

DFAT’s Management Response to the Empowering Migrants through Pacific Remittances (EMPR) Mid-term Review

An independent Mid-term Review of the Empowering Migrants through Pacific Remittances was conducted in June 2023 as part of DFAT’s investment monitoring and evaluation systems. The review provided a considered analysis of progress towards each of the program’s four outcomes, and its continuing relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, inclusion and sustainability of the services provided to-date.

The review found that remittances remain an important source of income for many people across the Pacific who use money received to help cover basic needs such as health and education, and to cushion the effects of shocks such as natural disasters and economic downturns. The revamped Send Money Pacific (SMP) comparison website, and new mobile phone app, is easier to use than earlier iterations. In-language content has been highly appreciated by Pacific communities. While the app shows promise in growth of users and high rates of return users, there is still relatively limited evidence of use of the comparison website by target Pasifika remitters in either Australia or New Zealand.

The review found that the program has few connections with the Australia labour mobility program and despite developing an effective network of community coaches from different Pasifika communities, had made limited use of people-to-people links. The review found that the rollout of educational modules so far focused on the use of the website and app, which meant it was not possible to assess the program’s effectiveness in improving outcomes relating to users understanding of the costs of remittances and confidence and skill in using remittance services. The review recommended a greater focus on workers and adopting a more people-to-people based approach for the remaining years of the program.

DFAT welcomes this timely review and, with our co-funding partner MFAT, has agreed with all six recommendations. Of the three operational recommendations, one has already been actioned and one is already in train. The other recommendations will now be advanced. More detailed management responses to each recommendation are included in the table below.

Strategic

Recommendation	Response	Explanation and Action Plan	Timeframe
<p>1. Focus on a smaller, discrete target group</p> <p>EMPR should focus its efforts on the seasonal worker populations in Australia and New Zealand in order to effectively use scarce resources.</p>	Agree	<p>In the first two years, EMPR has sought to engage with both Pacific and Timor-Leste diaspora communities and workers within Australia and New Zealand. The mid-term review (MTR), however, found limited evidence of individuals outside of Australian major cities using the Send Money Pacific (SMP) website or app.</p> <p>DFAT and MFAT agrees with the MTR recommendation to increase efforts to ensure seasonal/labour mobility workers benefit from the program. The contribution of remittances to family wellbeing and economic development is a key benefit of the Pacific labour mobility programs.</p>	Ongoing

Recommendation	Response	Explanation and Action Plan	Timeframe
		<p>Significant benefits and cost savings are possible when remitters understand the total costs and are aware of different sending options. Workers are more likely to be sending money home more frequently and in smaller values than Pacific diaspora.</p> <p>DFAT and MFAT will support EMPR to strengthen engagement with the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme and New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme (RSES) workers and participating countries. Cost effective strategies for ongoing engagement by EMPR with the diaspora community in Australia will continue.</p>	
<p>2. Increase face-to-face engagement</p> <p>EMPR should reallocate its budget to allow community coaches to work much more closely with DFAT and MFAT seasonal labour program staff, accompanying them on field visits to attend pre-arranged meetings with workers to personally introduce the SMP app to workers, leveraging the trusted relationships that exist between them and workers.</p>	Agree	<p>EMPR recognised the importance of personal connections and relationships of trust to supplement community engagement through social media and radio. The program has found it difficult to collect information on the reach and value of different engagement strategies, including through community coaches.</p> <p>Noting the lower levels of digital literacy of seasonal workers and the high value of remittances to worker families and communities, DFAT and MFAT agrees to pursue more effective ways of engaging with this target audience. This may involve more direct face-to-face engagement with workers. The approach and engagement will be developed in more detail with the EMPR PALM and RSES teams.</p> <p>With multiple small target audiences, it will be necessary to continue to pursue multiple engagement strategies. The program will increase attention on measuring the impacts on use of the SMP tools of the different strategies adopted.</p>	Ongoing
<p>3. Prioritise the app over the website</p> <p>While both the SMP website and app should be maintained, the app should be prioritised with an increase in budget allocated, if necessary, as it is showing more promising</p>	Agree	<p>The SMP website was first launched in 2009. Under EMPR, it was made more accessible and easier to use, including in seven Pacific languages, English and Timorese.</p> <p>In mid-2022, the SMP app was launched. While app user numbers are still relatively small, they are increasing steadily. Those with the app are using it</p>	Ongoing

Recommendation	Response	Explanation and Action Plan	Timeframe
signs in terms of achieving the program objectives than the website.		<p>more frequently and there is evidence that they are comparing a broader range of service providers.</p> <p>DFAT and MFAT agrees that the availability and accessibility of smartphones for workers and diaspora community members mean that resources should be prioritised to continue improving the app user experience, data collection and analysis on usage, and strategies to maximise the use of the app.</p> <p>DFAT and MFAT notes relatively few additional resources are required to maintain the website on an ongoing basis.</p>	

Operational

Recommendation	Response	Explanation and Action Plan	Timeframe
<p>4. Ensure ease of use of website and app in all locations</p> <p>The SMP website (and app if necessary) should be updated to ensure ease of use in New Zealand by ensuring it defaults to New Zealand settings for New Zealand-based users and wherever possible that third-party landing pages also default to New Zealand web pages.</p>	Agree	<p>The MTR identified some functionality issues with the SMP website that reflected development and testing of the tool performed in Australia. While these issues do not affect Australian-based users, it is acknowledged that it could be a barrier of use and engagement for New Zealand-based users.</p> <p>Resolving these IT issues has been prioritised by the implementing partner and is scheduled to be completed in the coming months.</p>	Immediate
<p>5. Work together to develop a fit-for-purpose reporting template</p> <p>DFAT and MFAT, and CulturalPulse should agree on a reporting template that ensures that reporting is focused on program outcomes,</p>	Agree	DFAT and MFAT values robust reporting. It is an essential tool for promoting continuous improvement in our development programs, capturing lessons, and ensuring we adapt our approaches to achieve effective outcomes.	Ongoing

Recommendation	Response	Explanation and Action Plan	Timeframe
including GEDSI outcomes, and includes in-depth trend analysis to identify issues and opportunities as soon as possible.		<p>The need to focus reporting and analysis on key performance measures, including GEDSI actions have been recognised and are already being actioned with the support of an M&E advisor.</p> <p>Refinements to the monitoring, evaluation and learning framework (MELF) indicators following the MTR will be reflected in new monthly updates, six-monthly progress and annual reporting templates.</p>	
<p>6. Develop a stand-alone SMP training module</p> <p>CulturalPulse should work with DFAT and MFAT’s seasonal worker program training providers to develop a stand-alone ‘How to Send Money Home’ training module that brings together information on the SMP app and website and the real cost of remittances. The module should be translated into relevant languages for online purposes and also developed into a half-day (maximum) in-person course that can be delivered during field trips to visit labour mobility workers.</p>	Agree	<p>The approach to improving remittance literacy adopted through EMPR has been staggered over six modules. Individual modules have been developed, tested, translated, produced and released. At the time of the MTR, the modules were limited to how to use SMP (website) and how to download and use the app. The third module on understanding the total cost was released at the end of May 2023 and the fourth module on changing remittance service provider was in production.</p> <p>DFAT and MFAT agrees that it will be useful to develop a standalone training module that draws on these four modules that can be provided to other programs and partners as well as delivered in a single engagement such as field visits to labour mobility workers.</p>	Ongoing