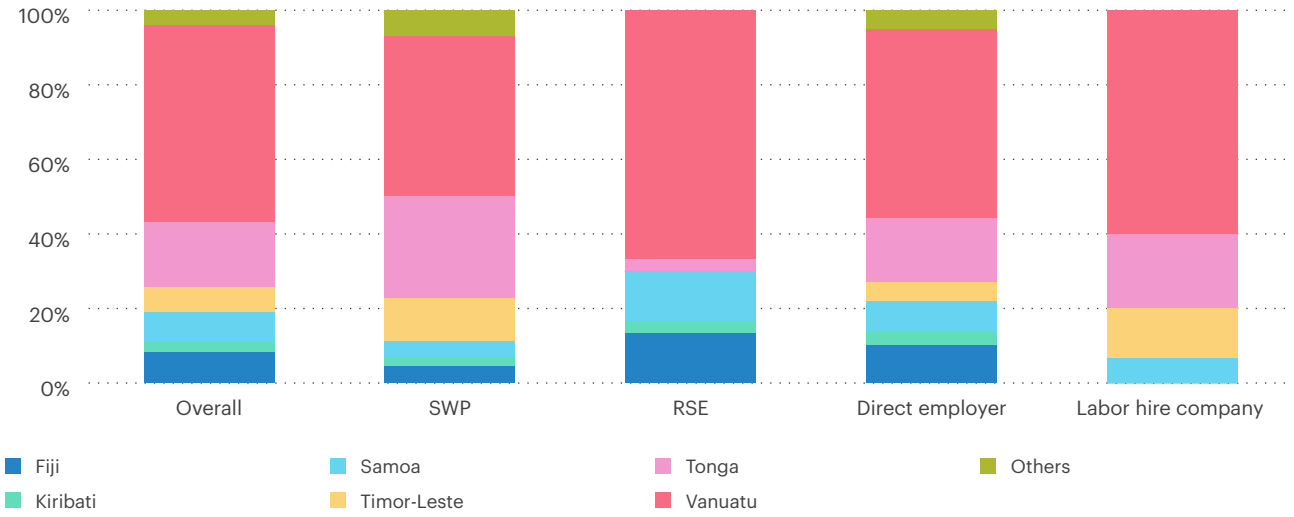
Employers	Direct employer	Labor hire company	Total
Total number of SWP employers	51	26	77
Interviewed SWP employers	34	12	44
Total number of RSE employers	unknown	unknown	unknown
Interviewed RSE employers	27	3	30

Employer Summary Statistics

The nationality profile of workers employed by the sample of employers is largely consistent with the actual profiles of workers on the SWP and RSE schemes. The largest group of workers employed by the sample of employers interviewed are from Vanuatu with 68 percent of employers saying they employed this group and specifically 86 percent of RSE employers. Workers from Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa also make up a large portion of seasonal workers with 23 percent of employers from both SWP and RSE collectively employing Fijian workers; 28 percent employing Tongan workers and 23 percent Samoan workers.

By scheme, SWP employers most commonly employed ni-Vanuatu, Tongan, and Timorese workers and RSE employers reported employing ni-Vanuatu, Samoan, and Fijian workers most commonly. I-Kiribati workers represent the smallest nationality of workers collectively nominated by the employers and are most often employed by RSE employers.

FIGURE 71: Nationality of seasonal workers employed by surveyed employers



Annex 3. Qualitative Data Analysis and Interview Profile

Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Upon completion of initial analysis, a process of reverse validation was used to verify findings. A summary of key findings was emailed to interview participants and they were invited to provide comments and feedback with the understanding that no response meant they had nothing more to add. In total, twelve responses to this email were received. Respondents indicated that findings were correct and at most added a handful of extra comments. These comments were incorporated into the final analysis.

The profile of interviewees was consistent with what one would expect of community leaders and representatives who have the 'authority' to speak on behalf of their community. Participants were generally middle-aged, well-educated and had been living in Australia or New Zealand for an extended period. The ages of participants ranged from 27 to 71 years. Roughly half of all participants were aged between their late thirties and fifties. Most community representatives were first-generation migrants, however some had moved to Australia or New Zealand as children, and had spent most of their lives there. Only six interviewees belonged to the second generation, however, roughly two-thirds of first generation migrants had spent at least twenty years living in Australia or New Zealand.

A mere two participants had lived in Australia or New Zealand for less than ten years. Almost all community representatives had high levels of education. Roughly half had completed postgraduate education to a Masters or Doctoral level. Only three had completed their education in high school, and the rest had attended vocational training or university. As a result, only two community representatives worked in unskilled positions. Almost all community representatives lived in Australia or New Zealand with their spouse and children. Eight community representatives had 'most' of their family living in the Pacific, seven had a parent, child or siblings living in PICs, and many had members of their extended family living in PICs. In sum, research participants were generally well established in Australia and New Zealand, and were thus in a position to provide useful insights about the wider community. The World Bank team established a good rapport with these community leaders and would like to continue this fruitful collaboration and engagement in future research work.

Annex 4. Topic Guide for Semi-structured Interviews

Information about the participant

Country of origin

How long lived in Australia/New Zealand?
1st or 2nd generation?

Location of family: is most of your family in Australia with you or still in PIC of origin?

Age

Gender

Occupation

Education levels

Role in community group/organization

How long held role

Information about organization & community

Can you tell me a bit about your organization?

What kind of activities, events etc do you do?

Who are your members?
[Some of this may be available via websites etc.]

- How many members/size of diaspora group?
- Geographical location of diaspora group members?
- Represent single PIC? Multiple? Which one(s)?
- Men/women/both?
- Rough age of membership (youth/families/elderly etc).
- Do people in your community generally live in nuclear households or extended families? Roughly how many people live together as a household?

Impacts of COVID-19

- What kind of jobs/industries do your members work in? Probe for industries, skilled or semi-skilled, casual/part-time/permanent/full-time.

A lot of people have lost employment due to COVID-19. Is this true of your community in Australia/NZ?

If yes

- What kinds of jobs have people lost? Has it impacted everyone equally? Probe for job types (industries, skilled or semi-skilled, casual or full-time), different groups (men, women, youth, newer migrants).
- How have people coped with this? Are they emotionally OK? Have they been able to access counselling services (government)? Does your organisation provide counselling etc? Probe: has access been impacted by English language ability, unfamiliarity with government systems, immigration status.
- How have people coped with this financially? Have they been able to access government payments? If not already answered probe for English language ability, unfamiliarity with government systems, immigration status.
- Are people taking on extra work (Uber Eats, cash in hand work etc)? Are they trading skills/goods etc informally e.g. selling cooked food?
- A lot of Pacific Islanders support family at home with remittances. Are people still able to meet/respond to remittance requests during this time? Has the amount of remittances sent home increased overall? Are there more/less requests? What do people do if they can't meet remittance requests?
- How do you or your community members send remittances home? Have you noticed a difference in remittance fees and exchange rates since March? Are these impacting remittance practices? Are you paying more to send money? Are family members at home paying more to receive money?
- Has social distancing made it more difficult to send/receive remittances? How? Why?
- Are people worried about communities at home? Is there a sense that they are more or less in need of remittances due to COVID-19?
- A lot of people are feeling uncertain about the future right now. Is this true of your community in Australia/NZ? Do people want to go back 'home' to PICs?

If no

- Why do you think people haven't been impacted by COVID-19 job losses?
- A lot of Pacific Islanders support family at home with remittances. Are people still able to meet/respond to remittance requests during this time? Has the amount of remittances sent home increased overall? Are there more/less requests? What do people do if they can't meet remittance requests?
- How do you or your community members send remittances home? Have you noticed a difference in remittance fees and exchange rates since March? Are these impacting remittance practices? Are you paying more to send money? Are family members at home paying more to receive money?
- Has social distancing made it more difficult to send/receive remittances? How? Why?
- Are people worried about communities at home? Is there a sense that they are more or less in need of remittances due to COVID-19?
- A lot of people are feeling uncertain about the future right now. Is this true of your community in Australia/NZ? Do people want to go back 'home' to PICs?

Impacts of COVID-19 on organization/ community group [if not already addressed above]

Has COVID-19 impacted your organization? If so, how?

Have there been any other impacts on your members (i.e. not jobs or emotional)?

Have your members needed more support from your organization? What kinds of support? Does this differ from what your organization does normally? Have you been able to meet your organization/community's needs?

Are there any organizations, churches or villages/ communities at 'home' (PIC) that your organization supports? Have you been able to continue this support during COVID-19? If not, why not? If yes, then have their needs changed? How?

Who currently supports/funds your organization (members/government grants/the church)? What kind of support does your organization need to deal with the pandemic?

Contact with/support of temporary labor mobility scheme participants

Does your organization/community have any contact with or provide support to Pacific islanders currently in Australia/NZ through the SWP/PLS/RSE? (probe for country, industry and numbers)

If so, do you know what kinds of impacts COVID-19 has had on this group and have they approached you for extra support during the pandemic?

If yes, what kind of support? (probe for financial/ emotional/food/clothing drives)

Have you been able to meet their requests?

What do you think the impact of COVID-19 will be on future seasonal work? Will people still want to come to Australia/NZ?

Closing questions & comments

Do you have any other thoughts about how COVID-19 has impacted your community either in Australia/NZ or at home (PIC) that we haven't asked about?

Are there any other organizations/community leaders who you think I should speak to? If so, who? Could you provide their contact details? Do you have any questions for me?

Would you like us to inform you when the research is finalized and the report is available?

Would you be happy for us to list your organization at the end of the report? We would do this in a way so that the information we have discussed today is not linked to your organization.

Thank for participating in research and encourage participant to get in contact if they have any questions or want to follow up on anything.

Annex 5. Qualitative Interviews: Participating Organizations and Communities

Many of the Pasifika community members who we spoke with represented community organizations in Australia and New Zealand. We would like to thank the following organizations and communities for participating in this research and acknowledge the time they put into responding to our questions. The insights and input offered by all of the community members we spoke with were invaluable for our understanding of how COVID-19 has impacted Pacific Islanders in Australia and New Zealand.

A Minister in the Uniting Church in Melbourne and Geelong area, Victoria

Canterbury Balwyn Road Uniting Church

Congregational Christian Church Samoa in Australia (Ipswich Congregation)

Fijian Association Victoria

Kingdom Community Life Care

Kiribati Aotearoa Diaspora Directorate Charitable Trust

LeMana (Empower) Pasifika Youth Project

Mana Pasifika & 3 Wiiise Group

Moana Research (Research Lead)

Pacific Connections

Pacific Islands Council of Queensland Inc

Pacific Islands Council of South Australia

Pacific Leadership Forum & Pacific COVID Response Team

PNG Wantoks Group Victoria

Samoan Adventist Church Perth

Solomon Islands Brisbane Community

Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council

Sydney Wantok Association Inc.

Tuvalu Community Brisbane Inc.

Victoria Samoan Advisory Council Inc.

Victorian Kiribati Association

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