

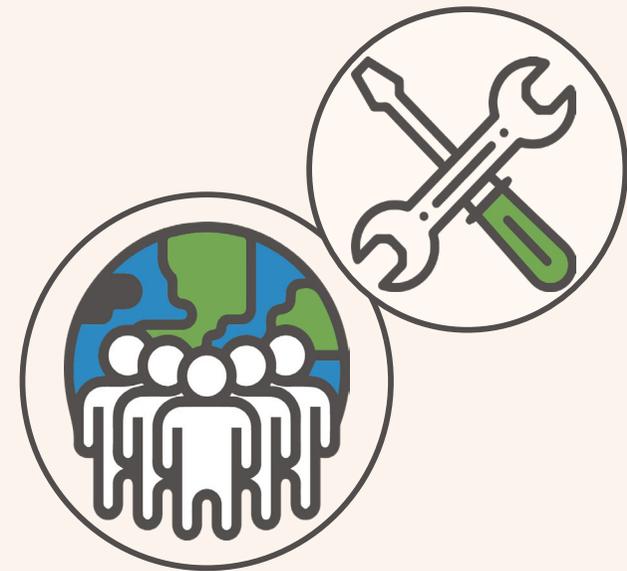
GROWING THE LABOUR FORCE AND PREVENTING DEPOPULATION

COVID-19 led to a further decrease in population and labour force which needs to be reversed so our economy has the skills and numbers needed to generate activity and incomes.

The Cook Islands faces an issue of a declining population due to emigration and if this decline is not addressed, it will significantly impact economic growth going forward – particularly our labour force. Adding to this, the commencement of the quarantine-free travel for passengers from the Cook Islands into New Zealand in January 2021 has seen a significant number of people of working-age migrating to New Zealand for employment opportunities.

As New Zealand citizens, Cook Islanders have ease of labour mobility with New Zealand and Australia. The 2018 New Zealand census estimates that approximately 80,000 people have Cook Islands heritage in New Zealand. This is in addition to approximately 22,000 people of Cook Islands heritage residing in Australia. This is a significant resource that remains largely untapped.

In order to increase the number of workers, and skills available to the Cook Islands economy, a key pillar will be a targeted approach to attract Cook Islanders back to live in the Cook Islands. This will involve establishing a coordinated network of the diaspora to allow Cook Islanders abroad to more easily contribute to the economic development of the Cook Islands. There is also a strong case to be made for looking into simplifying the immigration requirements and reducing barriers to entry in order to grow our labour force and address various needs in the economy.



Economic Development Strategy Actions related to this focus area:

No.	Action	Lead Agency	Details	Indicative timing
3.2	Population study	OPM	Study to increase the understanding of the drivers behind population movements	2022
3.3	National Population Strategy	OPM	Research and development of a national population strategy for the Cook Islands	2022
3.7	Diaspora Network	MFAI	Establish a formal diaspora network for communication, including promotion of activities, available jobs and procurement in the Cook Islands	2021

