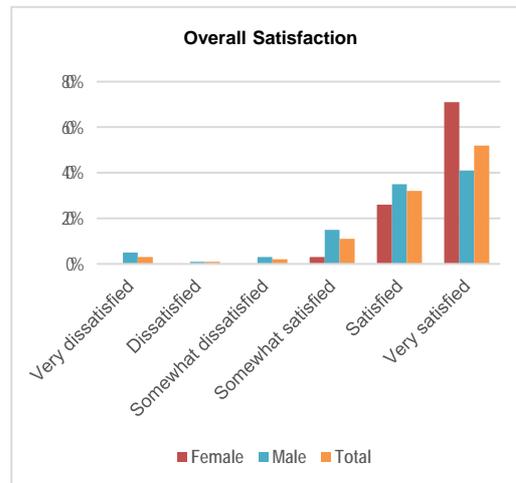


# LMAP Vanuatu Reintegration and Tracer Study Report for Management

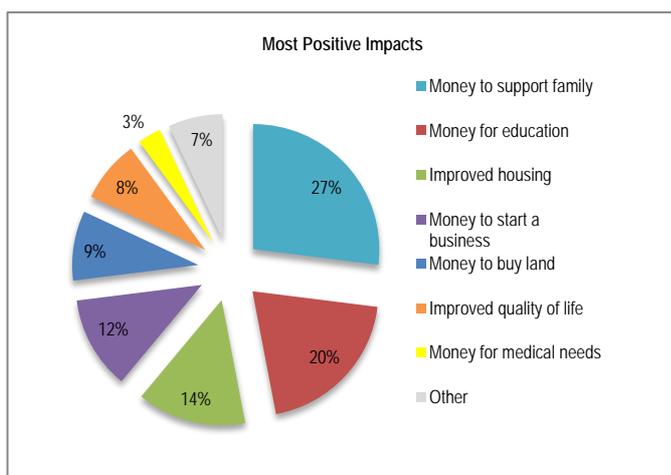
## Management Summary

100<sup>1</sup> workers from Vanuatu who participated in the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP), and returned in April and May 2017 were interviewed for this study<sup>2</sup>. Interviews were completed by a team of ni-Vanuatu researchers (two men and three women)<sup>3</sup> with support from a local lead researcher, all of whom had extensive previous research experience<sup>4</sup>. In total 66 men and 34 women were interviewed. Interviews were conducted using smart phones, and took up to one and a half hours to complete.

Overall, the experience of both women and men from Vanuatu on the SWP was overwhelmingly positive. 100% of women and 98% of men who were interviewed said they would prefer to be an overseas worker in Australia, and 100% said they would recommend the SWP to other members of their family. 89% of workers said they hoped to work in the SWP for as many years as possible. When asked about their overall level of satisfaction with their experience as a seasonal worker in Australia, all women respondents said they were satisfied (71% said they were very satisfied) and 76% of men said they were satisfied or very satisfied.



In explaining the reasons for their satisfaction, some workers said: "I achieved my goals to improve my standard of living"; "I was happy to be employed instead of being unemployed"; "My aim to pay for school fees was met during my time in Australia"; "Our group members were very cooperative, so everyone was happy, and our employer was happy with our work"; and one worker stated that they were satisfied because they had "made new friends". One worker concluded her interview by saying that the SWP experience had made her "think in new ways".



In general, the money workers saved (including remittances and money carried back from Australia) – estimated to be AUD \$8,529 per person on average – was one of the biggest positives. In the case of Vanuatu, it is clear this money is primarily going to pay for necessities such as money to support families, educational costs and improved housing. The impact this will have on families and extended families of seasonal workers is likely to be significant.

Workers also reported attitudinal changes. When asked if their views about gender had changed since working in Australia, 68% of women and 73% of men said they had, with 77% of workers saying they now saw women as more equal to men. 86% of workers also said this had impacted their behaviour in Australia, and 80% said it had (or would) impact their behaviour within their families.

The program has tailored pre-departure training (and other supportive activities) for workers with lower levels of literacy, and assisted them in 'actioning' this information. Workers would however benefit significantly from more active 'helpdesk' support in Australia, particularly around workplace safety, housing, and financial matters, including insurance.

In Vanuatu, there is support to ensure that recruitment and selection processes are based on principles of fairness, equal opportunity, and need. Extension to more remote and rural areas would bring benefits to these regions. Further, oversight over contracts and fee schedules in Vanuatu, to ensure that they are lawful, fair, transparent and consistent, would be valuable. Future work and research could be focused on support for returning workers (especially after multiple trips) to more effectively leverage their money for longer term benefit through small business development and training. Also looking at innovative ways to mitigate the impact of departing workers on local employers would be a potential area of future research.

<sup>1</sup> Prior to the study commencing, the Vanuatu Labour Department and Employment Services Unit estimated that 88 seasonal workers would have returned (for the season under review) by the time the study commenced.

<sup>2</sup> Despite significant issues securing interviews initially, once the workers were interviewed, most (97% of women and 95% of men) said they would be very happy to be contacted again for future research.

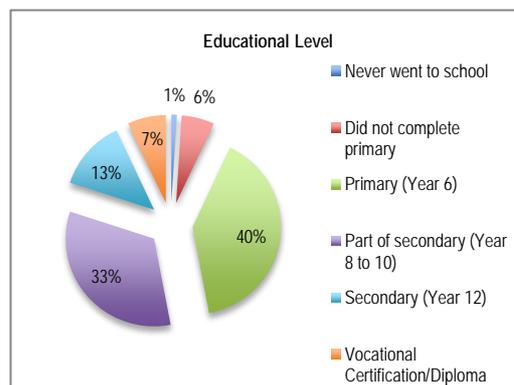
<sup>3</sup> For whom the opportunity to do this piece of research also resulted in substantial benefits in terms of the payment of school fees, the establishment of small business initiatives, and support for the construction and improvement of homes.

<sup>4</sup> With the exception of one male researcher who was retained as a trainee at the request of LMAP.

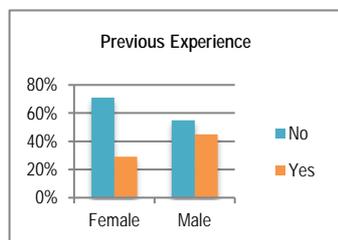
## Key Findings<sup>5</sup>

### 1. General Overview

The average age for women who were interviewed was 35 (ranging from 22 to 57) and for men it was 33 (ranging from 22 to 55). 74% of the workers who were interviewed were married or in a de facto or custom marriage. Others identified as single or never married (21%), widowed (1%) or separated (4%). More women identified as single, never married or separated (32% of women compared to 21% of men). Most workers said they were Protestant (93%), with 5% Catholic. 47% of all workers had completed some or all their primary education (40% until Year 6, and one woman saying she had never attended school). 46% of workers had completed some or all their secondary education.



Forty percent (40%) of workers identified Shefa province (where Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila, is located) as their 'home province'<sup>6</sup>, 21% identified Malampa province, 18% Tafea province, 12% Penama province, 7% Sanma province, and 2% Torba province. A notable finding is the relatively small number of workers from Sanma Province. This could reflect recruitment practices (see Conclusions and Recommendations below), but could also be due to the way in which workers were selected to participate in the study. When asked where they normally lived – in a rural or an urban centre – 63% of all workers said they normally lived in Port Vila, 33% in a rural area or village, and 4% in a provincial town<sup>7</sup>.

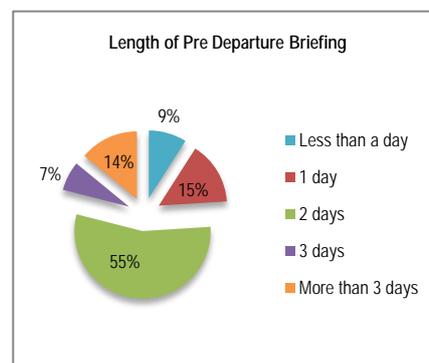


Sixty percent (60%) of workers (71% of women, 55% of men) said this was the first time they had worked overseas. Of the 40% who had previous experience, 57% said they had participated in the SWP before, 34% in the RSE, and 9% identified another migration labour program. Of the workers who had previously participated in the SWP, the average number of trips was 2.24, with the highest number of trips for any worker noted as six times. Fifty-Three percent (53%) of women and 29% of men who were interviewed said a member of their immediate household had participated in the SWP or RSE in the past. Most workers (89%) said they would like to work in the SWP for as many years as possible.

### 2. Pre-departure Processes

Workers said they had heard about the SWP through family (37%), friends (27%), through an agent (23%), through the media (4%), or through the Vanuatu Employment Services Unit (ESU) (3%). Interestingly, 9% of female workers said they had heard about SWP through an agent, compared to 30% of men. Twenty-Five percent (25%) of workers (15% of women and 30% of men) said they had moved to Port Vila from other locations to improve their chances of participating in the SWP.

Ninety-Nine percent (99%) of workers went through a pre-departure briefing before going to Australia, with most of this training (80%) offered by the ESU, and the remainder by agents or others. In rating their level of understanding and knowledge about various aspects of working and living in Australia before they left, workers rated how to maintain a happy and healthy attitude while in Australia, how to stay physically fit while in Australia, and the rate of pay they would be getting, higher than other aspects. Workers rated their lowest level of understanding around Australian laws, deductions from their pay, and the rights and responsibilities of their employer.



In general, female workers rated their level of understanding and knowledge about various aspects of working and living in Australia consistently lower than male workers. Women were more likely to select '1 – not at all' in several areas, including in particular knowledge about gender attitudes in Australia, Australian laws, Australian culture, and where they were going to work. Women also had a much lower level of understanding about their own, and their employer's, rights and responsibilities, with a number of women (and no men) saying they did not know what rights were (see Conclusions and Recommendations below). PDB material should be reviewed to strengthen in certain areas such as information and delivery.

In rating their preparedness overall, 44% of workers said they felt very well prepared or quite well prepared before leaving, and 21% said they did not<sup>8</sup>. When asked what could have been done to improve their preparation before they left for Australia, 27% of responses related to being better prepared physically. Others included a better understanding of the work environment, better knowledge of SWP rules and conditions, and a better orientation to living in Australia. Twenty-Six percent (26%) of women and 16% of men responded to this question by saying there was nothing to improve.

<sup>5</sup> All of the key research findings are available in tables and graphs in Annex 1.

<sup>6</sup> In Vanuatu home province represents 'ethnicity' or island affiliation more often than it represents actual geographic location.

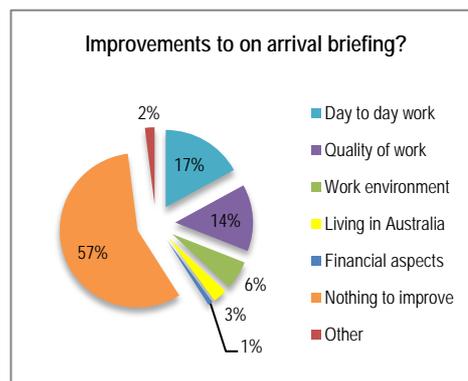
<sup>7</sup> This may also have been influenced somewhat by the fact that workers were accessed primarily in Port Vila, with others having already returned to their islands.

<sup>8</sup> This relates to a general sense of preparedness, and not to any specific pre-departure activities provided by any organisation.

Seventy-Nine percent (79%) of workers said they had received an on arrival briefing with their employer in Australia, and both women (92%) and men (80%) said this had prepared them quite well or very well. A small number said they would have liked more explanation of day-to-day work, and a better understanding of the quality of work needed, although 57% said there was nothing to improve. Pre-departure expenses for workers included; police clearances, passports, medical clearances, and for some workers transportation to Port Vila. Most workers (74%) paid for these expenses from their own savings.

### 3. Experience working in Australia

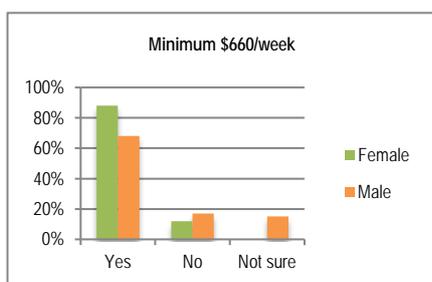
The majority of women (83%) and men (82%) rated the quality and comfort of their accommodation as quite good or very good. Seventy-Seven percent (77%) of women and 63% of men rated the value for money of their accommodation as quite good or very good as well. Several men, however, rated their accommodation as not very good in terms of value for money (20%), and in terms of quality and comfort (6%)<sup>9</sup>. Overall workers reported that the rules imposed in their accommodation were appropriate. On average workers shared their bedroom with four people, their bathroom with eight people, and their kitchen with 26 people. Given the overall level of satisfaction with accommodation, these ratios seem generally satisfactory.



Workers reported being provided with various amenities at or near their living quarters, including transportation, banking assistance, health care, places for religious observance, and recreational opportunities. Twenty-Eight percent (28%) of workers had access to the internet at or near their living quarters. Seventy-Eight percent (78%) of workers said they had received cash advances (with an average estimated value of AUD \$185) or in-kind contributions (with an average estimated value of AUD \$37) from their employer. In-kind contributions included food, toiletries, clothes, bedding and towels.

Ninety-Three percent (93%) of workers had been provided with a suitable toilet, hand washing facilities, and fresh water at their worksite, 76% were given protective work equipment, and 41% language translation where needed. Eighty-One percent (81%) of workers rated the care for their wellbeing provided by their employer highly, and 78% of workers described their employer as quite helpful and considerate. When asked if anything could be done to improve the care that was provided for their wellbeing, 83% of women said there was nothing to improve. Forty-Four percent (44%) of men said there was nothing to improve, however the remainder indicated improvements in work safety, transportation, access to help with medical care, and better access to internet.

All workers that participated worked in the agricultural sector. Women were primarily involved in picking fruit and vegetables (82%), with the remainder involved in packing, pruning, flower picking, acting in a supervisory capacity or engaged in other farm work. Men were also primarily involved in picking fruit and vegetables (73%), with the remainder involved in other farm work, packing, pruning and some working in a supervisory capacity. Eighty-Eight percent (88%) said their supervisor briefed them well or very well before they started work, and 96% of workers said they were given ongoing advice and help, mostly through on the job learning.



Workers worked on average 6.47 days per week and 8.43 hours per day. Eighty-Eight percent (88%) of women and 68% of men estimated that they had earned an average minimum of AUD \$660 per week. Some workers (9% of women and 20% of men) said there had been changes to the deductions outlined in their Letter of Offer, with most (67%) saying deductions had increased, and several (13%) saying they had not understood the changes that were made. Just over half of the workers said their employer had not explained the changes (56%), or asked them to sign the changes (63%). Ninety-Two percent (92%) of workers said they were given a pay slip every week, and 90% said they had understood the information on their pay slip.

73% of women said they had worked on piece rates for all or most of their work (compared to only 32% of men). For workers on piece rates, 84% of women, and 96% of men said they had filled as many bins or units per day as expected. Those who did not, said they had picked too slowly, or there was insufficient crop. 84% of workers who had worked on piece rates had their rate of pay calculated individually. Workers estimated<sup>10</sup> their total weekly deductions at AUD \$289.92 and their total weekly expenditures at AUD \$153.06. The average estimated income was AUD \$19,730, with workers estimating savings of AUD \$8,628 (including remittances, money left in Australian banks and money carried back). Workers reported spending on average AUD \$773 on goods.

Estimated Overall Income & Savings	
Total estimated income:	\$19,730
Total estimated savings:	\$8,529
Estimated savings consist of:	
Remittances:	\$1,205
Money left in Aus bank:	\$99
Value of goods purchased:	\$773
Cash carried back:	\$7,054

Workers from Vanuatu generally seemed to be healthy while in Australia, with 86% never visiting a doctor or hospital, and taking (on average) less than a day of sick leave. For workers who had accessed health services, 50% said it had not been covered by

<sup>9</sup> A number of men said they were living in cramped and hot containers for the first part of their time in Australia, with eight people and no air conditioning.

<sup>10</sup> The researchers generally found that a number of workers had a hard time estimating amounts, particularly when it required working in Australia dollars.

insurance<sup>11</sup>. When asked which organisations or groups had provided the most useful support and social opportunities in Australia, churches were the most popular (38%), followed by other workers in their group (11%), and the Approved Employer (8%).

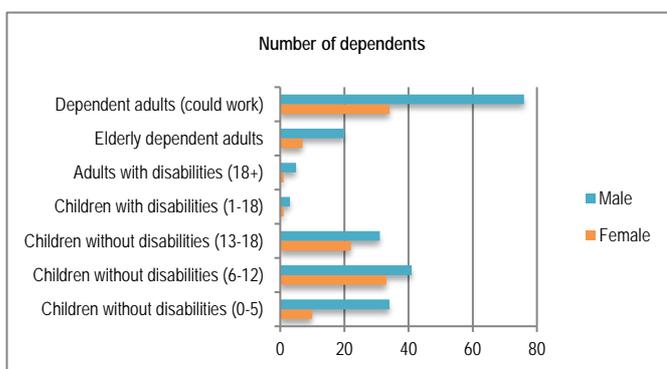
#### 4. Reintegration Process

Only 16% of workers had gone through a reintegration briefing when they returned from their most recent work assignment<sup>12</sup>. Sixty-Four percent (64%) of one agents' workers had gone through a briefing, compared to 14%, 5% and none for the other three active agents. Workers who had gone through a reintegration briefing said it had allowed them to provide feedback on their experience, had covered basic financial management, superannuation and banking, and advice on getting a job, starting a business or pursuing further training. Seventy-Five percent (75%) of the workers who had gone through a reintegration briefing said it was very helpful.

Most workers (94% of women and 95% of men) said they had not had any difficulty adjusting back to life in Vanuatu. When asked about their overall level of satisfaction with their most recent experience as a seasonal worker in Australia, all of the women and 91% of the men said they were satisfied. Workers were mainly satisfied because of the money earned (38%) and because the work was 'good' (26%). Several workers also said they had 'learned new things', and 7% of workers said they were satisfied because people were friendly. Most workers (89%) understood how to claim their superannuation, with 43% of women and 35% of men reporting they had claimed their superannuation in Australia already. No workers interviewed had received their superannuation yet. All of the women and 94% of the men said that their employer had told them they would like to engage them again in the future.

#### 5. Development Impacts

80% of workers had dependents that were primarily dependent upon them, and of these dependents, four children and six adults were identified as having disabilities. While they were away, spouses (for 39% of women and 74% of men), or their parents or spouse's parents (27% of women and 13% of men) mainly looked after dependents. 50% of women and 32% of men reported that their household had received additional support while they were away (for example for gardening and care of dependents). Sixty-One percent (61%) communicated with their family once a week or more (27% on a daily basis), with mobile phones as the primary means of communication, followed by social media.



Ninety-Four percent (94%) of all workers said there had been positive impacts on their household as a result of their participation in the SWP, with the ability to pay school fees and educational costs identified as the most positive impact, followed by money to support their families. Workers identified some improvements in their ability to speak English because of their experience in Australia. Eighteen percent (18%) of women and 11% of men said they were not working before they went on the SWP, however, 42% of workers said they had been in paid employment before going to Australia, most of them working full time (for on average six years and with a weekly average net income of VUV 12,657). Forty-Three percent (43%) of workers said they had resigned from their job before going on the SWP, mainly with financial justifications. Seventeen percent (17%) had given their employer less than a week's notice, and 26% said they had left their work with no notice.

Relatively few workers said they had regularly smoked (12% of women and 23% of men) or drank alcohol (3% of women and 26% of men) before they went on the SWP, with most workers saying their consumption had decreased or stayed the same in Australia. Thirty-Two percent (32%) of women and 26% of men regularly drank soft drinks before they left, with most saying that their consumption had decreased or stayed the same, and only a very small number saying it had increased. Ninety percent (90%) of workers said they had felt mostly happy or very happy while in Australia, with women identifying the highest levels of happiness (62% said they were very happy). Eighty-Seven percent (87%) of workers said they thought of Australia more positively now, identifying better services and friendly people for this. No workers reported developing a more negative view of Australia because of their experience with SWP.

About half of the workers said the amount of money they had brought home had matched their expectations, and 21% of women and 8% of men said they had earned more than expected. For those who had earned less than expected (29% of women and 39% of men), they said it was because they had worked fewer hours or there were more deductions. Eighty-Seven percent (87%) of workers sent money home while in Australia, with 23% sending money on a monthly basis, mainly through a money transfer operator. Most workers had sent money (and the most money) to their spouse. Remittances were primarily used for everyday expenses (43%) and school fees or other educational costs (32%). More than three quarters of workers had bought things in Australia to bring back to Vanuatu. These were mainly clothing (34%), small electrical goods (14%), mobile phones (13%) and computers (12%).

Nearly all workers (97% of women and 95% of men) had not done any additional training through the 'add on skills program' while they were in Australia, mainly because they said their employer did not offer it. Workers indicated that they had developed skills through their time in Australia, with fruit picking and packing skills being the most common. Workers also said they had learned to work in

<sup>11</sup> There seemed to be a poor understanding about health insurance among several workers (see Conclusions and Recommendations below).

<sup>12</sup> This may partly be because many of the workers were interviewed within a week or two of returning to Vanuatu.

groups, learned the value of punctuality, developed leadership skills and other farming and life skills while in Australia. Five percent (5%) of male workers said that they had learned how to cook while in Australia as well.

Half the workers said living and working in Australia had changed their views of their role in their family, and nearly half said it had changed their views of their role in their community. Most workers (and 97% of women) thought seasonal work was equally suitable for men and women<sup>13</sup>. Twenty-Four percent (24%) of women said they did not know why there was relatively low participation of women in the SWP, but 47% of men, and 15% of women thought it was because Australian employers requested men more often. When asked about discrimination against women in their Australian workplaces, 94% of women and 70% of men said they had not noticed any, although 30% of men said they had noticed women facing discrimination, mainly from other ni-Vanuatu workers. Ninety-One percent (91%) of female workers and 68% of male workers said that women and men did not have different roles in the workplaces.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

As outlined in the introduction and throughout this report, the experiences of both women and men from Vanuatu on the SWP were overwhelmingly positive. This program allows workers, who are often underemployed or unemployed to earn a substantial amount of money in a relatively short space of time. As this study shows, most of these earnings are going towards paying for household necessities and supporting educational costs. Generally, workers from Vanuatu work hard, and expressed high levels of satisfaction with their experience, describing the SWP as having a positive impact on their views of Australia, gender and their own roles within their families and communities. Key recommendations include:

- **Recruitment and selection processes** – Most of the SWP workers who were interviewed came from Port Vila, with only 25% saying they had moved to increase their chances of participating. It might be worthwhile to consider ways of increasing recruitment of workers from more remote and rural areas in Vanuatu. It would also be worthwhile to look more closely at selection processes here in Vanuatu, to ensure that participation is based on principles of fairness, equal opportunity and need, more than religious, political, familial or island affiliation.
- **Strengthening support for and understanding of rights** - Just under half of Vanuatu's workers had a primary education or less. While this represents a good demographic for seasonal work, pre-departure training could be geared more towards workers with low literacy. Beyond understanding rights and basic safety standards, workers should be supported with ways to report violations, and have access to advocacy support when needed.
- **Ensuring equal understanding among women** - While workers were generally very positive about pre-departure training, when data in this area was disaggregated by gender, it was clear that women identified lower levels of preparedness than men. For example, one third of women said they did not know what rights were or rated their level of preparedness in relation to their rights and their employers' rights and responsibilities as 'not at all'. It may be worthwhile to work with women separately from men in the pre-departure briefing, spending additional time with them particularly in these areas.
- **Strengthening contractual oversight, consistency and fairness** – Relatively low levels of literacy among Vanuatu workers may impact their ability to understand, and actively negotiate, agreements and contracts. Several workers have signed multi-year contracts and while this may be a useful and valid approach, workers are unlikely to actively raise issues, particularly if it could influence a multi-year arrangement. Oversight of contracts and fee schedules (for example, by agents), to ensure that they are lawful, fair, transparent and consistent would be valuable.
- **Helpdesk support in Australia** - While workers were generally quite happy with their living conditions in Australia, a small number of men identified issues around housing.<sup>14</sup> Another key area of challenge arose around health insurance and medical costs. Workers expressed confusion and frustration that they had insurance cards, but had not been able to 'use' them at Australian health facilities, and had to pay out of pocket. Several workers who did not use health services in Australia also felt it was unfair to pay for insurance, and would benefit from a better understanding of insurance in general. Several workers also expressed some confusion about their Letters of Agreement, pay rates, deductions and changes to their pay. Workers from Vanuatu may benefit from confidential help desk support, particularly for issues like housing, insurance and payments and deductions while in Australia.
- **Areas for future work and research** – Several Vanuatu workers seem to be leaving paid employment to participate in the SWP, often with very little notice. It would be helpful to carry out further research on employers' experiences of this, and to consider innovative ways of mitigating the impact on local employers, while supporting the rights and interests of workers to participate. Another area for future work would be to support returning workers (particularly those who have participated multiple times) to more effectively use their money to create longer term benefits through small business develop and training in partnership with local organizations (e.g. TVET, Vanwods, the Chamber of Commerce, the National Bank of Vanuatu).

*"People are afraid to exercise their rights. It's not enough to tell people their rights, but they also need to know how to exercise their rights in a way that is safe and confidential"*  
- Researcher

<sup>13</sup> 3% of men even said the work was more suitable for women, because they are 'harder workers'.

<sup>14</sup> Several men said they had been housed for part of their time in Australia in a container that had been divided into two rooms, with four workers sleeping in each half. These containers were described as very hot and uncomfortable, with no air conditioning. This was contrary to what was outlined in their contracts.