

Increased access for women and youth workers

- 7.1 As discussed in Chapter 2, thirty per cent of Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) participants are female and less than fourteen participants were between 18 and 20 years of age.
- 7.2 The majority of submitters for this inquiry focused on the number of women participating in the SWP. Very few commented on how to increase access for youth. The lack of evidence could be partly due to the requirement for SWP participants to be 21 years of age or older.
- 7.3 This chapter therefore focuses primarily on the challenges and benefits in recruiting more women for the SWP.
- 7.4 Papua New Guinea's Department of Labour and Industrial Relations stated a merit based approach, where qualified women would be provided the opportunity, would enhance female participation.¹
- 7.5 The Office of the Chief Trade Advisor (OCTA) (formed by Pacific Island countries to provide independent advice on PACER-Plus negotiations²) suggested that removing sectoral limits would enhance the recruitment of women and youth workers:

1 Papua New Guinea's Department of Labour and Industrial Relations, *Submission 29*, p. 4.

2 The OCTA's submission stated (p. 2): 'The Office of the Chief Trade Advisor (OCTA) was established on 29 March 2009 after Forum Leaders agreed to launch negotiations for a reciprocal trade arrangement with Australia and New Zealand – PACER Plus [Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations]. PACER Plus is oriented towards the economic growth and sustainable development of Forum Island Countries (FICs).' The OCTA has fourteen members: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Removing sectoral limits or at least expanding possible sectors covered under the SWP, would undoubtedly contribute towards increased recruitment of women and youth, who may currently feel that the sectors on offer are less suited to their skills. Focusing efforts on sectors where Pacific women and youth have already shown to be relatively more engaged in the Australian labour market would be a welcome development – an example being healthcare, social care which was found to be key for Solomon Islands women resident in Australia.³

7.6 The International Labour Organization (ILO) Office for Pacific Island Countries also called for expanding the SWP to other sectors in order to provide increasing access to under-represented groups.⁴

7.7 The ILO also highlighted the impact of male participation on their partners or wives left in-country:

It is important to consider the needs of women not only in terms of access to migration opportunities but also the impact that men's participation has on the partners and wives left behind. For example, the ILO Study in Vanuatu found that women left behind by a male family member participating in seasonal work gained additional responsibilities as receivers and managers of remittances and increased opportunity to establish small business ventures but also lacked training and support to be able to manage this, along with the increased burden of child rearing and other household management burdens while their male partners are abroad.⁵

7.8 Additionally, the ILO called for the provision of 'financial literacy and psycho-social support for women whose husbands migrate.'⁶

7.9 The Development Policy Centre (DPC) concurred with the suggestion to expand the SWP to other sectors:

I do feel that if you really want to make an impact on gender then opening it up and having similar schemes in other kinds of sectors is probably going to give you much bigger results. We have just seen this is male dominated, whereas if you go to aged care, for example, I think definitely you will find female workers coming out.⁷

3 Office of the Chief Trade Advisor, *Submission 5*, pp. 7-8.

4 International Labour Organization, Office for Pacific Island Countries, *Submission 31*, p. 4.

5 International Labour Organization, Office for Pacific Island Countries, *Submission 31*, p. 6.

6 International Labour Organization, Office for Pacific Island Countries, *Submission 31*, p. 7.

7 Professor Howes, Development Policy Centre, *Transcript*, 9 September 2015, p. 7.

- 7.10 While they did not agree with establishing a quota system for female participation, the DPC encouraged greater dialogue with the Governments of participating countries to send more women.⁸
- 7.11 The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste's Secretary of State for Professional Training and Employment Policy advised that they were satisfied with the increase in the number of seasonal workers from Timor-Leste and in particular women, adding:
- Currently Timor-Leste has approximately 30% female workers in Australia and this percentage can be increased according to the demand for female workers.⁹
- 7.12 Connect Group Pty Ltd believed that there would be advantages to providing increased access for women as they were more productive in processing lines and with certain crops like baby vegetables, herbs and smaller varieties of salads.
- 7.13 Connect Group Pty Ltd noted that there would be additional challenges in increasing the intake of women, including:
- more intensive Pastoral Care to ensure women are well settled and have the desired level of care to support their needs;
 - an increase in operational costs for Pastoral Care;
 - approved employers being mindful of cultural sensitivities that would impact on performance;
 - providing separate accommodation.¹⁰
- 7.14 With regard to youth workers, Connect Group Pty Ltd also noted the requirement for SWP participants to be 21 years of age or older, adding that other challenges for youth workers include:
- Maturity level, experience, emotional intelligence and personal commitment levels of people under that age may not be the best fit for the Program or grower requirements.
- There is also the issue that people under the age of 21 may not be culturally allowed to embark on such a huge adventure to a foreign country and may be overwhelmed by the impact of such all encompassing change in such a short period of time.¹¹

8 Professor Howes, Development Policy Centre, *Transcript*, 9 September 2015, p. 7.

9 Secretary of State for Professional Training and Employment Policy, Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, *Submission 6*, p. 2.

10 Connect Group Pty Ltd, *Submission 18*, p. 5.

11 Connect Group Pty Ltd, *Submission 18*, p. 6

- 7.15 While acknowledging that there was no single cause as to why participants are predominantly male, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) attributed it to a 'range of factors including the culture and traditions of home countries, the nature of the work and the gendered way in which employers from the host countries recruit in those industries.'¹²
- 7.16 The ACTU called for and an increased focus on educational and promotional efforts for women combined with:
- ... measures to address the negative impacts that participating women can experience, such as sexual harassment and bullying on the job, and marital conflict when men who stay behind in the home country struggle to take on household and child rearing duties.¹³
- 7.17 The ACTU suggested that there would be benefits to developing targets for female participation.¹⁴
- 7.18 The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) pointed out that research had not been undertaken on the barriers to female participation within Australia, but suggested that research on New Zealand's equivalent Recognised Seasonal Employer Programme may provide insight on why it is low.
- Research in 2013 by Rochelle Bailey identified that women often do not volunteer for the scheme because they are required to stay on the island and 'take care of things' as 'is their role.' Cultural reasons have been identified that require women to remain in the villages to look after the children, the garden and the livestock.¹⁵
- 7.19 The NFF suggested that the participation rate of women in the SWP could be improved through greater communication between workers and families.¹⁶
- 7.20 TAFE Queensland noted the challenges of increasing female participation and also called for greater communication:
- It is a challenge to increase participation of rural women and migrant female workers, but can be enabled by ensuring information on opportunities to train, have skills recognised and encouraging the confidence to participate in the workforce. Teaching female seasonal workers in their source country has the added benefit of extended information exchange with their own
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12 Australian Council of Trade Unions, *Submission 19*, p. 15.

13 Australian Council of Trade Unions, *Submission 19*, p. 15.

14 Australian Council of Trade Unions, *Submission 19*, p. 15.

15 National Farmers' Federation, *Submission 21*, p. 11.

16 National Farmers' Federation, *Submission 21*, p. 11.

community, impacting positively agricultural production in their own countries.¹⁷

- 7.21 The State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program (SSGMP) noted that ‘across the Pacific women are less likely to participate in the paid labour force.’¹⁸
- 7.22 The SSGMP also commented that women’s involvement in labour mobility was partly driven by cultural factors and attributed poor participation rates to:
- concerns about the safety of women in being in a team of largely men and working away from protections of home;
 - sending communities bias against women such as community leaders or managers of government labour sending units;
 - employer demand for workers with particular attributes where strength and size is an obvious advantage.¹⁹
- 7.23 The SSGMP remarked that there may be types of horticultural work that may be more suited towards women.²⁰
- 7.24 The SSGMP asserted that ‘gender composition of labour mobility is highly critical to development impacts’²¹, adding:
- The more women participate in seasonal labour mobility schemes such as SWP, the more they are able to invest remittances well, and the more development spin-offs in labour sending countries are likely to occur.²²
- 7.25 The SSGMP suggested improving working relationships and engagement with Labour Export Units of Pacific States and employers of seasonal workers would be valuable:
- Increased participation of women in labour mobility urgently requires capacity building and increased engagement around this issue by key stakeholders. From a labour sending country perspective, the recruitment of women and greater liaison with employers regarding the type of work required could help address disparate participation of women and men. Overwhelmingly recruitment practices have targeted men in rural sectors. ‘Policy changes in countries of origin and destination are instrumental’ in

17 TAFE Queensland, *Submission 27*, p. 12.

18 State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, *Submission 38*, p. 24.

19 State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, *Submission 38*, pp. 24-25.

20 State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, *Submission 38*, p. 25.

21 State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, *Submission 38*, p. 24.

22 State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, *Submission 38*, p. 24.

uptakes of women migrants. Improving working relationships between Labour Export Units of Pacific States and employers of seasonal workers, to identify greater employment opportunities for Pacific women should be given priority. It could also be achieved through the development of recruitment strategies that seek to work with cultural sensitivities and yet to be identified barriers to women's participation in labour mobility.²³

- 7.26 The SSGMP recommended establishing a pilot program specifically for women under the SWP.²⁴
- 7.27 On youth participation, the SSGMP noted the minimum age restriction but hoped that 'seasonal labour schemes would help target some of the problematic 'Pacific Youth Bulge' dynamics within the region.'²⁵
- 7.28 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) agreed with the view that several social and cultural factors may contribute to low participation rates including 'possible gender bias by both employers and sending countries',²⁶ adding:
- Attitudes in sending countries appear to contribute to participation outcomes: a 2011 analysis of the development impact of the Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme (PSWPS, the precursor to the SWP) found the majority of seasonal workers from Tonga felt that seasonal work in Australia suited men more than women; at the same time, the analysis found that all I-Kiribati workers felt that seasonal work was equally suited for men and women.²⁷
- 7.29 DFAT stated that it was increasing support to benefit women through:
- the delivery of a Labour Mobility Assistance Programme to increase the work readiness of participants, especially women;
 - pilot activities to increase the benefits of the SWP for women;²⁸
 - working with other agencies and with employers in Australia to ensure that they understand the interest and needs of women who are seeking to participate in the SWP.²⁹
- 7.30 DFAT also agreed with the view that expanding the SWP to other sectors would support the increased involvement of women:

23 State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, *Submission 38*, p. 25.

24 State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, *Submission 38*, p. 29.

25 State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, *Submission 38*, p. 25.

26 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Submission 37*, p. 9.

27 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Submission 37*, p. 9.

28 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Submission 37*, pp. 8-9.

29 Ms Cawte, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Transcript*, 13 November 2015, p. 8.

... we would see any expansion of the program into other sectors as supporting the increased involvement of women, in addition to the advocacy that we would undertake in the sending countries.³⁰

7.31 DFAT advised that it had also commissioned a World Bank study:

... on the development impact of the SWP, which will include an in-depth look at the impact on women, both as SWP workers and as household members remaining at home.³¹

7.32 The Department hoped that the findings of the study would enable DFAT to 'strengthen the benefits to women, both as participants and as members of sending communities.'³²

7.33 On providing increased access for youth workers, in particular for Timor-Leste, DFAT remarked that the SWP provided a 'good opportunity for the youth of Timor.'³³

7.34 DFAT advised that increasing employment for youth workers was 'a potential area for future attention.'³⁴

Committee comment

7.35 While the Committee acknowledges that there are some social and cultural factors that may be contributing to low participation rates, it is obvious that women are underrepresented and underutilised in the Seasonal Worker Programme.

7.36 Expanding the Seasonal Worker Programme to other sectors, especially those more conducive for women, establishing the Labour Mobility Assistance Programme, and working with other agencies in-country and with employers in Australia to increase recruitment are all steps in the right direction.

7.37 While the Committee is supportive of the actions currently being taken to increase access for women, it believes that more can always be done.

7.38 The Asia-Pacific region loses up to \$47 billion per annum as a result of women's limited access to employment opportunities.³⁵ Gender equality

30 Ms Cawte, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Transcript*, 13 November 2015, p. 8.

31 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Submission 37*, p. 9.

32 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Submission 37*, p. 9.

33 Ms Smith, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Transcript*, 13 November 2015, p. 12.

34 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Submission 37*, p. 9.

35 Speech by Ms Natasha Stott Despoja AM, Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls, address at the International Women's Day Parliamentary Breakfast, Canberra, 4 March 2014.

and empowering women has been shown to contribute to economic growth, development, stability and poverty reduction.

- 7.39 However, changing social and cultural factors that are inhibiting the employment of women are not easily fixed. Significant change can only be accomplished by all stakeholders working together.
- 7.40 The Committee calls on the Governments of Seasonal Worker Programme participating countries, labour export units, and the sending communities; Federal, State/Territory, and local governments and their Departments; all employers across all industries; peak bodies; unions; and non-government organisations to work collaboratively to encourage, attract, engage, recruit, employ and retain more women in the workforce both locally and globally.
- 7.41 The Committee therefore recommends that the Australian Government implement the following measures to increase gender equality and provide women greater employment opportunities:
- The Department of Employment review the memorandums of understanding with Seasonal Worker Programme participating countries;
 - The Australian Government assist interested countries in the establishment and development of programmes focused on gender equality;
 - That Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus negotiations include discussions on gender equality.

Recommendation 5

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