SAMOA CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY INC.

POWERING BUSINESS GROWTH

Labour Migration Survey Report 2025-2026

Findings, Trends and Private Sector Insights

Prepared by
Samoa Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Australian Aid

MDF Market Development Facility

Foreword

Talofa lava and greetings,

On behalf of the Samoa Chamber of Commerce and Industry, I am pleased to present the SCCI-MDF Labour Migration Survey Report 2025–2026.

Labour mobility has become an important part of Samoa's development story. Through overseas employment opportunities, many Samoan workers and families have gained access to income, skills exposure, savings and remittances that contribute significantly to household wellbeing and the wider economy. These benefits must be recognised and supported.

At the same time, this report highlights an important reality for Samoa's private sector. Businesses are facing increasing pressure from workforce departures, skills shortages, rising staff retention costs, replacement challenges and productivity impacts. For many employers, the issue is not simply the loss of staff numbers, but the loss of experienced, skilled and reliable workers who are central to daily operations, service delivery and business continuity.

The survey findings confirm that these impacts are not uniform across the economy. Some sectors are more exposed than others, and some businesses are better able to adapt. However, the overall message is clear: Samoa must strengthen the link between labour mobility, domestic workforce development and private sector resilience.

This report does not seek to reduce the value of labour mobility. Rather, it calls for a more balanced and coordinated approach. Samoa can continue to benefit from overseas employment opportunities while also investing more deliberately in local skills, employer support, workforce data systems, return-worker reintegration and the productive use of remittances.

For the private sector, this means strengthening workforce planning, improving internal HR records, investing in training, supporting staff retention and exploring productivity-enhancing tools. For Government, training providers, donors and regional partners, it means working with employers to design practical, sector-specific support that responds to real business needs. For returning workers and migrant households, it means creating better pathways to channel overseas experience, savings and skills into local employment, entrepreneurship and business investment.

SCCI acknowledges with sincere appreciation the support of the Government of Australia through its collaboration with the Market Development Facility, whose partnership was instrumental in supporting this initiative. We also recognise the contribution and guidance of key national stakeholders and partners, including the Samoa Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour, and the Labour and Employment Export Programme.

Most importantly, SCCI thanks the businesses that contributed their time, experiences and insights to this survey. Your responses have provided an important evidence base to support stronger policy dialogue, practical business support and coordinated action.

As the voice of Samoa’s private sector, SCCI remains committed to working with Government, members, development partners and communities to ensure that labour mobility continues to benefit Samoa while strengthening the resilience, productivity and sustainability of our local businesses.

Fa’afetai tele lava.

Fa’asootauloa Sam Saili
President
Samoa Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Executive Summary

The Samoa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), in collaboration with the Market Development Facility (MDF), is pleased to present the Labour Migration Survey Report 2025–2026.

Conducted from July 2025 to April 2026, the survey captured a total of 408 valid business responses. It assesses the impact of labour migration and labour mobility pathways on Samoa's workforce and private sector businesses.

The findings confirm that labour migration is placing material pressure on Samoa's private sector through workforce departures, skills shortages, staff retention costs, replacement challenges and productivity impacts. These impacts are not uniform across the economy. Retail/Wholesale, Hospitality/Tourism and Manufacturing recorded the largest numbers of affected businesses, while some smaller sectors showed higher levels of within-sector exposure.

At the same time, Samoa continues to benefit significantly from labour mobility through overseas employment opportunities, remittances and worker experience. The key policy challenge is therefore not to reduce the value of labour mobility, but to better balance its benefits with stronger domestic workforce development, employer support, return-worker reintegration and productive use of remittances.

KEY FINDINGS SNAPSHOT	
408	valid business responses captured from July 2025 to April 2026
47%	reported staff departures linked to RSE/PALM/StarKist pathways
79%	of respondents with role data selected skilled workers as affected
2,375	self-reported resignations recorded across 2023 and 2024
9	priority action areas identified for coordinated response

Key Findings by Theme

1. Workforce departures are substantial but uneven across sectors.
A significant share of businesses reported staff departures linked to labour mobility pathways, including RSE/PALM/StarKist and the New Zealand Quota. Retail/Wholesale, Hospitality/Tourism and Manufacturing recorded the highest numbers of affected businesses, while some smaller sectors showed higher levels of within-sector exposure.

2. Skilled and semi-skilled workers are the most affected.
The impact is concentrated in skilled and semi-skilled roles, indicating that businesses are losing experienced workers who are important to daily operations, productivity, service delivery and business continuity.

3. Businesses are facing rising retention and productivity pressures.

Some employers reported difficulty replacing workers, increased wage and incentive costs, and declining productivity. Businesses are beginning to respond through training, flexible work arrangements, automation, outsourcing, overseas recruitment and interest in rehiring returning workers.

4. Workforce data and support visibility need to improve.
Many businesses were unable to provide detailed departure, gender or role-specific records, limiting the ability to design precise interventions. Support awareness also remains low, highlighting the need for stronger HR reporting, labour market monitoring and a clearer SCCI-led referral pathway.

5. Labour mobility can be converted into domestic resilience.
Returning workers, overseas experience, remittances and migrant savings can support local employment, entrepreneurship, MSME development and business investment if linked to structured reintegration, financial literacy, business advisory services and job-matching pathways.

Priority Action Areas

Based on the findings, the report recommends coordinated action around the following priorities:

1. Establish a private sector workforce data and HR reporting system to improve departure tracking, role-specific workforce records, wage-pressure monitoring and future survey quality.
2. Develop sector-specific workforce plans for Retail/Wholesale, Hospitality/Tourism, Manufacturing, Construction, Transport/Logistics and other labour-sensitive sectors.
3. Expand practical skills development, apprenticeships, work placements and short-course training aligned to skilled, semi-skilled, technical, hospitality, digital and management roles.
4. Improve employer retention support through guidance on wages, incentives, flexible work arrangements, staff wellbeing, accommodation or meal support where relevant, supervisor training and career pathways.
5. Strengthen return-migrant reintegration and job-matching pathways so that overseas experience, skills and savings can contribute to local employment, productivity and entrepreneurship.
6. Channel remittances and returning-worker savings into productive investment through financial literacy, business advisory services, MSME development and access to appropriate finance.
7. Support automation, digitisation and productivity-enhancing tools as complementary responses to workforce shortages, not substitutes for local skills development.
8. Improve awareness of available support through a clear SCCI-led referral pathway connecting businesses to MCIL, SQA-registered training providers, PAS, Samoa Business Hub, BLP, MDF, PACER Plus and other regional or donor-supported programmes.
9. Facilitate targeted overseas recruitment for hard-to-fill technical or professional roles where local supply is insufficient, while continuing to invest in local skills, pipelines, training and succession planning.

These findings provide a clear call to action for coordinated support between the private sector, Government, donors, training providers and regional partners. SCCI will use the evidence from this survey to inform policy dialogue, strengthen sector-specific workforce planning, improve access to practical business support, and support coordinated responses that help employers retain workers, address skills gaps and enhance resilience across Samoa's private sector.

ACTION FOCUS

The report should be used as a practical coordination tool: to guide policy dialogue, target training and donor support, strengthen employer services, and link labour mobility benefits back into Samoa's local economy.

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Background and Purpose

Labour migration and labour mobility have become increasingly important features of Samoa's labour market and broader economic development landscape. Overseas employment pathways, including the Recognised Seasonal Employment (RSE) scheme in New Zealand, the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme in Australia, the New Zealand Quota, and other employment pathways such as StarKist-related opportunities, provide important income, skills exposure and remittance benefits for Samoan workers, households and communities.

At the same time, Samoa's private sector has raised growing concerns about the domestic workforce impacts of labour migration. Businesses have reported staff departures, increased difficulty replacing experienced workers, rising wage and incentive costs, productivity pressures, and shortages in skilled and semi-skilled roles. These pressures are particularly important for Samoa's small island economy, where the available labour pool is limited and many businesses rely heavily on experienced workers who have built skills through on-the-job training.

The Samoa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), in collaboration with the Market Development Facility (MDF), conducted this Labour Migration Survey to better understand how labour migration and labour mobility pathways are affecting businesses in Samoa. The survey was designed to capture employer experiences across sectors, business sizes and years of operation, with a focus on workforce departures, role impacts, replacement difficulty, retention measures, productivity effects, training responses, technology adoption, access to support and future support needs.

The purpose of this report is to provide an evidence base for policy dialogue, private sector advocacy, workforce planning and coordinated support between Government, the private sector, donors, training providers and regional partners. The report does not seek to challenge the development benefits of labour mobility. Rather, it highlights the need to balance overseas employment opportunities with stronger domestic workforce resilience, improved skills development, better labour market information, practical business support and clearer reintegration pathways for returning workers.

The findings are intended to support practical action. For SCCI, the results provide evidence to guide employer engagement, sector-specific advocacy and business support services. For Government and development partners, the report identifies areas where policy, training, reintegration, labour market information and private sector support can be better targeted. For employers, the report highlights emerging workforce risks and practical responses, including retention strategies, training investment, flexible work arrangements, automation, succession planning and improved human resource record-keeping.

National and Regional Labour Migration Context

Samoa's labour market context

Samoa's labour market is shaped by a relatively small working-age population, high dependence on services and trade-related sectors, strong family and community obligations, and significant outward migration. These factors create both opportunities and pressures. Labour mobility provides workers with access to higher earnings and international work experience, but it can also reduce the availability of labour for local businesses, particularly where workers leaving Samoa already have skills, experience and workplace reliability.

The 2022 Samoa Labour Force and Child Labour Survey recorded a labour force of 55,960 people, employment of 53,135 people and an unemployment rate of 5.0% (SBS & MCIL, 2022). Youth unemployment remained higher at 13.4%, while youth not in employment, education or training was recorded at 30.1%. These figures suggest that Samoa faces a dual labour market challenge: some employers struggle to find suitable workers, while some young people and potential workers remain outside stable employment pathways.

The same survey also shows that Samoa's labour market is not only affected by the number of available workers, but also by the quality and suitability of skills. For employers, the key issue is often not simply whether people are available for work, but whether they have the right technical, operational, customer service, management or work-readiness skills required by businesses. This is directly reflected in the findings of the SCCI-MDF Labour Migration Survey, where businesses identified skilled and semi-skilled workers as the most affected role categories.

Labour mobility pathways and Samoa's development priorities

Samoa participates in formal labour mobility pathways through New Zealand and Australia. These include the RSE scheme and the PALM scheme, which provide temporary overseas employment opportunities for Samoan workers. Labour mobility is recognised as an important national development pathway because it can support employment creation, household income, remittances, skills exposure and community investment.

The Labour and Employment Export Programme (LEEP) plays a central role in Samoa's labour mobility system. It supports recruitment, processing and preparation of workers for overseas employment and operates within Samoa's labour mobility policy framework. Samoa's Labour Mobility Policy 2023 aims to maximise the development benefits of labour mobility while protecting worker welfare and minimising social impacts. This policy framing is important because it recognises that labour mobility should deliver benefits not only for overseas employers and individual workers, but also for Samoa's wider economy, families, communities and domestic labour market.

For the private sector, the policy challenge is to ensure that labour mobility does not unintentionally weaken local business capacity. Employers are not only losing workers; in some cases, they are losing trained, experienced and reliable staff who are difficult to replace quickly. This can affect productivity, service quality, continuity of operations and business confidence. The survey findings therefore support the need for stronger alignment between labour mobility management, domestic workforce development and private sector planning.

Regional labour mobility trends

Labour mobility has expanded significantly across the Pacific. In Australia, the PALM scheme allows eligible employers to recruit workers from Pacific countries and Timor-Leste when there are not enough local workers available. The scheme includes short-term jobs of up to nine months and longer-term roles of between one and four years, including unskilled, low-skilled and semi-skilled positions. As of April 2026, PALM Scheme data recorded 33,160 participating workers, comprising 16,240 short-term workers and 16,920 long-term workers. Samoa accounted for 3,120 workers in that reporting period (PALM Scheme, 2026).

New Zealand's RSE scheme has also grown over time. The RSE cap increased to 20,750 places for the 2024/25 season, compared with 19,500 in the previous season. Samoa remains one of the eligible Pacific source countries for the scheme. This expansion demonstrates ongoing demand for Pacific labour in destination countries, particularly in sectors such as horticulture, viticulture, agriculture and related industries.

These regional trends show that Samoa's labour migration experience is part of a wider Pacific pattern. Labour mobility has become an important development and foreign employment pathway for Pacific countries, but it also raises questions about domestic workforce planning, skills retention, gender impacts, family wellbeing, worker reintegration and the long-term productive use of remittances.

Remittances and the dual economic impact

Remittances are an important part of Samoa's economy. World Bank data shows that personal remittances received were equivalent to 24.0% of Samoa's GDP in 2024 (World Bank, 2026). The Central Bank of Samoa also publishes regular data on visitor earnings and remittances, reflecting the importance of these flows to household income, consumption and the wider economy.

Beyond household consumption, remittances and overseas work experience also create opportunities for productive investment. With the right support, returning workers and migrant households can channel savings, skills and international exposure into local employment, entrepreneurship, MSME development and business upgrading. This requires stronger links between labour mobility programmes, financial literacy, business advisory services, skills recognition and private sector job-matching.

This creates a dual economic reality. On one hand, labour mobility supports households, strengthens remittance inflows and can help workers build savings, experience and confidence. On the other hand, the departure of experienced workers can create costs for local employers through recruitment delays, productivity losses, training costs, wage pressure and reduced operational capacity. The policy challenge is therefore not whether labour mobility is good or bad, but how Samoa can maximise its benefits while reducing avoidable costs to the domestic economy.

The findings of this survey should be understood within that context. Labour migration is not only a social or household issue; it is also a private sector competitiveness issue. If businesses cannot retain or replace skilled and semi-skilled workers, the impact can flow through to customer service, production capacity, business expansion, investment decisions and the overall ease of doing business in Samoa.

Methodology and Data Notes

METHODOLOGY AT A GLANCE	
Survey period	July 2025 to April 2026
Cleaned sample	408 valid business responses
Target group	Businesses operating in Samoa across sectors and business sizes
Distribution	Chamber communication channels, direct engagement and enumerator support
Interpretation note	High “not applicable” and “no response” rates are reported where relevant

Survey purpose

The Labour Migration Survey was conducted by the Samoa Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in collaboration with the Market Development Facility, to assess the impact of labour migration and labour mobility on businesses in Samoa. The survey collected information on business characteristics, workforce departures, role impacts, replacement difficulty, retention responses, productivity effects, training, automation, government and donor support, and priority support needs.

Target respondents

The survey targeted businesses operating in Samoa across a range of sectors, business sizes and years of operation. Respondents included micro, small, medium and large enterprises. The survey aimed to capture employer perspectives from both MSMEs and larger employers, recognising that labour migration impacts may vary depending on business size, sector, workforce structure and level of exposure to staff departures.

Survey distribution and data collection period

The survey was distributed through Chamber communication channels and supported through direct engagement with businesses. Enumerators were also engaged to administer the survey directly to businesses where required, including rural Upolu and Savaii. Data collection took place from July 2025 to April 2026.

Cleaned respondent base

The raw survey export contained 411 rows. Following data cleaning, 408 valid business response records were retained for analysis. One Qualtrics import-ID row and one final question-label row were removed from the analysis dataset.

Unless otherwise stated, percentages in this report are calculated against the cleaned valid respondent base of 408 businesses. Where percentages are based on a smaller respondent group, this is noted in the relevant section.

Data cleaning approach

The data cleaning process included standardising response labels, converting common placeholders such as “NA”, “N/A” and “No Ans” to blanks where appropriate, and parsing numeric departure counts from non-standard text where possible. Raw gender text was retained while additional parsed gender categories and counts were added for analysis. Multi-select responses were expanded into a long format to allow selections to be analysed by theme and sector. Possible duplicate identifiers were flagged but not deleted unless they were clearly non-valid records.

Percentage interpretation

Several questions allowed respondents to select more than one answer. For these multi-select questions, percentages may total more than 100% because one business could identify multiple affected roles, mitigation strategies or support needs. In some sections, percentages are presented as a share of all valid respondents. In other sections, particularly where follow-up questions were answered only by affected businesses, percentages are presented as a share of respondents who provided relevant information.

“No response” and “Not applicable” are reported where relevant. These categories are important because some businesses may not have experienced labour migration-related staff departures, while others may have lacked sufficient records, time or information to provide a detailed answer.

Limitations

The findings should be interpreted with care. The survey was based on voluntary responses and may not fully represent all businesses in Samoa. Several questions recorded high levels of non-response or were treated as not applicable by respondents. Some numeric and gender entries were submitted in free-text form and required cautious parsing. Sector-specific percentages for smaller sectors should also be interpreted carefully, as high within-sector percentages may be based on a small number of respondents.

Despite these limitations, the survey provides a valuable evidence base on how labour migration is affecting Samoa’s private sector. It captures both quantitative and qualitative employer feedback and helps identify where support, policy coordination and further research are needed.

Use of findings

The findings are intended to support evidence-based advocacy, policy dialogue, donor coordination and private sector workforce planning. They should be used to guide practical responses that help businesses retain workers, address skills gaps, improve productivity, access support and build resilience in the context of ongoing labour migration pressures.

The data should be used as an evidence base for identifying broad patterns and priority areas, rather than as a complete labour market count. Future survey rounds should be supported by standardised HR templates and clearer workforce tracking tools to improve the accuracy of departure, role, gender, replacement and wage-pressure data.

DATA NOTE

Future survey rounds would benefit from simple employer HR templates that track departures, gender, roles affected, replacement timelines, wage pressure and training responses in a more consistent way.

Policy and Institutional Context

Samoa already has institutions, programmes and partners that can support a more coordinated response to labour migration impacts. The challenge is to connect these resources more clearly to the needs of employers and affected workers.

MCIL and LEEP are central to Samoa's labour mobility system and can support stronger alignment between overseas employment pathways and domestic labour market needs. This includes improving labour mobility data, strengthening worker preparation, supporting reintegration, and ensuring that the interests of workers, families, communities and local employers are considered in policy dialogue.

The Samoa Qualifications Authority and SQA-registered training providers can help ensure that skills development is nationally recognised and aligned with industry needs. Training support should prioritise the role categories most affected by labour migration, including skilled, semi-skilled, technical, hospitality, customer service, trades, supervisory and management roles.

The Public Administration Sector, PAS (APTC 2.0), Samoa Business Hub, Business Link Pacific, MDF, PACER Plus and other regional partners can also contribute through training, advisory services, business development support, digital transformation, reintegration programmes and regional skills initiatives. These pathways should be better communicated to businesses through a clear referral system.

SCCI can play a coordinating role by continuing to gather private sector evidence, convening sector *'Think Tanks'* working groups, linking members to available support, advocating for practical policy responses, and supporting regular labour market updates. This could include quarterly labour market monitoring, employer briefings, business clinics and sector-specific workforce planning sessions.

Business Implications

The survey findings have several implications for employers and private sector planning.

First, businesses need stronger internal workforce records and practical HR systems. Many respondents were unable to provide numeric departure, gender or role-specific information, which limits the ability of employers, SCCI and policy partners to design precise interventions. Standardised HR reporting templates, simple digital workforce registers and regular tracking of resignations, hard-to-fill roles, wage pressure, training costs and replacement timelines would help businesses plan more effectively and support stronger labour market monitoring.

Second, workforce retention is becoming a strategic business issue. Wage increases and incentives are already being used by some employers, but retention should not rely on pay alone. Businesses may also need to consider flexible working arrangements, staff wellbeing, supervisor training, clearer career pathways, recognition, accommodation or meal support where relevant, and stronger workplace culture.

Third, skills development needs to be more targeted. The survey shows that skilled and semi-skilled workers are most affected. This means training responses should focus on practical occupational skills, work readiness, customer service, technical skills, digital capability and supervisory capacity rather than general training alone.

Fourth, business continuity planning should include workforce risk. Labour migration-related departures can affect operations, productivity and service delivery. Businesses in labour-sensitive sectors should identify critical roles, maintain succession plans, cross-train staff and build stronger recruitment pipelines.

Fifth, technology and automation should be treated as complementary responses, not replacements for people. Technology can help improve productivity and reduce pressure on manual processes, but it should be combined with training, job redesign and improved management systems.

Finally, returning workers represent an underused opportunity. Some workers return with improved skills, discipline, savings and international work experience. With better matching, recognition of skills and reintegration support, returning migrants could contribute to local employment, entrepreneurship and business productivity.

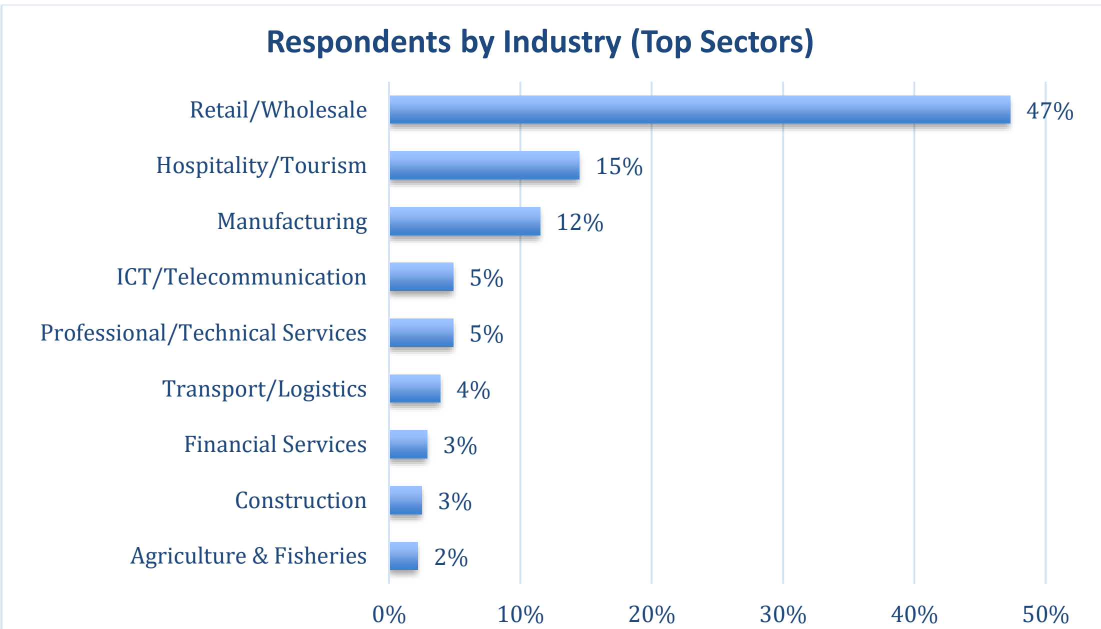
BUSINESS IMPLICATION

Returning workers can become a domestic resilience asset when their savings, skills exposure and work discipline are linked to job matching, entrepreneurship support and business investment pathways.

Section 1: Business Characteristics

1.1 Industry Breakdown

The dataset contains 408 valid business responses across a broad range of sectors. Retail/Wholesale accounted for the largest share of respondents at 47%, followed by Hospitality/Tourism at 15% and Manufacturing at 12%. This sector concentration should be considered when interpreting the overall results, as these industries carry substantial weight in the aggregate findings. Other respondents represented a mix of private sector organisations, state-owned enterprises and smaller industry groups, providing broader insight into how labour migration is affecting different parts of Samoa's business environment.

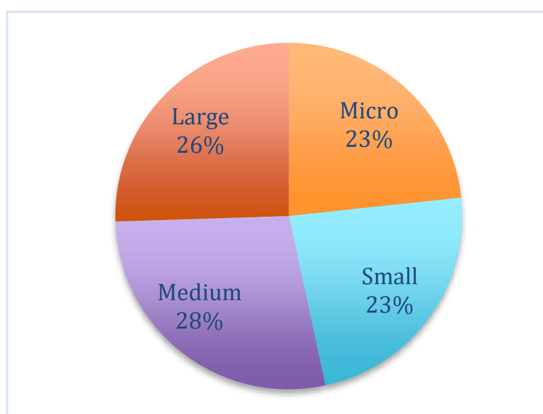


Source: SCCI/MDF Labour Migration Survey.

1.2 Employment Size

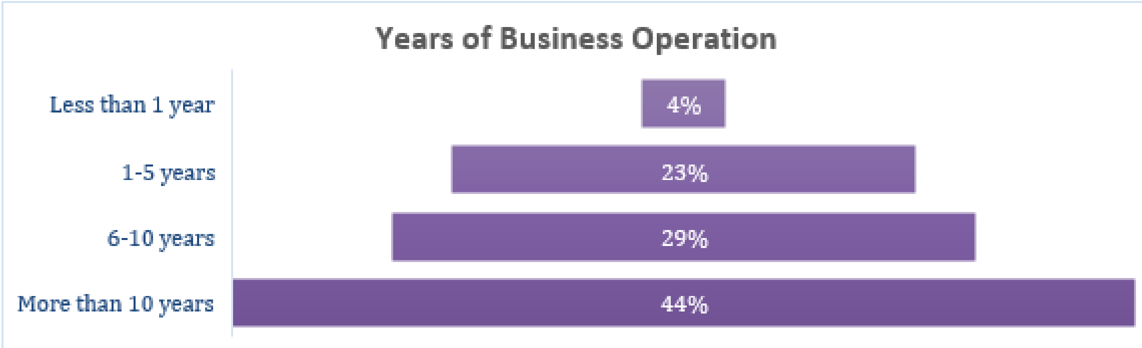
Respondents were distributed across all employment-size categories. Medium-sized businesses with 10–25 employees accounted for the largest share, with 114 responses (28%), followed by large businesses with more than 25 employees, with 104 responses (26%). Micro and small businesses each accounted for 95 valid responses, or 23% respectively.

Overall, the data captures perspectives from both MSMEs and larger employers, providing a broad view of labour migration impacts across different business sizes.



Source: SCCI/MDF Labour Migration Survey.

1.3 Years of Business Operation



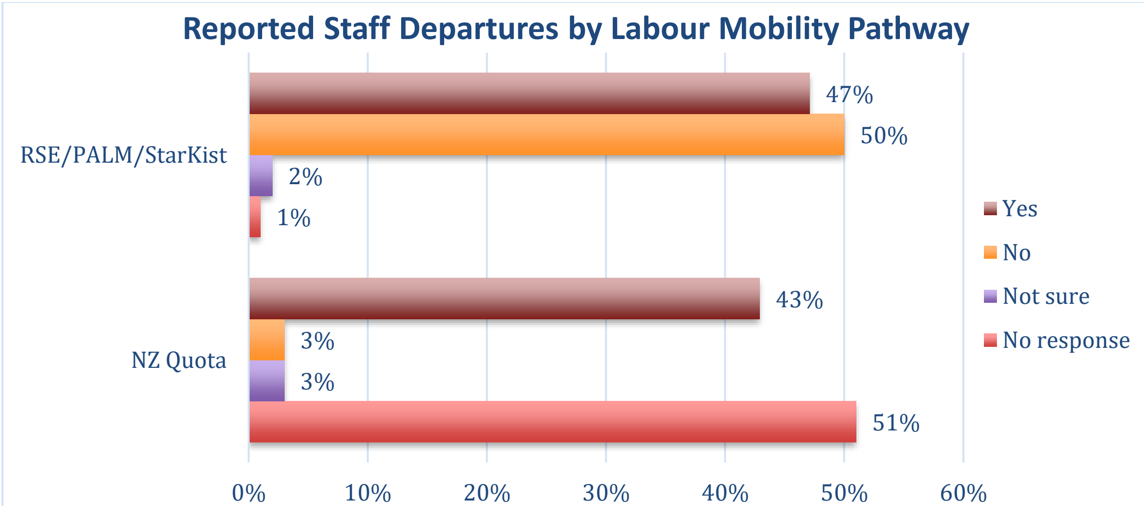
Source: SCCI/MDF Labour Migration Survey.

Long-established firms were strongly represented. Businesses operating for more than 10 years accounted for 181 responses (44%), while those operating for 6-10 years accounted for 29%. This suggests that the survey captures the experience of firms with sufficient operating history to compare workforce conditions over time.

The 23% of businesses operating for 1–5 years represents newer and developing enterprises that are still establishing their market presence. This proportion suggests continued entrepreneurial activity and the ongoing entry of new businesses into the market.

New businesses operating for less than one year represented 17 responses (4%). Most of these were in Retail/Wholesale (12 responses), with smaller representation across Construction, Hospitality/Tourism, ICT/Telecom, Manufacturing and Transport/Logistics. This indicates that the start-up group is relevant but relatively small and is not the main driver of the overall labour migration findings.

Section 2: Workforce Composition and Labour Migration Impact



Source: SCCI/MDF Labour Migration Survey.

2.1 Staff Departures: RSE/PALM/StarKist

Employers were asked whether they had experienced employee departures or resignations linked to the Recognised Seasonal Employment (RSE) scheme, the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, or StarKist-related employment pathways within the last two years. Of the total dataset, 193 businesses (47%) responded Yes, 204 businesses (50%) responded No, 8 businesses (2%) were Not sure, and 3 businesses did not provide a response.

The close balance between Yes and No responses suggests that labour migration-related departures are a significant issue for many businesses, but the level of impact varies across industries and individual employers. The low proportion of Not sure and non-responses may reflect either limited uncertainty among respondents or the absence of formal employee departure records linking resignations to these specific employment pathways.

Table 2.1.1. RSE/PALM/StarKist departures by sector

Sector	Sector n	Yes	% sector
Retail/Wholesale	193	84	44%
Hospitality/Tourism	59	35	59%
Manufacturing	47	24	51%
ICT/Telecommunication	20	9	45%
Professional/Technical Services	20	9	45%
Construction	10	9	90%

Sector	Sector n	Yes	% sector
Transport/Logistics	16	7	44%
Financial Services	12	7	58%
Agriculture & Fisheries	9	5	56%
Administrative and support services	3	3	100%
Real estate activities	2	2	100%
Waste Management	1	1	100%
Education & Training	3	1	33%
Other (NGO)	3	1	33%

The sector breakdown further confirms that impacts are not evenly distributed across the private sector. By number of responses, Retail/Wholesale, Hospitality/Tourism, and Manufacturing recorded the highest counts of businesses reporting employee departures. When assessed by within-sector exposure, Construction, Hospitality/Tourism, Financial Services, and Manufacturing showed particularly high levels of impact. However, results for sectors with smaller sample sizes should be interpreted with caution.

2.2 Staff Departures: New Zealand Quota

The question on employee departures linked to the New Zealand Quota recorded a high non-response rate, with 207 businesses (51%) not providing an answer. This should be treated as a key limitation when interpreting the results. Overall, 180 businesses (44%) reported departures linked to the New Zealand Quota, 14 businesses (3%) answered No, and 7 businesses (2%) were Not sure.

The highest numbers of Yes responses were again recorded in Retail/Wholesale, Hospitality/Tourism, and Manufacturing, reflecting the strong representation of these sectors in the overall sample. Construction recorded the highest within-sector share of Yes responses among the main sectors. However, this result is based on a smaller sector sample and should therefore be treated as indicative rather than definitive.

Despite the high non-response rate, the findings suggest that broader labour migration opportunities, including the New Zealand Quota, continue to affect workforce retention for many businesses across Samoa’s private sector.

Table 2.2.1. NZ Quota departures by sector

Sector	Sector n	Yes	% sector
Retail/Wholesale	193	82	42%
Hospitality/Tourism	59	31	53%
Manufacturing	47	19	40%

Sector	Sector n	Yes	% sector
ICT/Telecommunication	20	8	40%
Professional/Technical Services	20	8	40%
Transport/Logistics	16	7	44%
Financial Services	12	7	58%
Construction	10	7	70%
Agriculture & Fisheries	9	3	33%
Administrative & support services	3	3	100%
Education & Training	3	1	33%
Other (e.g. NGO)	3	1	33%
Real estate activities	2	2	100%
Water supply, sewage and waste management	1	1	100%

2.3 Staff Departures: 2023 and 2024

Numeric departure information was available for 182 businesses, representing 45% of valid respondents, for at least one of the two reporting years. It is important to note that 47 businesses did not report further staff departures in 2024 compared to 2023.

The high non-response rate of 55% should be treated as a limitation. This may indicate that some businesses were either unwilling or unable to confirm departure numbers due to limited employment records, incomplete tracking of staff movements, or difficulty linking resignations specifically to labour migration pathways. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of all surveyed participants.

Among businesses that provided numeric information, a total of 1,307 departures were reported in 2023 and 1,068 departures in 2024, resulting in a combined two-year total of 2,375 self-reported resignations.

KEY INSIGHT
The two-year total of 2,375 self-reported departures provides strong evidence of workforce movement among responding businesses, while the high non-response rate reinforces the need for improved HR tracking and labour market reporting.

Table 2.3.1. Reported staff departures by year

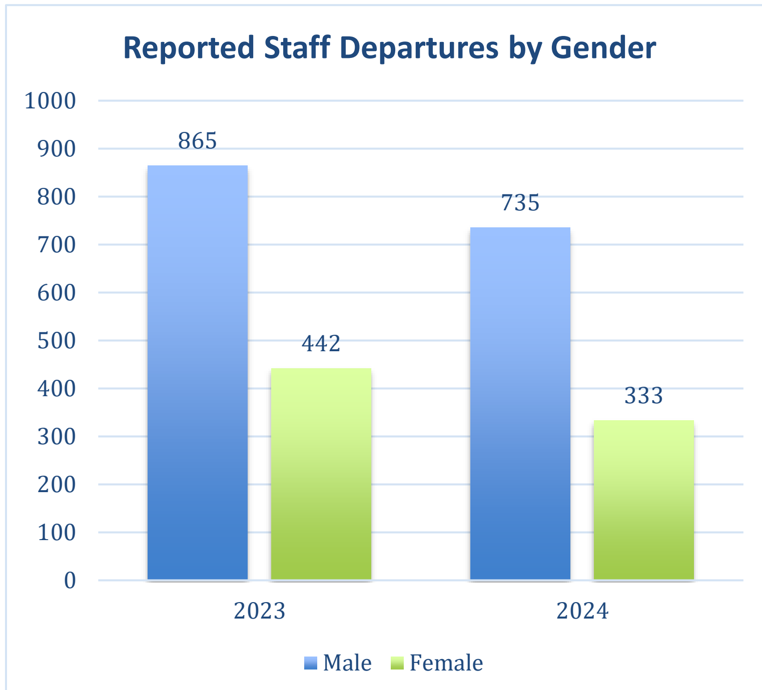
Year	Businesses responded	Self-reported departures
2023	146	1,307
2024	135	1,068
	TOTAL	**2,375**

Note: A total of 182 unique businesses provided numeric departure information for at least one of the two reporting years. The 2023 and 2024 respondent counts are not additive because some businesses provided data for both years.

2.4 Staff Departures by Gender

Among gender-specific entries combined across 2023 and 2024, males accounted for 67% of reported resignations, while females accounted for 33%. This supports the earlier finding that the immediate labour mobility impact is more strongly reflected in male departures and resignations compared to female employees.

However, these findings should be interpreted with caution due to the overall response rate. Approximately 64% of businesses did not provide gender-specific departure information, which means the results may not fully represent the gender profile of resignations across all surveyed businesses.

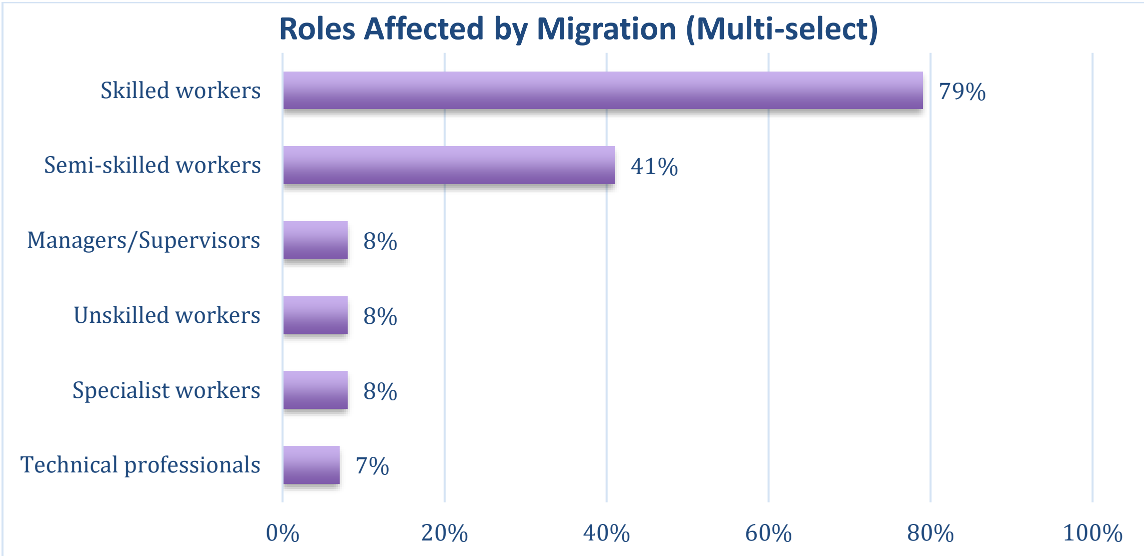


Source: SCCI/MDF Labour Migration Survey.

2.5 Roles Affected by Migration

This section examines the types of roles most affected by employee migration and overseas employment opportunities, based on 179 respondents with available employee departure data for 2023–2024. As this was a multi-select question, percentages may total more than 100%. A further 229 businesses did not provide a role category or treated the question as not applicable.

Among the selected role categories, skilled workers were the most affected, with 141 selections, representing 79% of respondents who provided role-specific information. This was followed by semi-skilled workers, with 73 selections, or 41%. Together, skilled and semi-skilled roles dominate the reported workforce impact.



Source: SCCI/MDF Labour Migration Survey.

This suggests that businesses are facing greater challenges in retaining experienced and trained employees, particularly in operational and trade-related roles. These losses may affect productivity, service delivery, operational efficiency, and the ability of businesses to maintain consistent standards. The lower reported impact on specialist workers, managers/supervisors, and technical professionals indicates that labour migration pressures are more strongly affecting frontline, operational, and skilled trade roles, rather than higher-level management or highly specialised professional positions.

2.6 Difficulty Replacing Workers

The largest group, 234 businesses, did not answer or treated the question as not applicable. Among those reporting replacement experience, 96 businesses (24%) said replacement was not difficult, while 44 (11%) said it was slightly difficult.

A smaller but important group of 34 businesses (8%) reported moderate, very difficult or extremely difficult replacement experience. These prolonged replacement cases were most visible in Hospitality/Tourism, Retail/Wholesale, Manufacturing and Professional/Technical Services, and were most often associated with skilled and semi-skilled roles.

KEY INSIGHT

Even where many firms can replace workers within one to six months, prolonged replacement cases highlight a deeper skills pipeline challenge for labour-sensitive sectors.

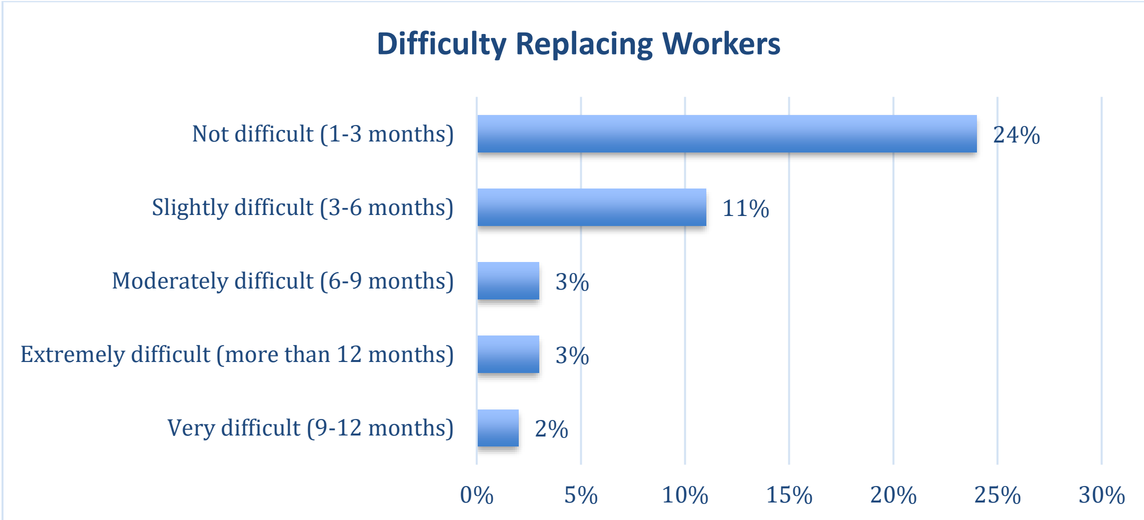


Table 2.6.1. Moderate to extreme replacement difficulty by sector

Sector	Moderate to extreme cases	Share within sector
Hospitality/Tourism	9	15%
Retail/Wholesale	8	4%
Manufacturing	4	9%
Professional/Technical Services	3	15%
Construction	2	20%
ICT/Telecommunication	2	10%
Real estate activities	2	100.0%
Administrative and support services	1	33%
Agriculture & Fisheries	1	11%
Education & Training	1	33%
Other (NGO)	1	33%

Table 2.6.2. Role categories linked to prolonged replacement difficulty (multi-select question)

Role category in moderate to extreme cases	Selections
Skilled workers	24
Semi-skilled workers	17
Specialist workers	10
Managers/Supervisors	7

Role category in moderate to extreme cases	Selections
Unskilled workers	7
Technical professionals	6

The findings suggest that while many businesses were either unaffected or able to replace workers without major difficulty, a number of businesses still faced prolonged recruitment challenges, particularly in sourcing suitable and experienced workers to fill vacancies created through labour migration.

2.7 Staff Retention Incentives

Businesses were asked whether they had increased wages, salaries, or staff incentives to retain workers or attract replacements in response to labour migration pressures. A total of 145 businesses (36%) answered Yes, while 35 businesses (9%) answered No. The remaining 228 responses (56%) were blank or not applicable, which may indicate that many businesses were either not directly affected, had not introduced retention measures, or did not provide further details.

Table 2.7.1. Staff retention measures reported by businesses

Retention measure	Count	% Share
Increase wages/salaries	105	25.7%
Both	24	5.8%
Others	9	2.2%
Offer incentives (vehicle/transport allowance)	2	0.5%

The relatively low share of businesses that answered No suggests that, among affected employers, wage increases and staff incentives are becoming an important strategy to address workforce shortages and improve staff retention. These measures include both financial and non-financial support aimed at retaining existing workers and attracting new employees.

KEY INSIGHT
Affected employers are already absorbing higher labour costs through wage adjustments, allowances and other incentives. Retention support should therefore include both financial and non-financial measures.

As a follow-up question, businesses that selected Yes were asked to identify the specific measures they had implemented. The top five responses were:

- Improved wages and flexible working hours
- Staff capacity-building and development benefits
- Accommodation and meal support
- Daily meal allowances
- Workplace automation measures

2.8 Percentage of Increased Wages/Salaries and Other Incentives

This section outlines the approximate percentage increases in wages, salaries, or staff incentives introduced by businesses in response to labour migration-related workforce shortages.

The majority of respondents, 66%, selected "Not Applicable." This indicates that many businesses either did not introduce wage or incentive increases, considered the question not applicable to their operations, or did not provide a response.

Among businesses that implemented increases, the most common adjustment was within the 5–10% range, accounting for 19% of responses. This suggests that affected businesses are making moderate financial adjustments to retain existing workers and remain competitive in attracting new employees.

Table 2.8.1. Wage/salary or incentive increases

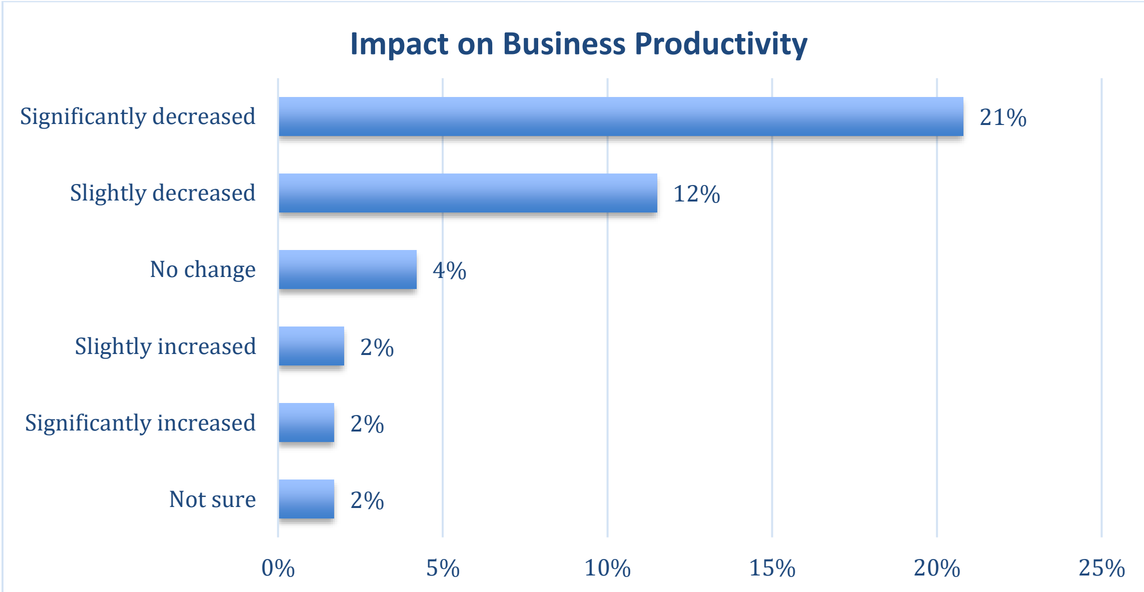
Approximate increase range	Count	% Share
Less than 5%	42	10%
5-10%	77	19%
11-20%	14	3%
Over 20%	9	2%

A further 42 businesses (10%) reported increases below 5%, while 23 businesses reported increases above 10%. This shows that affected firms are incurring additional labour costs to remain competitive in a tighter labour market. Overall, the findings suggest that while wage and incentive increases are being used as a retention strategy, most adjustments remain moderate rather than substantial.

2.9 Labour Migration and Productivity

Productivity findings show both direct impact and high non-response. 237 businesses (58%) did not answer or treated the question as not applicable. Among all valid respondents, 85 (21%) reported significantly decreased productivity and 47 (12%) reported slightly decreased productivity. Combined, 132 businesses (32%) reported declining productivity.

By sector, significant-slightly productivity decreases were most frequently reported by Retail/Wholesale, Hospitality/Tourism, Construction and Manufacturing. Non-response was also concentrated in Retail/Wholesale, Manufacturing and Hospitality/Tourism, suggesting that some firms may find it difficult to measure productivity impacts or may not yet connect workforce losses with productivity indicators.



Source: SCCI/MDF Labour Migration Survey dataset, n=408.

Table 2.9.1. Productivity impact by sector

Sector	Sector n	Moderate-High decreased	% within sector
Retail/Wholesale	193	62	32%
Hospitality/Tourism	59	25	42%
Construction	10	8	80%
Manufacturing	47	16	34%
ICT/Telecommunication	20	5	25%
Professional/Technical Services	20	5	25%
Transport/Logistics	16	3	19%
Agriculture & Fisheries	9	2	22%
Financial Services	12	2	17%
Real estate activities	2	2	100%
Other (NGO)	3	1	33%
Water supply, sewage and waste management	1	1	100%

Section 3: Skills, Training and Adaptation Responses

3.1 Workforce Skills Shortage

Businesses were asked whether they were facing shortages of specific skills. 43 businesses (11%) answered Yes, 70 (17%) answered No, 65 (16%) were Not sure and 230 (57%) did not respond or treated the question as not applicable.

Open-text responses from businesses reporting skills shortages most often referred to tourism, hospitality and culinary skills; technical, trade and machine-operation skills; professional, management, finance and administration; and customer service, sales and communication. By sector, these skills shortages were most visible in Retail/Wholesale, Hospitality/Tourism and Manufacturing. This reinforces the need to target training around practical, occupation-specific skills rather than general training alone.

Table 3.1.1. Skills shortage themes from open-text responses

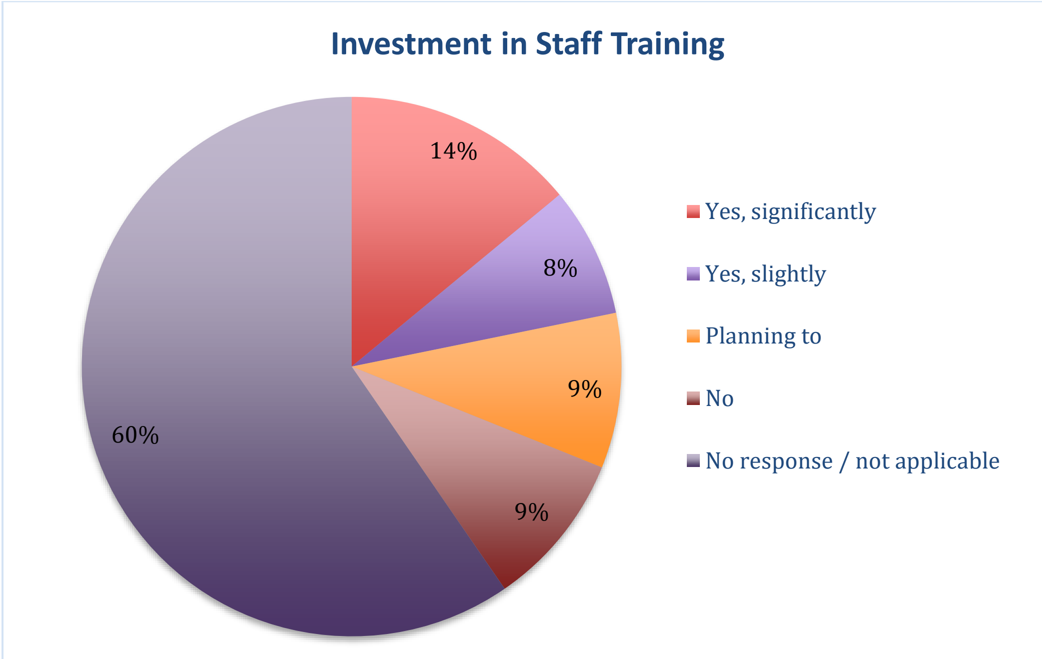
Skills theme from open-text responses	Count	Share of comments
Technical, trade and machine-operation skills	18	42%
Professional, management, finance and administration	10	23%
General labour, work readiness and other skills	7	16%
Customer service, sales and communication	7	16%
Tourism, hospitality and culinary skills	6	14%

3.2 Investment for Skills Loss

Training investment is emerging as a business response to workforce and skills losses, but implementation remains uneven across the private sector. Overall, 57 businesses, or 14%, reported that they had significantly increased investment in staff training, while 32 businesses, or 8%, indicated a slight increase. A further 38 businesses, or 9%, stated that they were planning to increase training investment.

However, the majority of respondents, 243 businesses, or 60%, either selected “Not applicable” or did not provide a response. This suggests that many businesses may not have experienced significant skills losses, may not yet view additional training as necessary, or may lack the resources and capacity to invest in structured staff development.

Sector-level results suggest that training investment is most visible by count in Retail/Wholesale and Hospitality/Tourism, reflecting the size and labour intensity of these sectors. However, higher levels within-sector shares are evident in ICT/Telecommunications, Hospitality/Tourism and several smaller sectors, indicating that skills development needs vary significantly across industries.



Source: SCCI/MDF Labour Migration Survey dataset, n=408.

Overall, the findings suggest that while many businesses have yet to adopt training-related measures, a growing number are recognising staff development as an important strategy to address workforce shortages, skills gaps and productivity pressures. These results support the need for a sector-specific approach to workforce development, with targeted training support for industries most affected by labour migration and skills loss.

Furthermore, respondents who indicated that they had increased investment in staff training were asked to explain how. A total of 89 respondents, representing 22% of the overall sample, answered "Yes" to the initial question and were asked to provide further details.

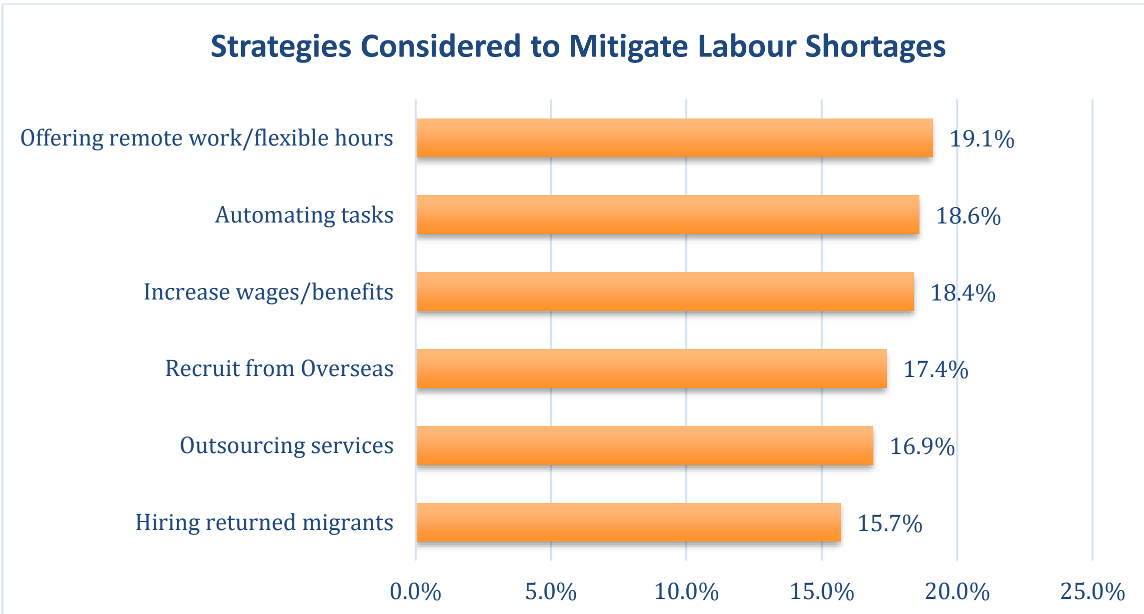
Table 3.2.1. Skills training and incentives responses

Theme from follow-up responses	Share	Explanation
Capacity building and training	24%	On-the-job and external training, basic certifications, professional development and overseas training.
No training introduced /not considered worthwhile	6%	Some businesses reported that training was not worthwhile because trained workers may still leave.
Retention and motivation measures	6%	Increased wages, bonuses, social activities and staff support measures.
No detail provided	58%	Respondents answered "Yes" to the investment question but did not specify how.

Note: Percentages are based on coded follow-up responses from businesses that indicated increased investment in training.

3.3 Strategies to Mitigate Labour Shortages

Businesses identified a mix of strategies to respond to labour shortages. Offering remote work or flexible hours, automating tasks, increasing wages and benefits, recruiting from overseas, hiring returned migrants and outsourcing services were all selected by notable numbers of respondents. Because this was a multi-select question, percentages are reported as a share of all valid respondents and can total more than 100%.



Source: SCCI/MDF Labour Migration Survey. Multi-select question.

By sector, Retail/Wholesale and Hospitality/Tourism reported strong engagement with mitigation measures to address labour shortages. Responses were broadly consistent across the different mitigation actions, indicating that these sectors are exploring a combination of workforce expansion, operational efficiency improvements, and financial incentives to respond to staffing pressures.

Notably, recruiting from overseas was most frequently selected by Retail/Wholesale and Hospitality/Tourism respondents by count. This suggests that some sectors are already considering external recruitment options where local skills supply is insufficient. However, any such approach should be balanced with continued investment in local training, workforce development, and retention strategies. *(Refer to Annex 2, Table 3.3.2 – Mitigation strategies to labour shortages by sector).*

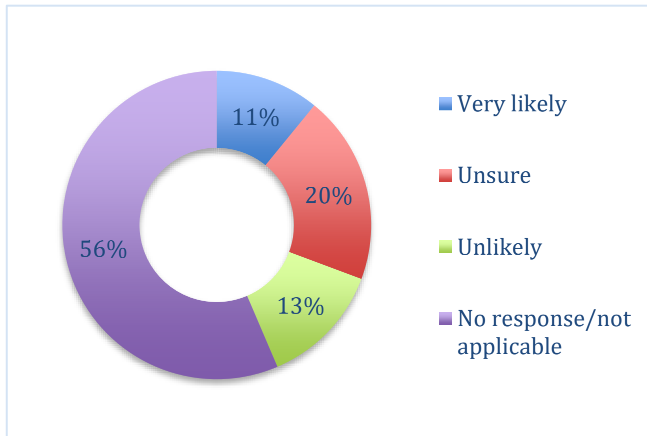
3.4 Likelihood of Re-hiring Returning RSE Workers

The survey findings show mixed views among businesses on the re-employment of returning RSE workers. A majority of respondents, 56%, did not provide a response, suggesting that many businesses may be uncertain, have not yet considered this option, or lacked sufficient information to assess the potential of rehiring returning workers.

Among those who responded, 43 businesses, or 11%, indicated that they would be very likely to re-employ a returning RSE worker. However, a larger share remained uncertain, with 81 businesses, or 20%, selecting "unsure", while 53 businesses, or 13%, stated that they were unlikely to re-employ returning workers.

Returning workers should not only be viewed as former employees re-entering the labour market, but as a potential skills and productivity resource. Some may return with stronger discipline, savings, exposure to international workplace standards and new technical or operational experience. However, without structured reintegration support, these gains may not flow back into domestic businesses.

Overall, the data suggest that while some employers are open to rehiring workers with overseas experience, there remains a significant level of uncertainty and hesitation across the private sector. This may reflect concerns around role suitability, business needs, workforce availability, and long-term retention. The high level of uncertainty and non-response highlights the need for stronger employer engagement, clearer role-matching mechanisms, and greater assurance around reintegration pathways for returning workers.



Source: SCCI/MDF Labour Migration Survey.

3.5 New Technology and Automation for Labour Shortages

Technology adoption remains limited across the private sector, although interest appears to be growing. Only 32 businesses, reported that they had already adopted new technologies or automation measures, while 83 businesses, indicated that they were planning to do so. A further 13% stated that they had not adopted any new technologies or automation measures.

Table 3.5.1. Technology and automation response

Technology/automation response	Count	Share
Yes	32	8%
Planning to	83	20%
No	53	13%
No response / not applicable	240	59%

These findings suggest that while current adoption levels remain low, technology, automation and digitisation are emerging as important medium-term responses to labour and skills challenges. This is particularly relevant for businesses facing difficulty replacing workers, rising labour costs, productivity pressures or ongoing skills shortages.

Among coded responses from businesses that reported adopting new technologies or automation processes, the main area of focus was increased investment in machinery, ICT equipment and digital payment systems, reported by 62%. This suggests that businesses are prioritising operational efficiency, productivity improvement and stronger technological capability. A further 28% reported investing in online or digital marketing platforms, reflecting the growing importance of digital presence, customer engagement and market reach. Meanwhile, 10% identified flexible working arrangements, including remote work and flexible off-site work arrangements, as part of their response to workforce pressures.

3.6 Change in Business Direction due to Workforce Challenges

Workforce challenges have affected business scale and strategic decision-making for some respondents. A total of 17% of businesses reported scaling down operations, making this the most common adjustment, while 4% reported changing their business focus or product mix. A further 5% indicated that they were planning changes.

The majority of respondents either did not answer the question or treated it as not applicable, again highlighting that direct exposure to workforce challenges varies across sectors and businesses. The highest non-response sectors included Retail/Wholesale, Hospitality/Tourism, and Manufacturing, which may suggest that some businesses in these sectors had not made major strategic changes, were uncertain about the extent of impact, or did not provide sufficient detail.

Table 3.6.1. Change in scale or strategic direction

Business direction response	Count	Share
Yes, scaled down operations	68	17%
Yes, changed focus/product mix	16	4%
Planning changes	20	5%
No change	63	15%
No response / not applicable	241	59%

Overall, the findings suggest that while labour-related pressures have affected some businesses, major changes to business scale, focus, or operating strategy remain relatively limited among surveyed respondents.

3.7 Government and Donor Support

Awareness and uptake of government or donor support remains low. Only 7 businesses (1.7%) reported receiving support, while 1 reported applying but not qualifying. At the same time, 86 businesses (21.1%) stated they were not aware of any support. This indicates a need for clearer communication, eligibility information and referral pathways for private sector support.

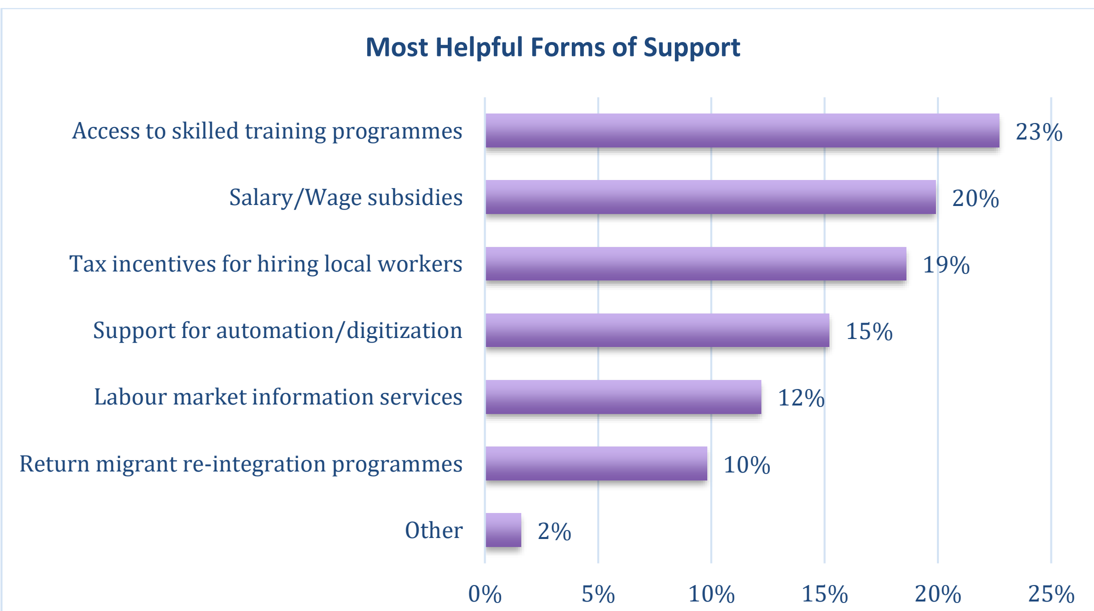
Table 3.7.1. Government and donor support

Government/donor support response	Count	Share
Yes	7	1.7%
Applied but did not qualify	1	0.2%
No	83	20.3%
Not aware of any support	86	21.1%

3.8 Forms of Support for Businesses

Respondents were asked to identify the forms of support that would be most helpful in responding to labour shortages. As this was a top-three, multi-select question, the results represent shares of total support selections rather than shares of individual respondents.

The leading support need identified was access to skilled training programmes, highlighting the importance businesses place on workforce development and upskilling. This was followed by tax incentives for hiring local workers, salary or wage subsidies, and support for automation and digitisation. Labour market information services and return-migrant reintegration programmes were also identified as moderate priorities. This indicates that businesses see value in improved labour market coordination, better workforce planning information and clearer pathways for reintegrating returning workers into local employment.



Source: SCCI/MDF Labour Migration Survey. Multi-select question.

Table 3.8.1. Most helpful forms of support

Support need	Selections	Share of support selections
Access to skilled training programmes	128	23%
Salary/Wage subsidies	112	20%
Tax incentives for hiring local workers	105	19%
Support for automation/digitisation	86	15%
Labour market information services	69	12%
Return migrant re-integration programmes	55	10%
Other	9	2%

Follow-up responses from businesses selecting Other highlighted the need for foreign professional staff, training and capacity-building opportunities locally and overseas, and support to broaden market reach, including in the Chinese market. These responses point to broader business needs linked to skills, growth, operational capability and export competitiveness.

The call for foreign professional staff suggests that some businesses require specialised expertise that may not be readily available in the local labour market. The emphasis on training and capacity building reinforces the need to strengthen local workforce capability. Meanwhile, interest in expanding into the Chinese market reflects a focus on increasing market access, export opportunities and long-term business growth. Overall, the findings show that businesses are seeking a combination of workforce development, targeted incentives, digital transformation support and market expansion opportunities to respond to labour shortages and improve competitiveness.

Section 4: Key Findings, Recommendations and Implementation Roadmap

Building on the survey findings and respondent feedback, the following section sets out practical actions that SCCI, Government, employers, training providers and development partners can take to strengthen workforce resilience and reduce labour migration-related business disruption.

4.1 Key Findings and Business Implications

The survey findings confirm that labour migration is not only a workforce movement issue, but also a business continuity, productivity and competitiveness issue for Samoa's private sector. While impacts vary across sectors and business sizes, the findings point to several areas where employers, Government and development partners can respond more strategically.

1. Labour mobility pressures are significant, but uneven across sectors

A substantial share of businesses reported staff departures linked to labour mobility pathways, with 47% reporting departures linked to RSE/PALM schemes and StarKist-related employment, and 44% reporting departures linked to the New Zealand Quota. By count, Retail/Wholesale, Hospitality/Tourism and Manufacturing recorded the highest numbers of affected businesses. Smaller sectors such as Construction showed high levels within-sector exposure, although these results should be interpreted with caution due to smaller sample sizes.

For employers, this means workforce risk is no longer limited to isolated firms or sectors. Businesses in labour-sensitive industries need to plan more actively for staff turnover, succession, cross-training and retention. For Government and partners, the findings point to the need for sector-specific workforce planning rather than broad, one-size-fits-all interventions.

2. Workforce movement is affecting operational capacity

Among businesses that provided numeric counts, 2,375 staff departures were self-reported across 2023 and 2024. This indicates significant workforce movement among affected firms and suggests that labour migration is contributing to ongoing recruitment and continuity pressures for parts of the private sector.

For businesses, the implication is that workforce planning should be treated as a core operational risk, similar to finance, supply chain or fuel security. For policy partners, the scale of reported departures highlights the importance of improving labour market information, tracking hard-to-fill roles, and understanding where workforce losses are affecting essential business services and productive sectors.

3. Skills loss is concentrated in operational and trade-related roles

Skilled and semi-skilled workers were the most affected role categories, selected by 79% and 41% of valid respondents respectively. This suggests that businesses are not only losing staff numbers, but also experienced and trained workers who are important to daily operations, service quality, productivity and business continuity.

For employers, this reinforces the need to invest in internal training, succession planning, skills transfer and retention of reliable staff. For Government, training providers and donors, the priority should be practical, occupation-specific training linked to affected sectors, including hospitality, trades, technical roles, customer service, machine operation, administration, supervisory skills and digital capability.

4. Replacement challenges are manageable for some firms but severe for others

The findings show that replacement difficulty is uneven. Some businesses were able to replace workers within a reasonable timeframe, while 34 businesses reported moderate to extreme difficulty replacing workers. These prolonged replacement cases are important because they can affect service delivery, production, customer experience and business expansion.

For employers, this points to the importance of maintaining recruitment pipelines, building internal talent pools and cross-training staff before vacancies occur. For Government and partners, support should be targeted toward sectors and roles where replacement takes longer and where skills shortages directly affect productivity or service delivery.

5. Retention costs and productivity pressures are increasing

A total of 145 businesses, or 36%, reported increasing wages, salaries or incentives, with the 5–10% range being the most common increase. At the same time, 32% of respondents reported decreased productivity, although non-response remains high.

For businesses, this shows that labour migration can increase operating costs while also affecting output, efficiency and service quality. Retention strategies therefore need to go beyond wage increases alone and include flexible work arrangements, staff development, workplace culture, supervisor training, accommodation or meal support where relevant, and clearer career pathways. For Government and partners, productivity support, training subsidies, wage-support pilots, tax incentives and advisory services may help affected firms adjust without weakening business viability.

6. Businesses are adapting, but support remains uneven

Businesses are already exploring flexible work, automation, wage and benefit increases, overseas recruitment, outsourcing and re-employment of returned migrants as mitigation options. However, these responses vary across sectors and depend heavily on business capacity, access to finance, awareness of support and management capability.

For employers, adaptation should be treated as part of a longer-term workforce resilience strategy, not only a short-term reaction to resignations. For partners, support should focus on practical tools that businesses can implement, including HR templates, workforce planning guides, training referrals, productivity audits, digitalisation support and return-worker matching.

7. Government and donor support has low visibility

Only 1.7% of businesses reported receiving government or donor support, while 21.1% were not aware of available support. This suggests that existing support may not be reaching enough businesses, or that businesses may not know where to access relevant programmes.

For SCCI, this creates a clear role in coordinating information, referrals and member support. For Government and development partners, the finding highlights the need to simplify communication, improve outreach, clarify eligibility criteria, and work through trusted private sector channels to ensure available support reaches affected employers.

8. Workforce data gaps limit targeted intervention

Many businesses were unable to provide detailed numeric, gender or role-specific departure information. This limits the ability to design highly targeted interventions and highlights the need for standardised HR reporting templates, improved workforce records and regular labour market monitoring.

For employers, stronger HR records would improve internal decision-making on recruitment, retention, training and wage planning. For SCCI, Government and partners, better workforce data would support a stronger private sector labour market dashboard, improve future survey quality and allow more precise targeting of support by sector, role type and business size.

9. Labour mobility can be converted into domestic resilience

Labour mobility also presents an opportunity. Remittances, returning workers and overseas work experience can support business investment, skills transfer and entrepreneurship if connected to structured reintegration, financial literacy, business advisory services and job-matching pathways.

For Samoa, the strategic opportunity is to convert labour mobility from a one-way workforce loss into a cycle of skills, savings and investment. This requires stronger reintegration pathways for returning workers, better recognition of skills gained overseas, and support to channel remittances and savings into MSME development, equipment, training and local employment creation.

4.2 Recommendations

The recommendations below are designed as a practical private sector pathway that can be led by SCCI in coordination with Government, donor partners, training providers and employers. The approach should focus on targeted sector interventions, stronger workforce data, clearer support referral pathways, and practical tools that businesses can use immediately. This should also strengthen future survey rounds by improving skip logic, using clearer numeric fields, separating “Not applicable” from “No response”, and using structured response options for gender, role type and migration pathway.

1. Establish a private sector workforce data and HR reporting system

Develop standardised HR reporting templates and a simple private sector workforce data tool to help businesses track resignations, hard-to-fill roles, wage pressure, training costs, replacement timelines, gender-disaggregated workforce changes and return-worker re-employment.

Resources/Pathways: SCCI and MDF survey team; MCIL labour and employment functions; Samoa Bureau of Statistics; data analysts; sector focal points; employers.

2. Strengthen sector-specific workforce planning

Develop sector workforce plans for Retail/Wholesale, Hospitality/Tourism, Manufacturing, Construction, Transport/Logistics and other labour-sensitive sectors. These plans should identify high-risk occupations, replacement timelines, skills gaps, retention risks, training needs and immediate productivity support required by each sector.

Resources/Pathways: SCCI sector working groups; MCIL Industry Development Unit; Samoa Bureau of Statistics where labour data is available; Samoa Tourism Authority for tourism-related roles; Samoa Manufacturers and Exporters where relevant; sector representatives.

3. Expand practical skills development and employer retention support

Prioritise vocational, technical, tourism/hospitality, trade, machine-operation, customer service, finance/admin, digital and management skills. Training should be co-designed with employers and linked to job placement, apprenticeships, work placements or workplace-based learning. This should be supported by employer guidance on wage and incentive design, flexible work arrangements, staff development, accommodation or meal support where relevant, supervisor training and structured career progression.

Resources/Pathways: SQA-registered PSET/TVET providers; PAS; National University of Samoa; Samoa Business Hub; employer-based trainers; MDF and donor-funded pilots; BLP business advisors; MCIL labour advisory services; ILO or donor technical assistance where available.

4. Strengthen return-migrant reintegration and job-matching pathways

Develop mechanisms to match returning RSE/PALM workers and other returning migrants with local employers, recognise skills gained overseas, provide refresher training where needed, and support reintegration into local employment or entrepreneurship. Returning workers should be treated as a potential skills and productivity resource for Samoa’s private sector.

Resources/Pathways: SCCI; MCIL/LEEP labour mobility functions; Samoa Business Hub; SQA; IOM regional labour mobility resources; PACER Plus Arrangement on Labour Mobility skills initiatives; employers and sector associations.

5. Channel remittances and savings into productive investment

Support returning workers, migrant households and affected communities to channel remittances and savings into MSME development, business upgrading, skills training, equipment purchase, entrepreneurship and local employment creation. This should be linked to financial literacy, business advisory services, start-up support and access to appropriate finance.

Resources/Pathways: Samoa Business Hub; BLP business advisory network; financial institutions; MCIL industry development pathways; MDF; donor partners; village/community economic development programmes where available.

6. Support automation, digitisation and productivity-enhancing tools

Target grants, concessional finance or technical assistance toward machinery, ICT equipment, digital payment systems, digital marketing, point-of-sale systems, workflow systems and other productivity-enhancing tools that reduce manual labour pressure without undermining job quality.

Resources/Pathways: MCIL duty concession and industry support pathways; BLP business advisory services; MDF innovation partnerships; financial institutions; regional digital transformation programmes.

7. Improve government and donor support visibility

Create a single SCCI-led referral point or information pathway for available business, training, donor and government support. This should include simple eligibility information, application guidance, regular member briefings, and referrals to relevant programmes.

Resources/Pathways: MCIL Guide to Private Sector Development Programmes; BLP advisor network and grants/advisory subsidies; Samoa Business Hub programmes; MDF; SQA; PAS; donor and regional partner support.

8. Facilitate targeted overseas recruitment only where local supply is insufficient

Where hard-to-fill technical or professional roles cannot be filled locally, support responsible and targeted overseas recruitment while continuing to invest in local skills pipelines, training and succession planning. Overseas recruitment should be treated as a complementary response, not a replacement for domestic workforce development.

Resources/Pathways: MCIL immigration and labour processes; employers; sector associations; regional professional networks; training providers.

4.3 Local and Regional Resource Pathways

The following existing resources and partners can be used to make the recommendations more practical and implementable:

- MCIL Industry Development Unit and Guide to Private Sector Development Programmes: use as a referral pathway for industry development support, duty concessions and MSME-related support measures.
- Samoa Qualifications Authority (SQA): use the Samoa Qualifications Framework and SQA-registered providers to ensure training is nationally recognised and aligned with local and regional standards.
- PAS and SQA-registered training providers: support modular training in construction, hospitality, technical trades, work readiness, leadership and management where programmes are available.
- Samoa Business Hub: support MSMEs through business skills, customer service, business planning, project management, entrepreneurship and reintegration-related programmes.
- Business Link Pacific (BLP): connect businesses with approved business advisors and potential advisory subsidies or grants for productivity, digital, marketing and business planning needs.
- PACER Plus Arrangement on Labour Mobility (ALM): use regional skills development work and qualifications alignment discussions to strengthen domestic skills gains from labour mobility.
- IOM and labour mobility partners: explore return and reintegration workshops, family reintegration support and migrant skills profiling for returning workers.
- SCCI: coordinate private sector feedback, sector working groups, referrals, business clinics and quarterly labour market updates.

4.4 Implementation Roadmap

The recommendations in this report require coordinated action between SCCI, Government, development partners, training providers and employers. The following roadmap outlines practical actions that could be implemented over the next 6–12 months.

Priority Action	Lead / Supporting Partners	Proposed Timeframe	Expected Output
Develop standardised HR reporting templates and a simple private sector workforce data tool to track resignations, hard-to-fill roles, wage pressure, training costs, replacement timelines and return-worker re-employment.	SCCI, MDF, MCIL, SBS, data analysts, sector focal points, employers	0–3 months	Standardised HR templates and pilot workforce data tool developed and tested with selected businesses.
Establish sector-specific workforce planning groups for Retail/Wholesale, Hospitality/Tourism, Manufacturing, Construction, Transport/Logistics and other labour-sensitive sectors.	SCCI, MCIL, sector representatives, MDF, employers	0–3 months	Sector workforce priorities identified and validated, including priority occupations, skills gaps and retention risks.
Develop a private sector labour market information and early-warning dashboard to monitor departures, hard-to-fill roles, wage pressure, productivity impacts and skills gaps.	SCCI, MCIL, SBS, MDF, employers	0–6 months	Quarterly labour market update shared with members, Government and development partners.

Expand practical skills training linked to affected roles, including skilled, semi-skilled, technical, hospitality, customer service, digital and supervisory roles.	SQA, PAS, APTC, NUS, training providers, employers, SCCI, MDF	3–12 months	Short-course, apprenticeship, work placement and workplace training options aligned to employer needs.
Develop employer guidance on retention strategies, including wages, incentives, flexible work, staff wellbeing, accommodation or meal support where relevant, supervisor training and career pathways.	SCCI, MCIL, BLP advisors, Samoa Business Hub, employers	3–6 months	Employer retention toolkit or guidance note developed and shared with members.
Pilot a return-migrant reintegration and job-matching pathway linking returning workers with employers, skills recognition, refresher training, entrepreneurship support and employment opportunities.	MCIL/LEEP, SCCI, Samoa Business Hub, SQA, IOM, employers, sector representatives	3–12 months	Return-worker skills profiling and referral pilot established.
Pilot a remittance and savings investment pathway linking returning workers and migrant households to financial literacy, business advisory services, MSME start-up support and appropriate finance.	Samoa Business Hub, BLP, financial institutions, SCCI, MCIL, MDF, donor partners	3–12 months	Remittance-to-business support pathway developed, with referrals to advisory and finance services.
Create a simple SCCI-led referral pathway for available business, training, donor and government support.	SCCI, MCIL, Samoa Business Hub, BLP, MDF, SQA, PAS, donor partners	0–3 months	Support directory and referral process shared with members.
Support technology, automation and digitisation for labour-affected businesses.	SCCI, MDF, BLP, financial institutions, MCIL, donor partners	3–12 months	Advisory support, grants or finance pathways identified for productivity-enhancing tools.
Facilitate responsible overseas recruitment only where local skills supply is insufficient, while maintaining investment in local training and succession planning.	MCIL, SCCI, employers, sector associations, training providers	6–12 months	Guidance developed for targeted overseas recruitment linked to local workforce development plans.
Improve future survey design and data quality by strengthening skip logic, separating “No response” from “Not applicable”, and using clearer numeric, gender and role fields.	SCCI, MDF, data analysts, sector focal points	Before next survey round	Improved survey tool and cleaner future dataset.
Convene regular policy dialogue on labour migration impacts, workforce data, reintegration, remittance investment and private sector workforce needs.	SCCI, MCIL, MDF, Government agencies, development partners, employers	Quarterly	Continued evidence-based advocacy and policy coordination.

4.5 Conclusion

Labour mobility provides important development benefits for Samoa, including employment opportunities, income generation, remittances and exposure to international work experience. However, the findings of this survey confirm that labour migration is also creating significant workforce pressures for Samoa’s private sector.

The impacts are not uniform across all businesses. Some employers have not experienced direct effects, while others are facing staff departures, skills shortages, replacement difficulty, rising retention costs and productivity impacts. The burden is most visible in sectors with large respondent numbers, including Retail/Wholesale, Hospitality/Tourism and Manufacturing, and in role categories such as skilled and semi-skilled workers.

Businesses are already beginning to adapt through wage increases, staff incentives, training, flexible work arrangements, automation, outsourcing, overseas recruitment and interest in rehiring returning workers. However, these responses remain uneven and require stronger support, coordination and access to practical resources.

The key policy challenge is to balance Samoa’s participation in overseas labour mobility with the need to protect and strengthen the domestic workforce base. This requires better labour market information, stronger local training pathways, more practical support for affected employers, improved awareness of available programmes, and clearer reintegration pathways for returning workers.

A coordinated response between SCCI, Government, donors, training providers and employers will be essential. With targeted action, Samoa can continue to benefit from labour mobility while strengthening private sector resilience, productivity and long-term economic sustainability.

Annex 1: Respondent Feedback and Recommendations

The table below consolidates recurring themes from respondent open-text feedback and links them to practical actions. Feedback has been anonymised and lightly edited for clarity. The table is intended to strengthen the report's recommendations and call to action.

Feedback theme	Consolidated respondent feedback	Recommended action / call to action
Shortage of skilled and technical workers	Respondents cited shortage of labourers, engineers, supervisors, heavy machine mechanics, welders, machine operators, technicians, aluminum joinery and glazing skills.	Establish sector-based skills plans; support apprenticeships and on-the-job training; link employers to SQA-registered providers, PAS and technical training partners.
Tourism, hospitality and customer service gaps	Businesses identified shortages in chefs, food and beverage staff, waiters, tour guides, drivers, front office staff, bartenders, kitchen hands and customer interaction skills.	Develop a hospitality and tourism skills pipeline with short courses, work placements, refresher training and supervisor mentoring through SCCI, STA, SQA-registered providers and PAS.
Retention pressures and staff incentives	Respondents reported using improved wages, flexible hours, staff development, accommodation and meal support, daily lunch allowances, leave benefits and workplace culture improvements.	Prepare a private sector retention toolkit with wage/incentive options, flexible-work templates, staff wellbeing guidance and examples for SMEs.
Training cost and risk of losing trained workers	Some businesses noted the cost of retraining, delays in accessing training, and frustration that trained workers may leave for overseas schemes before employers recover training investment.	Co-fund priority training; use modular micro-credentials; develop employer training agreements where appropriate; explore shared sector training to reduce individual employer cost.
Productivity and recruitment disruption	Feedback included owners covering vacant roles, more time spent on recruitment, fewer workers causing lower productivity, and difficulty finding reliable or experienced workers.	Create a quarterly labour market dashboard, shared job-matching/referral pool, and sector-specific recruitment clinics to reduce search time and improve matching.
Technology, automation and digital systems	Respondents cited automated payments, POS systems, booking and food-ordering systems, scan codes, online tools, ICT systems, machinery and digital marketing.	Target digital-readiness support, BLP advisory services, machinery/ICT financing, MCIL industry support and duty concession pathways for productivity-enhancing investments.

Feedback theme	Consolidated respondent feedback	Recommended action / call to action
Need for foreign professional staff in specialised roles	Some businesses requested access to foreign professional staff to operate machinery or fill specialised roles where local supply is insufficient.	Develop a transparent targeted overseas recruitment pathway for specialised roles, linked to local understudy, skills transfer and time-bound workforce planning requirements.
Return-migrant reintegration uncertainty	Some businesses were unsure about re-employing returning RSE workers, while some feedback suggested returning workers may wait for another overseas trip rather than re-enter local work.	Create a return-migrant skills profile and job-matching pathway; provide reintegration coaching, refresher training and business start-up referrals for returning workers.
Market expansion and operational upgrading	Feedback included interest in sourcing machinery, equipment and packaging from China to improve workflow efficiency and reduce labour-intensive processes.	Support export/import readiness, supplier identification, trade missions and market information through SCCI, MCIL industry/investment services and regional/private sector partners.
Low awareness of support programmes	Only a small number reported receiving support, while many were not aware of available government or donor support.	Create a single SCCI support referral pathway with briefings on MCIL programmes, BLP advisory/grants, Samoa Business Hub services, MDF partnerships and other donor resources.

Annex 2: Raw Data Tables

Table 1.1.1. Respondents by sector

Sector	Count	Share %
Retail/Wholesale	193	47.3%
Hospitality/Tourism	59	14.5%
Manufacturing	47	11.5%
ICT/Telecommunication	20	4.9%
Professional/Technical Services	20	4.9%
Transport/Logistics	16	3.9%
Financial Services	12	2.9%
Construction	10	2.5%
Agriculture & Fisheries	9	2.2%
Personal & Other Services	6	1.5%
Household employers/own-use services	3	0.7%
Administrative and support services	3	0.7%
Education & Training	3	0.7%
Other (Postal Services and NGOs)	3	0.7%
Real estate activities	2	0.5%
Electricity, gas and air condition supply	1	0.2%
Water supply, sewage and waste management	1	0.2%

Note: Percentages for sectors with small sample sizes should be treated as indicative only

Table 1.2.1. Employment size profile

Employment size	Count	Share
<5 (Micro)	95	23.3%
5-9 (Small)	95	23.3%
10-25 (Medium)	114	27.9%
>25 (Large)	104	25.5%

Table 1.3.1. Years of business operation

Years operating	Count	Share
Less than 1 year	17	4.2%
1-5 years	93	22.8%
6-10 years	117	28.7%
More than 10 years	181	44.4%

Table 1.3.2. Sector profile of businesses operating less than one year

Sector of businesses operating less than one year	Count	Share of less-than-one-year group
Retail/Wholesale	12	70.6%
Construction	1	5.9%
Hospitality/Tourism	1	5.9%
ICT/Telecommunication	1	5.9%
Manufacturing	1	5.9%
Transport/Logistics	1	5.9%

Table 2.5.1. Affected roles by sector (based on 179 responses)

Sector	Skill	Sem-skill	Manag / Superv	Unskilled	Specialist	Technic /Prof
Retail/Wholesale	68	28	3	5	2	
Hospitality/Tourism	25	19	3	3	2	2
Manufacturing	12	10	1	2	1	1
ICT/Telecom	7	1	1		2	3
Professional/Technical Services	7	2	2	1	3	2
Transport/Logistics	5	4	2			1
Financial Services	5	3	1			
Construction	7	2		3	3	3
Agriculture & Fisheries		1	1			
Administrative & support services	1	1			1	
Education & Training		1		1		
Other (e.g. NGO)	1					
Real estate activities	2	1	1		1	
Water supply, sewage and waste management	1					
TOTAL	141	73	15	15	15	12

Table 2.5.2. Roles affected by migration

Affected role category	Selections	Share %
Skilled workers	141	79%
Semi-skilled workers	73	41%

Affected role category	Selections	Share %
Managers/Supervisors	15	8%
Unskilled workers	15	8%
Specialist workers	15	8%
Technical professionals	12	7%

Table 2.6.1. Difficulty replacing workers

Replacement difficulty	Count	% Share
Not difficult (1-3 months)	96	24%
Slightly difficult (3-6 months)	44	11%
Moderately difficult (6-9 months)	14	3%
Very difficult (9-12 months)	7	2%
Extremely difficult (more than 12 months)	13	3%

Table 3.1.2. Skills shortages and training investment by sector

Sector	Sector n	Skills shortage Yes	% within sector	Training invest Yes/slight	% within sector
Retail/Wholesale	193	12	6%	39	20%
Hospitality/Tourism	59	11	19%	20	34%
Manufacturing	47	8	17%	7	15%
ICT/Telecom	20	2	10%	8	40%
Professional/Technical Services	20	3	15%	2	10%
Transport/Logistics	16	1	6%	2	13%
Financial Services	12	1	8%	3	25%
Construction	10	2	20%	3	30%
Education/Training	3	1	33%	1	33%
Real estate activities	2	2	100%		
Administrative and support services	3			2	67%
Agriculture/Fisheries	9			2	22%

Table 3.3.1. Strategies considered to mitigate labour shortages

Strategy	Selections	Share of valid respondents
Offering remote work/flexible hours	78	19.1%
Automating tasks	74	18.6%
Increase wages/benefits	74	18.4%
Recruit from overseas	71	17.4%

Strategy	Selections	Share of valid respondents
Outsourcing services	65	16.9%
Hiring returned migrants	64	15.7%

Table 3.3.2. Mitigation strategies to labour shortages by sector

Sector	Hiring returned migrants	Recruit from overseas	Remote work / flex hours	Increase wages / benefits	Automate tasks	Outsource services
Retail/Wholesale	29	38	44	32	40	25
Hospitality/Tourism	14	15	13	14	17	15
Manufacturing	5	4	5	12	5	3
Construction	4	3	2	1	2	1
ICT/Telecom	4	3	4	1	4	3
Professional/Technical Services		3	4	3		3
Transport/Logistics	2	2	3	2	3	3
Financial Services	1	1	1	5	2	3
Administrative and support services	2	1	1	1	2	2
Agriculture/Fisheries	1				1	
Education & Training		1				
Real estate activities	2			1		
Water supply, sewage and waste management				1		1
Other (NGO)			1			

Table 3.4.1. Likelihood of re-employing returning RSE workers

Likelihood response	Count	Share
Very likely	43	10.5%
Unsure	81	19.9%
Unlikely	53	13.0%
No response / not applicable	231	56.6%

Table 3.6.2. Change in scale or strategic direction

Sector	Yes, scaled down	Yes, changed focus	Planning changes	No change	No response / n.a
Retail/Wholesale	36	7	9	25	116
Hospitality/Tourism	17	2	4	9	27
Manufacturing	4	1	3	8	31
ICT/Telecom	3		2	3	12
Professional/Technical Services	1	2	1	3	13
Transport/Logistics		1	1	4	10
Financial Services				5	7
Construction	3			3	4
Agriculture & Fisheries	2				7
Administrative & support services	1			2	
Education & Training		1			2
Other (NGO, Postal services)		1			2
Real estate activities	1	1			
Personal/Other services					6
Activities of households as employers					3
Electricity, gas and air condition supply					1
Water supply, sewage and waste management				1	

References and Resource Pathways

The following references and resource pathways were used to strengthen the national and regional context, data interpretation, and practical implementation pathways in the recommendations section. Users should confirm current eligibility criteria, programme requirements, application windows and contact points directly with the relevant agency or programme before taking action.

A. Practical Resource Pathways for Implementation

Institution / Programme	Relevance to Report Recommendations	Link / Source/Access period
Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (MCIL) – Industry Development and Private Sector Development Programmes	Relevant to private sector development, business support, workforce planning and policy coordination.	https://www.mcil.gov.ws/services/industry *Accessed April–June 2026*
Samoa Qualifications Authority (SQA) – Samoa Qualifications Framework and PSET Quality Assurance	Relevant to accredited training, skills development, qualification standards and post-school education and training pathways.	https://www.sqa.gov.ws/ *Accessed April–June 2026*
Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) – Samoa Fact Sheet	Relevant to technical and vocational education and training, short courses and workforce skills development.	https://aptc.edu.au/hubfs/Files/FactSheet_Samoa.pdf *Accessed April–June 2026*
Samoa Business Hub – Special Projects Division	Relevant to business advisory services, enterprise support, MSME development and potential reintegration support for returning workers.	https://www.samoabusinesshub.ws/special-project-unit/ *Accessed April–June 2026*
Business Link Pacific – Advisor Network in Samoa	Relevant to business advisory services, private sector resilience, productivity support and access to technical assistance.	https://about.businesslinkpacific.com/the-business-advisor-network/ *Accessed April–June 2026*

Institution / Programme	Relevance to Report Recommendations	Link / Source/Access period
PACER Plus – Regional Workshop on Skills Development in Samoa	Relevant to regional skills development, trade-related capacity building and Pacific workforce development initiatives.	https://pacerplus.org/2024/07/09/regional-workshop-on-skills-development-underway-in-samoa/ *Accessed April–June 2026*
International Organization for Migration (IOM) – Support to Labour Mobility in the Pacific	Relevant to labour mobility governance, worker welfare, reintegration, migration management and regional labour mobility support.	https://roasiapacific.iom.int/resources/ioms-support-labour-mobility-pacific *Accessed April–June 2026*

B. Data, Policy and Context References

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