

Pacific Employment Action Plan (PEAP) Fund

Interim Evaluation -
Key findings

September 2025



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Evidence and Effectiveness



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Disclaimer

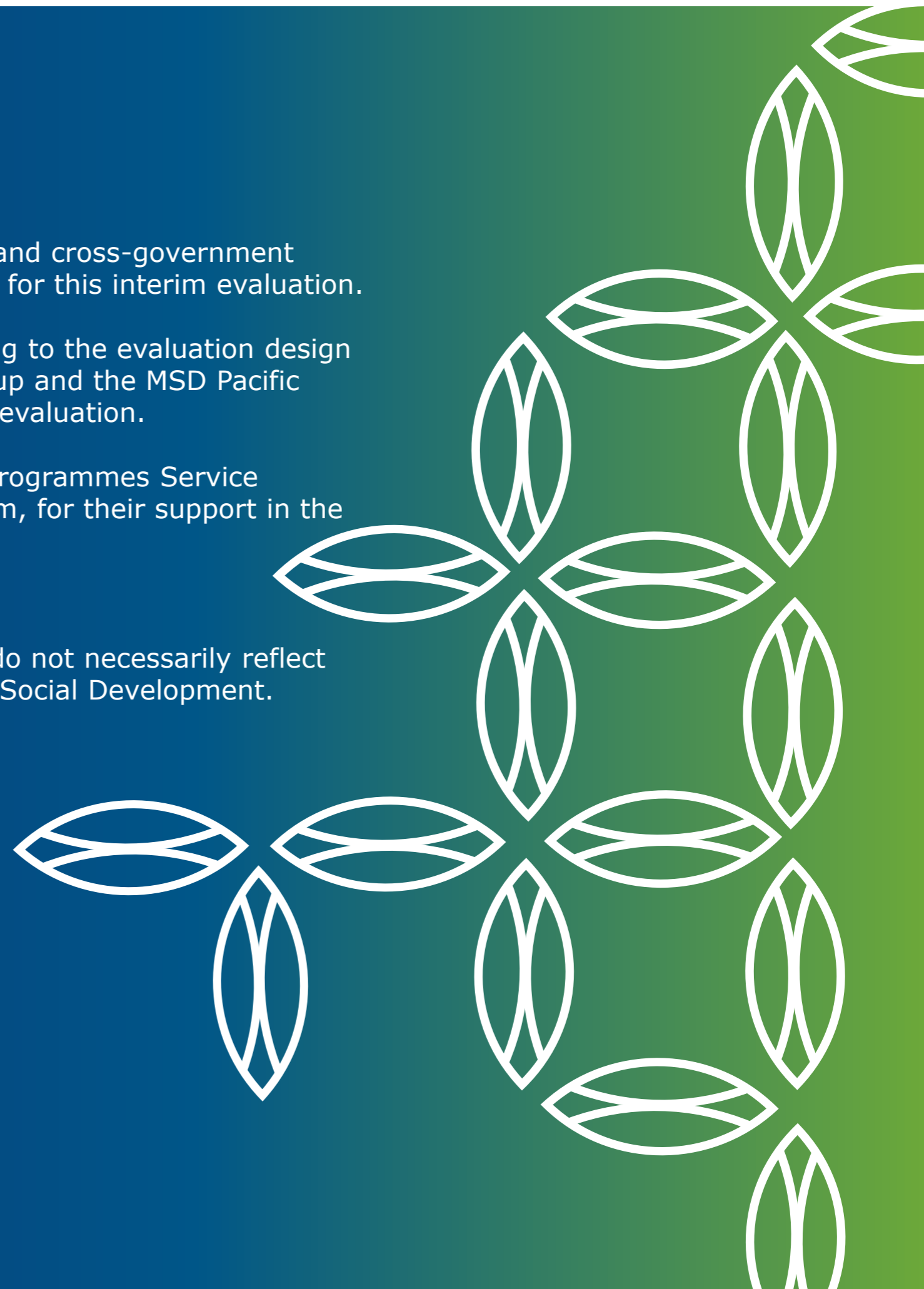
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Background of the PEAP Fund

The purpose of the Fund is to enable career advancement, build in-demand skills, and promote inclusive, culturally-grounded pathways into quality work for Pacific people. It is administered by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and the Fund design was supported by the Ministry for Pacific Peoples (MPP).

Implementation of the Fund began in August 2024 and lasts for two years.

The PEAP Fund was allocated across 13 Pacific organisations to deliver programmes which were selected based on their ability to:

- Be community-led and Pacific-focused
- Improve career pathways and develop in-demand skills
- Promote equity, inclusion, and wellbeing especially supporting target cohorts such as Pacific youth, women, disabled people, parents and rainbow communities
- Demonstrate successful and relevant outcomes for Pacific participants and communities.

This document summarises the findings of the interim evaluation of the Pacific Employment Action Plan (PEAP) Fund.

Evaluation Context

During the Fund's design phase in April 2024, we developed a monitoring and evaluation framework, and a Theory of Change (ToC) to guide the interim evaluation.¹

This evaluation aims to understand:

1. What is working well? (enablers during implementation of the Fund)
2. What is not working so well? (barriers to achieving desired outcomes)
3. What are the participants' early outcomes?

The evaluation draws on different methods including:

- Talanoa with funded service providers, programme participants, employers and MSD/MPP staff
- Descriptive analysis of monitoring data, including early participant outcomes
- Review of provider reporting, including case studies written by service providers.

We took a Pacific-centric approach by using the Kapasa framework and talanoa method.

What's next?

An impact analysis is planned at the end of the Fund (late 2026) that will use Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) to measure changes in employment and other outcomes. The findings from this interim evaluation will provide useful context to help understand these findings.

Key Takeaways

What is working well?

- The Funded programmes are underpinned by holistic wraparound support, soft skills development, flexible and adaptable delivery, Pacific For Pacific approaches, and strong system-wide relationships.

What is not working so well?

- Participants face complex, long-term challenges that sometimes differ from provider expectations, presenting barriers to achieving desired outcomes.
- Other challenges included operational and programme design constraints, labour market conditions, and structural barriers.

Some employment and training outcomes are emerging

- The Fund is beginning to show early signs of positive outcomes with participants gaining employment, upskilling, and progressing along training and career pathways.
- In many cases success has extended beyond immediate job outcomes. Participants have also gained confidence and improved wellbeing, which has helped prepare them for future opportunities.

PEAP funded programmes align with traditional Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) in some ways and differ in others

- Ways that PEAP programmes align with traditional ALMPs include targeting disadvantaged groups, actively supporting participants, building skills, and engaging employers.
- PEAP Funded programmes generally align with other community-led programmes by offering tailored support and prioritising community strengths.
- However, PEAP Funded programmes differ from traditional ALMPs through a Pacific-led, holistic approach and a slower pace that matches participants' needs.

There are opportunities to strengthen future community-led programme development

- Allowing for the measurement of broader outcomes beyond employment.
- Encouraging tailored approaches and flexibility to respond to complex and diverse needs.
- Engaging with a greater range of Pacific stakeholders in the community at the outset during the design phase.
- Continuing the support of culturally-grounded, relationship-based approaches.

¹ See appendix 1 for the full ToC and the new insights and refinements that emerged through this evaluation

² The Fund is still active, and this interim evaluation does not assess final outcomes.

What is working well?

Holistic, wraparound support builds trust between providers and participants

Most providers emphasised using a holistic approach, supporting participants' emotional, financial, social, and employment needs.

Relationships grounded in empathy, aloha, and family/whānau values helped participants feel genuinely supported.

Pastoral care and cultural responsiveness were seen as key to achieving participant outcomes.

Providers focused on development of peoples' soft skills to prepare for work

Programmes helped participants build confidence, shift mindsets, develop self-awareness, and reset their expectations about what they could achieve.

Soft skills training prepared participants for real-world environments, especially for youth, disabled people, and those new to work.

“ More sense of independence and kind of having that voice for themselves and making decisions. That then leads into doing things like creating a CV, having the confidence to approach people and practice those interpersonal skills.” - **Service provider**

Flexibility and innovation enables tailored journeys

Service delivery is adaptable, meeting clients where they are, whether online or in person.

Participants are supported to set their own pace and goals, with flexible pathways and creative methods that respond to life changes.

The personalisation of services was widely seen as crucial to achieving outcomes.

“ [The] structure we have is not rigid. So we can react and plan accordingly to what comes through our doors. Because no two families are the same.” - **Service provider**

Strong relationships across the system enhance impact

Service providers described success as relying on three layers of relationships:

Community: Engaging whānau, peer support, and local networks.

Employers: Building trust-based partnerships, offering internships, and aligning expectations and training.

Work and Income: As a key referral partner, supporting system integration and sharing data through the Service Outcome Reporting Tool (SORT).

This approach reflects Pacific ways of working and values, emphasizing relationality, collective responsibility, and culturally-grounded practices across all layers of engagement.

A by-Pacific, for-Pacific model fosters cultural safety

A shared cultural lens, language, values, and lived experience was central to building trust, empowering participants, and enhancing engagement.

Providers worked with each participant's whole family and created safe, welcoming spaces.

“ Communities know what their people need and they are best at engaging with them” - **Staff member**

Key participant demographics¹

624 people enrolled for PEAP-funded programmes between August 2024 and early June 2025. Monitoring data in this slide-pack reflects this group.

Participant demographics broadly reflect the target cohort

- Most people identified as Pacific People (91 percent), followed by Māori (13 percent) and NZ European (2 percent).²
- 39 percent of participants were aged 16-24.
- Around half of the participants were female (53 percent).
- Almost half of the participants were parents (47 percent).
- Around half of the participants (48 percent) were on a main benefit³, most of whom (78 percent) were on Jobseeker Support – Work Ready (JS – WR).
- **Only five percent of participants (32) have withdrawn from a programme, which highlights the strong cultural fit and engagement PEAP-funded programmes provide.**

¹ Demographic insights of participants were captured at the date of enrolment.

² Participants can identify with more than one ethnic group.

³ Main benefit numbers exclude partners.

What is not working so well?

Complex, long-term challenges that sometimes differ from provider expectations

One of the main barriers to getting work was participants' level and complexity of needs upon joining - such as mental health, justice involvement, and low self-confidence.

Many participants were early on their employment journey or yet not job-ready, needing time to progress.

Practical obstacles like language, literacy, access to technology, and missing credentials further limited progress.

Due to caregiving needs, some participants sought only casual or part-time work.

Complex needs clients can differ from what providers anticipate. While providers often deliver a wide range of support to meet these needs, contractual reporting requirements remain primarily focused on employment outcomes.

Expanding reporting to capture broader measures of progress could better reflect the meaningful steps participants are making and the value of providers' support.

“

[The] intent is to get them [a] sustainable job, but that doesn't represent the reality with participants - they come with all sort of challenges" - Service provider

Labour market conditions and employer bias impact outcomes

Realities of the labour market, such as limited jobs in some sectors, and employer bias toward disabled people, can impact participants achieving goals.

Some areas lack local job opportunities.

Design of Fund limits community voice and flexibility

Despite extensive pre-design engagement at the Fund set-up stage, some stakeholders suggested that the design process involved limited Pacific community voice, from a broader range of participants from the Pacific community, such as community organisations, churches or local employers, which limited responsiveness to community specific aspirations.

The strong focus on employment outcomes combined with short-term contracts (e.g. two years) are not well-suited for participants needing longer-term, holistic support, especially for disabled participants or those pursuing formal qualifications.

Taken together, these factors in the Fund design were seen by some stakeholders as creating practical limitations that influence programmes design and flexibility.

Operational constraints undermine delivery

Operational constraints refer to external issues affecting delivery. For example:

- Logistical delays such as booking systems for driver licensing slow down client progress.
- Scheduling in-person sessions that work for both staff and clients is challenging, especially in shift-based industries.
- Staff turnover and difficulty recruiting culturally-aligned trainers, especially Pacific staff, affect continuity.
- Referral systems are inconsistent, and outreach struggles to connect with clients beyond existing networks.

“ we've reached out to Te Whatu Ora recently and out of 1,600 students that go through nursing school, only half of those end up with a job. So we want them to be successful, gonna help them with these pathways. But some of these pathways may lead to nothing in the end - Service provider

Demographic and monitoring data reinforces the complexity of what many participants are navigating

The top five barriers¹ to gaining employment or improving their employment situation identified by participants were:

- Lack of qualifications (28 percent)
- Access to support or information (23 percent)
- Self-esteem (17 percent)
- Limited employment history (16 percent)
- Transport (15 percent)

Further monitoring data insights:

- 10 percent of participants reported having a health condition.
- 10 percent reported having a criminal record.
- 66 percent of participants were reported as not in employment, education or training (NEET).

¹ Note that participants were able to list more than one barrier.

Structural barriers beyond the programme

Wider systemic challenges such as discrimination, unstable housing, labour market conditions, and broader inequities make it harder for participants to engage with or sustain employment. These barriers can undermine motivation, even when participants have made positive mindset shifts.

“ Challenges: of our participants and residents face housing insecurity, making it difficult to maintain regular employment and that is a big factor if you know...[they have] mental health and addiction issues" - Service provider

Success goes beyond employment

For many participants, success extended beyond immediate job outcomes such as gains in confidence, improved wellbeing and other social outcomes¹. These have been foundational in preparing participants for future employment and training opportunities.

Confidence and mindset shifts are enabling progress

Providers reported that many participants showed greater motivation, clearer goals, and positive mindset changes through their programme engagement.

By recognizing participants as capable individuals and tailoring support to their journeys, providers helped people find direction and believe in new possibilities.

This human-centred approach supports sustained engagement and meaningful progress, complementing traditional employment metrics.

“ He gradually built his confidence and improved his social interactions. Increased Confidence: Transformed from shy to [a] confident, driven young adult ” - Participant case study

Upskilling supports work-readiness and career progression

Participants developed both practical and soft skills (e.g., communication, CV building, and interview skills).

Many engaged with learning, with some pursuing long-term qualifications beyond contract timelines.

Completion of training often led to participants being recognised or promoted at work.

Wellbeing improvements underpin sustainable success

Participants reported healing, improved mental health, reconnection with family, and rebuilding of cultural identity.

This holistic wellbeing support set the foundation for future employment outcomes.

“ You know, when I come from home, there was a little bit stress. And when I came here and it's all my stress goes away because of their smiling faces. meeting new people, helping me learn and also that let me go outside more instead of staying at the house” - Participant

Positive effects extend to whānau and aiga

Impacts extended beyond the individual. Families of participants were supported emotionally and practically, and were sometimes inspired to re-engage in work or learning themselves.

Peer connections through the programme strengthened social networks and reduced isolation.

¹ **Social outcomes** refer to individual-level changes that improve programme participants' ability to participate fully in society, such as improvements related to mental and physical health, motivation, self-confidence, social participation and other personal or social capabilities that go beyond employment or income gains. (OECD definition)

Some employment and training outcomes are emerging

Foundational support is helping achieve early outcomes

- > Participants needed time to build confidence, trust, and readiness for work, but these foundational shifts are supporting some early outcomes for participants.
- > Some participants moved into employment; often entry-level roles aligned with their job readiness and skills.
- > Other participants moved into better roles or were advanced from their current roles following participation.
- > Trusted provider-employer relationships helped open up new job opportunities.

Pathways align with broader Pacific aspirations

- > While many participants entered lower-skilled sectors, some participants pursued training for careers in diverse sectors such as aviation, nursing, and teaching.
- > This supports participants' longer-term goals for Pacific-led economic resilience and upward mobility.

Figure 1: Overall employment and training outcomes

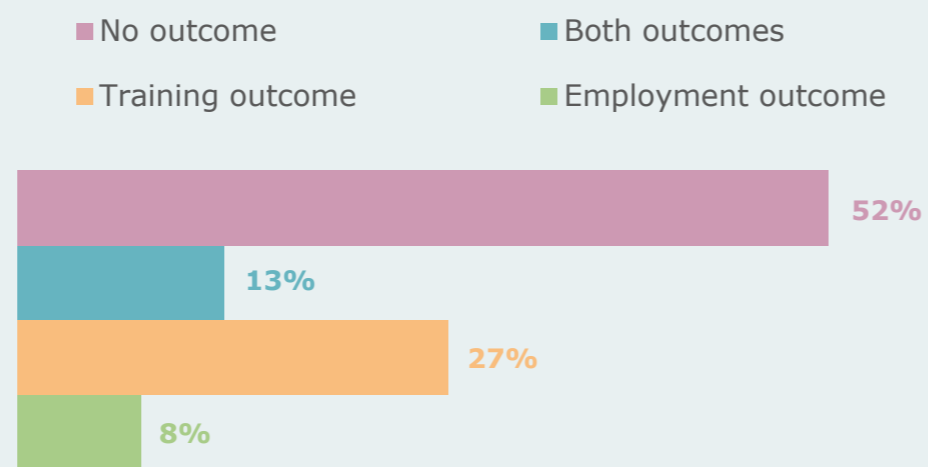
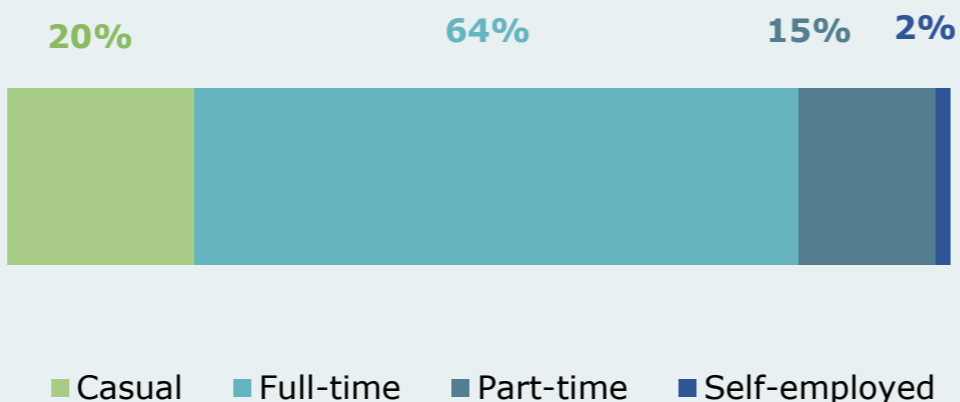


Figure 2: Breakdown of employment outcomes



Achieving an employment outcome means gaining some form of employment while in the programme. For those already employed, this meant gaining improved employment, such as a higher salary, more hours, or a preferred role/industry.

Achieving a training outcome means completing an employment-related training, such as CV writing, a first aid course, or getting a driver's licence.

Around half of participants have achieved an employment or training outcome ¹

Of the 624 participants in the monitoring group,

- > 27 percent (or 171 people) achieved a training outcome
- > 8 percent (or 49 people) achieved an employment outcome
- > a further 13 percent (or 82 people) achieved both training and employment outcomes

Of the 131 people that achieved an employment outcome, 84 people gained a full-time role, 26 gained a casual role, 19 gained a part-time role, and 2 became self-employed.

These outcomes aligns with expected immediate outcomes reflected in the TOC developed at the Fund Design (see Appendix 1 for the full TOC)

Weak economic conditions likely contributed to other participants not achieving employment or education outcomes

52 percent (or 322 people) do not have a recorded outcome², which is not unexpected as subdued economic conditions have resulted in a challenging job market. However, these people are still currently participating in the programme, and MSD expects that employment and education outcomes will increase over time.

Employment outcomes may also increase over time as the labour market improves. The unemployment rate was 5.2 percent in the June 2025 quarter³, which is when it was forecast to peak.

A weak economy also encourages people to take up education and training

The finding that 253 people (or 41 percent) achieved a training outcome is not unexpected, as when there are fewer opportunities for employment, people often choose to undertake education and training instead.

For the 300 participants who were on a main benefit at enrolment, the outcomes are similar to the overall cohort:

- > 50 percent (or 150 people) do not have a recorded outcome
- > 34 percent (or 101 people) achieved a training outcome
- > 5 percent (or 16 people) achieved an employment outcome
- > 11 percent (or 33 people) achieved both training and employment outcomes.

¹ Employment and training outcomes were counted as any outcome occurring prior to 5 June 2025.

² Note that some participants without outcomes have been in the programme for a short duration, as little as a week or a few days prior to 5 June 2025

³ The unemployment rate for June 2025 is as at the August 2025 release.

Alignment and differences with other Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs)¹

PEAP funded programmes align with traditional ALMPs in some ways...

- > PEAP funded programmes target groups facing labour market disadvantage consistent with ALMP objectives to improve equity and employability.
- > Participants are actively supported to improve motivation, job readiness, and self-confidence.
- > Many providers incorporate skills development, including job search skills, soft skills, and vocational training.
- > Employer engagement is present in some cases, especially when matching job seekers with real employment opportunities.
- > Services are tailored to individual needs, with case management and coaching reflecting best practices in personalised ALMP delivery.
- > Monitoring and learning systems were in place before implementation.

...they also generally align with other community-led programmes

- > PEAP funded programmes are similar to other MSD community-led programmes (such as the Māori Trades and Training Fund, He Poutama Rangatahi, Te Mana Whai Pukenga, and Oranga Mahi – Rākau Rangatira) as they are rooted in cultural values and provide a tailored approach prioritising collective strengths and community connections.
- > This tailored approach is similar to other Pacific initiatives like the Pacific Value Job (PVJ) programme, which focused on tailoring support to match Pacific job seekers' skills with local labour market needs by focusing on participants' aspirations and needs.

However, there are some differences compared to traditional ALMPs

Pacific design that is community-led:

- > Generally, traditional ALMPs tend to emphasise standardised delivery by providing a uniform set of services and support to all clients.
- > PEAP funded programmes took a Pacific-led approach in the delivery, which uses a tailored and holistic approach (focusing on employment outcomes, skills development, confidence and culturally relevant wrap-around support).

Slower pace of expected employment outcomes to allow for tailored support to participants' needs and pace:

- > Traditional ALMPs typically emphasise short-term employment outcomes and measurable short-term results e.g. job placements within a relatively short timeframe.
- > For PEAP funded programmes, providers meet participants where they are, allowing progress to unfold at a respectful, sustainable pace tailored to individual and community readiness.
- > Each participant's situation is unique and a plan to achieve employment outcomes varies and may take longer due to the nature of participants' situation and needs.

¹ Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) are government funded interventions aimed at improving a person's chances of finding and retaining employment. These policies typically offer targeted and personalised support, including case management, information and guidance, education and training, recruitment and retention incentives, start-up support, and job creation initiatives.

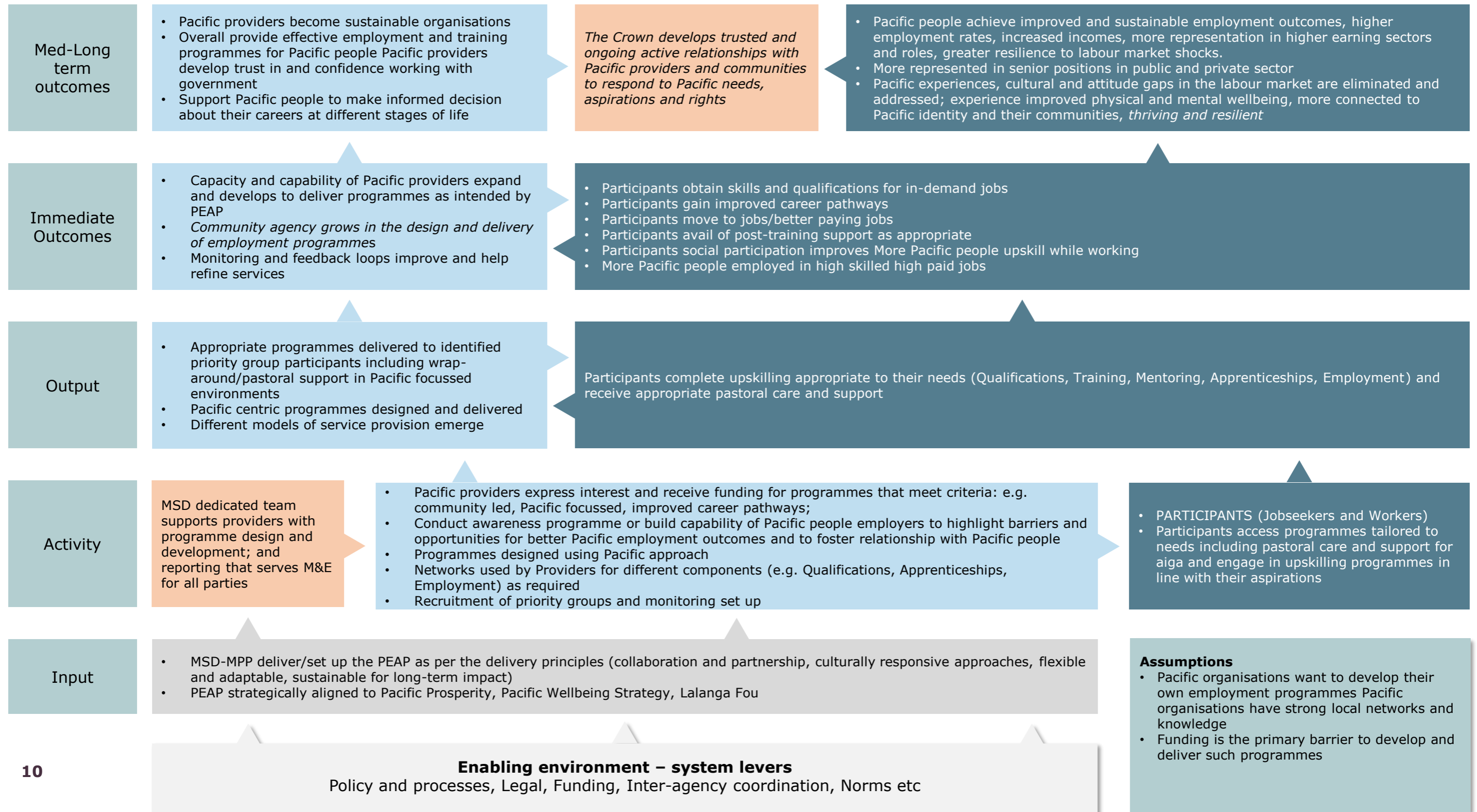
Opportunities to strengthen future community-led programme development

Opportunities for MSD and decision makers to influence	Opportunities for service providers to build on	Opportunities for strengthening through partnership
<ul style="list-style-type: none">› Measure broader outcomes reflecting stepped progress towards employment by integrating outcome measures into programme design in a way that captures outcomes towards employment and allow more time for change especially as work on outcomes-based contracting develops.› Encourage tailored approaches and flexibility to respond to complex and diverse participant needs. Participant needs varied widely - some needed only light-touch support; others required extensive wraparound services before becoming work-ready.› Strengthen community voice in design. Community and provider insights are a valuable source of understanding community needs and can contribute to labour market insights and inform the design of community-led programmes. The evaluation points to the need to provide opportunities for engagement from a broader range of participants from the Pacific community, such as community organisations, churches or local employers.› Continue supporting culturally grounded, relationship-based approaches.› Continue building on data and feedback loops – tools like SORT and regular reporting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› A by-Pacific for-Pacific model ensure services are led by Pacific staff and guided by strengths-based, culturally grounded practices that build trust and motivation.› In addition to job empowerment, maintain the person-centered approach focusing on soft skills and mindset development› Recognise and support broader career goals and continue tailoring and innovating programme activities to align with participants' evolving aspirations and employment pathways over time,› Strengthen employer partnerships: Maintain employer relationships that support job matching, retention, and feedback loops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› Balance flexibility and accountability in community-led models to support innovation while ensuring clarity in roles, expectations and responsibilities between government and community providers.› Partnership-based delivery models that integrate training and employer input can support more sustainable employment outcomes. Employer feedback highlighted the value of providers' role in preparing candidates and managing expectations.› Community of practice: Providers highlighted the importance of relationships with other service providers for building connections and sharing learnings.

Appendix 1 – Theory of Change

During the Fund design phase, a detailed Theory of Change (ToC) was developed. It provided a clear roadmap, guided both the implementation and evaluation approaches by outlining expected outcomes and key pathways.

TOC - Pacific Employment Action Plan (Fund)



Appendix 1 Continued– ToC - How our Understanding Evolved

In this evaluation, we used the ToC to structure our evaluation approach and deepen our conceptual understanding. As a result, several insights and refinements emerged, which are documented below.

Assumptions

That Pacific organisations have strong local networks and knowledge. We found that in some instances it was more with employers rather than with the community.

Funding is the primary barrier to develop and deliver such programmes. The time limited duration of the funding meant that for some providers they could not work long enough with participants who needed extra support.

Immediate Outcomes

More Pacific people employed in high skilled high paid jobs. More participants were jobseekers than workers, and many jobseekers had long benefit durations.

Monitoring and feedback loops. Providers highlighted the importance of relationships of other service providers for building connections and learnings sharing through a community of practice approach. This suggests that collaboration, shared learning, and ongoing engagement across providers are critical to improving service delivery and outcomes for the community.

Activity

Build capability of Pacific people employers for highlighting barriers etc. Besides awareness, the evaluation found the need to add employer-focused activities such as building partnerships, coaching employers, organising cultural competency training, trial placements with support.

Med-Long term outcomes

Participants experience improved physical and mental wellbeing. They experience improved outcomes includes more than just employment. Recognize the person-centered approach focusing on soft outcomes like shifting mindsets, increased self-efficacy, hopefulness, or improved family relationships.

Output

Appropriate programmes delivered. Could add transition support and long-term progression pathways. Some participants need support post-placement (e.g., mentoring, further training) to stay on track toward sustainable outcomes.

Different models of service provision emerge. Providers had different ways of engaging and sequencing services. Providers also act as connectors and advocates. Providers don't just deliver programmes, they act as connectors between participants and systems (employers, community, family).

Pacific centric programmes. Programmes strengthened cultural identity and confidence. participants highlighted that cultural connection helps build their confidence and motivation. Providers also model values-based and culturally grounded leadership; a key contribution to the social sector landscape.