



Gender Action Plan III

REGIONAL GENDER PROFILE

Pacific Island Countries*

June 2021

* The geographic scope of this document is aligned with the regional portfolio of the Delegation of the European Union for the Pacific, covering the Cook Islands, Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. For comparison purposes, this Profile makes occasional reference to the French Overseas Countries and Territories in the Pacific, Australia, New Zealand, as well as Papua New Guinea,

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BNPL	Basic Needs Poverty Line
BPA	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
BPA+25	25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
CAT	Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CIWGD	Cook Islands Women and Girls with Disabilities
CPPED	Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRMW	Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families
CROP	Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [Australia]
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DSM	Deep Sea Mining
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix [Vanuatu]
DWA	Department of Women's Affairs [Vanuatu]
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FPIC	free prior and informed consent
FWRM	Fiji Women's Rights Movement
GANHRI	Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions
GBB	gender-based budgeting
GBV	gender-based violence
GPC	Gender and Protection Cluster [Vanuatu]
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Surveys
HPV	Human Papilloma Virus
ICAAD	International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination
ICAN	International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
ICT	information and communication technology
IDM	Individual Deprivation Measure
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPPWS	Increasing Political Participation of Women in Samoa
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency

LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex
M4C	Markets for Change
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MWCSD	Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development [Samoa]
NCDs	Non-Communicable Diseases
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office [Vanuatu]
NZLC	New Zealand Law Commission
PACMAS	Pacific Media Assistance Scheme
PFRPD	Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
PICs	Pacific Island Countries
PICTs	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PLGED	Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration
PPA	Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality
RRRT	Regional Rights Resource Team [SPC]
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering And Mathematics
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TSMs	Temporary Special Measures
TVET	Technical And Vocational Education And Training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSCR1325	UN Security Council Resolution 1325
UNTOC	UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WHO	World Health Organization
WUTMI	Women United Together Marshall Islands

Acknowledgements

This Profile benefited from the inputs and consultations with a number of individuals and institutions, at national and regional level, including EU Member States and Civil Society Organizations. Other sources consulted include online materials, national/regional reports relating to gender equality, sustainable development and human rights as well as virtual archive documentation of the EU Delegation for the Pacific. Special attention was given to the publication of the report for the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BEIJING+25): 'Review of progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Pacific island countries and territories' (SPC, Suva, Fiji, April 2021).

Executive Summary

Despite the raft of commitments and progress in certain areas of gender equality in some Pacific Island Countries (PICs), the Regional Gender Profile for the Pacific remains adversely affected by underlying structural, social, cultural and economic barriers. These include harmful social norms, exclusionary and discriminatory practices, as well as the fact that gender equality is not systematically integrated into legal and policy frameworks. Whilst there is political will to advance women's rights and end domestic violence, limited resources for addressing gender inequality issues, combined with limited capacity within governments to develop and implement gender-responsive policies and programmes, hinder actual implementation¹.

The following points summarise some overarching issues, as well as key challenges and areas for further work in the region.

COVID-19: While there has been little-to-no local transmission of the Covid-19 virus in most Pacific Island Countries, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women and girls in PICs. These include adverse effects on their education, food security and nutrition, health, livelihoods and protection against violence. The crisis has exacerbated existing gender inequalities and women and girls face even higher rates of violence, sexual abuse and control from their husbands, partners and families. Women are expected to undertake more unpaid domestic work, while having less access to essential health services and being more vulnerable to economic hardship.

Poverty: In Pacific island countries, poverty is difficult to measure for several reasons, including the existing traditional systems of social and family obligations, as well as the ways in which benefits of community-owned land are distributed. Measuring poverty at the individual level within households is currently impossible, except through specifically designed surveys. Women and men experience poverty or deprivation differently and violence against women exacerbates their multiple dimensions. Poverty and hardship also vary between rural and urban areas, and female-headed households struggle more in terms of access to land, livelihoods and well-paid employment. The region needs improved social protection systems that are accessible to women of all ages and abilities.

Education: Countries have made commitments to universal access to free education at least until the end of primary school. Gender parity has been achieved, or nearly so, at primary level in most countries. Some PICs have started to undertake initiatives to make curricula gender responsive, but these require continuous investment and enhanced teacher training. Several countries have introduced policies to ensure that girls can complete their education

¹ Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Report, May 2021

even if they become pregnant as adolescents, but social stigma and family pressure may still cause these girls to drop out of school. Concerns about protection against sexual harassment and assault can prevent rural girls from attending boarding schools to complete their secondary education.

Health: Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for women of all ages, ethnic groups, backgrounds and skills remain an area of challenge in the Pacific. Maternal health indicators have improved across almost all countries, but unmet needs for contraceptives, adolescent pregnancies, and addressing the SRHR needs of women with disabilities remain problematic. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are epidemic in the region, with associated disabilities and mortality. Women bear a disproportionate share of the burden of caring for family members while also suffering from NCDs themselves. Mental health and depression are largely unmeasured but surveys on violence against women indicate that women who experience violence are often depressed and may even consider suicide.

Violence against women: Violence against women (VAW) in the Pacific region is both a symptom and driver of gender inequality. VAW rates in many PICs are amongst the highest in the world. Increasing regional coordination and development of integrated service protocols are gradually improving services for survivors but large numbers of women don't report violence due to fear of stigma or further retaliation. Governments and development partners recognise that ending violence against women requires changing social norms and entrenched gender power dynamics. These changes take time, integrated and well-funded initiatives, and continued advocacy from both male and female leaders in communities, churches and governments in order to succeed. Challenges include finding means to adapt political and development programming cycles to the scale and scope of the effort required.

Security: There are currently no armed conflicts in the Pacific islands region but in recent history Fiji and Solomon Islands experienced internal armed struggles. In both instances, women played their traditional role as peacemakers, bringing parties together to negotiate issues and truce. Women, however, have continually been excluded from formal negotiations to establish ceasefires and terms of peace.

Economy: Pacific women are entrepreneurial by necessity and, whilst there are many variations between sub-regions, they are highly involved in informal sector including production of goods for subsistence and micro-enterprise. There are significant rural-to-urban variations in women's engagement in the formal labour force and business. Across the region, the public sector is the largest employer of women, and women in urban areas are more likely to be in secure paid employment than rural women. Women's economic empowerment is an ongoing area of work in the region and recent efforts to engage rural women more actively in different levels of agricultural and handicraft value chains are showing positive results. The Pacific islands region sees continuing challenges linked to access to credit and collaterals, as well as other financial services, although a number of collaborative development initiatives are improving financial literacy and inclusion.

Power and Decision Making: At all levels and across countries, gender power dynamics disadvantage women as decision makers. This is tempered by individual relations and competencies and, whilst there are exceptions, socio-cultural norms in the Pacific see men as the 'natural' spokespeople for families, communities and governments. Increasing women's participation at all levels of decision-making is progressing at community levels, in public service and in civil society organisations. At the national political level women still hold few seats and temporary special measures are only used by a few countries.

Human rights: With the exception of Tonga, all Pacific island governments have made commitments to Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Palau has signed the convention and twelve other states have ratified it. PICs are working to revise discriminatory legislation and promote gender equality. Limited investment in gender mainstreaming and women's human rights, however, shows a gap between stated and demonstrated political will of leaders. A number of governments have or are exploring establishment of national human rights institutes and the Pacific Community houses the Regional Rights Resource Team, which provides technical assistance on CEDAW implementation across the region. The Parliament of Marshall Islands (RMI) passed the region's first Gender Equality Act in September 2019.

Environment: The Pacific islands region has diverse natural environments and women are active users and managers of the ocean, rivers and land. Increasing impacts of climate change are being felt across the region and women are becoming highly involved in disaster risk reduction and adaptation initiatives. As climate change emerges as a new area of policy and programming, gender inclusive standards and practices - largely introduced through development partners - are supporting women to lead and demonstrate their capabilities to their communities and peers. Climate change is a major concern for women in the Pacific as it is already threatening livelihoods, homes and citizenship.

Disability: Although the stated political support is strong, Pacific governments currently only allocate limited funding to implementing the range of measures required to fully realise the rights of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities often lack accessibility, visibility and inclusion across all aspects of society in the Pacific islands region. Stronger partnerships and more coordinated efforts from governments, development partners, civil society (including NGOs) and the private sector are needed to systematically address gender and disability concerns.

Girls and children: Due to the fact that Pacific cultures are traditionally hierarchical and patriarchal, being young and female is often denoted with an inferior status, and girls face multiple barriers to equality. Girls are at high risk of sexual abuse within families and from strangers. In some sub-regions, girls can be kept out of school to help with heavy household workloads or to protect them from perceived threats at boarding facilities. In other sub-regions, women and girls are supported to attend school but concurrently expected to fill traditional family roles as a priority over other life options. Children and adolescents are increasingly exposed to pornography, which negatively impacts their potential to develop respectful relationships. A number of civil society organisations are working to give girls options and increase their ability to network, share experiences and advocate for policy changes that will allow them to more fully exercise their rights.

Context

The Pacific islands region includes a myriad of cultures, languages, and ethnic groupings. It is diverse in terms of geography, natural resources, social systems and colonial contact experiences. Each country has also had unique experiences transitioning to and integrating political and economic systems that differ from their historical practices. What is common however is the prevalence of male dominated systems of decision-making, even in countries with matrilineal systems of lineage and inheritance. This creates a commonality of gender disadvantage across the region although it may be manifested in diverse ways.

Gender, culture and age are three principles of social organising that have intersected over time to entrench gender roles, stereotypes and expectations. Culture, together with religion, is revered in the Pacific islands region and establishes a rich historical heritage kept alive in ceremonies, arts, and family dynamics. Culture has contributed to social stability and secures access to land for many groups. But culture has also perpetuated harmful discriminatory practices against women and girls.

The remoteness and isolation of the region has historically inhibited information sharing and equitable distribution of services. Urban and rural women in the Pacific have different opportunities to access education, employment and support services. Women and men in remote and rural areas are more likely to be subject to strict gender roles and divisions of labour and have fewer education and employment choices. In addition, women in rural areas are more vulnerable to poverty than men and have limited access to justice if they are subject to violence, harmful traditional practices and discrimination.

Transport infrastructure is expensive and limited, and while communication infrastructure is advancing, many communities and islands still have intermittent access to basic services such as electricity, safe water supplies, sanitation, adequate housing. Mobile phone ownership varies from country to country but has seen steady increases, and phones are the main method used to access the internet.

Despite multiple challenges, the past 25 years have seen significant progress in gender equality policies and legislation in the region. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as regional commitments² have established standards and indicators that are facilitating progress. At the regional level, leaders are committed to addressing gender equality, including through the adoption of the Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) in 2012 and the Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights, endorsed by the Ministers for Women in 2017³. These indicators and processes have guided integration of gender equality objectives and measurements into a number of regional and national policies and data systems. At the same time, the region is hampered by a shortage of rigorous and accessible development-oriented research on gender and power relations. Quality, evidence-based research is critical to effective and efficient development planning and implementation of action on critical areas of concern. Collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data is improving but persistent gaps make it difficult to track progress.

² The adoption of the 2012 Gender Equality Declaration by Pacific leaders reaffirmed their commitment in the following six, key areas: gender responsive government policies and programmes; improving women's participation in decision making; economic empowerment; ending violence against women; and, improving health and education outcomes, for women and girls

(https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNDP_WS_FINAL_UNPS_2018-2022.pdf)

³ <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/First-Quadrennial-P.S.D.R.-Full-Report.pdf>

National legislation on violence against women has been developed in 13 Pacific island countries and is pending in Niue. Numerous countries have also revised discriminatory legislation on citizenship, divorce and marital property and have restructured business regulatory systems to support gender equity and equality across sectors.

Special measures to support women's participation in politics have been marginally effective, as they remain seriously under-represented in parliament: in the eight smaller PICs, only one in 30 parliamentary seats is held by women. This compares to an average of one in five across all developing countries.

Disability is a cross cutting issue in all of the critical areas of concern. Women with disabilities face greater exclusion and marginalization than men living with disabilities. Eleven Pacific island countries have ratified the UN Convention for Persons with Disabilities and there is increasing attention to gender differentiated experiences of persons with various types of disabilities.

Challenges remain in financing and implementing the gender equality commitments that are now on paper. While most countries have institutionalised 'women's machineries,' they are consistently underfunded and generally marginalised from national planning and budgeting processes. At country and regional levels, stated political will for gender equality is not adequately demonstrated in practice. A continuing lack of accountability mechanisms for gender equality policies means that failure to meet commitments has few consequences for decision-makers⁴.

WOMEN AND COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is having devastating impacts globally. For the Pacific, despite the fact that most PICs are experienced little-to-no local transmission of the virus itself, the pandemic presents a range of challenges owing to the unique contexts of the PICs, including multiple islands, vast distances and limited resources. In most Pacific countries, access to quality health services including intensive care is limited. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including cardiovascular diseases and chronic respiratory diseases, represent the single largest cause of premature mortality in the Pacific. Food security and livelihoods are particularly vulnerable to shocks due to semi-subsistence lifestyles and a high reliance on the informal sector for income⁵.

Health pandemics have specific and severe impacts on the lives of women and girls. Since the first reported cases of the COVID-19 outbreak, the gendered impacts began being documented in the Pacific and across the world. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Existing gender inequalities are exacerbated, resulting in women and girls facing even higher rates of violence, sexual abuse and control from their husbands, partners and families. Women are expected to undertake more unpaid domestic work, and they are less able to access essential health services and more vulnerable to economic hardship. Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic heighten the vulnerabilities of different groups, accentuating inequalities and leading to the neglect of the needs and rights of the most marginalised. This includes women and girls living in poverty, migrants, people with

⁴ Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Report, May 2021

⁵ CARE Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region, 26 March 2020 [version 1]

disabilities, the elderly and people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) ⁶.

Recognising the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on marginalised groups is vital to ensure an effective health response which does not further endanger and exclude already vulnerable groups. Failing to take into consideration the specific impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls will result in a response that is less effective and does not meet the needs and requirements of half the population. Experience from past outbreaks such as the Ebola and Zika outbreaks have demonstrated the vital importance of incorporating a gender lens into planning, response and re-building to ensure health interventions and humanitarian responses are effective and promote gender equality. Recognising how COVID-19 affects women and men differently is fundamental to an effective response in health services and health communications, law and justice, security and education.

Key findings on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women⁷:

- Women as primary care givers and with high domestic responsibilities including food security, have an increased workload
- Women are key frontline responders in the health care system placing them at increased risk and exposure to infection
- Women's engagement in decision making and leadership is low despite domestic responsibilities and roles as health care providers
- Women are well placed to deliver community risk communications due to their roles, responsibilities and networks
- Women's economic status is affected as key sectors such as tourism are impacted and quarantine measures affect the informal sector
- Gender based violence increases with the implementation of isolation and quarantine measures

WOMEN AND POVERTY

The current Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Human Rights 2018–2030 highlights “vulnerability to poverty” among the “pervasive problems remaining in advancing gender equality”, and notes that poverty is “an increasing concern, with women and children at greater risk, especially in urban areas”. Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030 is the first of the 17 globally endorsed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by 2015, with a target of halving extreme poverty rates was similarly prioritised as the first of the Millennial Development Goals (MDGs).

As noted in the Beijing+20 report⁸, official recognition and acknowledgement of the existence of poverty in PICs has been a longstanding problem, stemming from beliefs that Pacific peoples have communally-owned land and subsistence livelihoods to return to and are supported by a widely-subscribed cultural ethic and traditional practices of sharing and caring for kin. Ideas about the ‘traditional safety net’ and ‘subsistence affluence’ together

⁶ Thematic Brief | Gender and COVID-19 in the Pacific: Emerging gendered impacts and recommendations for response, Toksave-Pacific gender Resource (Pacific Women Support Unit)

⁷ CARE Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region, 26 March 2020 [version 1]

⁸ SPC 2015. Beijing+20 – Review of progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Pacific Islands countries and territories

with euphemisms of ‘hardship’ and ‘poverty of opportunity’ have also delayed attention to material or income poverty in the Pacific, even as visible evidence emerges in towns with the rapid spread of informal settlements and beggars on the street.

Today, poverty is recognised as a primary challenge in the Pacific region, and a major obstacle to achieving gender equality. Macroeconomic policies, no less than natural disasters, can have severely impoverishing effects, but in a much less visible or immediate way. Following a global trend, but even less-recognised in the Pacific until very recently, is the more worrying problem of economic inequality which also has its roots in macroeconomic policies that, *inter alia*, involve: public sector retrenchments and gutting of state capacity; trade-related issues; regressive taxation systems and reduced state revenue; job losses; wage stagnation; wealth concentration and capital outflow; steadily shrinking formal sector jobs; and an explosion in informal sector livelihoods where working women are mainly concentrated. All of these have impacts to which attention has long been drawn by non-governmental organisations in the region, to little avail. There have been no assessments of such policy impacts, and no review or modification of macroeconomic or social policies.

Poverty is also being seen in areas of the region where extractive industries are operating. Whether fisheries, logging, mining or oil/gas extraction, all have entailed impoverishing communities by their destructive environmental impacts. They have created income inequalities between those who are paid royalties and those who are not, bred corruption and, in some cases, triggered open conflict. An extraction-based economic growth strategy may increase national wealth but it does so at enormous environmental and social cost, and resource earnings often do not result in improved social provisioning.

Mitigating measures⁹

- ✓ Strengthen social protection measures to support women’s economic security throughout their lives; and
- ✓ Ensure appropriate social protection measures for poor women and their dependents that provide cash and in-kind transfers, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of marginalised people.

WOMEN AND EDUCATION

Education and training of women is the second of the 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPA). It is also one of the 13 critical issues in the 1994 Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (PPA) and remains so in its current iteration, the Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights. The BPA emphasises education as “a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace” and sets out six strategic objectives¹⁰ and a comprehensive set of actions to be taken by governments to achieve each of them. Responsibility for meeting the first strategic objective under the BPA – ensure equal access to education – is firmly placed on governments, suggesting that

⁹ Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Report, May 2021

¹⁰ The strategic objectives of Critical Area B in the BPA are: ensure equal access to education; eradicate illiteracy among women; improve women’s access to vocational training, science and technology and continuing education; develop non-discriminatory education and training; allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms; and promote lifelong education and training for girls and women.

realisation of the right to education depends on governments ensuring equitable access to public education systems.

“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” is SDG 4. There are seven targets outlined for implementation of SDG 4 and they focus on primary and secondary education; early childhood; technical, vocational, tertiary and adult education; skills for work; equity; literacy and numeracy; sustainable development and global citizenship; education facilities and learning environments; scholarships; and teachers. These go well beyond the minimalist single-target goal of achieving universal primary education under the MDGs. The indicator of male/female parity in primary school enrolment under MDG 2 was achieved by a good proportion of PICs. Gender parity in education at all levels is one of six key areas that Pacific leaders prioritised in the PLGED¹¹, adopted in 2012 and reaffirmed in 2015.

The First Quadrennial Pacific SDG Report (2018) noted that access to education had improved, but there is a need to focus on “improving the quality and relevance of education and cognitive learning outcomes, where results such as literacy and numeracy have not made the expected gains for all”. The report noted the “renewed focus on lifelong learning” but said priority attention needed to be given to early childhood education and post-secondary education and training, and “changes in approaches to learning will require new ways of teaching”.

Several PICs are committed to investing in educating all their citizens with the aim of making their countries “knowledge-based societies”. Education is an important part of national development plans and strategies. For Fiji, it is aligned to wider goals of reducing unemployment, eradicating poverty and achieving stronger growth and development “by preparing people for skills required in the modern workplace and the global economy”. For RMI, where the focus is on reviewing the curriculum to incorporate values, it is key to turning out responsible “global citizens” instilled with respect for international values like human rights and gender equality as well as with Marshallese values. Nauru’s educational vision is that every student “completes school as a confident citizen” with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to participate in and contribute to both the nation and to international society and economy.

Table 2 provides an overview of selected gender and education indicators for the region. The data illustrate variation in gross enrolment ratios between countries at secondary level. The table also highlights the shortage of current data for some countries.

¹¹ Encourage gender parity in informal, primary, secondary and tertiary education and training opportunities”, Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, 30 August 2012, Rarotonga, Cook Islands. Available at: <https://www.forumsec.org/pacific-leaders-gender-equality-declaration/>

Table 2. Key gender and education indicators.

Country	Secondary school gross enrolment ratio (GER) (total enrolled as a % of official secondary school age population)				Female share of tertiary students (% of all bachelor's or master's students)	
	Male	Female	Year and source	Gender parity Index (based on GER)	% female	Year and source
Cook Islands	64.0	78.0	2014 EMIS	122	74.4	2012 UNESCO
Fiji	93.6	101.9	2014 EMIS	109	58.6	2014 UNESCO
FSM	80.1	86.7	2005 UNESCO	108	–	–
Kiribati	62.4	81.0	2008 EMIS	130	–	–
Nauru	56.9	61.5	2014 EMIS	108	–	–
Niue	100.5	101.0	2014 EMIS	100	–	–
Palau	110.5	116.9	2014 EMIS	106	58.2	2013 UNESCO
PNG	24.6	23.6	2014 EMIS	96	–	–
RMI	101.4	104.4	2009 UNESCO	103	56.9	2002 UNESCO
Samoa	70.0	84.0	2015 EMIS	120	39.7	2000 UNESCO
Solomon Islands	48.9	50.6	2014 EMIS	103	–	–
Tonga	100.2	104.1	2013 UNESCO	104	30.9	1999 UNESCO
Tuvalu	67.0	87.0	2015 EMIS	130	–	–
Vanuatu	48.2	52.3	2014 EMIS	109	36.2	2003 UNESCO

Source: ADB and SPC. 2016. *Gender statistics: The Pacific and Timor-Leste*. Manila, Philippines: ADB.

Data are from the national education management system (EMIS), or the UNESCO Institute for Statistics database if national sex-disaggregated data were not available from the EMIS.

Access to Education

Most PICs have achieved universal access to education and gender parity at primary level. Fee-free education at primary level has been a factor in improving access, and several governments are recognising both primary and secondary education as a right for all citizens and have been putting in place laws and policies to ensure that education is accessible to all. In Fiji, both primary and secondary school education up to Form 7 is fee-free. The government's free education initiative includes per capita grants to schools as well as additional support to minimise other costs involved in attending school, such as bus fare and boat fare subsidies, free textbooks and other financial assistance.

In 2009, Samoa made education compulsory through the 2009 Education Act, under which children aged 5–14 years were required to attend school; compulsory early childhood education is now being enforced for children between the ages of 3 and 5. In 2010, Samoa introduced free education at primary level through the School Fee Grant Scheme, guaranteeing access to primary schooling for disadvantaged children. The scheme has now been extended to secondary schools, removing a key obstacle to disadvantaged Samoan children completing their education. The scheme is a priority policy of the government. However, hidden costs in education (including books, uniforms and fares) are a barrier to the enrolment of children from socioeconomically deprived families and in remote areas and leads to child labour as street vendors.

Tuvalu's National Policy for Persons with Disability aims to improve access to education for women and girls living with disabilities. Palau has an equal opportunity policy that includes access to education for persons with disability.

RMI's planned new curriculum for social citizenship is intended to include informal education components to be delivered to out-of-school youth through outreach training/workshops on

outer islands. Palau's Adult High School programmes offer out-of-school youths (both male and female) aged 18 and above the opportunity to complete their education. Solomon Islands National University (SINU) has a Second Chance programme for men and women, boys and girls who have dropped out of school.

Despite education being made free and compulsory between the ages of 5 and 18 for all Nauruan children – and in recent years for the children of refugees and asylum seekers on Nauru as well – and the introduction of other incentives including free lunches, free transport and an attendance allowance of AUD 5 a day, Nauru continues to face problems of truancy, retention and pass rates. The average attendance rate across the education system in 2016 was 54 per cent; in the following two years it fell to 44 per cent in each year.

Gender-disaggregated school enrolments

Enrolment rates in early childhood education (preschool, head-start, day care or kindergarten) in Palau were high in 2018 (65 per cent), with female enrolment rates higher than male enrolment rates (72 per cent compared with 59 per cent). Between 2014 and 2018, female enrolments at secondary level were 7 per cent higher than for males. The 2015 census also showed slightly more females than males attending tertiary institutions (313 compared with 293). There is a general pattern across the region of female enrolments being higher than male enrolments at both secondary and tertiary levels.

Dropout rates continue to be a problem at secondary level. Gender-disaggregated comparisons of primary and secondary school enrolments in Samoa suggest a higher dropout rate among males than females between primary and secondary levels. This is indicated by the lower gap between primary enrolments (20,381) and secondary enrolments (8556) for female students, compared with the gap between primary enrolments (21,687) and secondary enrolments (7967) for male students (National Report, Graph 3, p. 37). No explanation is given for the 36.7 per cent of students who did not complete secondary education; it was surmised that they may have left to pursue technical or vocational training. Female students in Samoa showed a higher secondary school completion rate than males (72.2 per cent compared with 53.1 per cent).

In Nauru, the primary school completion rate was 85 per cent in 2017 but the secondary school completion rate was much lower at 56 per cent, suggesting high attrition rates after Year 6. From 2018 figures, it is evident that 13 per cent of Years 6 and 7 students did not enrol in class at the next level the following year. The proportion of dropouts increased in higher level classes – in Years 8 and 9, 43 per cent; in Year 10, 51 per cent; and in Year 11, 63 per cent. There are no gender-disaggregated data on attrition rates.

In 2012, the Cook Islands raised the minimum age for leaving school from 15 to 16. Ninety per cent of children in the Cook Islands remain in school until Year 11 (age 15). At senior secondary level, girls are performing better than boys although they have a narrower range of training opportunities than boys. Figures indicate that girls completing secondary education have not been “moving into the labour force”. Research is needed to discover the reason(s) for this disjuncture between successful completion of education and failure to enter the labour force.

Protecting girls' rights to education

Adolescent pregnancy has been a key cause of girls dropping out of school. Social stigma and family pressure and lack of support for girls who become pregnant have also prevented them from returning to school to finish their education after the birth of a child. Figure 2 shows the rates of teen pregnancies in PICs.

Births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years

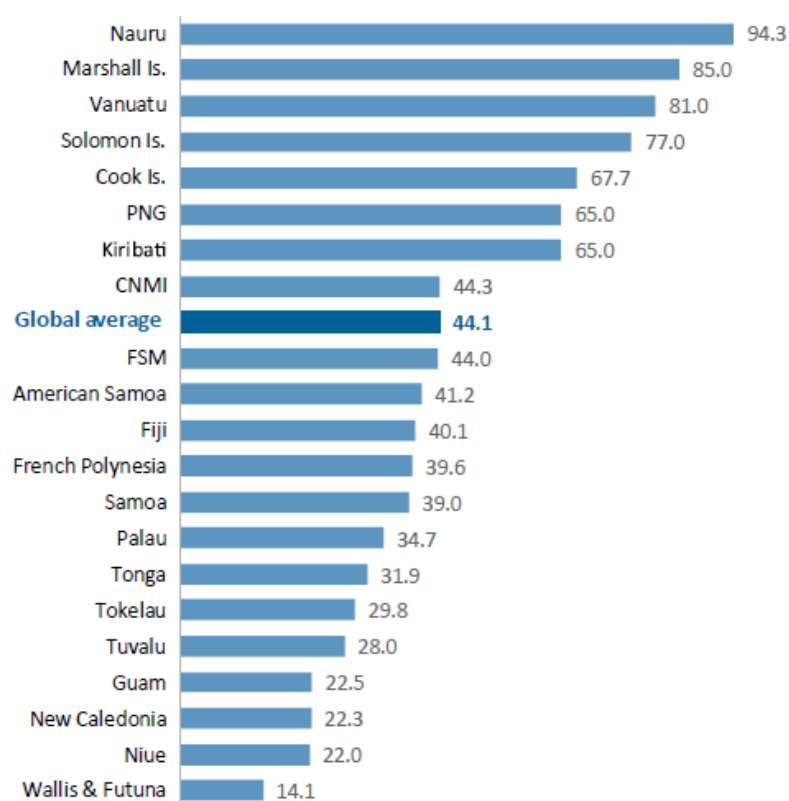


Figure 2. Adolescent pregnancies in PICTs.

Source: SPC (most recent census, demographic and health survey, and/or vital statistics reports).

The adoption of new, rights-based initiatives to provide a supportive environment for girls to pursue their education has been gaining traction in PICs. Samoa has joined Palau and the Cook Islands in adopting a public school policy under which school girls who become pregnant are no longer expelled but allowed to continue their schooling, with the school providing support to students during pregnancy and securing their return to school following childbirth¹². Support for young student mothers in Palau extends to tertiary level where Palau Community College has a day-care centre on campus.

Tuvalu has already changed its policy to allow the return to school of expelled pregnant teenagers after their babies are born. And Solomon Islands is currently reviewing its 2014 Education Act to address the same issue of re-entry to schools for girls expelled for becoming pregnant. Some schools in the country are reported to be already practicing reintegration of pregnant girls.

Federated State of Micronesia (FSM) reported that although pregnant girls do not face expulsion from school, there are no specialised health facilities on public school campuses to assist them, which effectively forces girls to leave school when they become pregnant. Mothers often accompany their teenage daughters to the public health clinic to be advised and supplied with contraceptives. The FSM Youth Program meanwhile coordinates an Abstinence Program for Youth and a Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP). At the College of Micronesia, FSM, a staff nurse and a small clinic provide health services to students, including pregnant students, but there are no counselling services.

¹² The policy change in Samoa followed advice from its MWCS in 2015 in its role to protect the interests of children and the rights of women and girls.

Samoa's National Safe Schools Policy aims at providing a positive learning environment for all children and students and expressly prohibits violence, bullying (including cyber bullying), sexual harassment and abuse as well as "stigmatizing pregnancy amongst young women".

Policies on bullying and sexual harassment in schools have been introduced by several PICs. Several have either made corporal punishment illegal or have policies expressly prohibiting it in schools or during any activity organised by schools. Gender equality and human rights training for both students and teachers is being undertaken in several PICs.

Tertiary education

Apart from the University of the South Pacific which is jointly owned by 12 Pacific governments, different PICs – namely, Samoa, Fiji, Solomon Islands – boast a national university (more than one, in some cases) and others have at least one tertiary college and/or technical and vocational training institutions. A good proportion of students in tertiary institutions study under government or other scholarships or with the support of government-provided education loans. In several of these tertiary institutions female student enrolment and graduation numbers are on par with male student numbers or, in some cases, higher.

In Palau, higher enrolment rates for women in tertiary institutions is resulting in a larger number of female graduates. Already, women make up 54 per cent of Palauans with tertiary qualifications and the government reports increases in women's tertiary degrees, professional careers and annual incomes.

Access to TVET and STEM programmes and continuing education

Palau is promoting a skilled Palauan citizen workforce, by mandating the establishment of a vocational certification programme at Palau Community College. To stimulate job creation, Palau has also created a tax incentive for businesses to hire vocational certified students. However, despite other tertiary level gains for women in Palau, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programmes continue to be dominated by males and only one in four students (23 per cent) are women.

Fiji has been encouraging gender balance in training courses for professions that have traditionally been gender defined. As a result, the numbers of female students enrolling for industrial arts in Years 9 and 10 have substantially increased over the past five years. Since 2015, the government-run Technical College of Fiji has also seen more women than men enrolling in agriculture, and female students have also enrolled in construction and engineering programmes. Although there is a growing interest in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as a whole, and the numbers of female students accessing TVET training in male-dominated areas has increased, the overall enrolment of female students in technical and vocational colleges, at 34 per cent, remains low. Of those women who do enrol, 60 per cent complete their programmes.

In Tuvalu, as a step towards achieving gender balance and extending equal opportunity to women and girls, young women are increasingly being offered training and employment in fields that have long been male dominated or exclusive to males. In the last five years young women have been enrolled in the maritime school, the numbers of women police officers have increased, and a woman has recently started working on a patrol boat. Women's role in fisheries and natural resource management is also being recognised, and a woman has been employed as a fisheries observer.

Continuing challenges

The fact that human rights, gender equality, respect for diversity, sexuality and reproductive health and rights, and violence against women are generally not established components of the educational curricula in PICs is a continuing challenge.

Continuing focus on education and training for shrinking segments of the labour market and limited adaptation of curricula to prepare more students for work in expanding technical or informal sector employment is also a challenge and reflects a disconnect between education and job creation policies. There are also continuing barriers to women and girls with disabilities accessing education in mainstream schools because of low investment in encouraging inclusive education and disability-friendly schools¹³.

*Mitigating measures*¹⁴

- ✓ Review early childhood, primary and secondary education curricula, teacher education and student assessment to promote and guarantee gender equality and human rights and challenge gender stereotyping and similar harmful norms;
- ✓ Promote lifelong learning for all women, of all diversities, and encourage and support young women to develop skills in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and economics, and gain qualifications that enhance their employment prospects;
- ✓ Improve the educational environment for TVET, to attract women, young women and girls into technical fields and apprenticeships;
- ✓ Adopt measures to promote and guarantee that all places of learning and work are safe places for women, young women and girls of all diversities;
- ✓ Increase women's access to ICT and digital services, including for women with disabilities and women living in remote areas;
- ✓ Support government and regional organisations to undertake and implement gender-responsive budgeting;
- ✓ Provide incentives for the private, not-for-profit and state sectors to train and employ women; and
- ✓ Support family life education that promotes gender equality, human rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

WOMEN AND HEALTH

Regional investments of effort and monitoring towards meeting MDG 5 have seen improvements in women's health. As noted in the Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (PPA) in 2018, increased coverage of antenatal care and attendance of trained personnel at births have reduced maternal mortality rates in the region, although preventable maternal deaths do still occur.

Pacific island countries have ongoing commitments to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Plan of Action, especially on sexual and reproductive health and rights, improving reproductive health services, making pregnancy safe and adopting rights-based approaches to family planning. Improvements have been slower in some areas than others. Young people especially have largely remained outside the ambit of

¹³ CROP (Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific) 2018. First quadrennial Pacific sustainable development report, 2018. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Available at: <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/First-Quadrennial-P.S.D.R.-Full-Report.pdf>, p. 18.

¹⁴ Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Report, May 2021

family planning coverage, as have marginalised and vulnerable groups.¹⁵ Teenage pregnancy rates are high and said to be increasing in some countries, and STI rates also remain high. In some PICs HIV/AIDS continues to be a challenge. Contraceptive prevalence rates remain as low as 33 per cent in some countries.¹⁶ In 2018, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) began a multi-country¹⁷ programme aimed at reducing the unmet need for family planning in the region to zero by 2020.¹⁸ Figure 3 shows the unmet need for contraception among married or partnered women. Data on unmet need among young and/or single women are not available.

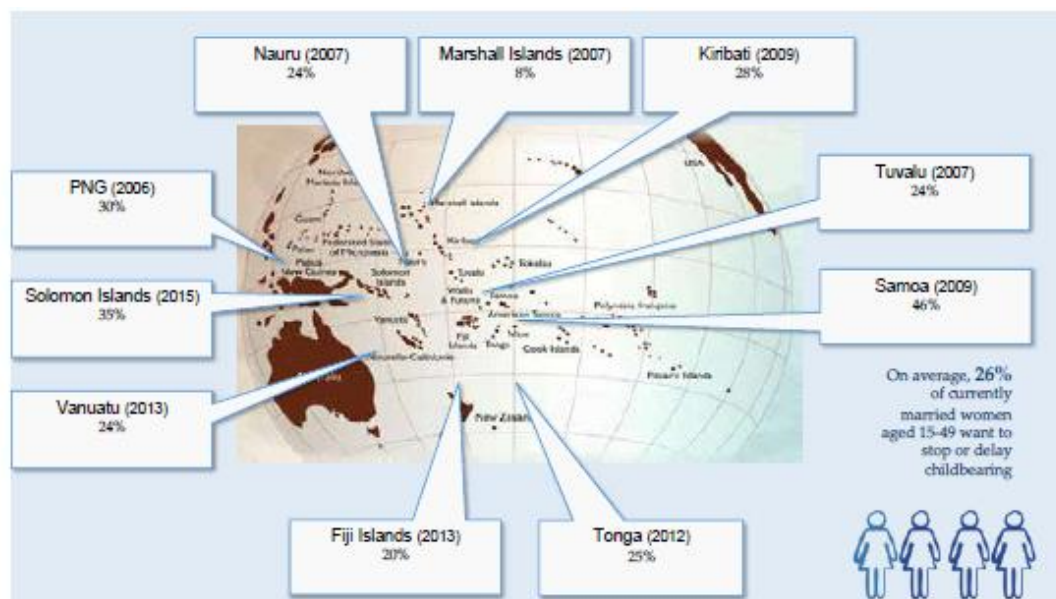


Figure 3. Unmet need for family planning.

Source: most recent census or demographic and health survey data in the respective country.

In the last decade the region has come to face worrying new health challenges. NCDs, often referred to as 'lifestyle diseases', now pose the biggest threat to women's health in the region. Across the region an NCD epidemic is impacting families, economies and health systems, resulting in early deaths, amputations and disability and imposing an additional burden on women to whom the work of caring for others afflicted by NCDs usually falls. Incidences of women's cancers, namely breast and cervical cancers, are especially high. The prevalence of diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases, together with obesity and cancer, reflects changes in lifestyle and eating habits. Diets are increasingly high in simple carbohydrates, sugar and salt, meats, and inferior food imports, while consumption of fresh vegetables and fruits is limited. In a number of PICs this is a result of limited arable land to grow fresh produce locally, leading to a dependence on imported foods which, owing

¹⁵ CROP (Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific) 2018. First quadrennial Pacific sustainable development report, 2018. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Available at: <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/First-Quadrennial-P.S.D.R.-Full-Report.pdf>, p. 18.

¹⁶ SPC 2017. Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018–2030, p.10. Noumea, New Caledonia: SPC.

¹⁷ The countries are Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

¹⁸ UNFPA Pacific Sub-Regional Office (PSRO) A transformative agenda for women, adolescents and youth in the Pacific: Towards zero unmet need for family planning 2018–2022. Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/transformative-agenda-women-adolescents-youth-pacific.pdf>

to the isolation and relative poverty of these islands, is often cheap, long-life, processed items. Figure 4 shows the percentage of overweight and obese men and women in PICs.

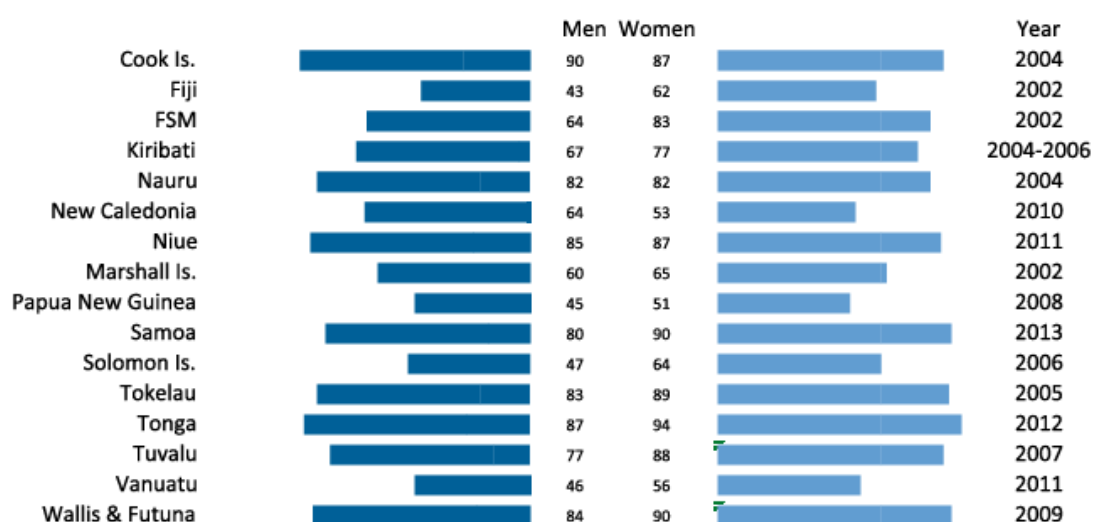


Figure 4. Percentage of overweight and obese men and women.

Source: Most recent WHO STEP surveys or national health agency survey data.

Gender-disaggregated results from an NCD risk factor survey conducted in 2013 of men and women in the 25–64 age group indicate worrying trends in men’s and women’s health in Palau; 55 per cent of women had three to five risk factors for NCDs compared with 61 per cent of men.¹⁹ Palau’s school health screening between 2017 and 2018 also indicated increased NCD risks for both sexes; the report showed 36 per cent of school age girls, compared with 40 per cent of boys, are either overweight or obese. Palau reports that NCDs have lowered life expectancy especially for men. The most recent life expectancy statistics (2014) from Palau’s Ministry of Health are 74.5 years for women and 57.6 years for men.²⁰ When compared with figures from the 2012 mini census, life expectancy for men had remained unchanged and life expectancy for women had slightly declined from 75.5 years in 2012.

A new health concern, which has begun to emerge in the last four years or so but is still not flagged in national reports, is drug use. In the absence of facilities to rehabilitate addicts, the spread of hard drug use within several of the PICs is challenging and implies increased risks of violence and crime in the region. It also has potentially negative impacts for women who can themselves fall victim to addiction, be abused by addicted partners, or exploited by organised crime.

Health policies, programmes and services

Government health policies, programmes and services for women and girls in all PICs have predominantly focused on maternal and child health, and strengthening sexual and reproductive health services including family planning, safe sex practices and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) prevention, screening and treatment. This has brought significant

¹⁹ More women than men chewed betel nut daily (64 per cent compared to 57 per cent) and women were more likely to add cigarettes and tobacco with betel nut than men; 62 per cent of women (compared to 44 per cent of men) do no form of recreational exercise; and 47 per cent of women (45 per cent of men) had a body mass index in the obese range.

²⁰ Republic of Palau 2019. Pathway to 2030 – Progressing with our past towards a resilient, sustainable and equitable future, First Voluntary National Review on the SDGs, p. 14.

improvements in women's health. In recent years the crisis of non-communicable diseases NCDs, which affects women as much as men, has claimed priority attention from governments.

In some PICs sexual and reproductive health information and services are culturally sensitive and, where this is so, accessing such services by young women and men can be difficult. Governments are often grateful to have the support of well-resourced NGOs that provide services in the health sector to complement their own. In Fiji, NGOs²¹ are acknowledged for strengthening the capacity of the government, including by providing post-rape care, safe abortion counselling and violence against women counselling, by operating the Domestic Violence Helpline and the Child Helpline, and generally supporting other government initiatives towards ending violence against women.

Solomon Islands adopted a National Health Strategy (2016–2020) and a National Reproductive and Child Health Strategic Plan (2016–2020) in 2016, and a National Population Policy (2017–2026) in 2017.

Palau's national health policy mandates universal access to quality health services for women and girls (15–18 years) and strategies and action plans are in place to implement the policy. Women hold 72 per cent of professional health jobs and 71 per cent of jobs across the entire health sector, including jobs involving residential care. Health services for women and girls in Palau are offered free or for a minimum cost. Services include primary health care, maternal health (ante- and post-natal), mental health, food security and nutrition, disability, sexual and reproductive health, treatment and rehabilitation for substance abuse, geriatric health, HIV and STIs. Palau also provides a medical programme for new mothers, regular medical checks for women and children in communities and schools, and discounts for medicines. Health workers delivering these services are gender sensitised.

In keeping with commitments to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Plan of Action, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) is actively improving reproductive health services, including making pregnancy safe and offering adequate family planning services. RMI aims at providing quality sexual and reproductive health services for all people of RMI in maternal and neonatal health, family planning, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, control of STIs/HIV and integration with other sexual and reproductive health programmes.

Fiji's decentralised health system continues to provide access to quality health facilities and services with improved doctor-to-patient ratios and increased funding for essential drugs. The improvements to maternal health care facilities and services include the addition of new birthing units on Koro Island, which was devastated by Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2016, and a low risk maternity unit at Makoi in the Central Division that is expected to manage 800 births a year and ease demand on the main referral hospital in Suva. In addition, new sub-divisional hospitals as well as new health centres in rural areas will help to decentralise care provision. Doctors in Fiji are trained and sensitised to ensure, in cases of termination of pregnancy or abortion, that women give informed consent in accordance with the Crimes Decree, are subject to the conditions set out in that decree, and are adequately counselled on the choices they make. Despite offering information and awareness programmes on sexual and reproductive health that are "youth friendly and rights-based", under-18-year-olds in Fiji can only access prescription contraceptives with parental consent, and there is stigma

²¹ Medical Services Pacific and Empower Pacific - through EU funding - provide access to justice accompaniment, referral, support, helplines, counselling, and knowledge/awareness raising/training.

attached to unmarried adolescents attending sexual and reproductive health clinics.²² The Fiji Adolescent Health Situational Analysis in 2016 commented that programmes relating to sexual and reproductive health “largely appear to cater for older and married adolescents”, and adolescent sexual and reproductive health services had largely become ‘drop-in’ centres in the three main cities, focused on clinical testing for STIs and HIV and contraception.²³

Continuing challenges

Information from national Beijing+25 reports identifies ongoing challenges in the region. While some challenges are country specific, others are common to many countries and territories.

Non-communicable diseases are at epidemic levels. Palau reported that NCDs account for 70 per cent of all deaths, with heart disease, strokes and cancer claiming most lives among working age people. In Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), 74 per cent of deaths of people between 15 and 49 years of age were attributed to NCDs in 2017. The RMI country report reflected that high NCD morbidity and mortality, combined with productivity losses and the costs of health care, will impact on development in terms of health (life expectancy) and socio-economic development.

A major challenge that applies to almost all PICs was illustrated in RMI’s report. It notes that 94 per cent of rural women and 79 per cent of urban women across all ages, education and income levels in RMI have reported problems in accessing health care. Ensuring access to health services in rural areas, especially outer islands and more remote inland areas, is complex and expensive to address, requiring investment across multiple sectors.

Meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people is also challenging across the region, whether because of restrictive legislation, policies informed by conservative ideas about sexuality, or stigma associated with visiting sexual and reproductive health clinics. Rates of teenage pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) around the region continue to be high despite sexual and reproductive health programmes specially targeting young people.

Increasing protection from cervical cancer by extending coverage of the vaccination against HPV, two strains of which cause cervical cancers, has also been a challenge in the region. The vaccines are costly and access to them by Pacific Island states has only been attained through substantial donor support. In RMI the vaccination programme, which is advised for girls and boys between 11 and 12 years, has also met resistance in the outer islands from parents not consenting to their daughters being vaccinated.

A nationally-specific challenge was highlighted in the RMI report. RMI faces ongoing nuclear illnesses occurring within the lifetime of the cohort of population exposed to fallout radiation in 1954 from US military nuclear weapons testing, among whom excess cancers are estimated to have totalled 530, within an expected total of 6130 cancers. As a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), RMI raised the issue of the continuing health and environmental impacts of US nuclear testing when submitting its 2017 report to the CRC Committee, citing the Special Rapporteur’s report on a visit to RMI which said “Radiation from the testing has resulted in fatalities and in acute and long-term health complications” and that “the full effects of radiation on the right to health of Marshallese

²² Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Fiji 2016. Fiji adolescent health situational analysis 2016. Available at: https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/Fiji_Adolescent_Health_Situational_Analysis_2016.pdf

²³ Ibid.

women may have been, and continues to be, underestimated.”²⁴ RMI also raised the issue in its report, as a State Party to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to the CEDAW Committee.

*Mitigating measures*²⁵

- ✓ Ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is available to all people, with increased support and protection for girls and young women, including enhancing access to education and appropriate resourcing, human and financial; and
- ✓ Increase financing and sustained investment to provide affordable, high-quality and accessible care services, such as child care, elder care, mental health care and disability care.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN²⁶

Violence against women remains a key focus of the Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Human Rights 2018–2030, under Priority Area 2: Legal and human rights. Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPA) and the Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (PPA), gender inequality remains a major debilitating aspect of PICT societies and the predominant cause of ongoing gender-based violence against women and girls. Socio-economic disparities between women and men are intertwined with men’s power and control over women and girls, which is generally manifested at all levels of society, from the private realm of the family to the public sphere of the state.

Gender-based violence against women is experienced in multiple ways at the personal level – verbal, physical, emotional or psychological, sexual – and is often underpinned by economic control. It is not unusual for these different forms of violence to occur in the same unequal, gendered, intimate partner relationship. Non-partner gender-based violence against women and girls is also prevalent within the supposed sanctuary of the family, in communities and in public spaces. Sexual harassment, cyber violence and online stalking are other forms of gender-based violence experienced by women. As the CEDAW Committee explains, “Gender based violence against women is one of the fundamental social, political and economic means by which the subordinate position of women with respect to men and their stereotyped roles are perpetuated”.²⁷ In its extreme form, gender-based violence against women can end in women being killed – femicide – and, not unusually, brutally so.

Fiji is the first Pacific island country and the second country globally (alongside Australia) to have a whole-of-government, whole-of-population, inclusive and evidence-based approach

²⁴ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 23 February 2017. Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under article 44 of the Convention, Third and fourth periodic reports of States parties due in 2010, Marshall Islands. CRC/C/MHL/3-4: 23. Available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fMHL%2f3-4&Lang=en

²⁵ Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Report, May 2021

²⁶ CEDAW Committee General Recommendation 35, Clauses 19 and 20, p. 6. General Recommendation 35 replaces the term “violence against women” with the more precise term “gender-based violence against women” which makes explicit the gendered causes and impacts of the violence. In this document, however, we use the term violence against women – or violence against women and girls – as this is the term commonly used in the region, including by UN Women.

²⁷ CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation 35.

to developing a national action plan to prevent violence against all women and girls before it starts.

Figure 5 shows data from countries that used the WHO methodology for surveying violence against women, except for Tuvalu where the demographic and health survey module was used. As the graph shows, violence against women and girls in the region is well above the global average of 35 per cent. Available country-level rates of lifetime experience of gender-based violence show that in Tonga the figure is 79 per cent, Samoa 76 per cent, Kiribati 73 per cent, Fiji 72 per cent, Vanuatu 72 per cent and Solomon Islands 64 per cent²⁸. While the global average of intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence for women is around one-third, Pacific rates are much higher with Samoa at 86 per cent²⁹, Kiribati 68 per cent, Fiji and Solomon Islands 64 per cent, Vanuatu 60 per cent, and RMI 51 per cent. According to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, as of June 2019, 295 cases of domestic violence had been reported over 180 days.³⁰

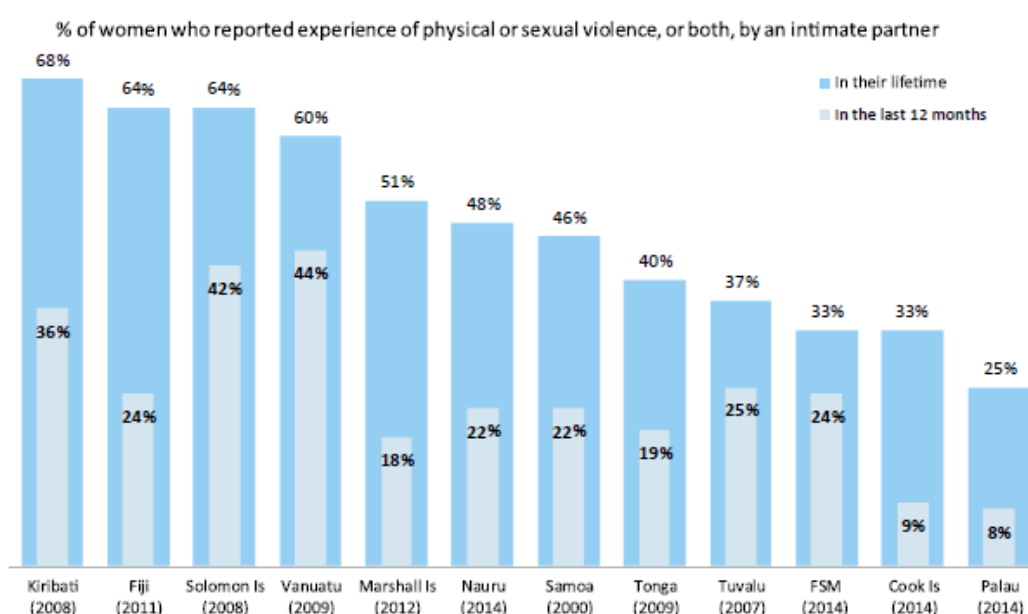


Figure 5. Women's experience with physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner.

Source: SPC presentation of UNFPA data.⁴⁶

Women most often do not make official complaints of intimate partner violence, and in Fiji it takes on average 2.5 years for women to share their experience of repeated partner violence.³¹ In RMI when women did report the violence, "it was because they were severely

²⁸ Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development: <https://pacificwomen.org/our-work/focus-areas/ending-violence-against-women/> (accessed 22 September 2020).

²⁹ NRHI (National Human Rights Institution) 2018. National public inquiry into family violence in Samoa. Apia, Samoa: Samoa Office of the Ombudsman / National Human Rights Institution. Available at: https://ombudsman.gov.ws/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/National-Inquiry-Report-into-Family-Violence_-_State-of-Human-Rights-Report-2018-SUMMARY_English.pdf

³⁰ Narayan V. FWRM strongly condemns brutal and horrific killing of Fijian women. Fijivillage News, 22 August 2019. Available at: <https://fijivillage.com/news/FWRM-strongly-condemns-horrific-and-brutal-killing-of-Fijian-women-in-intimate-partner-violence-92rk5s>.

³¹ Ibid.

injured, their life had been threatened or they could not endure the violence any longer. Most women who experienced physical violence had experienced it multiple times.”³²

Addressing Violence against Women

All PICs have recognised the seriousness of gender-based violence and the endemic nature of physical and sexual violence against women and girls in the region. In several countries, women’s groups and NGOs have strongly campaigned for decades against all forms of violence against women and children and have been collaborating with governments to address this major social problem. Across the region, the problem has received more than 30 years of attention through NGO advocacy, research, public education, victim counselling and training, including of males. There is no doubt about the high prevalence and seriousness of the problem. Attention has more recently turned to trying to understand root causes in order to end it. Samoa recently held a national public inquiry into family violence, which included three weeks of public and closed hearings in which survivors and perpetrators shared their stories and understanding of the problem and how it could be addressed.³³ In most countries, domestic violence was identified at Government level as a priority human rights concern (Fiji, Samoa, Tuvalu, Tonga.....) and a major impediment to gender equality. Governments are involved in awareness campaign. Relevant ministries (e.g. Ministry of Woman, Children and Poverty Alleviation in Fiji, Ministry of Women, Communities and Social Development in Samoa, Women Affairs Division at the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Tonga) are tasked to address gender inequality and gender violence problem; some countries have established a domestic violence unit in relevant service (Tuvalu). At regional level, the Pacific Islands Forum leaders have expressed grave concern over gender-based violence and their strong commitment to end violence against women, including sexual violence, is reiterated in the PLGED adopted in 2012 at the Rarotonga meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum. Three years earlier, the Forum Regional Security Committee established an independent expert reference group to address violence against women. In the same year, 2009, at the Cairns meeting of Forum Leaders, a strong commitment was made to “eradicate VAW and ensure all individuals have equal protection of the law and equal access to justice”. It was envisaged that the inclusion of ending violence against women in the Gender Equality Declaration would usher in an integrated approach combining education, health care, support and counselling, protection and prevention, and the development of comprehensive legislation for increased access to justice for victims and survivors.

Over the last five years, several PICs have reported taking integrated measures at the national level to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls. These include collaboration between government and non-government organisations in education and awareness-raising activities, review and implementation of laws, facilitating expeditious and supportive procedures for victims/survivors, carrying out social surveys on the prevalence of gender-based violence, as well as addressing trafficking in women and girls and cybercrimes such as gender-based bullying and stalking.

Regionally, since 1992, the Pacific Network against Violence against Women, comprising 13 countries and 40 NGOs aided by an advisory group, has been working to end all forms of

³² Results of 2015 survey on violence against women by Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI), cited in RMI National Report for Beijing+25.

³³ NRHI 2018. National public inquiry into family violence in Samoa. Apia, Samoa: Samoa Office of the Ombudsman / National Human Rights Institution. Available at: https://ombudsman.gov.ws/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/National-Inquiry-Report-into-Family-Violence_-Stateof-Human-Rights-Report-2018-SUMMARY_English.pdf

violence against women and girls. The network comprises independent national NGOs set up by strong women leaders to provide counselling and other support to victims of violence against women, advocate for legislative and policy changes, and mobilise public awareness and support for ending violence against women at national level. It meets every two years and the 60 participants in the meetings are mostly women, although male advocates are also involved. The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre is the chair of the network³⁴.

In late 2018 donor partners including the European Union, the Australian Government, New Zealand, the UN, SPC and PIFS announced a new partnership to end violence against women. The EUR 26 million project, named the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls (2018–2022), is a five-year initiative involving a strengthened partnership among donor organisations, the UN and regional intergovernmental bodies, in collaboration with civil society (including the private sector) and governments of the region. Led by the EU, which has contributed the most funds (EUR 12.7 million), with strong support from the Australian Government (EUR 9.5 million) and New Zealand (EUR 3.2 million) and some backing from UNWOMEN (EUR 0.6 million), the partnership aims at promoting gender equality, preventing violence against women and girls, and increasing the quality of services to survivors of violence.³⁵ It “builds on the decades of work in the region led by civil society and governments to address this issue”³⁶, and focus on ‘transform[ing] social norms that allow violence against women and girls to continue.’³⁷

More recently, the Spotlight Initiative Pacific Regional programme was launched to complement the efforts towards ending violence against women. Spotlight is a global, multi-year partnership between the United Nations and the European Union, which places Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality (as well as SDG 16) at the centre of efforts with the aim to provide an enabling environment for the implementation of all goals. The Initiative focuses on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) to address the continuum of gender-based violence in the Pacific region.

Employers are also increasingly joining the efforts to address gender-based violence because of its impacts on workers and employers (see for example International Finance Corporation led research in the Solomon Islands³⁸). Studies have been conducted in the past of the economic costs of violence against women. New initiatives like the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law biennial reports are centred on enabling and empowering women by promoting legislative changes on the understanding that “laws influence women's decisions to start and run businesses or get jobs.”³⁹

Data on violence against women and girls

³⁴ Personal communication, Ms Shamima Ali, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Coordinator, 16 August, 2019.

³⁵ UN Women. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/fiji/ending-violence-against-women/pacific-partnership>

³⁶ New Pacific partnership addresses gender equality and violence against women, 26 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.forumsec.org/new-pacific-partnership-addresses-gender-equality-and-violence-against-women/>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ IFC 2019. Waka Mere Commitment to Action improving business outcomes in Solomon Islands through advancing workplace gender equality, November 2019. Available at: <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/c90592dd-ac2c-42a8-a20d-d0d499e4103c/Waka+Mere+Commitment+to+Action-Report.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mUQKvzN>

³⁹ World Bank Group 2018. Women, business and the law 2018. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29498>

While several countries have provided statistics over the last two decades on gender-based violence, no PICT has conducted annual surveys. Recent studies have been conducted in RMI and in Samoa. Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) conducted its survey in 2015 and found that 51 per cent of women had experienced intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, and 18 per cent were experiencing physical and/or sexual violence during the survey period. Two out of three women were survivors of physical and/or sexual violence by intimate partners or non-partners in their lifetime. Disturbingly, 85 per cent of women agreed that domestic violence is justified under certain circumstances. Violence begins early in relationships, as 38 per cent of 15–24-year-old survey respondents reported partner violence. Twenty-one per cent of ever-partnered women had experienced at least one act of sexual violence in their lifetime and more than 25 per cent reported that their partner took their money.

The Samoa Family Safety Study, commissioned by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development released in July 2017⁴⁰ found high levels of family violence against women, children, persons with disabilities and the elderly. The national public inquiry into family violence by Samoa's National Human Rights Institute – the first such inquiry ever carried out in a PICT – took place over 2 years, 2016–2018. The report, released in October 2018 with the subtitle 'Let the TRUTH be Out and RIGHT be Done,'⁴¹ uncovered high levels of seemingly normalised intra-family violence, including against children, wives who are from outside the village (nofotane), trans females (fa'afafine) and between male family members. The public inquiry was an unprecedented, far-sighted initiative that uncovered aspects of family violence which were not being recognised, and highlighted "underlying misconceptions related to the term human rights" and the need for "dialogue at all levels on the status of women and inequities present in the current way of life."⁴² Samoa has called for "proactive leadership by village councils, church leaders and government" to address the problem of violence in a holistic way and try to end it, including by drawing on the interlinked cultural values of fa'asamoa, human rights and Christianity.

Besides more regular surveys of violence against women, data from police, hospitals, NGOs and other service providers could usefully be collated on a regular basis so that trends can be seen and the impacts of new legislative, policy and community-based interventions monitored and evaluated.

Violence and discrimination commonly experienced by LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and intersex) persons have tended, until recently, to largely remain under the radar, and the focus on high levels of intimate partner violence may have left other forms of family violence less examined. The submission made to the Constitutional Review Commission in Fiji in 2012 by Fiji-based lesbian, bisexual and transgender feminist and human rights group DIVA for Equality changed that.⁴³ DIVA's effective organisation of LBT women, and recent publication of the results of pioneering evidence-gathering research on the lifetime experiences of human rights violations by LBT

⁴⁰ Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development 2017. 2017 Samoa family safety study. Apia, Samoa: Government of Samoa. Available at: <https://library.nzfvc.org.nz/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=5617>

⁴¹ NRHI 2018. National public inquiry into family violence in Samoa. Apia, Samoa: Samoa Office of the Ombudsman / National Human Rights Institution. Available at: https://ombudsman.gov.ws/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/National-Inquiry-Report-into-Family-Violence_-Stateof-Human-Rights-Report-2018-SUMMARY_English.pdf

⁴² Samoa National Report for Beijing+25.

⁴³ Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA) 2012. Submission to the Constitution Review Commission of Fiji.

persons⁴⁴ has uncovered this formerly-hidden or -ignored dimension of gender-based violence that flies in the face of Fiji's constitutional protection for all persons from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

Policies, Legislation and Access to Justice

With the exception of Tonga, all Pacific Island Countries are States Parties to, or have signed, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and have begun to address gender discriminatory policies and laws. Despite this, with the exception of RMI, which has comprehensively reviewed its domestic laws in preparation for CEDAW-compliant legislative reform, much more work is required for PICs to comply with their CEDAW obligations.

In the last five years, some existing laws have been amended and new laws have been introduced to strengthen legislative frameworks to end violence against women in PICs. All countries have domestic violence legislation, pending legislation (Niue), or partial legislation on domestic violence. In FSM, two States have domestic violence laws while two do not. In Fiji, a National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls is currently under development with the support of the EU-funded Pacific Partnership, with further work underway to develop a primary prevention strategy, the development of standards for multi-sector service provision and the roll-out of service delivery protocol. The Pacific Partnership also helps to map and manage information related to relevant available services and supports an evaluation of relevant community programmes in order to redesign community prevention interventions. Table 3 provides detail on each country or territory's laws and dates of enactment.

⁴⁴ DIVA for Equality 2019. Unjust, unequal, unstoppable: Fiji lesbians, bisexual women, transmen and gender non-conforming people tipping the scales toward justice. Suva, Fiji: DIVA. Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D2YiPOQb_erOxBK2rdRt45Z8mEB1no0z/view?fbclid=IwAR1heHPXMzf6lby-6QNntdGX8y_

Table 3. Pacific Island countries and territories domestic violence legislation.

Country/territory	Legislation	Date of Legislation
Cook Islands	Family Protection and Support Act	2017
Fiji	Family Law Act and amendment by Decree	2003 and 2012
	Domestic Violence Decree	2009
	Crimes Decree	2009
FSM		
- Pohnpei	Domestic Violence Act	2017
- Kosrae	Family Protection Act	2014
- Chuuk		
- Yap		
French territories	Covered under French law by Law 2010-769: Violence Against Women, Violence Between Spouses, and the Effects of These Types of Violence on Children	2010
- New Caledonia		
- French Polynesia		
- Wallis and Futuna		
Kiribati	Family Peace Act	2014
Nauru	Domestic Violence and Family Protection Act	2017
Niue	Niue Family Bill	Drafted 2016
Palau	Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act	2014
PNG	Family Protection Act	2013
	Lukautim Pikinini Act	2015
RMI	Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act	2011
Samoa	Family Safety Act	2013
	Crimes Act	2013
Solomon Islands	Family Protection Act	2014
Tonga	Family Protection Act	2014
Tuvalu	Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act	2014
Vanuatu	Family Protection Act	2008

Source: For all except Niue and French territories source is Government of Australia 2018. *Legislative Barriers to Gender Equality in Pacific Island Countries* (draft); Niue information sourced from *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Website* <https://pacificwomen.org>; French territories information sourced from <http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/france-law-on-violence-against-women/>

A number of countries are also reviewing their legislation relating to sexual assault, rape and sexual abuse of minors. In many countries the legal definition of rape continues to exclude penetration by objects other than a penis or requires corroboration of the assault. There are also some countries that do not consider marital rape as a form of sexual assault. Palau reported to the Human Rights Council (HRC) Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in January 2016 that “by removal of marriage as a defence”, marital rape is now a crime of sexual assault in Palau.

Few PICs formally cover sexual harassment in the workplace and where it is addressed it is generally only dealt with as a policy issue through guidelines or codes of conduct within public service employment. In Fiji, sexual harassment complaints can be directly dealt with using the law. In Kiribati and Solomon Islands the law can be used if sexual harassment complaints are filed as sexual assault cases.⁴⁵ Tonga undertook a gender audit in its public service in 2018, and for the first time recognised gender-based bullying and harassment as offences.

⁴⁵ ILO Office for Pacific Island Countries 2015. *Eliminating sexual harassment in workplaces in the Pacific Policy Brief*. Suva, Fiji. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/policy/wcms_407363.pdf

Violence against women is included in the 2018 National Security Strategy Policy of Samoa. A number of countries have adopted policies and laws to address cybercrimes including bullying and stalking. Fiji's Online Safety Act 2018 is an example and under the legislation an Online Safety Commission has been established to receive and assess complaints and refer cases for investigation.

A number of PICs have adopted 'zero tolerance' and 'no drop' policies on gender-based violence. These include the Cook Islands, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. The domestic violence legislation (Table 3) contains provisions that protect victims of domestic violence by authorising police and judiciary officers to execute restraining orders and police protection orders to keep perpetrators away.

Between 2012 and 2016, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) reported that seven out of ten restraining order applications were by women and that in the three years preceding 2017 these restraining order applications had more than doubled.⁴⁶

Access to justice, protection and support for victims and survivors of violence against women have improved in some PICs but this is still a major issue for women in rural and remote areas. Counsels for the Director of Public Prosecutions Office in Fiji have assisted victims of violence who have disabilities to strengthen their court cases so that perpetrators are convicted.

The collaboration among governments, NGOs and donor partners has resulted in manuals and protocols for service providers to victims and survivors of violence against women. Several PICs have also reported that gender-based violence training programmes and sensitisation regarding victims and survivors of violence against women have been instituted for police and judicial officers. Besides donor partners, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre has been involved in these programmes in Vanuatu and Tuvalu.

Police forces in a number of countries, for example the Cook Islands, Fiji and RMI, have established domestic violence units to provide more specialist and supportive services.

In 2018, Fiji sought to improve referral networks through the launch of a National Gender Based Violence Service Delivery Protocol. Besides the long-standing Fiji Women's Crisis Centre's 24/7 helpline and recently-established, EU-funded helplines by Medical Services Pacific, a domestic violence helpline was established by the government in 2017 to provide free 24-hour counselling to women. The Ministry of Women, Culture, and Poverty Alleviation also launched a toll-free child helpline. Solomon Islands has SAFENET, a network of service providers specifically for cases of violence against women, established in 2013 but implemented from 2016. Through SAFENET, women and girls have access to essential health services, including reproductive and sexual health services, maternal health, mental health and social welfare services. In 2018 the SAFENET referral system began to be rolled out to the provinces with support from UN Women. The rollout is continuing in 2021 financed by the Pacific Partnership.

In Tonga, Ministry of Internal Affairs together with civil society and partners is leading on developing Tonga's National Service Delivery Protocol for Responding to Gender Based Violence. Support to the victims of domestic violence is provided by the Family protection Legal Aid Centre.

⁴⁶ Sumner C., Lister L. and FWRM Gender and Transitional Justice Team 2017. Balancing the scales: Improving Fijian women's access to justice, p. 22. Suva, Fiji: FWRM. Available at: http://www.fwrmm.org.fj/images/fwrmm2017/publications/analysis/Balancing-the-Scales-Report_FINAL-Digital.pdf

Whilst shelters and safe houses for victims and survivors have been established in a number of countries (Fiji, Tonga, the Cook Islands), they are still not available in other countries (RMI, Nauru, Kiribati), and there are not enough of them to adequately meet the needs of all victims and survivors and their dependents. This is especially the case for remote localities and outer islands. In Fiji and Tuvalu, modest cash transfer or voucher programmes have been established to temporarily support victims.

Several countries have also reported that registered counsellors are being provided to support victims and survivors. It is not very clear, however, what type of education and training these counsellors have undergone, and the nature of the counselling support provided. Research on counselling services for survivors of violence against women was conducted in 2016 and is being used to guide work on counselling training.⁴⁷

Despite the adoption of family protection and domestic violence legislation, statistics continue to “reflect the grim and horrific reality” for women in Fiji⁴⁸ and other PICs.

Awareness raising and efforts to end Violence against Women

National and community-level campaigns to raise awareness on gender-based violence and build understanding that it is wrong have been reported by many countries. These campaigns have involved cooperation between government agencies, NGOs and church groups, as well as donor partners. The Sixteen Days of Activism and associated series of ‘international days’ has been mentioned as central to these campaigns by a number of PICs, and in Palau the annual ‘White Ribbon’ campaign is used to raise awareness among men and boys about violence against women. Palau’s Ministry of Justice’s Bureau of Public Safety organises the ‘White Ribbon’ community campaign. A global initiative, this is a movement of men and boys to end violence against women and girls, and promote gender equity, healthy relationships and a new vision of masculinity. It seeks to transform attitudes and sensitise men and boys on this issue. In its report to the HRC Working Group in January 2016, Palau reported that “the enactment of the FPA [Family Protection Act] and subsequent increase in public awareness of the law has resulted in an increased number of cases [of violence against women] being reported.”⁴⁹

Fiji reported that 64 local communities are certified as ‘zero tolerance of violence’ villages. In Samoa, the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development has collaborated with chiefs, church leaders and community groups to raise awareness about domestic violence. The Safer Families, Safe Villages campaign in 30 villages and groups across Samoa is seeking to change attitudes, mind-sets and encourage zero tolerance towards violence. Samoan NGOs have taken up this campaign in other districts.

Continuing challenges

Progress has been made towards ending violence against women, including greater awareness about its widespread presence and negative consequences for victims/survivors,

⁴⁷ DFAT (Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) 2017. Review of counselling services in the Pacific final report, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development. Available at: https://pacificwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ReviewofEVAWCounsellinginthePacific_FINAL_April2017.pdf

⁴⁸ Narayan V. 2019. FWRM strongly condemns brutal and horrific killing of Fijian women. Fijivillage News, 22 August 2019. Available at: <https://fijivillage.com/news/FWRM-strongly-condemns-horrific-and-brutal-killing-of-Fijian-women-in-intimate-partner-violence-92rk5s>

⁴⁹ Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Twenty-fourth session, 18–29 January 2016. National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21 Palau. A/HRC/WG.6/24/PLW/1, p. 19. Available at: https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/palau/session_24_-_january_2016/a-hrc-wg.6-24-plw-1-e.pdf

their families and wider society. This in turn has led to the criminalisation of sexual and gender-based violence in almost all PICs.

Resourcing of facilities and support services is a critical challenge for all PICs. In a number of countries, protocols and manuals have been put in place to support empathetic assistance and coordinated service delivery to victims and survivors, and in some cases access to justice has been improved. There are, however, still countries where facilities and support services for victims and survivors of violence against women are very limited. The absence or small number of shelters, lack of counsellors, and poor transport and communication options in remote locations and outer islands all increase risks for women dealing with violence.

Reporting of violence against women remains a major issue in all PICs due its normalisation, social stigma, and women's fear of isolation or retaliation from families and/or partners. As was noted in the BPA+20 review, and as is reflected in demographic and health survey data, intimate partner violence is commonly condoned and perceived as a normal aspect of relationships between men and women. In a number of PICs, both men and women justify violence against women. In RMI the WUTMI survey showed that 85 per cent of the women respondents believed that violence against women was justified in certain circumstances. In Solomon Islands, 69 per cent of the women surveyed similarly indicated that violence against women was justified under certain circumstances compared to 65 per cent of the male respondents. In Vanuatu, a 2011 survey indicated that 60 per cent of the women felt that a man could beat his wife for certain reasons. "Such widespread attitudes of tolerance of violence against women are likely to generate a climate of minimisation of women's experiences of violence, and to deter reporting. In addition, small populations and a lack of privacy in communities often create peer pressure and stigma against reporting."⁵⁰

Maintaining current statistics on violence against women is an ongoing challenge. Without accurate data trends in incidences of violence against women, progress cannot be monitored and neither can the effectiveness of policy and laws be assessed and, if necessary, strengthened. There is scope for closer cooperation and coordination of efforts among service providers such as police, health workers, NGOs and donor partners.

Access to justice remains a major problem for women as the cost of taking matters to the courts is beyond the means of nearly 50 per cent of women (in Fiji). Even though there is a 'no drop' policy, women find that police continue to direct them to resolve intimate partner violence privately. And even though there are numerous Legal Aid Commission offices in the country, these have been used by twice as many men as women, as men tend to be accused of criminal offences⁵¹.

*Mitigating measures*⁵²

- ✓ Recognise the need for effective partnerships between academics, governments, CROP agencies, development partners and the private sector to conduct studies, gender analysis and participatory research to generate knowledge on causes and social and

⁵⁰ SPC 2015. Beijing+20: Review of progress in implementing the Beijing platform for action in Pacific Islands countries and territories, p. 49. Noumea, New Caledonia: SPC.

⁵¹ Sumner C., Lister L. and FWRM Gender and Transitional Justice Team 2017. Balancing the scales: Improving Fijian women's access to justice. Suva, Fiji: FWRM. Available at: http://www.fwrmm.org.fj/images/fwrmm2017/publications/analysis/Balancing-the-Scales-Report_FINAL-Digital.pdf

⁵² Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Report, May 2021

economic impacts of gender-based violence, and strategic approaches to address harmful social norms;

- ✓ Urge governments to adopt, review and implement legislative measures to address all forms of sexual and gender-based violence in all areas of life;
- ✓ Call on the public and private sectors to improve working conditions for women by supporting enterprises to introduce and strengthen violence and harassment policies and conduct gender audits to identify measures to ensure gender equality at all levels, establish respectful and safe workplace environments for women and men, and enable reconciliation of work and family responsibilities;
- ✓ Encourage the development and strengthening of partnerships between women and men, and between government institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs), faith-based organisations, unions and the private sector to:
 - a) establish high-level corporate leadership of gender equality to advance policies for addressing gender based violence, discrimination and sexual harassment, and promote the appointment of women to leadership positions; and
 - b) support the initiatives of CSOs to challenge harmful gender norms, gender-based violence and discriminatory practices, and to promote equality and the human rights of women and girls of all diversities; and
- ✓ Call on PICs, CROP agencies and development partners to establish or support the implementation of and reporting on existing commitments with accountability mechanisms that demonstrate: development and implementation of legislative measures, policies and programmes to eliminate gender-based discrimination and violence and harmful gender norms in the workplace.

WOMEN AND SECURITY

The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security in 2000 provided a vehicle for advocacy on women, peace and security in the Pacific region. UNSCR1325 recognised the changing nature of war with civilian populations increasingly being targeted, the continued exclusion of women from peace negotiations and processes, the different ways that conflict and war impact on women, and the greater prospects of achieving a lasting peace if women are involved in the peace process. It also explicitly encouraged expansion of the role and contribution of women in UN peace-keeping operations. Although this thematic area seems inapplicable to a region where there are no active conflicts, all of its objectives have relevance for the Pacific region.

Armed conflict in the region

Women have played key roles in the recent past in working informally to end conflict and secure peace in PICs. Notable preliminary facts on conflict and peace-making in the region include the following:

- Although formal peace talks have always excluded them, women have been strong mediators and negotiators in traditional settings including the armed conflicts in Fiji⁵³ and Solomon Islands.
- Significant regional disarmament occurred in a period marked by serious internal conflicts.

⁵³ https://wmc.contentfiles.net/media/documents/Women_Mediators_Bridging_the_Peace_Gap.pdf,
<http://www.peacewomen.org/content/fiji-women-sidelined-military-regime>

- Pacific societies have longstanding cultural practices of resolving disagreements and conflicts through dialogue as well as systems of restorative justice, and women are often traditionally bestowed with peace-making responsibility.
- Fiji and Samoa have earned solid reputations for their longstanding contributions of soldiers and police (including a small number of women) to UN peace-keeping missions in conflict-affected regions abroad, and several PICs cooperated in a regional peace-keeping operation in Solomon Islands from 2003.
- Across the region and in difficult contexts women have played strong roles in fostering a culture of peace, establishing organisations for the purpose and providing training in peace-making skills.
- Two PICs have had the challenging experience of hosting, under controversial contracts with Australia and for several years, large numbers of asylum seekers awaiting processing of their applications for refugee status, and have come under the spotlight for alleged breaches of human rights.

While most women living in the region today have been spared the experience of armed conflict, many of their parents lived through the Second World War, in colonial times when the Pacific became a theatre of war, and had first-hand experience of the scourge of international war including, in some cases, displacement and military atrocities by enemy forces. Nuclear testing in the Pacific, and the use of a Pacific island to send planes to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, spawned a strong nuclear-free and independent Pacific movement, supported by independent Pacific Island states, which paved the way to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty of 1985.

In the post-independence period, the region has experienced domestic armed conflicts. In Solomon Islands, interethnic tensions escalated from December 1998 to outbreaks of open conflict, involving the use of home-made and repurposed Second World War weapons by one side and modern weapons illegally seized from the police armoury by the other, and caused the loss of 50 lives before it ended. Law and order was restored with the help of an Australian-led regional assistance mission that remained in place for 10 years. In this conflict women were subjected to sexual violence with many raped at gunpoint by combatants on both sides. At great risk to themselves, women bravely acted to try to end the fighting and get combatants to disarm⁵⁴. Solomon Islands is a post-conflict society, with unfinished healing processes.

Fiji has not experienced armed conflict, although its people have suffered the traumas of four military coups since 1987, with disturbing impacts: inter-ethnic tensions, temporary displacement of terrorised communities, and detention, beatings or degrading treatment of dissidents including women activists. Fiji's army is male-dominated and still predominantly comprised of one ethnic group.

Recounting the Pacific's experiences with conflict and war, past and present, helps appreciate the relevance of BPA Critical Area E to this region, and the significance of positive developments that have occurred over the years since the adoption of the BPA.

⁵⁴ Garasu L. 1996. The role of women in promoting peace and reconciliation. BICWF Forum for Peace Workshop. Accord 12. Available at: <https://www.c-r.org/accord-article/role-women-promoting-peace-and-reconciliation>; and Fangalasuu J., Maetala R., Rodi P., Vota A. and Wickham E. 2011. Herem kam: Story blong Mifala Olketa Mere, Women's Submission to the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Honiara, Solomon Islands. Available at: <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/Solomon-Islands-TRC-Submission-Sept-2011.pdf>

Two positive developments emerged from the conflict in Solomon Islands. The first is women's autonomously initiated efforts to end the conflict and bring about peace and reconciliation during the hostilities⁵⁵ and alongside peace talks. Their courageous efforts during the fighting have gone into the annals of history on peace-making in the region. Second is the surrender and disposal of weapons that was accomplished as part of the peace processes that ended both conflicts. A Pacific-wide "consensus on disarmament"⁵⁶ reportedly emerged after the Bougainville war ended, through which several Pacific Island states accepted Australian and New Zealand help in better securing their armouries and agreed to the destruction of much of their firearms stock⁵⁷. This consensus on disarmament among Pacific Island states was remarkable. That it was accomplished in a region in which only three Pacific Island states have standing armies, and most have unarmed police, does not diminish the political significance of these concrete steps consciously taken to minimise the risk of armed conflict in future.

Fostering a culture of peace

Most PICs have no military, their police forces are unarmed, and they are intent on remaining so. This is a conscious policy that is eloquently articulated in Samoa's Beijing+25 report: "Respect for the rule of law has been an integral part of Samoa's 55-year journey as an independent nation." Peace and security are maintained by "cultural institutions and the traditional chiefly system", and constitute a core part of Samoa's village governance structure, in which women's committees play an important role⁵⁸.

Longstanding traditions of women playing peace-making roles are often referenced in PICs. RMI's report for Beijing+25 records that in traditional Marshallese society, women are integrally involved in decision-making and peace-keeping, and this is reflected in traditional proverbs such as Lejmaanjuri, which vests mothers and older sisters in each family with responsibility for peace-making – to "keep the peace and stop fights between male members of the family"⁵⁹. The traditional role given to and played by mothers and sisters in peace-making is also known in Fijian society. Pollard has described how different cultures in Solomon Islands provide means for women to intervene in conflicts to resolve them⁶⁰. In Areare culture, "women intervene by using their clothes, words or body contact"⁶¹ to bring fighting to an immediate end and commence negotiations for reconciliation and compensation.

⁵⁵ For more information on the role played by the Women for Peace group in Solomon Islands in trying to "convince the fighting parties to lay down their arms" and enter into peace negotiations, see Pollard A.A. and Liloqula R. 2000. Understanding conflict in Solomon Islands: a practical means to peacemaking, SSSGM Discussion Paper 00/7. Canberra, Australia: ANU; and Fangalasuu J., Maetala R., Rodi P., Vota A. and Wickham E. 2011. Herem kam: Story blong Mifala Olketa Mere, Women's Submission to the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Honiara, Solomon Islands. Available at:

<https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/Solomon-Islands-TRC-Submission-Sept-2011.pdf>

⁵⁶ Alpers P. 2015. The Pacific region lives up to its name with disarming success. The Conversation, 27 February, 2015. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/the-pacific-region-lives-up-to-its-name-with-disarming-success-36134>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Government of Samoa 2019. Beijing+25 Samoa national report. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/samoa.pdf?la=en&vs=801>

⁵⁹ RMI. 2019. National review for the Beijing+25. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/marshall_islands.pdf?la=en&vs=1901.

⁶⁰ Pollard A.A. 2000. Resolving conflict in Solomon Islands: The Women for Peace Approach. Development Bulletin, Conflict and Peacemaking in the Pacific: Social and Gender Perspectives 53: 44–46.

⁶¹ As Pollard illustrates with an example, body contact is tambu but can be suggested as having happened by words ("you have stepped over my legs"), compelling compensation.

Global arms control

In its national report for Beijing+25, Samoa expressed the view that “small arms and light weapons in the wrong hands can cause instability, encourage criminal activities, disrupt peace and hinder sustainable development.” Samoa joined global efforts to reduce the possibilities for armed conflict by ratifying the Arms Trade Treaty in 2014 and submitting a comprehensive report on its compliance with the UN Programme of Action Addressing the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in 2016. It also ratified the Biological Weapons Convention in 2017. In 2018, Samoa also hosted a regional Pacific Island states parliamentary workshop, attended by legislators from across the Pacific region, to advocate for improved compliance with the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons. The workshop highlighted the importance of encouraging the participation of women parliamentarians in defence and security. Samoa is currently undertaking work to develop a small arms and light weapons database to be administered by the Ministry of Police, and this is aligned with its National Security Policy 2018.

Nine Pacific Island states –Fiji (ratification – 7 July 2020), Cook Islands (accession – 4 Sep. 2018), Kiribati (ratification – 26 Sep. 2019), Nauru (ratification - 23 Oct. 2020), Niue (accession – 6 Aug. 2020), Palau (ratification – 3 May 2018), Samoa (ratification – 26 Sep. 2018), Tuvalu (ratification - 12 Oct. 2020), and Vanuatu (ratification – 26 Sep. 2018) – have ratified or acceded to the landmark Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017). The Treaty, which resulted from a long campaign spearheaded by the International Campaign against Nuclear Weapons, outlaws nuclear weapons and makes long overdue provisions for victim assistance and environmental remediation. It offers the possibility of some degree of justice to Pacific Islanders in countries of the region which continue to suffer intergenerational health and environmental effects of the nuclear tests, and the danger of nuclear waste buried on their islands. The treaty rekindles hope that global nuclear disarmament, as called for by the nuclear-free and independent Pacific movement in the 1970s and 1980s, will one day be achieved.

Eleven Pacific Island states (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, RMI, FSM, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu), have become states parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)⁶². Fiji, Kiribati, FSM, Nauru and Palau have also ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children supplementing UNTOC. Four Pacific Island states have become states parties to the second protocol under UNTOC against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air⁶³; and three have ratified UNTOC’s third Protocol against Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, the Parts and Components and Ammunition⁶⁴. Ratification of these international laws by Pacific Island states shows commitment to helping combat transnational organised crimes that significantly impact on the safety and security of women and girls, namely trafficking in persons and in firearms and ammunition. Palau has also introduced a human trafficking office and a temporary shelter.

Participation of women in peace-keeping and security services

In 2007, Cook Islands withdrew its reservation on Article 11 (2) (b) of CEDAW, regarding women’s recruitment into or service in the armed forces and law enforcement agencies “in situations involving violence or threats of violence”. Following the establishment of the

⁶² Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, RMI, FSM, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.
<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/signatures.html>

⁶³ Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru and Palau.

⁶⁴ Fiji, Nauru and Palau.

Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2003 and with the support of the Australian and New Zealand governments, 22 Cook Islands police personnel including four women were trained for armed conflict situations, and served for up to nine months on assignment in Solomon Islands, progressing BPA and UNSCR1325 with respect to ensuring appropriate representation of women in the police force in peace-keeping missions. Tuvalu also contributed two policewomen to RAMSI for peacekeepers duties in Solomon Islands.

Fiji currently has a little more than 100 women soldiers including officers deployed in peace keeping missions abroad. Fiji reported on appointments of women to senior military leadership positions within the Republic of Fiji Military Forces as indicative of Fiji's commitment to gender equality. The senior appointments include one full colonel, two lieutenant colonels, one major, 12 other commissioned officers, the first ever female Chief of Staff Land Force Command, and the first female Commanding Officer at the Logistic Support Unit. With the acquisition in 2018 of navy vessels equipped with facilities for women, Fiji will be moving to recruit women into the Navy.

Samoa's women police officers have been an important part of Samoa's contributions to UN peace-keeping efforts since 2000. Thirty-nine female police officers have been sent on peace-keeping missions. In 2017 Samoa signed the UN voluntary compact between the United Nations Security Council and states involved in supporting UN operations on the ground such as peace-keeping to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse.

In late August 2019, during a 'Women, Peace and Security Summit' held in Apia, the New Zealand and Samoan governments launched the 'Pacific Defence Gender Network', to promote the meaningful participation of women in Pacific defence forces through annual seminars and increased collaboration. Current members of the Network include the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, His Majesty's Armed Forces of Tonga, the Papua New Guinea Defence Force, the Vanuatu Mobile Force, the Australian Defence Force and the New Zealand Defence Force. The Network works in parallel with and complement the existing police-led 'Women's Advisory Network', established in 2003 by the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police to support the empowerment of women in policing in the Pacific.

Women, peace and security action plans

In October 2012, the Pacific Islands Forum adopted a Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012–2015). The action plan was developed by the Working Group for Women, Peace and Security which was set up on the 10th anniversary of UNSCR1325 by Forum member states, CROP agencies, UN agencies and civil society. The Working Group comprised representatives from Solomon Islands Government, PIFS, FemLINKPacific, UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, SPC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Sustained independent advocacy efforts over several years by FemLINKPacific and its partners for regional implementation of UNSCR1325 had paved the way to this inter-governmental initiative.

The Regional Action Plan provides a framework to support regional and national efforts in: (1) utilising and enhancing women's capabilities as peace-builders, including at state institution levels, to provide a secure and conflict-free environment for our communities; (2) increasing the visibility and active participation of women in conflict prevention and peace-building activities, including by increasing women's engagement with and in security sectors; and (3) ensuring necessary frameworks of protection for women and girls during

humanitarian crises and transitional and post-conflict situations⁶⁵. The first two elements of the plan could potentially produce a sea change in security policy protocols with the inclusion of women in formal conflict prevention, management and post-conflict recovery efforts, and at the same time effect transformation in how women are perceived – no longer simply as victims, but as effective agents of change.

A number of PICs subsequently adopted national action plans on women, peace and security. Solomon Islands' Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan (WPS-NAP) (2017–2021) was adopted in 2017. Based on the UNSCR1325 priorities, WPS-NAP's four priority outcomes are: (1) women's participation, representation and decision making in peace and security are expanded at all levels; (2) women's human rights are protected, and women are secure from sexual and gender-based violence; (3) Solomon Islands actively prevents conflict and violence against women and girls; and (4) women's and girls' priorities and rights are reflected in development and peace building⁶⁶.

Solomon Islands also planned to mainstream women, peace and security at the provincial level by formulating four gender and women's policies for Malaita, Guadalcanal, Western Provincial Governments and the Honiara City Council, with priority outcomes on women, peace and security. A new national security strategy makes protecting the rights of all citizens a national security goal, and explicitly states a concern to "ensure that women, youth and children's perspectives are incorporated into the security efforts of Solomon Islands". The plans and strategy reflect political will, but Solomon Islands admits it lacks the resources, capacity, knowledge and skills to implement them, and in some provinces there is neither a specific women's policy nor a mandate on peace and security and no infrastructure to bring women together to collaborate. According to the national report, there is a need "to establish women's desk officers and peace officers in some provinces".

Continuing challenges

The Pacific Ocean has become a major highway for drug smuggling and the vast dispersal of the many islands makes national borders porous to the illegal entry of contraband products. It is difficult for PICs to adequately defend borders as they have very limited naval surveillance capacity. New drug smuggling routes between Central/South America and Australia via the Pacific Ocean, using methods of dropping a huge cache in the ocean secured in a net with GPS location identified for a pickup vessel, recently came to light after packages of cocaine/methamphetamine washed up on Pacific beaches after breaking free from their ocean moorings in rough seas. Worth millions of dollars on the Australian market, these dangerous drugs pose a worrying new external threat, with enormous security and criminal implications. According to the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPD), "despite its extensive maritime borders, the Pacific region suffers minimally from large-scale arms trafficking"⁶⁷.

Mitigating measures⁶⁸

⁶⁵ PIFS 2012. Forum chair launch regional action plan on women, peace & security. Available at: <https://www.forumsec.org/forum-chair-launch-regional-action-plan-on-women-peace-security/>

⁶⁶ Solomon Islands Government Women's Development Division Ministry of Women Youth Children and Family Affairs 2019. Beijing+25 national review report. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/solomon-islands-en.pdf?la=en&vs=711>

⁶⁷ The United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons. Available at: <http://unrcpd.org/conventional-weapons/poa/>

⁶⁸ Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Report, May 2021

Noting the (then) forthcoming Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the 13th Triennial Conference of Women delegates called specifically for “the development and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programs, where appropriate, to address the inter-generational effects of nuclear testing, including on women’s health and other areas”.

WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

In Pacific Island Countries women’s economic roles and participation are affected by the gender division of labour, the burden of care work, cultural norms and practices, gender and other bases of discrimination (age, class, ethnicity, education, disability etc.), the limited supply of formal sector jobs and a growing informal sector. Even though gender parity has been achieved in primary education, and women and girls have higher achievements in secondary and tertiary level education, this has not translated into an increased share of formal sector employment by women.

Women’s access to employment and productive resources

Generally, PICT economies are characterised by a large informal sector and a relatively small formal sector. The informal sector generally comprises household-based small-scale agricultural and livestock production as well as microbusiness activities such as the production and sale of farm produce, handicrafts, seafood, cooked meals, cut flowers and floral arrangements, as well as the provision of a range of services including tailoring and sewing, domestic work, care-giving, grass-cutting and gardening. The formal sector is dominated by the public sector with private sectors varying in size from very small in atoll states to relatively large in Fiji and Samoa. Table 4 provides a range of information on key elements of women’s participation in the labour force.

Table 4. Key labour force indicators.

Country	Labour force participation rate (working and unemployed persons as % of total working age population)		Gender gap (male– female)	Paid employment rate (persons in paid work as % of total working age population)		Women’s share of wage employment in non- agriculture sector (%)	Year and source
	Male	Female		Male	Female		
Cook Islands	77	65	12	68.9	59.3	47.3	2011 Census
Fiji	80	46	34	64.3	28.8	33.2	2010-11 LFS
FSM	66	48	18	–	–	37.9	2010 Census
Kiribati	67	52	15	33.9	25.9	47.4	2010 Census
Nauru	79	49	30	58.2	35.2	37.6	2011 Census
Niue	69	61	8	65.5	56.1	46.0	2011 Census
Palau	77	60	17	–	–	39.6	2005 Census
PNG	62	62	0	–	–	–	2009-10 HIES
RMI	–	–	–	48.0	26.5	36.7	2011 Census
Samoa	40	24	16	29.8	20.1	37.5	2012 LFS
Solomon Islands	69	67	2	35.2	17.6	33.2	2009 Census
Tonga	63	42	21	44.0	29.6	47.9	2011 Census
Tuvalu	68	51	17	–	–	43.5	2012 Census
Vanuatu	81	61	20	37.2	23.4	41.3	2009 Census

Source: ADB and SPC. 2016. *Gender statistics: The Pacific and Timor-Leste*. Manila, Philippines: ADB.

Data from population and housing censuses, labour force surveys, or household and expenditure surveys.

In virtually all PICs, women do non-paying or very low paying informal sector work, especially in agriculture. They are also mainly engaged in household and care-giving work. In Palau for instance, 75 per cent of this kind of work is done by women (2015 census). Their labour force participation rates have been much lower than men's and it was reported in the regional review for Beijing+20 that the proportion of economically active women had declined since the Beijing+10 review in FSM, Kiribati, Niue, Palau, Samoa and Vanuatu. Palau's national reported that in 2014 75 per cent of women were in the labour force, 54 per cent of whom were in paid employment, 2 per cent were self-employed, and 16 per cent were unpaid family workers. Samoa indicated a slight increase in women employees in the public sector to 28 per cent in 2016 compared to 22 per cent in 2011.

Country reports for the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPA+25) contained some more recent figures than Table 4 and a wider range of variables. Fiji's statistics on gender differentials in labour force participation show that men's participation is 76 per cent compared to women's at 37 per cent. More disturbing is the trend of a steady decline in the number of women in paid employment from 39 per cent in 2002, to 33 per cent in 2011 and to 31 per cent in 2017. In that year the unemployment rate for women remained at 7.8 per cent, the same as in 2011, and more than double the men's unemployment rate of 2.9 per cent. A joint Asian Development Bank (ADB) and International Labour Organization (ILO) study reported more than half of employment in Fiji being in the informal sector, "leaving workers without income security or social protection and vulnerable to shocks"; most female workers being in informal employment and "engaging in subsistence activities" and urban workers' average earnings being more than double those of rural workers⁶⁹.

Women's employment figures in the Solomon Islands public service, however, were high at 44 per cent. However, an ADB study showed that women held only 5 per cent of senior management positions and 22 per cent of middle management posts. The Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey 2015 reported that more than 50 per cent of the women surveyed were unemployed in the year preceding the survey. It also highlighted that of the 37 per cent of women who indicated that they were employed, about half were not paid. The report noted that outside of the capital Honiara, women worked in the agricultural sector and 80 per cent of them were not paid, and were subsistence agriculturalists "producing food for their own family"⁷⁰.

From Table 4, labour force participation rates in the Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu are approaching or above 70 per cent for men, although in Vanuatu the rate is inflated with the inclusion of unpaid subsistence work. Samoa, surprisingly, has relatively low participation of males in the paid labour market, only 42 per cent. Among these countries, with the exception of the Cook Islands where women's labour force participation is 73 per cent, the gender participation indices for Tuvalu (0.57), Samoa (0.62), Tonga (0.63)

⁶⁹ ADB 2015. Fiji: Creating quality jobs - Employment diagnostic study. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/11540/5307>

⁷⁰ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia), Ministry of Health and Medical Services (Solomon Islands), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), Solomon Islands National Statistics Office (SINSO), Solomon Islands Resource Facility (SIRF), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey 2015. Available at: http://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/SDD/DHS/SI/SI_Demographic_and_Health_Survey_DHS_2015.pdf

and Nauru (0.69) are all very low. Labour force participation rates can be inflated by the inclusion of subsistence workers as part of the employed population⁷¹.

The Cook Islands and Niue have higher proportions of women in paid employment, 59 per cent and 56 per cent respectively. Nauru has 35 per cent, Tonga 30 per cent, Kiribati 26 per cent, Vanuatu 23 per cent, Samoa 20 per cent and Solomon Islands 18 per cent. At the sector level women hold a majority of low-paid service positions in several PICs including the Cook Islands (93 per cent), Samoa (89 per cent), Nauru (80 per cent), Tuvalu (77 per cent) and Kiribati (66 per cent). However, for Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, women are mostly engaged in agriculture, at 71 per cent and 67 per cent respectively. By contrast, 59 per cent of employed women work in the manufacturing sector in Tonga.

Overall, women's relatively lower participation in the labour force in PICs, their much smaller numbers in – and even absence from – senior manager positions in both the public and private sectors, and their higher numbers in the informal sector and especially in agricultural production, reflect gender inequality and the urgent need to address women's economic empowerment.

The Beijing+20 review report validly noted that land and natural resources are not owned or controlled by women. Cultural, social and legal norms and practices continue to be barriers to women's control over and access to land and natural resources.

*Women and fisheries*⁷²

Across the Pacific gender roles in the fisheries sector are shifting due to lifestyle changes, climate change related adaption processes, demographic and migratory movements as well as changes within value systems that influence culture and traditional practices.

While Pacific men have always been associated as main fishers, they continue to dominate deep-sea fishing, using more advanced fishing gear and have easier access to boats, especially motorised boats and finances. Women, in contrast, concentrate on gleaning activities (invertebrate fishing) along the inshore habitats while using simple gear. Women also undertake many more diverse tasks such as making fishing nets, preparing men's fishing trips, selling, marketing, displaying, packing, cooling, prizing, or sharing excess marine resources within their communities as well as various post-harvest and value adding processes such as filleting, drying, smoking, salting or bottling of fish.

Cultural barriers as well as time burdens for women remain key obstacles for women to further engage in the fisheries sector. In addition, women's contributions are seen as less valuable because gleaning or 'helping' men fish is seen as minor or low-key fishing. The lack of sex disaggregated data further exacerbates the assumption that women's contributions are little, fostering the picture of invisible women fishers. However, a recent study⁷³ suggests that women's estimated contribution accounts for 56% of the total small-scale fisheries catch in the Pacific with significant contributions to subsistence and food security.

Recent gender and fisheries assessments suggest that more women are venturing into deep-sea fishing because of changing lifestyles, more access to motorised boats. More women access markets and operate small fishing businesses with more post-harvest

⁷¹ According to the ILO definition of the labour force, subsistence workers should not be included in the employed population.

⁷² Regional information available from 2017-2020

⁷³ Harper et al. 2013

engagement of women and more opportunities seen in value-adding processes for women's economic empowerment.

Women remain under-represented in fisheries related decision-making processes at national and local level⁷⁴. Whilst women's voices are already underrepresented in decision-making across federal levels and sectors, the fisheries sector being associated with men, male dominance in fisheries associations and national fisheries agencies, may bear greater risks of women's voices being unheard. While more efforts have been made to include women's representation in community fisheries committees, and ensuring women are consulted as a key group, these efforts have remained numerical. The underlying root causes for women not speaking up or not understanding their voice as a valuable contribution to political decisions have hardly been tackled. Positive change can be observed at national fisheries agency level, where more women have been recruited as fisheries officers than 10 years ago. Risks associated with absent women's voices are gender blind coastal fisheries management plans that may impact negatively on food security needs and women dominated fishery sectors such as crabs, invertebrates, seaweed, sea grapes, sea cucumber, among others. Also, less investment placed on women's post-harvest activities (e.g. seafood handling), value adding and safety and security matters for women fishers can be a result of women's absent voices in decision-making.

Women's economic empowerment

Fiji's national report for Beijing+25 identified the obstacles and gaps that affect women's participation in the economy, which can be applied more broadly to nearly all PICs:

The list of barriers to women's economic empowerment is long and multifaceted: greater burden of household and care work; concentration in precarious, casual, low wage, informal employment; lack of control over income and assets; greater levels of violence against women; lower levels of education; restricted mobility; lower levels of financial literacy; greater levels of financial exclusion; lack of access to, control over, tenure of, land and other natural resources; lower levels of access to market-related information; lack of access to training and extension services; unequal pay; and discriminatory attitudes toward women in general, and toward their economic participation in particular.

These barriers to women's economic empowerment were also recognised by the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Trend Assessment Report 2012–2016, which stated that "...challenges include gender pay disparities, [lack of] legal protection for women in the informal sector, legal, policy and social barriers for women to access economic and employment opportunities including land, credit and resource needs for sustainability of business and enterprise. Additional barriers to achieving women's economic empowerment in the Pacific include archaic labour regulations and laws, gendered norms at the workplace resulting in occupational segregation, limited access to leadership and decision making opportunities, lack of recognition and economic value placed on women's care and domestic (unpaid) work and security related issues including the impact of violence against women and girls..."

⁷⁴ Tuvalu's Fisheries Department has worked in collaboration with the Gender Affairs Department with a view to improving inclusion of women and women's groups. In 2016, the Gender Affairs Department provided awareness training for Fisheries Department staff to highlight women's role in fisheries and their contributions to post-harvesting processes, food preservation and food security. The Funafuti Reef Fisheries Stewardship Plan, launched in 2017, takes into account women's role and contribution. Two women are registered under the Funafuti Fisherman's Association.

While domestic and informal sector work contribute to women's vulnerability and poverty, the incomes earned by women in the public sector can also be low. Samoa's Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) (2013/2014) recorded 11 per cent of women earning below the Basic Needs Poverty Line (BNPL) in the public sector, and 23 per cent below the BNPL in the private sector⁷⁵. Given that women occupy the lower categories of employment in these sectors in all PICs, it is likely that they form significant proportions of the working poor.

Promoting economic empowerment of women

National governments and regional organisations are committed to gender equality and the economic empowerment of women. As states parties to CEDAW, nearly all PICs have adopted enabling policies and strategies towards the economic empowerment of women. Such policies have been advocated by women's groups and pushed by the increasing number of women in decision-making positions. As noted in Palau's BPA+25 report, increased numbers of women holding decision-making positions in elected offices and in professional fields have helped to drive gender related policies.

In some PICs, laws and policies have been introduced to address sexual harassment in the workplace, improve facilities and safety for women market vendors, and increase access to both credit facilities and export markets for goods and services supplied by women in business.

Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu have adopted national gender equality policies and, together with many other PICs, have been reviewing laws and policies to create a more enabling social and economic environment for women. Legislative initiatives have included the institution of minimum wage regulations in Fiji and RMI, the provision and extension of maternity leave in nearly all PICs, the institution of paternity leave in some PICs, the explicit proscription of sexual harassment at the workplace in Fiji, and criminalisation of gender-based violence in nearly all countries.

Within the framework of Fiji's National Gender Policy, the Family Law Amendment Act 2017 provides for paternity leave of five days and increases maternity leave by 14 days from 84 to 98 days. Fiji has adopted a new Family Care Leave Law to allow employees to attend to family emergencies and care for sick family members.

In the RMI there have been progressive increments to the minimum wage which reached USD 4.00 an hour in September 2020. To this end, the Minimum Wage Act of 1986 was amended in 2017, making the regulated minimum wage in public and private sectors USD 2.50 per hour. This was increased to USD 3.00 an hour in 2018, and is envisaged to increase to USD 3.50 an hour by late 2019. RMI's Equal Employment Opportunity Act 2017 prohibits discrimination and requires equality of treatment of employees including in the benefits they receive.

Fiji's national minimum wage of FJD 2.00 an hour, established in 2013, increased to FJD 2.32 in July 2015, and subsequently to FJD 2.68 in 2017, was reported to have "significantly benefited women who work as house maids, house helpers, in garment factories, restaurants, supermarkets and private and small companies". However, the weekly wage this realises of FJD 107.20 for a 5-day week falls well below the BNPL of FJD 200 a week for a family of four (two adults and two children).

⁷⁵ Government of Samoa, Samoa Bureau of Statistics and UNDP Pacific Centre 2016. Samoa hardship and poverty report. Analysis of the 2013/14 household income and expenditure survey, p. 66.

Several PICT governments have partnered with NGOs to promote and support women producers in the cultural or handicraft industry, as well as in food production and processing. Since 2013, Samoa has worked to revive traditional knowledge and skills in fine mat (le Samoa) production by women, with the result that there are now more than 3000 producers of this highly valued cultural commodity, including young women. Production of fine cloth mats and other artefacts has also increased in RMI as young mothers and 'school dropouts' are taught basic handicraft and sewing. In Samoa and Fiji national gatherings and exhibitions are held to promote handicraft production. In Fiji, the National Women's Expo which began in 2014 has gained momentum, and in 2017, 340 women artisans were provided with opportunities to refine the designs of their products, and improve product packaging, marketing and business management. Palau and other PICT governments have supported the attendance of handicraft makers at national, regional and international cultural expositions such as the 12th Festival of Pacific Arts in Guam in 2016.

Virgin coconut oil, noni juice, and cocoa for chocolate making have also become important products for women in Fiji and Samoa. Women are active in the Palau Organic Growers Association which seeks to promote organic farming and support rural families in agriculture. The Samoan Chamber of Commerce internships for career development have been given to both women (65 per cent) and men (35 per cent). Fiji reported that the Ministry of Women, Culture and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA) opened 30 new resource centres, 26 women's extension centres and established networks with 1702 groups to encourage income generation programmes. The resource centres provide space for handicraft making, and to incubate micro-businesses.

Several PICs have also reported providing financial literacy training for women and significant increases in microcredit facilities for them. The Samoan National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2017–2020 led by its central bank in partnership with the Development Bank of Samoa facilitated training for 778 participants (558 female and 220 male). Unemployed women, and women who have been victims of domestic violence, have been enabled to establish 138 micro-businesses.

In Fiji between 2014 and 2017, 2643 women were assisted with micro-credit loans and business training by the National Centre for Small and Medium Enterprises. The South Pacific Business Development initiative, which also operates in Samoa with the objective of empowering women in rural villages to start, grow and maintain income-generating micro-enterprises, provided 6900 women with credit and business training. Solomon Islands' National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls (NSEEWG) 2014–2017 promotes financial inclusion through financial literacy training, saving schemes, access to credit and affordable financial services. In Vanuatu, VANWODs, the microcredit agency, has provided financial support to 8000 members in the informal sector with a good proportion being women.

Vanuatu, Fiji and Solomon Islands have reported significant improvements in market facilities and security for women market vendors. The Markets for Change Project (M4C) with UN Women started in Fiji in 2014 and involved six market vendor associations. This number doubled in 2018 with 12 such associations comprising 3500 members. Women led nine out of the 12 associations and also held 50 per cent of the leadership positions.

Several PICs have reported that short-term labour migration to Australia and New Zealand has increasingly included more women and contributed to women's economic empowerment. Australia started working with eight countries but has expanded its programme to include all Pacific island states. New Zealand's partnerships are with Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The Australian

Seasonal Workers Programme established in 2012 has been enhanced since 2018 by the Pacific Labour Scheme providing employment for unskilled and semi-skilled workers in horticulture and other sectors.

Continuing challenges

As stated in the Beijing+20 report, labour markets in nearly all PICs are small and the private sector in most of them is underdeveloped. Formal employment is largely limited to the urban areas of larger 'main islands'. Although gender parity has been attained in education in most PICs, and women and girls have demonstrated higher achievements in tertiary-level education, this is not reflected in their share of formal sector employment. There is scope for more jobs for women in the public sectors of several PICs. There is also a need for more vocational and technical training for women, including training for non-gender-stereotyped occupations, so that gender segregation in labour markets is reduced.

In aggregate terms, workers in vulnerable employment, defined as working in the informal and subsistence sectors as family and own account workers, remains unchanged with 84 per cent of women and 71 per cent of men affected. For women, the burden of unpaid household and care work also means a significant opportunity cost with regards to accessing training and opportunities to achieve economic independence.

No PICT has instituted mechanisms for gender-responsive budgeting and gender audits of their public expenditures. Gender budgeting is challenging and requires not only national-level political will but also specific technical knowledge and robust national budget systems. Raising awareness about and undertaking gender-responsive budgeting in the region remains aspirational.

The absence to date of gender-disaggregated data to inform women-empowering economic policy-making constitutes a major obstacle. Work to improve data collection and build capacity for gender analysis of statistics is ongoing as part of the international community's effort.

The newly adopted ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (Convention 190, 2019) is an important new international law providing protection particularly for women workers and should be ratified by PICs.

Mitigating measures⁷⁶

- ✓ Women's economic empowerment must be supported by all sectors, including information and communication technology (ICT), education, finance, justice, public service, water, agriculture, marine resources and infrastructure, and by subnational and local government and the private sector.
- ✓ Central and local governments, with the assistance of CSOs, faith-based organisations, CROP agencies and development partners, are encouraged to mainstream gender across their policies, legislation, programmes and services.
- ✓ Support women's entrepreneurship.
- ✓ Facilitate financial inclusion of women.
- ✓ Support enterprises to introduce and strengthen violence and harassment policies and conduct gender audits to identify measures to ensure gender equality at all levels, establish respectful and safe workplace environments for women and men, and enable reconciliation of work and family responsibilities.

⁷⁶ Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Report, May 2021

- ✓ Improve infrastructure and governance of market places to create inclusive and gender-responsive environments.
- ✓ Implement training, mentorship, internship, apprenticeship and sponsorship programmes to enable female employees to develop their skills.
- ✓ Ensure that structural reforms, budgets, economic policies, taxation, aid arrangements and trade agreements do not disadvantage women.
- ✓ Provide high-quality, accessible and affordable child care.

WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

Pacific Island states still have a long way to go in achieving balanced representation of women in national parliaments. With the exception of the French territories where equitable representation of women in their legislative assemblies is ensured by the French parity law, which compels all political parties to include an equal number of women as men on their party list, women's representation in national parliaments across the region is shockingly low. The Pacific region had earned the dubious distinction of having the lowest representation of women in the world. As shown in Figure 6, three Pacific Island states currently have no women in parliament at present. The Pacific Women in Politics reported in May 2021 that across the region - excluding Australia, New Zealand, the United States and French Territories - there were 48 women MPs, or 8.6 per cent of all parliamentarians⁷⁷. While there are no legal barriers to women contesting elections, social barriers are strong, including negative perceptions of women in politics and traditional views of leadership and decision-making being men's role.




Countries	Number of MPs	Number of Women	% of Women
 Cook Islands	24	6	25
 Niue	20	5	25
 Tokelau	20	4	20
 Fiji	51	11	21.5
 Tonga	26*	3	11.5
 Nauru	19	2	10.5
 Samoa	50	5**	10
 Kiribati	46	4	8.6
 Palau	29***	2 (plus female Vice President)	6.9
 Tuvalu	15	1	6.7
 Marshall Islands	33	2	6.1
 Solomon Islands	50	3	6.0
 PNG	111	0	0
 Federated States of Micronesia	14	0	0
 Vanuatu	52	0	0
* This includes the elected representatives of the Nobles (9 members) and the people (17 members).			
**This includes the 4 elected women representatives together with the next highest polling woman included as part of Samoa's 'special measure' for 10% of women's representation in Parliament.			
*** This number refers to both Houses of Congress in Palau – the House of Delegates with 16 members, and the House of Senate with 13 members.			

Figure 6. Seats held by women in national parliaments, May 2021

⁷⁷ <https://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/>

Over the last two decades, enormous efforts have been made by women's NGOs, regional intergovernmental organisations, UN agencies and donor partners to increase women's political leadership and representation in national legislatures and local government, through research and advocacy, consultations with governments, public education, mobilisation and training of women, and engagement with women parliamentarians. This work has included: national and regional level women in politics projects from the late 1990s which have encouraged women to stand for local and national elections, trained potential candidates, tracked progress, celebrated women's electoral successes and profiled women Members of Parliament (MPs); non-partisan voter education and profiling candidate positions on women's issues in the lead up to national elections;⁷⁸ commissioned regional research⁷⁹ into factors that enable or constrain the advancement of women's political representation, with follow-up work exploring with governments in several countries the possibilities of introducing temporary special measures (TSMs) or a quota system in national legislatures; national studies on barriers to women's political participation and factors that limit or enable electoral success;⁸⁰ public education and campaigns on women's leadership; practice parliaments for women, initiated by UNDP and PIFS (with subsequent support by UN Women) and held in 10 PICs between 2011 and 2016 with the support of national parliaments and departments of women;⁸¹ and community and voter surveys on perceptions of women's leadership and attitudes towards women candidates⁸².

These efforts have not been in vain. A small number of parliaments in Pacific Island states have passed laws to introduce TSMs in one form or another to bring a small quota of women representatives into the national parliament (in two cases) or onto local government councils (in two cases).

The earliest law enacted by a Pacific parliament to introduce TSMs to ensure women's representation in parliament was PNG's Equality and Participation Act of 2011. Implementing this major legislative achievement was stymied, however, in 2012 when PNG's parliament did not pass the enabling legislation for the Act, which consisted of amendments to the organic law. The last national elections in PNG in 2017 saw no women win a seat in PNG's 111-member parliament, despite a record number of 167 women candidates contesting.

In Samoa, a traditional system of governance still co-exists with democratic processes in Samoa, affecting participation of women in politics and public decision-making: only chiefs (matai) can contest the election, the number of women holding matai title remaining low. In

⁷⁸ Voter education and profiling candidates' positions on women's issues during national elections in Fiji was an established part of FWRM's work until the 2014 Electoral Decree (Section 115 – Restrictions on Campaigns) prohibited NGOs receiving foreign funds or assistance to engage in any way with elections or election issues.

⁷⁹ A PIFS-commissioned study in 2006 proposed the introduction of TSMs or quotas for women (Huffer E. (ed). 2006. *A woman's place is in the house-the house of parliament: research to advance women's political representation in Forum island countries: a regional study presented in five reports*. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat). PIFS subsequently explored the implementation of TSMs with a number of Pacific states, and a joint PIFS/UNDP Pacific Centre initiative proposed TSM options to advance gender equality. See Clark L. and Rodrigues C. 2009. *Utilising temporary measures to promote gender balance in Pacific legislatures: A Guide to Options*. Suva, Fiji: UNDP Pacific Centre.

⁸⁰ EU-funded UNDP study in Solomon Islands on women's leadership and political participation as part of the Strengthening the Electoral Cycle in Solomon Islands project II (SECSIP II).

⁸¹ Practice parliaments were run in Kiribati, RMI (2011), PNG (2012), Palau (2011, 2013), Tuvalu (2013, 2016), Solomon Islands and Tonga (2014), Samoa (2015), Nauru and Fiji (2016).

⁸² Fiji Women's Forum 2014. *Public perceptions of women in leadership*; Young Women's Parliamentary Group in Solomon Islands' study of voter attitudes/behaviour to women candidates before and after the 2014 elections.

June 2013, Samoa legislated a minimum quota of five reserved seats for women by amending Article 44 of its constitution. This achievement was part of a programme on increasing political participation of women in Samoa. The seats are filled through election and, where necessary, through appointments of unsuccessful women candidates with the highest numbers of votes, to make up a shortfall. As a result of the TSM, which came into effect before the 2016 national elections, Samoan women MPs now constitute 10 per cent of the national legislature. Following the April 2021 elections, the FAST party, led by former Deputy Prime Minister. Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa won the majority of seats in the Samoan Parliament. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa may become the first Samoan woman Prime Minister, once the Court considers all pending electoral petitions.

Vanuatu's Parliament passed the Municipalities (Amendment) Act (No. 11 of 2013), and a further amendment (Act No. 5 of 2015) to strengthen women's representation in municipal councils by reserving one seat in each local government ward for women. The amendments to the Act followed strategic lobbying by the Women in Shared Decision Making (WiSDM)⁸³ coalition, which sought provisions for a 30–34 per cent quota in municipal councils. Reserved seats are contested by women candidates on a first-past-the-post basis, but women may also contest general seats, which are based on proportional representation. Five women won seats in Port Vila's municipal council elections in 2014, resulting in 35.7 per cent representation in the 14-member council; and five women were also elected to Luganville's 13-member council in elections in 2015, raising women's representation to 38.4 per cent. In 2018, six women were elected in Port Vila and five in Luganville. Although no women were elected in Lenakel municipal council, the achievements in Port Vila and Luganville are significant; prior to the introduction of TSMs both councils had only one woman representative following elections in 2009 (for Port Vila) and in 2011 (for Luganville)⁸⁴. Two of the women councillors in the Luganville council are deputy mayors. Vanuatu women's representation at national and provincial levels, however, remains poor – in the last two national elections no women were elected to parliament but a newly formed women's party planned to field five candidates in the elections held early in 2020. The Leleone Vanua Party, launched at the Vanuatu National Council of Women's 15th National Congress in May 2018, has also been engaging in advocacy for increased women's representation at provincial level. Through the work of Vanuatu's Department of Women's Affairs (DWA), for the first time, a woman in “one of the most patriarchal islands, Tanna”, contested the provincial elections⁸⁵. Under the Decentralization Act, Area Councils (administrative areas within provinces) are now required to have a women's representative.

In June 2014 Solomon Islands passed the Political Parties Integrity Act which introduced a requirement that political parties reserve “at least 10 percent of the total number of candidates it selects and endorses for women” (Art. 48:1)). The Act includes the incentive of a “temporary special measures grant” for parties that “are successful in returning women candidates at elections” (Art. 49) and even permits parties to benefit from the grant if a successful independent woman candidate subsequently joins the party (Art. 49:3). A weakness in the provision is indicated in Art. 48:2, under which a party will not have breached the law if the number of women who applied or agreed to be nominated by the

⁸³ The WiSDM coalition was formed in 2012 with representatives from the Vanuatu Electoral Office, the Attorney General's Office, the University of the South Pacific and the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA). It was supported by the Pacific Leadership Program and other donor partners (UNDP Pacific Office et al. 2016).

⁸⁴ See http://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/Country_profiles/Vanuatu.pdf

⁸⁵ Government of Vanuatu 2019. Beijing+25 National Review Report. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/vanuatu.pdf?la=en&vs=4050>

party falls short of the required minimum stipulated in Art. 48:1. This is a loophole that effectively permits parties to make minimum effort in seeking women candidates.

A second effort in 2018 to legislate the reservation of 10 parliamentary seats for women in Solomon Islands was overwhelmingly defeated. Despite this setback, and without the aid of TSMs, three women were successfully re-elected in the 2019 elections in Solomon Islands. In several other PICs, the numbers of women in parliament have also been steadily rising without the aid of TSMs. In Solomon Islands, the adoption of TSMs will remain high on women's agenda, with attention now focused on accelerating women's participation and representation at the provincial level. The Premier of Western Province and his executive are leading the way by endorsing the option of reserving three elected seats for women in the Western Province Provincial Assembly.

Only two women have ever won seats in Nauru's Parliament, one of whom is a cabinet minister. Although many women contested the 2013 general election, the idea of introducing TSMs, when raised during Nauru's constitutional reforms in 2006, reportedly met with resistance from many in the community, including women. The CEDAW Committee expressed concern about the absence of any TSMs in the legislation or policies of the state party, and about women and men opposing the introduction of TSMs, saying it indicated incorrect public understanding of the purpose and non-discriminatory nature of such measures. The Committee recommended that Nauru "adopt and implement temporary special measures, including goals, statutory quotas and gender-responsive budgeting", to achieve substantive equality of women and men in all areas in which women are disadvantaged or underrepresented.

Tuvalu has only one woman in its 15-member parliament, and since independence in 1978 there have only ever been three women MPs, and no more than one at a time. The Tuvalu BPA+25 report notes that despite women's political participation being "a matter of discussion for many years", TSMs being "widely discussed over the past five years" and the Gender Affairs Department together with the Attorney General's Office producing a TSM options paper that recommended the creation of two extra seats in parliament for women, TSMs remain an ongoing challenge for the advancement of gender equality. Traditional ideas about men's and women's roles have been suggested as the reason for the resistance to TSMs in Tuvalu⁸⁶.

In the Cook Islands 2018 elections, six out of the 10 women who contested were elected to the 24-seat parliament, giving women 25 per cent representation in the parliament, without TSMs⁸⁷. The Cook Islands also has a woman Speaker, Hon. Tutonga Puapii Picknic Rattle (Nikki Rattle), which brings the total number of women in the Cook Islands Parliament to seven. The Cook Islands reported to the CEDAW Committee in 2018 that women dominate the House of Ariki (High Chiefs) which advises the government on matters concerning custom and tradition and landholding.

⁸⁶ Government of Tuvalu. 2019. Beijing+25 national review report: Tuvalu. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/tuvalu.pdf?la=en&vs=758>

⁸⁷ There were much fewer women than men contesting the elections, but women candidates had a much higher success rate (60 per cent) compared with male candidates who had a 30 per cent success rate, with 18 of the 60 male candidates who contested the elections winning seats. Two of the women's results were initially contested post-election, requiring each of them to run in by-elections held in 2019, which they won. A third woman candidate was confirmed winner of her seat following a successful petition for the scrutiny of the constituency roll. <http://www.mfem.gov.ck/elections>

RMI reports candidly that it has “one of the lowest rates of representation at the legislative level internationally”, with only three elected women in the 33-seat parliament (Nitijela). One of them, Hilda Heine, however, held the highest political office of President. There are two women members of the Council of Iroij (Chiefs), the role of which is largely consultative on matters of custom and traditional practice. All other decision-making structures and the judiciary are male dominated. Although a proposal from the Nitijela was brought to the 2015 Constitutional Convention to establish a quota of six reserved seats for women, following deliberations and public consultations, it was defeated in the 2017 Constitutional Convention. Large numbers of women (165) nonetheless contested in local government council elections in RMI in 2015 – albeit far fewer than men (657) – and 56 women won seats. Only five women out of a total of 91 contested in the elections for the Nitijela that year.

In 2010 the FSM Congress introduced a bill to amend the national constitution to provide for reserved seats for women in Congress but it was never acted upon. A second attempt was made in 2012 with a new bill with the same objective being put to the vote, but it did not receive sufficient support to pass. The same bill “resurfaced in 2014”, but was still “pending” when FSM reported to the CEDAW Committee in October 2015. No woman has ever been elected to the FSM national legislature.

Fiji has not adopted TSMs. Since the 2018 general elections, however, the second held under the single national constituency and proportional representation system introduced in 2014, saw a record number of 11 women elected to Fiji’s 51-seat parliament, thereby achieving very close to 21.50 per cent parliamentary representation. This is the largest representation ever achieved since Fiji gained independence in 1970. The system of proportional representation has been a boon for women contesting elections under a large party ticket as the number of seats are allocated to parties on the basis of the proportion of total votes won by their candidates. Popular leaders amass large numbers of votes which increases the chances of their women candidates securing seats. Three women MPs hold ministerial posts and a further two are assistant ministers.

In Palau, there are 2 women MPs (plus a female Vice-President), out of 29 seats.

Looking back at how far the region has come, and how much further it has to go, we can say that we are starting to gain traction in this long march to equal representation. There has been some slippage and there are one or two seemingly intractable contexts, but on the plus side, in Pacific Islands Forum countries (not including Australia and New Zealand, US and French Territories), as of May 2021 there are only 48 women MPs out of 560 MPs altogether⁸⁸, meaning that there has been almost a 100 per cent increase in female parliamentarians since 2013⁸⁹.

Commitment to gender balance

The 2012 PLGED reflects a major commitment by governments, although more needs to be done in concrete implementation at national level. Several PICs have adopted national gender equality policies and plans with stated policy outcomes but mostly without setting goals and measurable targets to progressively achieve gender balance in government bodies, committees, public administrative entities and the judiciary. Implementation of national gender equality policies and plans are also reported to be hampered by different

⁸⁸ A breakdown of numbers of women parliamentarians by country: Tonga two, Tuvalu one, the Cook Islands six, Fiji 10, Kiribati three, RMI three, Nauru two, Niue five, Palau four, Samoa five and Solomon Islands two (<https://www.pacwip.org/>)

⁸⁹ <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages>

sections of government not fully understanding or subscribing to the policies, and by capacity constraints, in one case caused by high staff turnover.

Instituting gender balance in all decision-making panels and boards is expressly stated and included in four key actions proposed as needed special measures to meet the objectives of the Solomon Islands' Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in the Public Service Policy. Vanuatu's Council of Ministers has called for 40 per cent representation of women in national task forces and committees.

There is no gender balance policy mentioned in the Cook Islands national report but women dominate the public service, occupying 60 per cent of positions. Women head six of the 14 government ministries and half of the 10 crown agencies. In addition, two of the 10 island executive officer positions and one island mayoral position are held by women.

In Tuvalu women make up 46 per cent of senior management within the public service, but comprise only 32 per cent of the highest levels of senior management.

In Solomon Islands women comprised 44 per cent of the public service work force in 2018, an increase from 30 per cent in 2007, but a majority are employed at junior administrative levels. Only 25 per cent of senior positions in government (from Level 9 to Speaker level) are held by women. There are only four women permanent secretaries out of a total of 24.

Samoa now has four women judges – two Supreme Court judges and two district judges – as well as two women Lands and Titles Court judges. A Family Court was established in 2014 and a Drug and Alcohol Court in 2015. The latter receives funding from the gender programme to support officers of the court. Both the Family Court and the Drugs and Alcohol Court are presided over by female Supreme Court judges.

Palau's judiciary is close to gender balanced with four women judges out of a total of nine, and women hold an almost equal share (49 per cent) of managerial positions.

Nauru reports that although only two women have ever been elected to parliament, the value of women's contribution to public life is reflected in the large proportion of public sector agencies that have historically been headed by women.

Encouraging shared work and responsibilities

While the "difficulties of combining family life, work life and politics" are recognised in some national reports as an obstacle to women seeking political office, there have been no reported policies, awareness or sensitisation training, or work-based champions to encourage a change in the disproportionate responsibility for household duties and care of children that women carry, founded on fixed ideas about women's roles.

Appointments to decision-making positions

Vanuatu's Public Service Commission in 2018 appointed on merit the first two women directors-general (to the Ministry for Internal Affairs and the Ministry for Justice and Community Services), and in February 2019 made further merit-based appointments of eight women to director positions, increasing women's appointments at these senior responsibility areas: finance, environment, women's affairs, geohazards, labour, tertiary education, biosecurity and civil aviation. Vanuatu also has a female Commissioner of Labour, and in May 2019 appointed its very first female ni-Vanuatu Supreme Court judge. Senior appointments of women have also been made in the Vanuatu police force, with the women officers appointed to senior positions deployed in international UN peace-keeping missions.

The numbers of women appointed to management level positions (CEO and assistant CEO) in government ministries in Samoa have increased in the last five years. Sixty per cent of these positions are now held by women. Samoa has two women cabinet ministers and two women MPs chair parliamentary committees, the Public Accounts Parliamentary Committee and the Social Sector Committee of Parliament.

RMI reports increasing numbers of women being appointed to “high level government positions, management, government boards and diplomatic posts”. This has been driven by women gaining higher level education and degrees and by government support for equitable access for men and women to decision-making posts and participation in public life.

Women’s leadership in civil society

Most PICs have strong and long-established women’s NGOs including women’s rights organisations, many of which enjoy a high profile in the region at large. There are two strong and active regional networks of women’s NGOs, headed by very able and effective women leaders, working in the areas of ending violence against women; and women, peace and security and women’s media. Several women’s organisations run training programmes and mentor younger women as part of their organisational mandate. In some PICs, women’s NGOs also provide leadership for national NGO coalitions, such as the NGO Coalition on Human Rights in Fiji.

There are longstanding relationships in many PICs between established national women’s NGOs and governments. These relationships are often mutually supportive partnerships. Over the past years, many women’s NGOs have also effectively engaged with governments at the regional level through SPC and PIFS processes, to deliberate on issues of common concern in the region such as sustainable development, climate change and oceans, and help set regional development agendas and strategies. Women’s NGOs and women-led coalitions and networks have been centrally involved in these processes.

Continuing challenges

Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) have proven successful in increasing women’s political representation in PICs. They will remain an important vehicle for progressing women’s political participation and representation in national parliaments, and local government councils. Legislating reserved seats or the mandatory inclusion of a specific quota of women candidates in parliaments and councils depends on both effective advocacy and lobbying by champions within and outside government, and political will. Introducing a requirement for political parties to include a particular proportion of women in the candidates they put forward for election also depends on increased involvement by women in executive positions within political parties.

Reforms of electoral systems have often been undertaken to achieve fairer representation than through systems based on first past the post. Proportional representation systems are known to benefit smaller parties and are usually fairer to women candidates. Electoral reforms can present challenges however, and women’s organisations and women leaders need to ensure that they are consulted and included in any electoral reform process. They also need to be alert to the possibilities that even proposed new systems may have negative consequences for women’s representation, for instance if they include a qualifying threshold of votes that is set too high for an independent candidate or small party to attain⁹⁰.

⁹⁰ This is the case with Fiji’s new election system, introduced in 2014 by decree. Independent candidate Roshika Deo secured 1055 votes in the 2014 elections but failed to win a seat as her total votes fell far below

Women in all PICs constitute roughly 50 per cent of the voting population. Not all women voters give their vote to women, however. The Fiji Women's Forum's 2014 survey of community attitudes to women's leadership returned a 72 per cent response from women surveyed in favour of having more women in national government. Yet Fiji election results in 2014 indicated that only 16 per cent of women voters actually voted for women candidates. In the 2018 elections, the percentage of women voters supporting women candidates fell to 8 per cent. This suggests the need for more advocacy among women voters who should be expected to be the natural vote bank for women candidates.

Achieving gender balance in other decision-making bodies in the public sector, including the boards of statutory bodies, commissions and advisory committees, remains an ongoing challenge, although some progress has been made. The CEDAW Committee has expressed concerns to Pacific nations about women's under-representation in parliament and decision-making positions in government. In one case, the Committee highlighted, "discriminatory stereotypes, nepotism and favouritism" as "barriers to the full and equal participation of women in political and public life".

Mitigating measures⁹¹

- ✓ Increase the number of women in national and subnational parliaments and legislatures, in customary institutions and in senior decision-making positions in government;
- ✓ Set appropriate targets for the representation of women, men and marginalised groups across the key decision making areas noted in the PLGED, and consider adopting TSMs, where appropriate, to increase women's representation in legislatures;
- ✓ Work with women, particularly the most marginalised, to amplify their voices and support representative organisations to negotiate with national, subnational and local government and private sector bodies;
- ✓ Promote a safe and enabling environment for all civil society actors, with a specific focus on women human rights defenders, and more equitable access to resources for grassroots, local, national and regional women's organisations and CSOs to support women in asserting their economic rights;
- ✓ Encourage women's participation and leadership in trades unions, organisations for informal workers, employers' and business organisations and professional associations; and
- ✓ Promote women's influence and agency by supporting the capacity of special interest groups, such as market vendors, to develop their bargaining power in economic areas.

WOMEN AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In the last 10 years, PICs have made substantial progress in legally committing to the protection and promotion of human rights by ratifying international human rights laws. Today, their human rights treaty ratification record looks much more respectable. All of the independent states have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), all except two (Tonga and Palau) have ratified Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and all except two (Solomon Islands and Tonga) have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Except for Tonga and Palau, all PICs have ratified at least three of the nine core international human

the high threshold of 5 per cent of all votes cast. See Liki A. and Slatter C. 2015. Control, Alt, Delete: How Fiji's new PR electoral system and media coverage affected election results for women candidates in the 2014 election. *Journal of Pacific Studies* 35(2).

⁹¹ Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Report, May 2021

rights instruments, and five states (Fiji, PNG, RMI, Samoa and Vanuatu) have ratified five or more, with Fiji becoming the first and only Pacific island country to have acceded to all nine core international human rights instruments in 2019.

Table 5. Pacific Island countries' ratification record by decade, 1970–2019.

Number of ratifications	Decade				
	1970–1979	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2009	2010–2019
	2	3	19	11	19
Treaty name and number of countries ratifying in brackets	CERD (2)	CERD (2)			
	CRC (14)				
		CESCR (1)		CESCR (1)	CESCR (2)
			CEDAW (5)	CEDAW (5)	CEDAW (1)
				CRPD (2)	CRPD (9)
				CCPR (3)	CCPR (2)
					CAT (4)
					CPPED (1)

CERD, Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; ICESCR, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; CRC, Convention on the Rights of the Child; CEDAW, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; CRPD, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; CAT, Convention Against Torture; CPPED, Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Note: the Cook Islands and Niue ratified CEDAW in 1985 through association with New Zealand. The Cook Islands began reporting independently as of 2006. Palau is a signatory to CEDAW but has not ratified and is not counted in this table.

As the international bill of rights for women, CEDAW is identified as the most important international human rights law in the BPA. The fact that almost all Pacific island countries have ratified CEDAW is significant – indicating widespread political will to protect women's rights and eradicate gender discrimination. Whilst the process of Tonga's accession to CEDAW has stalled since the intention to ratify was announced in 2015, in 2020 the Cabinet approved the implementation of awareness activities through legal literacy and panel discussions on gender equality and human rights. This is expected to contribute towards creating a conducive environment for the ratification of the CEDAW.

Rights and principles that are also crucial to the protection of women's interests and that guarantee substantive rights for women (especially women in developing countries) is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which enshrines key economic rights⁹² and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which inscribes the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) as a right of indigenous peoples.⁹³ The new ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (Convention 190, 2019) adds significantly to the corpus of international laws protecting women's rights but has only been ratified by Fiji, amongst 5 other States Parties to date.

While all PICs have been making efforts to implement the international human rights laws to which they are party, including by meeting their reporting obligations with the CEDAW

⁹² ICESCR enshrines the rights of all peoples to self-determination of all peoples, and to freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources; the rights to an adequate standard of living including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to continuous improvement of living conditions; the rights to education, to the highest standard of health, to safe and affordable housing, water and sanitation; the rights to work, to just and favourable conditions of work, including fair wages and safe and healthy working conditions; and the right to form and join trade unions that function freely.

⁹³ FPIC is an internationally recognised human right enshrined in ILO Convention 169, and linked to treaty norms like the right of self-determination in the ICESCR. It obliges states to obtain the consent of indigenous people before undertaking development projects which may affect their land, territory or resources.

Committee and other treaty bodies, they are still a long way from achieving full compliance with the various conventions they have ratified and several of them have been behind schedule in submitting their reports. This is understandable given their under-resourced national machineries; although technical assistance from UN specialised agencies and other development partners (including the EU) can be requested and is often provided.

International reporting obligations

Only FSM, Fiji, RMI and Samoa deposited instruments of ratification for core international human rights treaties after 2013. Eleven PICs have reported to CEDAW, but only seven – the Cook Islands, Fiji, FSM, Kiribati, Nauru, RMI and Samoa – have submitted a report after 2015 until 2019. Reporting to UN human rights treaty bodies is a technical exercise that requires funding for specialised resources. Pacific island countries struggle to finance regular reporting and often rely on assistance from regional agencies and development partners. Table 6 shows the ratification and reporting status for the 12 PICs that have ratified CEDAW, noting that Palau is a signatory.

Table 6. CEDAW ratification and reporting status.

State party	Year of ratification	Periodic reports submitted
Cook Islands	1985*	2006, 2017
Fiji	1995	2000, 2009, 2016
FSM	2004	2015
Kiribati	2004	2019
Nauru	2011	2016
Niue	1985*	
Palau	Signed 2011**	
PNG	1995	2009
RMI	2006	2016
Samoa	1992	2003, 2010, 2017
Solomon Islands	2002	2013
Tuvalu	1999	2008, 2012
Vanuatu	1995	2005, 2014

Source: OHCHR website: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=181&Lang=EN

* Note that the Cook Islands and Niue are committed to CEDAW through their association with New Zealand, which ratified in 1985. The Cook Islands began submitting independent reports in 2006.

** Palau is a signatory to CEDAW but has not yet ratified the convention.

CEDAW implementation

RMI earns distinction amongst PICs for its Gender Equality Act, the first such comprehensive standalone CEDAW legislation in the region. The Act was approved by RMI's parliament, the Nitijela, in September 2019. A CEDAW legislative compliance review was also completed as a parallel process, paving the way for gender-based cross-sectoral law reform in the future.⁹⁴ Both undertakings lay a strong legal foundation for eliminating gender-based discrimination and promoting gender equality in RMI, and were supported by technical assistance from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and PIFS.

Since ratifying CEDAW in 2011, Nauru has enacted a number of new laws. These were welcomed by the CEDAW Committee and include the Domestic Violence and Family

⁹⁴ The legislative review also addressed issues raised by the CEDAW Committee in its concluding observations on RMI's reports to the treaty body.

Protection Act 2017; the Public Service Act 2016, legislating equal pay for work of equal value and maternity and paternity leave; the Crimes Act 2016 which repealed the 1899 Criminal Code and broadens the definition of rape, criminalises marital rape, removes the corroboration requirement in sexual offences and makes complainants' sexual history inadmissible; the Adoption of Children (Amendment) Act 2015, which facilitates adoption of girls and boys by families; and the Education Act 2011 which ensures equal access to education by girls and boys, raises the age of compulsory education to 18 years and includes disciplinary action for sexual harassment in schools.⁹⁵

The CEDAW Committee also welcomed Nauru's efforts in improving its institutional and policy framework to support progressing gender equality. The National Women's Policy (2014–2024) sets goals for achieving gender equality; the National Policy on Disability (2015) addresses issues and concerns of persons with disabilities including women and girls; the Young Women's Action Plan (2009–2015) provides priorities for young women; the National Sustainable Development Strategy (2005–2015) recognises the rights of women, promotes equal opportunities and expresses a commitment to integrating gender across all sectors; and the Gender Country Plan includes support for women and girls affected by domestic violence, alcohol and teenage pregnancy. Nauru's ratification or accession to other human rights conventions, namely the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) and its optional protocol⁹⁶ in 2012 and 2013 respectively, and the CRPD in 2012, were also commended by the committee.

Cook Islands reported that a systematic programme of legislative reform had been approved by the Cook Islands Government. New laws included the Employment Relations Act of 2012, guaranteeing maternity protection for female employees in both the public and private sectors, and making gender and sexual preference prohibited grounds for discrimination.

Following ratification of the CRPD in June 2017, the Parliament of Fiji passed the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2018. By August 2018, Fiji had ratified seven of the nine core international human rights laws. On 16 May 2019 parliament approved accession to the two remaining conventions, namely the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Fiji has not as yet signed or ratified the optional protocol to CEDAW which establishes a complaints and inquiry mechanism and entails recognition by states parties of the competency of the CEDAW Committee to accept and consider complaints from individuals.

FSM reported that the National Women's Conference which is held every two years is used to push for implementation of CEDAW committee recommendations at state level. The FSM national and State governments "have not as yet modified their laws to respond to the requirements of the Convention". FSM reported that sex work is still an offence in the penal codes which means women engaging in sex work to support their families have no protection under the law. Domestic workers also have no protection under employment laws. There are no anti-discrimination provisions in FSM's laws and the laws in all four states of the FSM and the FSM government do not guarantee women equal conditions of work, including leave, superannuation and worker's compensation.

⁹⁵ See concluding observations of the CEDAW Committee, 2017. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3v0uiFI>

⁹⁶ The optional protocol of CAT, OPCAT, obliges a state party "to set up an independent National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) to undertake regular visits to places of detention and formulate recommendations to the authorities." See <https://www.ap.t.ch/en/what-is-the-opcat/>

The CEDAW Committee also recommended the establishment of national human rights institutions to several PIC states parties. Most have not established them as yet.

Continuing challenges

While some progress has been made in several PICs to protect women's human rights and freedoms, the region as a whole has a long way to go in securing *de jure* equality for women through reform of discriminatory laws and policies.

From national penal codes or laws on criminal offences, to family law, labour and employment laws, property and inheritance laws and access to justice, discriminatory provisions are awaiting reform.

A very concerning feature of Solomon Islands' Draft Federal Constitution 2018 is its explicit exclusion of sexual orientation from the prohibited grounds of discrimination, which effectively licenses discriminatory treatment of LGBTI persons and denies them protection under the law.

The newly adopted ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (Convention 190, 2019) is an especially important addition to international law for women workers and should be ratified by PICs.

*Mitigating measures*⁹⁷

- ✓ Reform discriminatory legislative and regulatory frameworks to promote gender equality and women's rights to decent work and employment, equal pay, decent living wages, timely and accessible justice, freedom and personal safety, sexual and reproductive health, property, inheritance and citizenship;
- ✓ Develop and support legislation, policies and programmes that challenge harmful and unjust gender norms, gender stereotypes and all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence;
- ✓ Protect migrant workers and the human rights and social protection of women migrant workers;
- ✓ Promote gender equality and the human rights of women of all diversities in the workplace;
- ✓ Establish high-level corporate leadership on gender equality to advance policies for addressing gender-based violence, discrimination and sexual harassment, and promote the appointment of women to leadership positions;
- ✓ Support the initiatives of CSOs to challenge harmful gender norms, gender-based violence and discriminatory practices, and to promote equality and the human rights of women and girls of all diversities;
- ✓ Support programmes that engage men and boys as allies in challenging gender stereotypes and reducing women's double burden of paid and unpaid work; and
- ✓ Support enterprises to introduce and strengthen violence and harassment policies and conduct gender audits to identify measures to ensure gender equality at all levels, establish respectful and safe workplace environments for women and men, and enable reconciliation of work and family responsibilities.
- ✓ Support PIC governments in acceding to core international human rights instruments and fulfilling their reporting obligations, including through offering technical assistance.

WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

⁹⁷ Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Report, May 2021

PICs are located in a zone known as the ‘Pacific Ring of Fire’ – “a seismically active belt of earthquake epicentres, volcanoes, and tectonic plate boundaries that fringes the Pacific basin⁹⁸.” They are also vulnerable to hurricanes and cyclones and periodically to tsunamis and flooding. Smaller PICs, and particularly atoll states, have always been faced with issues of limited land and natural fresh water sources. In the last decade, with the impacts of global warming and climate change becoming more palpable and extreme, the vulnerability especially of low-lying atoll states to sea level rise registered as an existential threat. After experiencing several extreme weather events including Category 5 cyclones and witnessing the same in other regions, PICs have become more focused than ever before on disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery, as well as on climate change adaption and resilience-building strategies. At the global level they have provided outstanding leadership in negotiating and securing a global agreement on climate action.

There are other pressing environmental issues impacting on people, and especially women, in the larger PICs. All extractive industries (mining, logging and fisheries) have had environmental and social impacts in PICs but mining has been the most destructive⁹⁹.

While many PICs have environmental legislation in place requiring independent environmental impact assessments (EIAs) to be carried out prior to the commencement of mining, environment departments often do not have monitoring or enforcement capacity, and developers often themselves hire consultants to carry out EIAs, and without properly consulting communities. The principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is rarely practiced.

Logging has not only destroyed large areas of inland native forests but mangrove forests as well. Mangroves protect coastal areas from extreme events, are important nurseries for fish and crustaceans, and significant gleaning grounds for women fishers. Unregulated or illegal logging of trees causes serious erosion and silting in river systems resulting in flooding and loss of homes. The region’s tuna fisheries, the world’s largest, have been plundered for decades by foreign owned, state-subsidised, high-capacity, global industrial fisheries operations that have had impacts on the inshore fishery on which local people depend.

In two PICs, foreign military-operated nuclear testing programmes have left terrible legacies including ongoing environmental danger and health consequences for the people of RMI and French Polynesia (including cancers and female reproductive health problems such as birth abnormalities), for which environmental remediation and justice are still being pursued.

A future environmental threat of unknown proportions, should ambitions to pursue it come to fruition, is posed by strong interests among some PICT governments in deep sea mining of the Pacific Ocean seabed. These interests dovetail with intensified corporate interests in industrialising the oceans – the last frontier on planet Earth. The establishment of marine protected areas within PICs’ exclusive economic zones provides no insurance against damage that will almost certainly result from experimental deep sea mining, including transboundary environmental harm, for which sponsoring Pacific states would be liable. CSOs and several PICT governments are calling for a 10-year moratorium on deep sea mining. PICs’ assertion as Oceanic people, of a historical connection to and custodianship of the Pacific Ocean, and the Blue Pacific narrative adopted by PICT leaders, behove them to

⁹⁸ See <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ring-of-Fire>

⁹⁹ In the case of Ocean Island, the destruction of the island resulted in the forced displacement/resettlement of its indigenous people on Rabi Island in Fiji; in the case of Nauru intensive phosphate mining left 90 per cent of central Nauru a wasteland (National Report for Beijing+25). Nauru took Australia to the International Court of Justice in 1989. See <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/80>

resist racing into mining the seabed without sufficient scientific knowledge of its possibly irreversible impacts on deep sea ecosystems or certainty about its safety.

Land-based development in PICT towns has involved some environmentally destructive practices, such as coral extraction and sand mining of beaches on coral atolls for building purposes, and on larger islands, reclaiming wetlands to build high-end housing or shopping complexes, which impacts on water run-off during heavy rains. Poorer communities occupying informal settlements in mangrove areas in towns have been pushed off these wetland areas to make way for reclamation and development.

Last but not least, in almost all PICs, majority indigenous populations enjoy access to land held under customary ownership systems that are legally and/or constitutionally protected. Both men and women generally enjoy the same usufruct rights to customary land. The retention and protection of customary landowning systems have enabled the option of subsistence/semi-subsistence livelihoods for indigenous people in PICs. CEDAW Committee has asked states parties among the PICs to undertake land reform to give land rights to women, interfering with land laws with a view to securing individual rights for women.

Solid waste disposal is also a major environmental issue for atoll states. Inadequate land makes the use of landfills problematic. Sewerage problems together with sea level rise are already contaminating limited natural freshwater lenses in the atoll states.

Environmental NGOs exist in almost all PICs, although their capacities vary. Women are strongly represented within these organisations, including in leadership roles. International environmental and conservation organisations are also present in many PICs, playing strong advocacy and policy advisory roles, and women also make up a significant proportion of their staff.

Integrating gender concerns

Environmental plans, policies and programmes undertaken and reported on by PICs in line with Beijing Plan of Action (BPA) strategic objectives cover a number of sectors, from renewable energy and disaster risk management to land lease policies and water, sanitation and hygiene projects. In the main, what was reported under women and environment in national Beijing+25 reports focused on disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery. The importance of women's participation in this work at all levels is self-evident and great strides have been made in mainstreaming gender considerations on this front.

Samoa's National Environment Sector Plan integrates gender and the needs of vulnerable groups. Samoa has a Gender in Disaster Risk Management policy, focused on gender equity and ensuring that women are involved across all phases of disaster risk management. Samoa reported that there are many projects and programmes carried out by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and supported by international partners which include a gender perspective and gender concerns, and that these concerns are "integrated at all stages of the project cycle". Among the projects cited is the opening up and leasing of customary land for development purposes – 81 per cent of land is held under customary ownership and is considered underutilised. The Customary Land Advisory Commission (CLAC) is handling the marketing of customary lands in this project. Promoting the economic use of customary lands is intended to benefit landowners and enhance the economic development of rural communities. There is no mention of a gender equitable policy in relation to the sharing of landowner lease monies. Other projects cited did not indicate whether women were involved in decision-making or gender concerns were taken into account. Samoa's National Environment Sector Plan "integrates gender and vulnerable groups' needs". Its Gender in Disaster Risk Management policy is a gender mainstreaming

initiative focused on gender equity, ensuring that women are involved across all phases of disaster risk management.

Solomon Islands' Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology recognises the principle of gender equality and applies it in the implementation of meteorology services and in recruiting suitably qualified personnel. Gender concerns are integrated into the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan 2011–2020, particularly in targets on protected area systems and inland water biodiversity, as it is recognised that “protected area interventions require an inclusive strategic approach that includes women at all stages of the project cycle”. Solomon Islands has also invested in supporting research and development initiatives to bring a stronger gender perspective into its environmental policies, particularly in the area of community-based natural resource management.

In Vanuatu, since 2014, women have been centrally drawn into national disaster management work – from risk reduction and preparedness to response and recovery. The Department of Women's Affairs leads a Gender and Protection Cluster (GPC), established under the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) structure in 2014. The GPC is a collaboration between 20 government agencies and CSOs/NGOs that work on gender equality. Three subclusters of the GPC address gender-based violence, child protection and disability inclusion in humanitarian action. The GPC has been playing a key role in ensuring gender, protection and social inclusion in cross-sectoral disaster risk reduction, preparedness and resilience, as well as in response and recovery work during numerous national disasters in the last six years: the Efate flash floods (2014), Tropical Cyclone Pam (2015), Tropical Cyclone Cook and Tropical Cyclone Donna (2017), Tropical Cyclone Hola (2018), the Ambae volcano response (2017–2019), the tsunami affecting Aneityum (2018), the Ambrym earthquake/volcano activity (2018–2019) and Tropical Cyclone Oma (2019).

Vanuatu reports that gender, protection and social inclusion in preparedness, response and resilience has been mainstreamed into the NDMO's policy on climate change and disaster-induced displacement (2018), and the (draft) Schools Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Resilience Building Handbook “includes gender responsive planning such as facilities for menstrual hygiene management, gender balance on School Disaster Management Committees and DRR decision-making bodies and processes”. School safety plans take account of the needs of women, girls and people living with disabilities. In 2016, the Water Resource Management Act was amended to require a minimum 40 per cent representation of women on rural water committees. The NDMO's Cyclone Support Plan (2018) and Tsunami Support Plan (2019) mainstream gender, protection and social inclusion, and its national displacement tracking matrix (DTM), which was finalised in 2019, disaggregates vulnerable categories such as people living with a disability, single female- and male-headed households, child-headed households, elderly-headed households, pregnant and lactating women and widows. The DTM's collection of SADD (sex, age and disability disaggregated data) provides a strong baseline for planning, implementation and monitoring of response and recovery programmes. Vanuatu also reported that the Lands Reform Act (2013) provides for both men and women deciding on customary land ownership and usage. Decision-making processes on land now also require the approval of the ‘tribe’, including women representatives. Vanuatu acknowledges, however, that cultural and knowledge barriers to women being able to participate and exercise their rights in land use and ownership remain.

In Palau, significant numbers of women are being trained for disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation work and women are playing key roles in environmental protection and conservation management. The Palau International Coral Reef Center's research on

climate-resilient reef ecosystems to protect food security at sea includes female researchers who are being supported to do graduate work related to Palau's environment. There are two women on the seven-member Environmental Quality Protection Board, which promulgates regulations and enforces environmental laws, and the Executive Officer, Laboratory Supervisor and most of the staff are female. Women have also been engaged as conservation managers and employees by the Protected Areas Network (PAN) to implement PAN management plans in their states. Palau reported that there are also "national policies and legislation that promote women's and men's equal ownership, management and use of natural resources (e.g. water, fuel, land, forests)".

Fiji's Gender Policy recognises that women in rural communities have the most limited access to energy sources including renewable energy sources. The policy stipulates ensuring that women in communities are consulted in any energy projects and enjoy affordable access to energy sources.

Nauru reported on its considerable environmental challenges, principal among which are its limited natural freshwater resources, dependence on desalination, and water shortage; intensive phosphate mining during the past 90 years which had "left 90% of central Nauru a wasteland" with limited arable land; a major problem with waste disposal; and increased droughts and coastal inundation – all of which impact the health and well-being of its communities. No specific mention was made of women in this discussion.

In Tuvalu, the Environment Department within the Ministry of Natural Resources receives considerable development assistance to support climate change resilience efforts. A number of practices and processes have been put in place to support gender mainstreaming. Gender considerations are part of Environmental Impact Assessments and action plans in Tuvalu, and all workshops and trainings aim for gender balance. Consultations particularly in the outer islands continue to be male dominated, but consultation facilitators aim to ensure that women are given an opportunity to speak.

The Cook Islands reported that improving the capacity of women to contribute to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies is one of the six priority areas in the Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Gender considerations are also part of the 2013–2016 Climate & Disaster Compatible Development Policy and programming. The national policy "recognises that women and men play different roles in the livelihood strategy of their families and their use of natural resources and provisions of food for the family differs".

The climate crisis and the Gender Action Plan

Pacific Island leaders played a leading role in securing the landmark Paris Agreement to combat climate change at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015. Their success at COP21 in galvanising the conference through a coalition of developed and developing countries (the 'High Ambition Coalition') on the goal of limiting global temperatures to a 1.5°C increase, and securing the inclusion of loss and damage in the agreement, followed several years of vigorous climate change advocacy by Pacific small island developing states (SIDS) leaders. Pacific leaders have continued to lead in holding developed state parties accountable on their commitments to reduce green gas emissions, compensate loss and damage experienced in the SIDS, and strengthen the resilience of islands communities.

According to Pacific Community (SPC), "many Pacific Islanders had advocated for many years to take into account the differentiated vulnerability of women and men to climate

change impacts and the importance [of promoting] gender equality, support[ing] the empowerment of women, and protect[ing] human rights across climate change initiatives”¹⁰⁰.

Continuing challenges

The need for more data on links between gender and the environment was highlighted by the Cook Islands. It was pointed out that data on changes in women’s and men’s work burdens as a consequence of droughts, floods or deforestation is not available. There is also no monitoring of impacts of climate change on the lives of women and men. Sex-disaggregated data on the effects of natural hazards on education, health, food and economic security are needed.

Sex-disaggregated data on national capability to protect local natural resources are also not available. Data disaggregation across a range of characteristics – including sex, gender, age, location, socio-economic status, access to basic services and ethnicity – on participation in the conservation, preservation and management of local natural resources such as water and biodiversity is also lacking, and is essential to better understand the complex interrelationships between Pacific environments, ecosystems, biodiversity, women, men, boys and girls for sustainable development.

*Mitigating measures*¹⁰¹

- ✓ Design programmes and services that support women’s roles as managers and custodians of natural resources in sectors including agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture and mining.

WOMEN AND DISABILITY

According to the First Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report (2018), at least 1.5 million Pacific Islanders, or 15 per cent of the total Pacific population, are living with some form of disability. Persons with disabilities in the Pacific are over-represented among those living in poverty and under-represented in social, economic and public life, including in national decision-making. They also experience generally lower economic status, health and education.

Women make up a significant proportion of persons with disabilities in PICs. In Palau, for example, 63 per cent of people living with disabilities are aged 60 years and over, and 71 per cent of older persons living with disability are women.

As Table 7 shows, 11 PICs have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and committed to promoting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities.¹⁰² Two additional countries, Solomon Islands and Tonga, signed the convention but have yet to ratify it, and Niue is a party to the CRPD through its political association with New Zealand. CRPD ratification obliges states parties to bring their domestic laws and policies into compliance with the convention with measures taken to ensure the enjoyment of equal rights and opportunities by persons with

¹⁰⁰ Leduc B. 2019. Assessing implementation of the UNFCCC gender action plan in the Pacific Islands countries, Circular requesting information from PICT governments on progress made in the region in implementing the UNFCCC GAP for the Beijing+25 report, August 2019.

¹⁰¹ Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Report, May 2021

¹⁰² Solomon Islands and Tonga are signatories to the CRPD; Niue has not signed or ratified the convention.

disabilities. This entails eliminating all barriers¹⁰³ and prohibiting all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities, and putting in place measures for the advancement and empowerment of persons with disabilities, especially women (Article 6, CRPD).

Table 7. Pacific Island countries' ratification of CEDAW and CRPD.

PICT	CEDAW	CRPD
Cook Islands	State party by association with New Zealand 1985; independent reporting as of August 2006	May 2009
Fiji	August 1995	June 2017
FSM	September 2004	December 2016
Kiribati	March 2004	September 2013
Nauru	June 2011	June 2012
Niue	State party by association with New Zealand 1985	State party by association with New Zealand 2008
Palau	September 2011 (signed not ratified)	June 2013
PNG	June 1995	September 2013
RMI	March 2006	March 2015
Samoa	September 1992	December 2016
Solomon Islands	May 2002	September 2008 (signed not ratified)
Tonga		15 November 2007 (signed not ratified)
Tuvalu	6 October 1999	18 December 2013
Vanuatu	8 September 1995	23 October 2008

Table 7 also shows that all but one PIC have signed or ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Both CRPD and CEDAW priorities align with the BPA. At the regional level, Pacific leaders have also committed to addressing the rights of vulnerable groups such as women with disabilities through the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) and the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PFRPD), which were developed to support Pacific governments in fulfilling their responsibilities under CEDAW and CRPD.

Legislation, policies and programmes

In line with their obligations as states parties to the CRPD, almost all PICs have adopted policies, strategies and frameworks, as well as legislation, to address inequality and discrimination on the basis of disability.

RMI has made stand-out efforts to implement the CRPD. In 2014, the government adopted a national policy on disability inclusive development 2014–2018, together with an action plan with specific provisions to address the needs of women with disabilities. Among the objectives of the policy were the following: that all women with disabilities enjoy full human rights and fundamental freedoms; that violence against women with disabilities is effectively addressed; and that youth with disabilities are empowered to participate fully in society. In 2015, the government enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2015 to give legal effect to the CRPD. The Act came into force in October 2016 and incorporates all the substantive rights and obligations under the CRPD. To meet its obligations as a state party to the CRPD to bring domestic laws, regulations and by-laws into full compliance with the convention¹⁰⁴, an omnibus bill – the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Consequential

¹⁰³ Barriers are factors in a person's environment that, through their absence or presence, limit functioning and create disability – for example, inaccessible physical environments, a lack of appropriate assistive technology, and negative attitudes towards disability.

¹⁰⁴ RMI National Review Report for Beijing+25.

Amendments) Bill 2019 – was subsequently developed to consolidate alignment with the CRPD and promote disability mainstreaming across the entire legislative framework.

Cook Islands has had the Cook Islands Disability Act since 2008, which requires the government to institute and maintain a disability strategy, to make discrimination against persons with disabilities unlawful, and to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to certain buildings and footpaths. The Cook Islands Women and Girls with Disabilities (CIWGD) Strategic Plan was launched to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities in 2018. This strategy will guide all activities of the CIWGD for the next five years.

In 2018, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was passed by the Fijian parliament, following ratification of CRPD in 2017. The legislation sets out the rights of persons with disabilities including the right to work and employment, equal recognition before the law, freedom from exploitation, access to justice, health, and participation in political life. It makes disability a prohibited ground for discrimination, and includes enforcement measures against discriminatory acts. The Act also establishes a National Council for Persons with Disabilities. A disability allowance provides financial assistance to 5157 people with disabilities, and bus fare concessions to more than 4000 elderly women and 218 women with disabilities.

In Samoa the National Disability Programme was launched in 2014 to support capacity building on disability-inclusive policy and implementation across government agencies, service providers and organisations supporting persons with disabilities. In 2016, the government developed the second National Disability Policy, following a review that recommended a greater focus on women with disabilities. The National Building Code was also updated to include provisions for persons with disabilities. Ongoing programmes such as the Strategy for the Development of Samoa and the Community Development Sector Plan 2016–2021 fully mainstream disability and continue to demonstrate the government's commitment to disability-inclusive development across all sectors¹⁰⁵.

In order to implement the CRPD, the Government of Vanuatu has undertaken a number of important steps. It established the National Disability Policy and Plan of Action 2008–2015, the Mental Health Policy and Plan 2009–2015, and the Inclusive Education Policy and Strategic Plan 2010–2020. The Government of Vanuatu also created a disability desk within the Ministry of Justice and Community Services to monitor the implementation of disability-related policies and to coordinate collaboration with government institutions, civil society and development partners¹⁰⁶.

Solomon Islands has committed to empowering women and girls with disabilities through policy reforms and programmes. The Ministry for Infrastructure and Development now considers disability in its building designs, transport infrastructure and services with regards to accessibility and connectivity. In 2019, the National Policy on Disability Inclusive Development (2013–2018) was being updated to better comply with CRPD obligations.

Disability is identified as a priority issue in the Kiribati Development Plan for 2016–2019 and a draft Kiribati national disability policy is currently being finalised. In 2015, the Kiribati Government also launched an inclusive education policy.

¹⁰⁵ Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, Pacific Community and UNICEF Pacific 2018. Samoa disability report: An analysis of 2016 census of population and housing. Suva, Fiji: UNICEF. Available at: https://www.sbs.gov.ws/newsandevents/samoa-disability-monograph-2018?download=2018_Samoa_Disability_Monograph.pdf

¹⁰⁶ UNICEF Pacific and Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2014. Children, women and men with disabilities in Vanuatu: What the data says. Suva, Fiji: UNICEF. Available at: <https://vnso.gov.vu/index.php/en/special-reports/vanuatu-disabilities-in-vanuatu-what-do-the-data-say>

Nauru currently lacks a national disability policy. However, as a signatory to CRPD, it has established a number of support mechanisms for persons with disabilities, including a disability pension for eligible persons, financial support for modifications to houses, and a school for disabled children and adults¹⁰⁷.

Tuvalu's National Policy for Persons with Disability aims to improve access to education for women and girls living with disabilities. Tuvalu has also introduced a monthly financial support programme for those living with disabilities and their carers, and for elderly persons over 70 years of age¹⁰⁸. In 2019, the payment was increased to AUD 100 monthly.

The Government of Niue adopted a national policy on disability in 2011.¹⁰⁹ Niue also has a welfare disability cash transfer of between NZD 150 and NZD 180 fortnightly, until death or fulltime employment.

Palau introduced its National Disability Inclusive Policy in 2017. Major achievements include the passage of a gender mainstreaming policy in 2018 and the establishment of an office for the Bureau of Aging, Disability, and Gender. Palau also has national policies mandating universal access to quality health services and equal opportunities in education for women and girls with disability. Since 2002, the Severely Disabled Assistance Fund has provided financial support for persons with disabilities of USD 75–100 a month. In the 2018 fiscal year, around 3000 persons with disabilities benefited from the fund at a cost of USD 298,000.

In 2014, the Government of Tonga adopted the National Policy on Disability Inclusive Development 2014–2018. The Tonga Disability Taskforce was then established to monitor implementation of the policy. In 2015, the Social Protection and Disability Division was established within Tonga's Ministry of Internal Affairs. A disability welfare scheme was also introduced in 2015, which includes an unconditional cash transfer programme that provides TOP 75 per month and support services for people with severe disabilities.

The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), as the regional umbrella organisation in the Pacific, is highly active in data collection, policy and legislative consultation, and awareness-raising for issues facing persons with disabilities in the Pacific. Alongside supporting and advocating to PICs' governments for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, the PDF has been proactive in defining and promoting legislation and minimum standards for accessibility and inclusion in the PICs. In particular, PDF is developing a set of minimum building standards for the Pacific region (seeking endorsement through the Pacific Islands Forum) to ensure accessibility is ensured in national building codes in the PICs.

Physical and sexual violence

Women with disabilities are at higher risk of all forms of violence than men and women without disabilities, as well as men with disabilities. In PICs, women and girls with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be victims of physical and are more likely to use psychological punishment than physical punishment.

Data collection

The issue of disability mainstreaming and improving the availability of reliable disability statistics has become more prominent in PICs and a subject of discussion at recent high-

¹⁰⁷ Statistics Nauru and UNFPA 2015. Disability Monograph: Analysis of the 2011 Nauru population and housing census. Suva, Fiji: UNFPA. Available at: <http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/x37nn>

¹⁰⁸ Tuvalu Beijing+25 national report.

¹⁰⁹ Committee on the Rights of the Child: Concluding observations on the initial report of Niue.

level meetings – most recently in 2016 when Pacific leaders endorsed the PFRPD at the 47th Pacific Islands Forum in Pohnpei, FSM. Goal 5 of the PFRPD focuses on strengthening disability research, statistics and analysis. In many PICs, collection of data on disability is limited, often having been given low priority or excluded from official statistics in the past. The lack of disaggregated data makes it difficult to accurately map where persons with disabilities are located, especially in relation to needed services, and to identify policy issues or development impacts on women with disabilities. Available data reveal wide disparities in disability prevalence across the Pacific region, ranging from 1.2 per cent in Samoa to 5 per cent in Nauru and 18.5 per cent in Australia. This variance is most likely due to differences in how disability is defined, how data are collected, and limited capacity for producing disability statistics. The lack of data availability and the quality of existing data on disability continue to pose major challenges to policy development and service provision.¹¹⁰ More reliable disability data can play a pivotal role in the development, implementation, monitoring, funding and evaluation of programmes aimed at equalising opportunities for persons with disabilities including women with disabilities. This should be given priority to avoid persons with disabilities being ‘left behind’.

Continuing challenges

Almost all PICs have adopted national disability policies and several have passed legislation to domesticate the CRPD. Resources for full CRPD implementation are, however, limited. At the regional level, Pacific leaders have also prioritised addressing challenges faced by vulnerable groups such as women with disabilities through the PLGED and the PFRPD.

Although stated political will is strong, Pacific governments currently only allocate limited funding to implementing the range of measures required to fully realise the rights of persons with disabilities. Stronger partnerships and more coordinated efforts from governments, development partners, civil society, NGOs and the private sector are needed to systematically address gender and disability concerns. Significant disparities still exist in education, health and economic activity that require urgent attention. In order to address these issues, the collection of data must improve. More reliable disability data are needed for the development, implementation, monitoring, funding and evaluation of programmes aimed at equalising opportunities for persons with disabilities, and especially women with disabilities who may be the most disadvantaged.

GIRLS AND CHILDREN

International agreements, legislations and policies

All PICs have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the four core principles of which are non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, and survival and development. Only Fiji, FSM, Nauru and Vanuatu have ratified the CRC’s optional protocols, which prohibit the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the involvement of children in armed conflict. Some PICs have also ratified ILO conventions relating to protection of the rights of children. Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tonga are states parties to the 1999 ILO Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms Of Child Labour

¹¹⁰ ESCAP 2015. Disability at a glance 2016: Strengthening employment prospects for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok, Thailand: ESCAP. Available at: https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/SDD%20Disability%20Glance%202015_Final_0.pdf

(ILO Convention No 182)¹¹¹ and Fiji is also a state party to the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (Convention No. 138). Complying with reporting obligations under these various treaties has not been easy for PICs given their limited resources. Only one-third are “on track with their CRC reporting obligations”¹¹² and implementation has also been uneven across the region.

Nonetheless, four PICs have enacted child protection laws, 11 now have family protection laws in place, and across the region policy initiatives to protect the rights of the girl child have been introduced. In May 2019, representatives from government welfare ministries across 12 PICs collaborated in developing a framework to improve child protection services in the region¹¹³.

In progressing compliance with its international obligations, RMI introduced the Child Rights Protection Act in 2015, and the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Act in 2017. RMI is taking an integrated approach to implementing child rights through education, services and a programme aimed at preventing teenage pregnancy.

Nauru is reported to have demonstrated significant “political will and community support to address child protection and domestic violence”¹¹⁴. Nauru’s parliament passed the Child Protection and Welfare Act in June 2016 establishing a protective legislative framework for children. Nauru submitted its first report to the CRC Committee in October 2016.

In December 2016 Nauru passed the Domestic Violence and Family Protection Act. Implementation is monitored by a family protection and coordination committee and training for service providers is in progress¹¹⁵.

The Cook Islands’ Family Protection and Support Act 2017 encompasses child protection rights in line with the principles and provisions of the CRC, by putting the child’s best interest at the heart of all decision-making. The Cook Islands Gender Policy seeks to reduce teenage pregnancies and the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases amongst adolescents through education and health support.

Solomon Islands’ Child and Family Welfare Act 2017 includes provision for a child protection referral pathway, which aims to ensure that girls (and all children) who need care and protection receive the support they need in a timely and coordinated manner.

Fiji reported increased budgetary allocation for its Child Services Unit and the establishment of a child helpline through a partnership between government, health providers and telecommunications companies to help eliminate violence against children. In three years of operation to October 2018, more than 42,000 calls had been registered. Community and school programmes have also been rolled out to increase protections for girls.

Palau’s penal code, effective from July 2014, has been strengthened to include an expanded number of child exploitation crimes, mandatory registration of sex offenders, and public posting of the sexual offender registry list online.

¹¹¹ See https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/publication/wcms_304562.pdf

¹¹² UNICEF – Pacific Islands Countries. See https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/overview_22695.html

¹¹³ Pacific Regional Workshop on Child Protection for the Social Welfare Sector, 31 May 2019. See https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/1852_28252.html

¹¹⁴ Domestic violence and family protection laws to protect Nauruan women and children 6 December 2017. See <https://dfat.gov.au/news/news/Pages/domestic-violence-and-family-protection-laws-to-protect-nauruan-women-and-children.aspx>

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

While digital technology can open up a world of educational and economic opportunities, it can also make children, and in particular girl children, more susceptible to harm¹¹⁶. Samoa is taking steps to improve protection for girls from sexual abuse, including exploitation online through its National Cyber Security Strategy 2016–2021.

Vanuatu's Child Online Protection Awareness Strategy also seeks to strengthen safeguards for girls as part of a broader scope of work under its National Child Protection Policy (2016–2026).

While PIC governments have shown strong formal commitment to the rights of the child, including the girl child, and have been undertaking significant legislative and policy reforms to support their CRC commitments, their achievements are limited by inadequate human and financial resources for more comprehensive implementation and by the persistence of factors and practices that are seriously injurious to the girl child.

Addressing girls' human rights

There are many challenges to ensure the rights of female children in the Pacific are upheld.

Early marriage and teenage pregnancy. According to UNICEF, region-wide 12 per cent of girls marry as teenagers, compared to 4 per cent of boys, and there are legislative gaps in eight countries where the minimum age for marriage is lower for girls¹¹⁷, increasing the risk of girls dropping out of school, experiencing early pregnancy with its attendant health risks, and being exposed to domestic violence. As stated in a 2006 paper presented to an expert group meeting on elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child by well-known advocate for ending violence against women, Shamima Ali, “early marriage is not only a health risk for girls, but puts girls at high risk of physical abuse, as they move outside of their relatively protected family environment to live with their husband and his extended family”¹¹⁸.

The Justice Ministry in Tonga is supporting a campaign to end child marriage by the Talitha Project, an NGO for young women in Tonga. The ‘Let Girls Be Girls!’ campaign is creating awareness about child marriage and seeks to raise the legal age of marriage to 18 by repealing sections of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1926. Currently the legal age to marry in Tonga is 15 years, provided the child has the consent of a parent.

Solomon Islands is also working to review the Islander Marriage Act to raise the legal age of marriage, and work is similarly underway in Palau to raise the age at which a girl can marry from 16 to 18 years.

In its report to the CRC Committee in 2017, RMI reported that “although child marriages officiated by the courts do not exist, this does not take into account the much more common practice of customary marriages or cohabitation”. The RMI report said “no studies [had been] conducted on customary marriages and cohabitation in children, though there is

¹¹⁶ UNICEF 2017. The State of the World's Children 2017, Children in a Digital World. New York, USA: UNICEF. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2017>

¹¹⁷ UNICEF 2017. Situation analysis of children in the Pacific Island countries. Suva, Fiji: UNICEF. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/661/file/Situation-Analysis-Pacific-Island-Countries.pdf>

¹¹⁸ Ali S. 2006. Violence against the girl child in the Pacific Islands region. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in collaboration with UNICEF Expert Group Meeting Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. Florence, Italy, 25-28 September 2006. EGM/DVGC/2006/EP.14. Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/elim-disc-viol-girlchild/ExpertPapers/EP.14%20%20Ali.pdf>

considerable anecdotal evidence of children below the legal marriageable age cohabitating”¹¹⁹.

While teenage pregnancy is generally declining in the Pacific, it remains a concern as there are evident disparities across countries. The average adolescent (15–19) birth rate is approximately 50 births per 1000 women, although data are incomplete. RMI has the highest teenage birth rate (85 per 1000) and teenage pregnancies account for 20.6 per cent of the total number of live births nationally, which is higher than in most other PICs. Nauru has the second highest teenage birth rate (81 per 1000) followed by Solomon Islands (70 per 1000). Niue and Tonga (both at just under 20 per 1000) have the lowest rates¹²⁰. Teenage pregnancies negatively affect young girls’ educational, health and economic prospects¹²¹.

In the past, pregnant teenagers faced expulsion or were pressured in other ways to leave high school. This is, fortunately, changing with several countries including the Cook Islands, Palau and Samoa permitting pregnant girls to remain in school, and Solomon Islands and Tuvalu supporting the return of young mothers to school. However, lifelong education for young mothers is not supported in all PICs¹²².

The Cook Islands has also prioritised meeting the health needs of pregnant girls and young mothers, establishing a youth-friendly clinic offering family planning services in 2010.

Despite PICs’ consistently strong support for sexual and reproductive health and rights at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and throughout the subsequent review processes on the ICPD programme of action implementation, adolescents in PICs continue to face barriers to freely accessing sexual and reproductive health information and services, including contraceptives, because of prevailing conservative religious ideas. The practice of mothers accompanying their teenage daughters to the public health clinic to be advised and supplied with contraceptives, as some reportedly do in FSM, is enlightened but unusual. Indeed, much work is required in most PICs to improve the right of unmarried, adolescent girls to confidential sexual and reproductive health information, advice, services and especially contraception, not least to prevent teenage pregnancies.

Child labour¹²³. Ending child labour by 2025 is Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Fiji has been designated a ‘pathfinder country’ of Alliance 8.7. Pathfinder countries are those that commit to accelerating efforts with new actions to achieve Target 8.7¹²⁴.

In PICs, older children traditionally assist their families in subsistence production (agriculture and/or fishing) as well as in informal sector economic activities undertaken by their families. Increasingly, in many PICT capitals, male children are seen selling food made by a family

¹¹⁹ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 23 February 2017. Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention, Third and fourth periodic reports of States parties due in 2010, Marshall Islands.

¹²⁰ SPC. 2015. The Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023: a coordinated approach to youth-centred development in the Pacific. Prepared by the Social Development Division of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Suva, Fiji: SPC. Available at: <https://www.spc.int/resource-centre/publications/pacific-youth-development-framework>

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² PIFS 2016. Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration: trend assessment report 2012–2016. Suva, Fiji: PIFS. Available at: <https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/resource/pacific-leaders-gender-equality-declaration-2016.pdf>

¹²³ Child labour is defined by the ILO as work undertaken by a child which is “harmful to the child’s health and development” and “impedes their growth and development”.

¹²⁴ Observing the World Day against Child Labour in Suva, Fiji, 12 June 2019. See: https://www.ilo.org/suva/public-information/WCMS_710154/lang--en/index.htm

member around shopping centres, or by the roadside, and are often selling their wares into the evening. For girl children, child labour generally involves burdensome domestic labour, which can result in their interrupted education, and a lifetime occupation of unpaid domestic service.

Child labour research conducted by the ILO's Tackling Child Labour through Education programme found that Pacific children are also "susceptible to the worst forms of child labour, such as hazardous work, illicit activities, and commercial sexual exploitation". Factors "aggravating risk and vulnerability of children to exploitation and abuse" included poverty, illiteracy, poor academic performance and lack of employment opportunities¹²⁵.

Several PICs report a higher likelihood of girls leaving school early and becoming involved in child labour. PICs' increasing NCD burden also puts a strain on girls in countries such as Nauru, where they may need to leave school to care for family members with NCDs.

Violence against girl/children. The most serious violations of the rights of children in PICs come from their dependence on adults and vulnerability to violence from adults. A 2019 NGO report describes violence against children, and in particular against girl children, as being "at endemic levels across Pacific island nations" with "millions" of children affected¹²⁶. The Save the Children, Child Fund, Plan International and World Vision report describes the violence facing Pacific children as "everyday violence".

Corporal punishment in schools is outlawed in all Pacific Island nations except Niue and Solomon Islands. However, in many countries physical punishment and discipline of children are seen as acceptable within the home¹²⁷. The above quoted 2019 report states that violent discipline of children is evident in 70–87 per cent of homes¹²⁸. These are shocking statistics for a region that prides itself on valuing family and community, and suggests stresses in social and economic realities as contributing causes.

The violence inflicted on girl children is however also reflective of the alarming prevalence of gender-based violence, and particularly intimate partner violence, against adult women in the region. Intimate partner violence against women starts early. In a 2015 Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) survey on domestic violence, 38 per cent of young women aged 15–24 were already reporting experience of intimate partner violence.

Despite the crisis in the region of gender-based violence against women and of family violence more broadly, corroborated by surveys and research, and despite significant advances that have been made across the region at the legislative level to address this, some segments of society, including legislators, still oppose strengthened legal protections

¹²⁵ ILO 2014. Child labour "in a nutshell" – A Resource for Pacific Island Countries. Geneva, Switzerland: ILO. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/publication/wcms_304562.pdf

¹²⁶ Suthanthiraraj K. 2019. Unseen, unsafe: The underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste. Sydney, Australia: Save the Children Australia, ChildFund Australia, Plan International, World Vision International. Available at: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/15605/pdf/stc01615_unseen-unsafe-report_web-1.pdf

¹²⁷ UNICEF 2017. Situation analysis of children in the Pacific Island countries. Suva, Fiji: UNICEF. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/661/file/Situation-Analysis-Pacific-Island-Countries.pdf>

¹²⁸ Suthanthiraraj K. 2019. Unseen, unsafe: The underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste. Sydney, Australia: Save the Children Australia, ChildFund Australia, Plan International, World Vision International. Available at: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/15605/pdf/stc01615_unseen-unsafe-report_web-1.pdf

against family violence for the reason that it contradicts culture, interferes with parental authority and gives children the right to sue parents for alleged assault¹²⁹.

Sexual abuse and exploitation. Eight-five per cent of welfare workers from Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu surveyed in 2019 reported seeing child sexual exploitation in the past year, with two-thirds of the victims being girls¹³⁰. The report of the survey highlighted homelessness, extreme poverty, labour migration, stigmatisation of victims, cultural taboos, small community size, and a general lack of agency for girls (and indeed, a lack of understanding among children of what constitutes ‘unacceptable touching’) amongst the underlying risk factors for children¹³¹. The common practice of sending children to live with extended families, usually to attend school, can increase their vulnerability to violence, sexual abuse, child labour and even trafficking.

In Fiji, 16 per cent of girls under 15 reported having experienced sexual abuse according to a Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre report. In Solomon Islands, 37 per cent of women surveyed said they had been sexually abused as a child. A Cook Islands study found “about a quarter of the aronga mapu (youth) in the Cook Islands experience sexual violence”, and the victims were predominantly female¹³². The 2018 Samoa National Inquiry into Family Violence revealed an “epidemic” of sexual abuse and incest involving children¹³³. Sexual abuse is most often perpetrated against girl children by close family members, within the supposed sanctuary of their homes.

While girls are most often subjected to sexual abuse by someone within, or known to, the family, child trafficking and commercial exploitation linked to workers within extractive industries, for example, in remote logging communities in Solomon Islands and PNG, have become worrying concerns¹³⁴. All extractive industries – fishing, logging and mining – involve the influx of a labour force of single men, posing particular risks to girls of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking¹³⁵. In Solomon Islands, the government’s Anti-Human Trafficking Advisory Committee is working in logging communities to raise awareness on child trafficking, as well as child marriage and exploitation.

The 2019 US Department of Labour’s International Child Labour and Force Labour Report on Fiji states that “Commercial sexual exploitation of children continued to occur in Fiji,

¹²⁹ Tongan Minister opposes Family Protection Act, 19 July 2019, Radio New Zealand; UNICEF 2017.

See: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/394735/tongan-minister-opposes-family-protection-act>

¹³⁰ ECPAT 10 June 2019. Pacific Region: Frontline welfare workers regularly seeing child sexual exploitation. See <https://www.ecpat.org/news/pacific-sexual-exploitation-children/>

¹³¹ UNICEF 2017. Situation analysis of children in the Pacific Island countries. Suva, Fiji: UNICEF. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/661/file/Situation-Analysis-Pacific-Island-Countries.pdf>

¹³² Youth not safe from sexual violence. Cook Island News 29 May 2019. See

<https://www.cookislandsnews.com/national/youth-not-safe-from-sexual-violence/>

¹³³ Ombudsman, NHRI Samoa 2018. National public inquiry into family violence in Samoa, State of Human Rights Report – Summary: https://ombudsman.gov.ws/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/National-Inquiry-Report-into-Family-Violence_State-of-Human-Rights-Report-2018-SUMMARY_English.pdf

¹³⁴ Robinson P. 2011. Combating commercial exploitation of children and violence against women in remote regions of the Western Pacific impacted by large scale commercial logging: Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu 2010. Melbourne, Australia: Live & Learn. Available at: https://livelearn.org/assets/media/docs/resources/Combating_Commercial_Exploitation_Children_Violence_Against_Women.pdf

¹³⁵ Ibid.; and UNICEF 2017. Situation analysis of children in the Pacific Island countries. Suva, Fiji: UNICEF. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/661/file/Situation-Analysis-Pacific-Island-Countries.pdf>

particularly by family members, taxi drivers, foreign tourists, businessmen, and crew on foreign fishing vessels. Parents sometimes send their children to live with families in cities or near schools to facilitate their continuing education and to perform light household work. Research found that some of these children are vulnerable to involuntary domestic work or are forced to engage in sexual activity in exchange for food, clothing, or shelter.”¹³⁶

Continuing challenges

Gender-disaggregated data gaps exist in several areas (e.g. health; water, sanitation and hygiene; social protection) making analysis of other dimensions of disadvantage experienced by girl children difficult¹³⁷. Further research is needed on teenage pregnancies, including on predisposing factors to children, boys and girls, becoming sexually active; the effectiveness of sex education programmes within the school curriculum; adolescent access to sexual and reproductive health information, services and contraceptives; living conditions which pose risks to the safety and security of girl children; the impact of absentee parents through new labour migration schemes on children and especially girl children; and monitoring and evaluating the effect of new curriculum interventions, such as the HRSD-led initiative of incorporating social citizenship and human rights into school curricula, and the RMI curriculum reform initiative, in creating mutually respectful and more equitable relationships between young men and women.

Further research is also needed on youth unemployment and access to new jobs, and new initiatives are needed in respect to job creation in PICs. In 2014 UNICEF was reported to have warned that “denial of economic and social opportunities leads to frustrated young people and the result can be a high incidence of self-harm with the loss of productive potential of a large section of the adult population”¹³⁸.

There are also key gaps in understanding key influences in young women’s lives and in particular the role of faith-based organisations and churches in influencing values and behaviour.

*Mitigating measures*¹³⁹

- ✓ Strengthen sex- and age-disaggregated data collection and analysis to promote legislation, policies and programmes that address the needs of both girls and boys;
- ✓ Ensure social security policies protect girls and boys in poor families and facilitate their access to education, health and justice services;
- ✓ Support family life education that promotes gender equality, human rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- ✓ Protect all children from direct and indirect impacts of domestic violence and ensure that girls are not subjected to sexual or gender-based violence in homes, schools or the wider community;
- ✓ Develop and support legislation, policies and programmes that challenge harmful and unjust gender norms, gender stereotypes and all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence; and

¹³⁶ See <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/fiji>

¹³⁷ Suthanthiraraj K. 2019. Unseen, unsafe: The underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste. Sydney, Australia: Save the Children Australia, ChildFund Australia, Plan International, World Vision International. Available at:

https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/15605/pdf/stc01615_unseen-unsafe-report_web-1.pdf

¹³⁸ See <http://www.pireport.org/articles/2014/08/15/suicide-rate-pacific-islands-among-highest-world>

¹³⁹ Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Report, May 2021

- ✓ Support programmes that engage men and boys as allies in challenging gender stereotypes and reducing women's double burden of paid and unpaid work.
- ✓ Recognise women's and girls' roles and knowledge as environmental managers and ensure decision-making processes about the environment are inclusive and equitable;
- ✓ Recognise the positive role of culture in the lives of girls and boys and concurrently reduce harmful or discriminatory culturally reinforced norms, stereotypes and practices; and
- ✓ Ensure that legislation and policies integrate consideration and proactive programming to reduce discrimination against girls with disabilities, and provide them with equitable access to educational, health, leisure and employment opportunities.

GENDER STAKEHOLDERS¹⁴⁰

Different players have a stake in advancing gender equality and the rights of women and girls in the Pacific – governments, CSOs, regional intergovernmental and multilateral partners and the private sector.

National governments

National governments are primarily responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights, through national policies, legislations and ratification of international human rights instruments. In some countries it also carries out awareness programmes including in collaboration with CSOs. For example, in RMI, the government raises on human rights in partnership with CSOs. This it does through media programmes including the national radio station V7AB, the Marshall Islands Journal (privately owned) and the social media. The public school system and the Ministry of Health have regular information programmes on the national radio station that often touch on human rights issues including sanitation, parenting skills, and substance abuse in youth.

Regional intergovernmental organisations

SPC has historically been the intergovernmental organization that has led gender work in the Pacific region. SPC's long established mechanisms for reviewing the situation and status of women have been its Triennial Conferences of Pacific women, attended by representatives of Government ministries and departments with responsibility for gender, women NGOs and other regional and international organisations, and the Meetings of Ministers of Women which followed the Triennial Conference.

The organisations that make up CROP prioritize and mainstream human rights and gender equality through their mandated work. CROP functions as a coordination mechanism between the heads of the regional organisations in the Pacific, and as a high-level advisory body, to provide policy advice and may assist in facilitating policy formulation at national, regional and international level. It provides a forum to enable CROP heads to collectively review progress with their respective organisations' contributions on the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, and other regional policy frameworks and priorities endorsed by Pacific leaders. PIFS and SPC are the lead agencies in coordination and implementation of regional interventions on human rights including gender equality.

The Northern Pacific countries have indicated that they are more engaged in regional human rights, gender violence, gender equality and have more access to information and opportunities since the establishment of regional and multilateral organisations in the North

¹⁴⁰ [http://www.PIFS-SPC%20Joint%20Submission%20\(17%20July%202020\).pdf](http://www.PIFS-SPC%20Joint%20Submission%20(17%20July%202020).pdf)

such as the SPC North Pacific Office and the UN Country Inquiry into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific. These offices bring closer to both governments and CSOs expertise and opportunities for sharing with southern Pacific countries.

Pacific regional ministerial meetings and councils. PIFS convenes the PIF Leaders and key ministerial meetings that provide a platform for Leaders and Ministers to discuss key issues of priority to the region. These meetings include the annual Pacific Island Leaders Forum, Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM), Forum Trade Ministers Meeting (FTMM), and Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting. SPC convenes the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting, and the Pacific Women's Triennial and Ministers of Women meeting. USP, through the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) Facilitation Unit, convenes the Forum Education Ministerial Meeting.

Regional coordination mechanisms. There are regional coordination mechanisms that exist to coordinate and promote coherence of support to Pacific countries. In the human rights space, these include the CROP Gender Working Group, the Gender Coordination Group (and as part of that the CSW Working Group), the Pacific Regional Reference Group on Disabilities, CROP Human Resource Development Working Group and Regional Disability Taskforce. PIFS also convenes an annual Regional CSO Forum, which brings together CSOs from across the region to discuss key regional issues and in recent years recognized the issue of violence against women and girls. Furthermore, PIFS convenes quarterly meetings with CSOs providing further space for CSOs to discuss current issues and opportunities to coordinate and collaborate.

Multilateral/International Organizations

The UN agencies that operate in the Pacific work to support PICs bilaterally and regionally to progress issues of priority including human rights and gender equality.

Pacific CSOs form a diverse tapestry and take a number of different forms, including:

- Local, community-based CSOs such as the Kosrae Community Action Programme (KCAP) in Kosrae State, FSM, Tonoas Women Council (FSM);
- National issue-based CSOs, such as the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) in Fiji, Cook Islands Family welfare Association (CIFWA), Punanga Tauturu Inc (Cook Islands Women's Counselling Center), Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI);
- Churches and faith-based organisations, such as the Congregational Church of Samoa, Anglican Diocese of Polynesia, Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Pacific Uniting Church, and National Councils of Churches;
- National umbrella organisations: Cook Islands Association of NGOs (CIANGO), FSM Association of NGOs (FANGO), Marshall Islands Association of NGOs (MANGO), Kiribati Association of NGOs (KIANGO), National Council of Women – Samoa, Samoa Umbrella of NGOs (SUNGOs), Soqosoqo Vakamarama I Taukei (SSVM), Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), Cook Islands National Council for Women (Cook Islands) and Civil Society Forum of Tonga (CSFT);
- Pacific Regional NGOs: Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO), Pacific Action Network on Globalisation (PANG), and Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), Pacific Youth Council, Pacific Disability Forum (PDF); and
- International NGOs operating in the Pacific: Amnesty International, CARE, CARITAS, Greenpeace, Red Cross, Save the Children Fund, Oxfam Pacific, Oxfam Fiji/PNG/Solomon Islands/Vanuatu, Salvation Army, Lions Club, Rotary, and World Wide Fund for Nature.

CONCLUSIONS

This Gender Profile aims to describe Pacific women's condition and rights, and assess how far Pacific governments have progressed in achieving gender equality through promoting women's leadership and participation in the political and legislative processes; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting and to the full realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Pacific.

While the majority of countries prove that much has been achieved since Beijing, much more needs to be accomplished. There are definitely variations in the pace the Pacific region has moved from country to country. Those that made the milestone step to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women early on, before Beijing, have garnered the windfalls of the UN Decade prior. Whilst One country in the region has yet to accede to CEDAW, on-going awareness activities on gender equality and human rights are expected to create conducive environment towards the eventual ratification.. .

Women are taking steps and making considered decisions towards their empowerment. An increasing number of women successfully completed their studies which helped them find decent work opportunities to take them on a path of their choice.

Women themselves must take the lead in advancing the action towards gender equality in the context of their societies. Innovation and initiative are critical. Pacific media feminist activism focused on utilising a range of appropriate and accessible media platforms – print, digital storytelling, online/social media and television – to increase the visibility of women's and young women's viewpoints and realities. The experiences encountered will be catalytic to evolving mind-sets. The challenges women face are demonstrating success in what is still a male-dominated world, preserving an independent outlook and acquiring the ability to influence decisions so as to help bring about the changes in society that women want to see.

In 1995, where the need for institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women was recognised as a priority by the global body, Pacific societies were cognisant of the fact that respective social structures provided the mechanisms for the advancement of women across the region. At the national level, governments in the Pacific started to establish offices for women, women's desks, and divisions for women or standalone ministries. These institutional mechanisms for women were tasked with the design, promotion, implementation, monitoring, advocacy and mobilising resources for the policies that support the advancement of women. Countries continued to evaluate the efficacy of such national mechanisms and how they were serving the interests of women. To enable the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development of Samoa to respond in a more meaningful manner to the needs of the community, the focus of its work was restructured during 2016–2018. The restructure was premised on thematic areas of social development, economic empowerment, governance and leadership, and ensured the mainstreaming of gender, children, and people living with disability into all divisions of the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, and across sectors, for more effective responses to people's needs.

Fiji will become the first country in the region (and the second worldwide) to adopt a whole of government National Action Plan (2021-2026) to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls, once on-going national consultations are complete,

The Beijing review has encouraged continuous engagement of national mechanisms in a policy platform, including consultative processes for the work on gender equality in the Pacific at all levels; generating often difficult conversations on gender equality and engaging governments and partners in initiatives to empower women; and keeping the momentum going towards gender equality.

The main progress for women with disabilities has been that they are now more vocal and visible advocating for their issues. The inclusiveness of education has shown significant improvements, as exemplified in many Pacific countries with an increase of up to 40 per cent of children with disabilities attending regular schools. All but two of the Pacific countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Partnerships and networks have been instrumental in bringing to the fore the priorities of people with disabilities. For instance, the collaboration of Solomon Islands and other countries with the Pacific Disability Forum and Monash University of Australia has resulted in the Pacific Indicators for Disability Inclusive Education (Pacific INDIE) and the regional ministries of education developing inclusive education policies.

Gender parity has been achieved in most countries of the Pacific particularly in primary education, while at secondary and tertiary levels females are outperforming males as determined from surveys of learning outcomes.

Women and girls cannot live quality lives if they are not safe from violence. Since the BPA was launched Pacific countries have implemented an increasing and diverse range of measures to address violence against women, illustrating a commitment to prevent violence against women, to investigate and hold perpetrators accountable, and to provide justice and remedies to victims. These measures have resulted in strengthened and enhanced legal and policy frameworks for addressing such violence and more consistent implementation; better and more accessible protection and services for victims/survivors of violence; a greater focus on prevention of violence and the role of men and boys in these efforts; expanded and more systematic awareness-raising and capacity-building measures; and quality useful data and information that support legal and policy development. Reversing the traditional perceptions of a division of labour in the home, rewriting the narrative to reflect shared responsibilities, as well as shunning all language that objectifies women are the start of a new beginning. The European Union has certainly put the spotlight on ending violence against women and children by way of the Pacific Partnership and the regional declination of the global initiative Spotlight.

There has been considerable progress at the national policy level, and a growing awareness of the importance of gender dimensions in health policies, including general health policies and those specific to sexual and reproductive health. Most countries have highlighted progress related to revising, strengthening and amending health-related action plans, policies and agreements to include gender perspectives. Countries have identified many obstacles and challenges including insufficient statistical data, lack of expertise and resources for research on women and health, the trend to limit women's health policies to reproductive roles, insufficient funding, and socio-cultural attitudes.

This Profile examines the issue of women and the environment and emphasises the essential role that women play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management, and

stress the need for women to participate in environmental decision-making at all levels. Reflections from the northern Pacific indicate a significant delinking of women's roles from natural resources management with current policy shifts. In such cases, governments appear to have made advances at policy level but have not brought gender equality considerations to specific initiatives.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015 and celebrating its sixth year anniversary in 2021, provide an additional framework for action to support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Therefore 2021 and the years to come are pivotal for accelerating gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

The progress in achieving the BPA's objectives is painfully slow and as projected it will take many more years to close the global gender gap and a few hundred years to achieve economic gender parity. Be that as it may, Pacific countries are focused on accelerating the gender equality agenda and are exploring all avenues and innovative measures to prioritise accelerated action.

Achieving gender equality and women's economic empowerment requires transformative economic and social policy agendas that are firmly anchored within a human rights framework. Greater efforts are essential to mobilise and increase domestic and international resources for gender equality, including official development assistance. The full and equal participation of women at all levels of decision-making to influence the planning, implementation and monitoring of policies, is essential. Achieving gender equality requires the involvement of everyone, and is the responsibility of all stakeholders at national, regional and global level.