Re-integration of return migrants in the context of Timor-Leste

Issues, Challenges and Good Practices

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1. INTRODUCTION.

This background paper is based on a review of extant literature on challenges that female and male labour migrants face in their re-integration upon return to their home country. This review has special reference for implication to Timor-Leste, the newest country of Southeast Asia.

This review contains analyses of existing literature, to include previous case studies and similar projects, with the following objectives:

- To review the reintegration challenges of female and male labour migrants upon return to their home country, including Timor-Leste;
- To outline the benefits and/or positive aspects of reintegration as identified by female and male labour migrants,
- Examine reintegration issues particular to Timor-Leste and/or similar societies, including comparison of the reintegration experience of female and male labour migrants;
- To identify, where applicable, the benefits of remittances sent by labour migrants to their family/households in the country of origin.

2. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

The literature on “Return and Reintegration” comes together around the first principle of seeking to utilise the enhanced skills that seasonal migrants gain through overseas work. This is vital, but recognition of this does not go far enough. While it sounds like a validation of “human capabilities” approaches, instead, “utilisation” is narrowly focused on gains for national productivity. This is a relatively recent creed. There was a new reminder of this when Bruno Latour, the recently deceased anthropologist commented on how the pandemic made clear that the economy is a very narrow and limited way of organising life and for deciding what is important and what is less important[1]. Consistent with this, the end goal in human capabilities approaches is people achieving nonmaterialistic and materialistic wellbeing through the distribution of opportunities within their society That such opportunities are too often rare is the factual challenge. The wellbeing of returnees is dependent on meeting the challenge. So too is their resulting ability to contribute to productivity gains in their home countries. And the literature, despite its narrow perception of the end goal, is acutely aware of the challenge of providing workplace opportunities for returnees.

The acquired capabilities of seasonal migrants attract very limited demand in Timor's job market (specifically in the agricultural sector). Moreover, their skills are under-valued by the host countries, Australia and South Korea. For example, the Australian visa category of farm workers is "unskilled" (which confers low rates of pay). But the work in Australia and South Korea is far from unskilled[2]. For a start, the farms that engage most Timor seasonal migrants are horticultural. This makes the job inherently skilled because the work of picking and packing fruits and vegetables and pruning vines and treesrequires special methods. Horticulturists process vulnerable crops like grapes, berries and stone fruits selectively, skilfully. Their manual skills need to be finely attuned to produce that machinery ruins. Even when power tools are useful, to prune nut trees for instance, the work requires specialised skills.

As mentioned, the literature on "return and reintegration" attributes strong importance to the goal of utilising acquired skills in the sending country. Fittingly, this is viewed as a complex project, which, in the literature is ultimately dependent on the success of "motivation" on the side of seasonal migrants. It is understood in the literature that "motivation" is complicated by lack of access to opportunities and especially big money earnings. These are simply not replicable in the existing Timorese labour market, for example.[3] This makes the entrepreneurial sector the biggest area of hope in the literature. Most good outcomes from return and reintegration activities are expected to come from small business start-ups, which would draw on savings from seasonal work overseas. A good example of this aspiration in the T-L National Employment Strategy 2017 – 2030 is the intention that "the Government should support those who are self-employed in establishing their own small businesses" [4].

In sum, there is broad consensus in the literature that motivation if tackled well will achieve reintegration of returnees. There is general agreement that this is a difficult challenge but one that it is likely to happen in the entrepreneurial sphere – and in wage labour too if there are adequate training and job market improvements.

Whereas, this background paper argues that the situation is much more complicated when it comes to 'motivation', and that the bulk of the literature neglects or makes too little of a finding that Graeme Hugo shared in 2009[5]. In that work, Hugo recognised that the prospect of motivating returned workers is decisively juxtaposed with their drive to *repeat* the seasonal work. In Hugo's words:

> "*Certainly many temporary migrants see their move as a part of a longer-term strategy to remain permanently at the destination. Yet for others, circular migration is a preferred strategy. He writes: "Certainly there are sacrifices of separation from family, but the idea of earning in a high income/cost context and spending in a low income/cost context is appealing as is the idea of remaining in their cultural hearth area.*

[2] Klocker et.al. (2020)
[3] Although, it is well-understood that hospitality differs from agriculture in respect to jobs (for men at least) in these sectors.
[4] E.g., Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. National Employment Strategy 2017 – 2030. III-44. National-Employment-Strategy-2017-20301.pdf (timor-leste.gov.tl).
[5] Hugo (2009: 2)

> *Circular migration can become a continuing and structural feature of families and economies and it doesn't have to lead to permanent settlement……. The key point is that low-skill circular labour migration can have positive outcomes for migrant workers and their origin communities*".

In the country context of Timor Leste, a key implication in Hugo's piece is that deprivation/ poverty/ vulnerability drives the want to repeat overseas work assignments rather than "settle down" and work in Timor. This point cannot be over-stated. The money that can be earned overseas gives seasonal migrants and their extended families a chance to escape extreme poverty. Consider that approximately 42% of the Timorese population were living below the global poverty line in 2014[6]. Food security is an ongoing country-wide problem. Although the amount of food consumed for each individual has steadily increased since 1996, it remains well below that in neighbouring countries and malnutrition remains unacceptably high. Many families experience a 'hungry season' of up to 4 months per year. Clearly, in situations of poverty/ deprivation, circular seasonal migration makes sense. Moreover, the reasoning has a sound legal basis because seasonal workers can work in Australian placements up to 9 months and can access a multi-year visa to return to Australia for up to 9 months each year for 4 years. Seasonal workers can return in following seasons. But they must spend three months out of every twelve in their home country. The pandemic forced some temporary changes to visa arrangements in 2020, which allowed Pacific (and Timorese) workers under the Seasonal Worker Programme and the Pacific Labour Scheme to continue working in the agriculture sector until the coronavirus crisis passed. The revised visas enabled workers to remain in Australia and continue working to support themselves for up to 12 months.

There are exceptions in the literature to the charge that writers underplay the significance of circular migration. Several examples follow. The first is the 2018 survey by Wigglesworth and dos Santos, where they asked returned seasonal workers about adjusting to life on return to Timor. The respondents expressed their worry that there is no work (at home). Probably this means they found that even available work is unsuitable, poorly paid, or both. So as a result, they said their only option is to wait until they can go to Australia again[7].

A similar nod to the implications of circular migration in terms of return and reintegration can be seen in the language of the National Employment Strategy in Timor Leste. This textual gesture does however contain a hesitancy about expecting motivation strategies to bear near-term success, given the realities of the social and the economic situations in Timor:

> *"Such workers have had experiences of integration into countries with better economic and social circumstances than Timor-Leste can currently provide.*

[6] Timor-Leste Overview: Development news, research, data | World Bank. At that time (2014) the World Bank used $1.25 as the global poverty line.

[7] Wigglesworth & dos Santos (2018: *6.2 On return home*).

> *…..For instance, they may have got used to being paid higher wages and enjoying a lifestyle and facilities that Timor-Leste cannot currently match"[8].*

The inclusion of this cautionary note in the Employment Strategy suggests that the plans and programmes to re-integrate seasonal migrants are founded on longer-term hopes rather than current social-economic situations. This caveat is warranted. There is a long history of youth everywhere dreaming about "big earnings" abroad. Chasing the dream has become customary behaviour in many countries (e.g., the Maghreb) wherever youths (and older adults) encounter wage and opportunity gaps. Circular migration in its myriad forms, which include seasonal migration, strongly undercuts the short-term success of "motivation" strategies. The wage differentials between "labour-sending" and "labour recipient" countries are consequential. Timor-Leste's national minimum wage rate is 177 AUD per month[9]. In Australia the monthly minimum wage is 3,248 AUD[10] and in South Korea it is 2,166 AUD[11]. It should be noted that comparative costs of living show significant differences too. Rent is not a useful indicator in this context where seasonal migrants do not face urban rental market realities. But grocery prices are relevant; and in Australia these are 48.0% higher than in Timor-Leste. Restaurant prices are relevant for female seasonal migrants who work in urban hospitality sites. Restaurant Prices in Australia are 101.6% higher than in Timor-Leste[12]. Despite these much higher costs of living, the minds of seasonal migrants are likely to be fixed on the prospect of overseas gains, often with remittance sending as the overarching mission.

In terms of solutions for keeping seasonal migrant workers motivated in Timor-Leste, the national employment strategy formulates a three-component approach. (It is possible that the components are ranked, although this fact is unclear in the report). The first component in the document is support for establishing returnees' own small businesses; the second is increasing access to labour migration employment in other countries; while the third is making better use of the skills and experience of returnees[13]. The third component is simply a reiteration of the prior components. Which adds to the critique that what stand out in the national employment strategy is that seasonal migrants feature weakly in the planning. Certainly, *comprehensive* reintegration planning is not a priority in the national employment strategy, even though there is a limited commentary on reintegration. This involves tactics to improve pre-departure trainings through the sharing of experiences of returned seasonal workers.

Pre-departure trainings are generally seen in the literature – and adopted in policy actions – as the optimal , strategies for return and reintegration. There is a consensus among writers in this field that such activities need to be recurring: starting with predeparture briefings; moving to mid-term; and then "end of season" briefings. But while an array of Timorese policy programs attends to this aim,the principal activities around return and reintegration remain focused on predeparture briefings. This despite the

[8] Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. National Employment Strategy 2017 – 2030. III-44. National-Employment-Strategy-2017-20301.pdf (timor-leste.gov.tl)
[9] Minimum wage - Timor-Leste - WageIndicator.org
[10] Minimum wages - Fair Work Ombudsman
[11] South Korea National Minimum Wage - NMW 2022 | countryeconomy.com
[12] Cost Of Living Comparison Between Timor-Leste And Australia (numbeo.com)
[13] National Employment Strategy 2017 – 2030. III-44

reality that predeparture briefings are primarily about adaptation to workplace and social cultural conditions in the *host* country. This interpretation of primary aim of predeparture activities can be seen in the content of the Labour Mobility Preparation Course where the focus is on preparing for Australia[14].Yet, predeparture is less than an ideal time in the lives of seasonal migrants to deal with the issues and challenges of return and reintegration.

There were seven reintegration workshops in DFAT's 2019 workforce Development Plan that engaged 247 participants[15]. The percentage of female workshop participants was 36%. The numbers represent fewer than half of the 538 seasonal migration workers who returned to Timor in 2019, and a lot less than the 80% target[16].

A targeted annual reintegration workshop was also held in 2019. This focused on Entrepreneurism, attracting those with interests in setting up their own small businesses. The agenda was ostensibly to expand the network of business opportunities outside of Timor-Leste and into Indonesia. The number of participants was 58 returning workers (13 women, 45 men) [17].

The total number of Timorese who worked seasonally in Australia by 2018–2019 was 1,560[18], and "several thousand" others in South Korea[19]. Note that the number of Timorese living/ working overseas (50,000[20]) is way beyond the number of Timorese who worked as seasonal migrants in Australia and South Korea. Note that this larger contingent (of spontaneous labour migrants) would not be targets for pre-departure/ pre-return briefings.

A review of the reintegration workshop scheme was held by DFAT's Workforce Development Program. It developed a proposal for "an improved reintegration model" which would "*likely"* be piloted the following year in 2020. The review concluded that "improvement" was predicated on a lack of capacity in the Labour Mobility Assistance Program (LMAP). More specifically this lack of capacity was in the Labour Sending Unit (LSU). The LSU is the "labour supplier" in Timor. While it clearly did not happen, LMAP is tasked to prioritise capacity development in the "labour supplier" unit. Responsibility for this is delegated by DFAT's Workforce Development Program (WFDP) on the back of its own Terms of Reference under the Labour Mobility Assistance Program (LMAP). Capacity development is coupled with improved predeparture briefings and reintegration briefings in the remit of WFDP. This coupling meant that when capacity building in the labour sending unit failed, so too did the improvement of predeparture briefings and reintegration briefings.

[14] The Labour Mobility Preparation Course was conceived as an accredited training course delivered by SEFOPE, intended to grow and screen/ filter the labour mobility workforce.
[15] DFAT. Workforce Development Program Timor-Leste. Annual Report January – December 2019. https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/workforce-development-program-timor-leste-annual-report-2019.docx
[16] Ibid
[17] Ibid
[18] Lawton, H. (2019, July 25). Australia's seasonal worker program now bigger than NZ's. *Devpolicy Blog*. https://devpolicy.org/australias-seasonal-worker-program-now-bigger-than-nzs-20190725/
[19] Wigglesworth A & Fonseca Z (2016: Abstract)
[20] Ibid

In our reading of the WFDP Report, it does not attribute responsibility for these shortcomings to the Palladium Group, to whom WFDP outsources the implementation of predeparture and reintegration briefings. Palladium is a private sector conglomeration of seven prior companies who operate in ninety countries. The original contractual life of WFDP as the oversight entity of Palladium was eight years, due to end in 2022. The available evidence in the public domain is unclear as to whether or not the WFDP program will continue. However, this seems to the case since there is a recent recruitment notice that indicates continuation[21], presumably as a part of Timor-Leste's post COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan. As noted earlier, COVID-19 had meant the pausing of the Timor-Leste Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) in March 2020.

Returning to the review of the DFAT Workforce Development Program, it recommended the following actions over the subsequent six months: 1) Department of External Employment (DNEE) should establish a team to support reintegration processes; 2) reintegration activities and resources should be conducted throughout the whole cycle of "labour mobility", i.e. an ongoing reintegration strategy that begins with predeparture, continues in the workplaces, and culminates on return; 3) introduce a preparatory course which includes reintegration goal setting for applicants prior to entering the work ready pool; 4) provide peer to peer support to workers through SEFOPE before and at the point of reintegration; and 5) enhance the database of seasonal migrant workers.

Reintegration is the theme and underlying assumption in the literature recommendations. "Reintegration" centres in the aspiration to engineer the transfer of skills back home. Ostensibly this is a sound economic policy aspiration. Except, in the near-term it does not match commodity market realities.
Timor-Leste is a largely agrarian society where agriculture accounts for 1/3 of GDP[22]. Approximately 64% of the population is engaged in agricultural activities, with a majority relying exclusively on low-input/output subsistence farming.

In horticulture, for example, crops in Timor are very different to Australia and South Korea. Rather than nut and fruit trees and vines that typically occupy seasonal farm migrant workers in Australia, there are rice, maize, cassava, sweet potato, mung bean, peanut and soya bean gardens in Timor[23]. Again, the horticultural products in South Korea resemble Australia, much more than Timor.
Coffee growing in Timor is an exception, at first glance. The political economy of coffee is certainly an unusual situation, globally. During Portuguese rule in Timor-Leste, each household had to plant at least 600 trees, with the aim for the state to start an industry[24]. Fast forward to post-independence Timor, and there are 76,846 households who continue (voluntarily) to grow coffee, in a sector that provides seasonal work for around

[21] International Consultant, Inclusive Education - Workforce Development Program Timor-Leste | Devex
[22] Food security in Timor-Leste through crop production (aciar.gov.au)
[23] Plan 4.21-4.65.pdf (laohamutuk.org)
[24] National Coffee Sector Development Plan (2019 – 2030). Foreword. Coffee and Agroforestry Livelihood Improvement Project: Timor-Leste National Coffee Sector Development Plan, 2019-2030 (adb.org). As a further notes, imagine the situation of growing 600 coffee bushes/ trees on a small holding that is probably far less than a hectare. This would leave room for a very small garden for edibles; and the small house would be in one corner of the property. It is a lot of coffee. In the harvest times, there would have been no time to do anything except pick.

10,000[25]. The ADB 2016 estimate is "almost one-third of all Timorese households" are coffee growers"[26]. Importantly, most growers are subsistence farmers for whom coffee is a source of supplementary income. There is a rogue variable when it comes to human/ food security, which is the volatility of the commodity market. Globally, green coffee bean is the second largest commodity market in the world, in value terms[27]. To be competitive in this environment, Timorese small producer groups have formed noteworthy cooperatives. The National Cooperative Business Association is the largest producer, processor and exporter of organic coffee in the world[28]. Within Timor, the cumulative product of their members in small producer groups makes coffee the country's chief export commodity, accounting for 24% of total exports. Coffee is grown in districts across the whole country, although almost half is in one district (Ermera)[29].

On the observation above, indicating that coffee growing in Timor only *seems* to be an exception to the unlikelihood of reintegrating seasonal migrants into the current agricultural wage labour market, the crucial point is that hired labour for coffee is seasonal (harvest times). Moreover, the work is traditionally rewarded "in kind" or barter. This severely undercuts the prospect of financial motivation in returned seasonal migrant workers.

Moreover, in terms of hiring wage labour, smallholders (coffee or otherwise) are subsistence farmers in Timor. They have very little land to subsist from. The households are typically an extended family with an average land size of around 0.721 hectares[30]. So, while agriculture is the second largest single sector in the Timor-Leste economy (after mining and quarrying), the small size of holdings is a big factor. Plus, there is increasing likelihood that smallholders will have even smaller plots of land. With large families, land gets divided when children grow up[31]. The backdrop to this is that the average number of children per *rural* woman in Timor-Leste is 4.6, which is globally very high[32].

The agricultural sector is a highly significant factor for human/ food security in Timor, on top of national productivity. Farming provides subsistence for about 80% of the population, as well as generating an average of 90% of the country's exports[33]. Climate change is set to alter Timor-Leste's food production, by the country likely to be one of the most affected by changes in rainfall in Southeast Asia[34]. But in terms of current efficiencies and yields, almost all farmers practice subsistence farming in Timor, which

[25] Ibid
[26] ADB Supports Development of Timor-Leste's Coffee Sector". ADB.
[27] USAID (2001). Sustainability Assessment of The National Cooperative Business Association East Timor Coffee Activity. PNACU968.pdf (usaid.gov)
[28] Ibid
[29] "East Timor : a survey of the coffee sector (English)". Washington, DC: World Bank. 2001.
[30] Sonia Akter (2021). Increasing smallholder farmers' market participation through technology adoption in rural Timor-Leste. Asia and The Pacific Policy Studies. ANU. Increasing smallholder farmers' market participation through technology adoption in rural Timor-Leste - Akter - 2021 - Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies - Wiley Online Library. For regional comparison, note the rural average land size in Cambodia and Laos is 1-2 hectares.
[31] wcms_536580.pdf (ilo.org)
[32] Timor-Leste Demographic and Health Survey 2016 - Key Findings [SR244] (dhsprogram.com)
[33] Microsoft Word - Field Instructions Manual TLAC 2019 20181030.doc (statistics.gov.tl)
[34] Climate Risk Country Profile - Timor-Leste - Timor-Leste | ReliefWeb

means they plant and harvest pretty much only what they use themselves. Most farmers have very little access to or need for technologies and traditions used in large-scale production.

Turning to the Timorese hospitality sector, this area of work generates highly contrasting potential for seasonal migrants. It complicates policy-making – and indicates the importance of ***sectoral-targeted*** reintegration programs. This is one of the chief observations in this background paper and is covered in more detail below.
The hospitality sector has a buoyant outlook when it comes to both national productivity and for the vocational wellbeing of returned hospitality workers (particularly males). There are currently 30 locally owned hotels in Dili that are registered on online platforms. Four of them are well-starred establishments which offer 238 rooms and experience an average occupancy of approximately 60%[35]. Five-star international hotel investors including Hilton and Pelican Paradise both have large projects. GoTL tourism policy seeks to attract 200,000 tourists per annum by 2030[36]. Yet, none of this should be taken to mean that hospitality vocational prospects for returned female seasonal migrants are healthy. While the hotel industry in Timor-Leste has more women than men[37], the sector follows the global workplace pattern where women are under-represented in management and senior executive positions[38]. Until this changes – as it must – the problem of motivation concerning female hospitality workers is not dissimilar to what horticultural seasonal migrants experience: low wages, weak demand for acquired skills, and longer-term vocational aspirations.

In sum, the vocational marketplace in Timor cannot match acquired aspirations of returned seasonal migrant workers, especially wage-wise. Significantly, there are efforts in the hospitality sector to tackle this in terms of formally recognising skills learned in seasonal migration work. Good examples include a partnership formed in 2022 to support the TVET institutional/system. This involves the Australia Pacific Training Coalition, the National Institute of Workforce Development (INDMO) and the National Directorate for Vocational Training in Timor-Leste. The partnership established a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) hospitality hub and systems. The first 60 enrolments in RPL Certificate III Hospitality included a number of returned hospitality seasonal workers.

“Recognition of prior learning” (RPL) is a significant human capability initiative. The goal is seasonal migrants being able to transfer skills and knowledge they gained through work and life experiences in Australia or South Korea, by means of training or coursework. The Australian office that runs this program in Timor-Leste is the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC). APTC Timor-Leste has broad aims in that it supports the implementation of Timor-Leste’s Economic Recovery Plan 2020-2022. But of specific interest to this background paper, APTC handles Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems reform, aimed at helping seasonal migrant workers gain skills and qualifications considered equal to Australian standards. The first

[35] TOURISM SECTOR | TradeInvest Timor-Leste
[36] TOURISM SECTOR | TradeInvest Timor-Leste
[37] Women constitute 62% relative to 38% of men among hotel employees in Timor-Leste (Freitas et al., 2016).
[38] 25% of women compared to 75% of men hold top management positions (Freitas et al., 2016).

offering of Certificate courses relevant to the aims of returned seasonal migrant workers was in hospitality. Enrolments in RPL Certificate III Hospitality occurred at the end of 2020 and included an (unspecified) number of returned seasonal workers. Additional training initiatives include a 2022 partnership involving the Australia Pacific Training Coalition, the National Institute of Workforce Development (INDMO) and the National Directorate for Vocational Training in Timor-Leste. Among other training initiatives, Charles Darwin University is mentoring in the delivery of hospitality and accommodation courses; the non-Government organisation East Timor Development Agency provides Tourism and Hospitality training; and Hilton Hotels awarded six scholarships in 2020 for training.

There is no equivalent quality in existing initiatives that target reintegration of horticulturist seasonal migrants. Wigglesworth and dos Santos (2018) mention that there are agricultural support and market access programs, including those by Avansa Agrikultura and TOMAK in Timor-Leste, which could (potentially) provide backing and encouragement. Australia's Labour Mobility Assistance Program has initiated links with these organisations in their debriefing program, although they were described as current "weak links"[39].

In the final instance, there are several observations in this background paper that warrant special emphasis. This relates to the proposition that "motivation" is a much ***longer-term*** programme than is typically articulated in the literature, if found at all. The background paper uncovers strong evidence that strategic ways to motivate seasonal workers' return and reintegration need to be ***targeted*** **and** ***sequenced***. The rationale for targeted, sequenced strategies is three-fold: 1) seasonal migrants' plans are to reside *temporarily* in Timor while engaging in a "circular" pattern of seasonal migration; 2) horticulturists' experiences are very different to seasonal migrants returning from overseas work in the hospitality sector; and 3) female seasonal migrant experiences are very different to males concerning reintegration. Similarly, their aspirations and accomplishments differ[40]. In a longitudinal study, half of female respondents said they wanted to start a business. After being back in Timor-Leste for six months, *all* had achieved their goal. In the case of male returnees, half of them too *wanted* to start a business. The difference is that six months later, less than half had attained this.
The next section of the background paper turns to Good Practices in Return and Reintegration, which notwithstanding the key importance of country context, is usefully a regional and global review of the literature.

3. Reintegration issues particular to Timor-Leste and/or similar societies, including comparison of the reintegration experience of female and male labour migrants.

[39] Ann Wigglesworth & Abel Boavida dos Santos (2018). Timorese migrant workers in the Australian Seasonal Worker Program Timorese.migrant.workers.in.SWP-Wigglesworth&dosSantos.pdf (devpolicy.org)
[40] Ibid

GOOD PRACTICES IN RETURN AND REINTEGRATION (ASEAN, and beyond ASEAN)

Good practices in this sphere can be characterised as establishing and implementing human capability programmes for migrant workers, so that they are re-employed (or simply, employed) in jobs matching their newly acquired skills. This reflects the understanding reached by a 2021 ASEAN report under the auspices of the Government of Indonesia[41]. The guiding principles, making it possible to know which programmes to construct, are contingent on a measurable metric, able to target/ disaggregate different categories of returned workers and their needs – at local levels. The tool covers economic, social, psychosocial and health needs[42].

IOM's Sustainable Reintegration tool (RSS) draws on primary research that reflects different return contexts found in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Senegal, and Somalia. The work was done by the Samuel Hall research team in 2017[43]. Subsequently, IOM field-tested 15 indicators and their 29 elements related to the economic, social and psychosocial dimensions of reintegration, and informing to a quantitative measure at individual level, based on returnees' perceptions or self-evaluation of "sustainable reintegration"[44]. IOM defines sustainable reintegration in terms that fundamentally speak to the human capability construct, given that this outcome is where "returnees are able to make further migration decisions *a matter of choice*, rather than necessity"[45]. More specifically, sustainable reintegration is the consequence of "Returnees hav[ing] reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being allowing them to cope with (re)migration drivers[46].

At the same time, a measurement system is not a stand-alone instrument for ascertaining the value, for example, of holding micro business workshops. The predicate of a database and measurement tool boils down to reintegration governance. While the Government of Timor pledged (in 2017) to "finalise and implement the three-year National Action Plan for Labour Migration[47], hopefully it includes a dedicated strategy on returnees. Reintegration remains as the "unwritten chapter in the history of migration"[48]; and it is a chapter that needs to encompass enactment of pertinent legal principles, as well as a *comprehensive* strategy for reintegration.

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[41] ASEAN Secretariat (2021). ASEAN Guidelines on Effective Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers. developed by the Government of Indonesia and ACMW. https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/07-ASEAN-Guidelines-on-Effective-Return-and-Reintegration10.pdf

[42] Ibid. VI.1.4. Assessment of needs of returned migrant workers

[43] Samuel Hall/IOM (2018). Setting Standards for an Integrated Approach to Reintegration. Cover (iom.int)

[44] IOM (2020). Analysis of Reintegration Sustainability Survey data. Sustainable Reintegration Knowledge Bites Series. knowledge_bite_1_-_introduction_0.pdf (iom.int)

[45] ASEAN Secretariat (2021). p. 3.

[46] Ibid. p. 3. See Footnote 8, which reads that circular migration "can take place and can still be a choice regardless of whether reintegration is successful, partially successful or unsuccessful. On the other hand, returnees are unlikely to reintegrate if they find themselves in situations whereby moving again or relying on a family member abroad is considered necessary for their physical or socioeconomic survival".

[47] Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. National Employment Strategy 2017 – 2030. National-Employment-Strategy-2017-20301.pdf (timor-leste.gov.tl)

[48] King (2000, p. 7) "Generalizations from the history of return migration", in B. Ghosh (ed.): Return migration: Journey of hope or despair? (Geneva, IOM)

Indonesia provides an example of how migration governance structures could develop, in stages. A crucial early stage involved passing an apposite decree: Law 18/2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers. Its exemplary qualities include decentralisation of migrant services down to the village government level. Legal principles set the direction for public policy – optimally comprehensive. In Indonesia, strategic planning is not yet comprehensive, but importantly, it demonstrates a targeted approach in its early stage. The guiding principle of a targeted approach was transferred by Law 18/2017, which, in turn, generated a programme called the Productive Migrant Workers Village (Desmigratif) scheme[49]. This targets the home villages of migrant workers. Its functions include maintaining a database on returnees; providing vocational guidance; advice on the labour market; options for circular migration; skills training; small business assistance; and facilitating the development of cooperatives to strengthen *village-owned* business enterprises. The number of Migrant Villages in the Indonesian scheme was 150 in 2019.

Three things stand out in the Indonesia example. First, it is tightly focused on the wellbeing of returnees and their families. It disregards the norm of taking a narrow view of economic value[50]. Second, it stresses the importance of building and maintaining a database on returned seasonal migrants; and third, which is of special interest to Timor with its history of small-holder coffee production is the goal to make cooperatives more appealing and valuable as forms of business enterprises. The village would own and manage these enterprises, to spread the risks and help to assemble more resources. In the case of Timor, this evokes the example of the National Cooperative Business Association, which as previously mentioned is the world's largest producer, processor and exporter of organic coffee. But it might still require GoTL-backed credit and microloans, given that financial institutions tend to refuse loans to returnees without assets or capital.

Regarding the second point above on maintaining a databased on returnees, it is crucial to do this throughout the migration cycle. Indonesia understood the importance of databases covering the entire temporary migration cycle (pre-departure, employment abroad, and return and reintegration). Similar advice on the value of staged returnee databases is included in the Regional Guidelines of the 2015 ILO-Korea Partnership Programme[51]. There are further instances of good practice that involve maintaining a database on returned seasonal migrants, including the following. The European University Institute took a qualitative approach in its database on returning migrants to Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia)[52]. In contrast, a 2013 survey of returning Bangladeshi migrant workers adopted a quantitative methodology[53]. Its

[49] Wickramasekara (2019)

[50] Both wellbeing and economic value of returnees is acknowledged by Ecuador's "Welcome Home Programme" (Bienvenid@s a Casa). It is a far-sighted example of assisting their transition by providing benefits that include one-way air tickets, small loans for specific productivity investments, and housing credits[50].

[51] ILO/Korea Partnership Programme (ILO in Asia and the Pacific)

[52] Cassarino, Jean-Pierre (ed), *Return migrants to the Maghreb countries : reintegration and development challenges*, [Return Migration and Development Platform (RDP)], MIREM - http://hdl.handle.net/1814/9050

[53] Surveying returning Bangladeshi migrant workers. Good practice - Surveying returning Bangladeshi migrant workers (ilo.org)

analysis is focused on the demand for skills and entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. This study interviewed 1,200 returning migrant workers, including 272 women migrants at the airports, and was supplemented by in-depth interviews with 85 returned workers. The database had good flow-on effects including the creation of a Help Desk and a guide on how to find jobs or develop self-employment.

Gender sensitivity needs to be the norm in returnee databases, as emphasised by a Joint ILO–UN Women Regional Workshop on Effective Social and Economic Reintegration of Women Migrant Workers[54]. This means being aware of the different needs, roles, and responsibilities of women and men, and their implications for differential access and control over resources and benefits[55]. Database categories that capture women's distinctive experiences throughout the migration cycle apply to men too, if differently. This extends from workplace discrimination to small business aspirations and achievements.

Database categories should also include age; returnees' village or urban locations and geographical distribution; skills; occupation(s) abroad; reasons for return home; preparedness for return to Timor; and intent to repeat overseas work. Lack of good data is a significant issue in planning, implementing, and monitoring return migration and reintegration and the formulation of policies. Importantly, *a quantitative database is only the entry point.* Multi-dimensional qualitative data are needed to supplement such data. They need to be based on periodic and systematic surveys, of the kind indicated by the Flinders wellbeing survey.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Tthe key recommendations in this background paper are firstly for Timor to adopt legal principles dedicated to return and reintegration, and secondly, to develop a *comprehensive* strategic plan for return and reintegration. While the rationale for requisite legal principles is rights-based, aimed specifically at **social protection** for seasonal migrants; tThe latter would strengthen and increase the value of current programs – which are essentially tactical rather than strategic.

As noted, the recommended legal reform refers to the provision of social protection for returnees. Thiscan be seen as a legislative gap that occurs across two existing laws. The first is Decree-law no. 31/2008 of 13 August which established the Migration Service (MS) as a separate entity and placed it directly under the member of the Government overseeing migration matters[56]. The second existing regulation is Law No. 12/2016 establishing the Social Security Contribution Scheme, which makes social security a guaranteed right in the Constitution of Timor-Leste[57]. The social security scheme, in its current form, offers broad pensions, maternity, and paternity protection to workers. Seasonal migrants face a legislative gap across the two afore-mentioned existing laws. Removing legislative barriers that impede their social protection would also serve to motivate their reintegration. It could be said thata legal reform is a pre-condition of motivation. The suggestion here is that this gap could be

[54] Review of Joint ILO–UN Women Regional Workshop on Effective Social and Economic Reintegration of Women Migrant Workers. 2014. Outcome Document ILO-UN Women Reintegration Workshop Nepal 2014

[55] ASEAN Secretariat (2021). ASEAN Guidelines on Effective Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers developed by the Government of Indonesia and ACMW

[56] Microsoft Word - Decree Law 31-2009 Migration Service Staff Regulations.doc (ilo.org)

[57] Timor-Leste - Law No. 12/2016 establishing the Social Security Contribution Scheme. (ilo.org)

closed through similar legislative pathways that was taken by a 2010 European Commission programme "Beneficiary Parties of the Social Security Coordination and Social Security Reforms"[58]. The European Commission programme expresses an interest in managing labour migration by exploring the social security coverage of migrating seasonal workers (along with other categories of workers). The issue in terms of policy remedies hinges on the limitations of access to coverage that migrant seasonal workers have. Turning to the recommendation to assemble *strategic imperatives* related to return and reintegration, this paper has identified general principles from the literature review of good practices in design and implementation of return and reintegration programmes. They are summed up in the following bullet points.

- Targeted and sequenced planning for return and reintegration: interventions need to be continuous throughout the temporary migration cycle. Where this does not happen there is increased likelihood of high debt burdens and other failures of workers' migration objectives.

- Financial literacy is an essential area of planning. Returnees need to take a wide range of financial decisions, which means they are likely to overlook or just don't know the risk attached to their decisions. They often lack or are perhaps overconfident about their financial knowledge. They need to be apprised of government initiatives, frameworks and regulations. Cabo Verde provides an example of good practice concerning small business enterprises. Their Country of Origin Migrant Support Centre (CAMPO) programme feeds detailed advice to prospective small business owners on the legal steps involved, fiscal incentives and taxes, labour laws, and importantly supports access to credit[59]. The Government of Portugal supports this initiative, producing a manual covering access to vocational training programmes, and business creation contacts.

- In view of the limited use of acquired horticultural and hospitality skills in Timor-Leste, seasonal workers should be provided with opportunities to learn specific skills or trade that can be utilised in Timor-Leste. This could be achieved by offering free or highly subsidised technical courses for, say at least one semester at the end of their seasonal work contract.

- Australia's farm workplaces could start targeting horticultural skills of East Timorese seasonal migrants that are mutually beneficial to host and sending countries. For example, they could employ Timorese seasonal workers on coffee plantations. Australia has about 50 coffee plantations. The arabica bean quality is considered high with minimal pesticide use. An additional plus for the green economy is that the green bean has to travel relatively few kilometres from "paddock to plate". While the country currently produces a very low percentage of coffee consumed in Australia, it is a dynamic industry. A recent coffee growers' strategy plan commissioned by the Australian Government-funded AgriFutures made several recommendations on how to develop productivity. These included planting more trees, value-adding, and making new varieties available[60]. Regarding the benefits of acquired skills to the host country Timor, we earlier mentioned Timor's coffee plantation tradition of rewarding work "in kind" or barter. To motivate returnees, ostensibly the system could be changed to payment in cash under Fair Trade agreements.

[58] Social security of migrant seasonal workers - Serbia.doc (live.com)
[59] CAMPO – Country of Origin Migrant Support Centre - Camões - Instituto da Cooperação e da Língua (instituto-camoes.pt)
[60] Australian Coffee Strategic RD&E Plan | AgriFutures Australia

- As previously emphasised, the farm sector is a highly significant factor for human/ food security/ wellbeing in Timor. Farming provides subsistence for about 80% of the population, as well as generating an average of 90% of the country's exports[61] The households are typically an extended family with an average land size of around 0.721 hectares[62]. Regionally this is not small. But in terms of efficiencies and yields, most Timorese farmers plant and harvest only what they use themselves. One policy response could be to focus on the formation of cooperatives so that small land holders together can become owners of larger plots of land. We noted how in Indonesia there has been a guiding legal principle that generated a programme called the Productive Migrant Workers Village (Desmigratif) scheme[63]. This targets the home villages of migrant workers and in addition to other measure facilitates the development of cooperatives to strengthen *village-owned* business enterprises. The number of Migrant Villages in the Indonesian scheme was 150 in 2019.
- Skills training related to cooperatives can usefully be seen in the broader context of cluster development training, where 'cluster' refers to a mass of collaborations between a diverse number of public and private sector actors, government agencies, and academic institutions. To date, Timor cluster development initiatives have been focused on the petro-chemical industry. Lessons could be applied to the farm sector from this experiment.

Ultimately, our recommendations derive from exemplary actions in the literature that arise from legal principles and have been implemented as strategic plans. The word "strategic" is important. Iff we were view return and reintegration projects and programmes in Timor in terms of their tactical aspects/ actions, we would deduce that Timor-Leste is doing well. There is an array of schemes to recognise and certify skills, provide training and entrepreneurial workshopping, information on access to work, and more. In addition, there is good understanding shown of the need to improve these aspects of seasonal migrants' wellbeing. But tactical activities do not equate with comprehensive policy. Targeted approaches to reintegration demand an overarching set of migration governance structures in which a comprehensive strategy and legal framework are essential components. While, at the roots of this deficit, migration governance in Timor lacks a specific law addressing emigration/ return. This is seen as a high priority, which having been tackled by various other countries provides valuable guiding principles for Timor-Leste.

Literature on returned seasonal migrant workers

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[63] Wickramasekara (2019)

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GLOSSARY

AEA: Approved Employers of Australia (seasonal worker employer’s umbrella group)

APTC: Australia Pacific Training Coalition

DFAT: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)

DNEE: Direccao Nacional Emprego Exterior (Department of External Employment Timor)

GoTL: Government of Timor-Leste

ILO: International Labor Organization

INDMO: National Institute of Workforce Development (Timor-Leste)

LMAP: Labour Mobility Assistance Program

LSU: Labour sending unit (Timor-Leste)

PALM: Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme (includes Timor-Leste)

RPL: Recognition of Prior Learning

SEPFOPE (SEFOPE): Secretariat of State for Vocational Training and Employment Policy (Timor-Leste)

SWP: Seasonal Worker Program

TVET: technical-vocational education and training

WDPTL: Workforce Development Program Timor-Leste