



## SITUATION ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN IN THE PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

**Coram International @ Coram Children's Legal Centre (CCLC)**

**2021**

**Commissioned by UNICEF Pacific**

## Acknowledgements

This Situation Analysis was written by Coram International in December 2021.

The report was commissioned by UNICEF Pacific, which engaged Coram International, at Coram Children's Legal Centre, to finalise 14 Situation Analyses and a regional overview of Pacific Island countries. These countries included: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

UNICEF Pacific is a multi-country office based in Fiji, with country offices in Vanuatu, Kiribati and the Solomon Islands. UNICEF Pacific promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child in the 14 Pacific Island countries, which are home to around 1.43 million children and youth, living on more than 660 islands and atolls stretching across 17.2 million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean.

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## Executive Summary

This report summarises and synthesises findings from 14 in-depth situation analyses (SitAns) of children in the following Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs): the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. It provides a regional overview of developments since the 2017 situation analysis.

The report provides evidence to inform decision-making across sectors that are relevant to children and adolescents, and is intended, in particular, to contribute to the development of programmes and strategies to protect, respect and fulfil the rights of children and women in the whole Pacific region, covering health and nutrition, WASH, education, child protection, social protection, early childhood development, and adolescents and youth.

The Pacific region is home to hundreds of small islands and atolls that are spread over an area equating to 15 per cent of the earth's surface.<sup>1</sup> The total estimated population of the PICTs in 2021 was 2.7 million people.<sup>2</sup> Of the 14 islands covered by this study, approximately 43.66 per cent of the population is aged 0-19 year old.<sup>3</sup>

### Health and Nutrition

Over the last few decades, the PICTs have made progress in enhancing the overall health and well-being of the Pacific population. For example, the neonatal mortality rate and the under-5 mortality rate has been met, prior to the 2030 target date, and there has been good progress in fighting vaccine-preventable diseases. However, there are a number of endemic problems which continue to impact on Pacific health systems. In particular, the Pacific region continues to have high rates of undernutrition, micronutrition deficiencies, and obesity existing simultaneously within the population. Other concerns include high and growing rates of obesity, while diabetes and chronic kidney disease remaining the leading causes of death and disability in the Pacific. The issues mean that a number of the PICTs are unlikely to meet all the SDGs concerning child and maternal health and nutrition by 2030.

Public health services are the main provider of health care for the PICTs population. The impacts of climate change and the COVID-19 crisis both exist as a potential threat to health systems across PICTs. Large portions of the health sector budget were allocated for COVID responses, to the detriment of funding for other health issues. However, as a result of the pandemic, there has been an increase in resources and funding made available both by partners and through the allocation of domestic budgets to the health sector.

In general, there is little pressure on the health system to produce timely data and at present there has been limited development of a 'data culture' in the health systems.

Recommendations include fully incorporating reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health and nutrition core interventions and indicators within national health strategic plans;

<sup>1</sup> World Bank, 'The World Bank in the Pacific Islands, Overview: Context.' Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pacificislands/overview#1>

<sup>2</sup> Calculated from Pacific Data Hub tables, 2021. Available at: [https://stats.pacificdata.org/vis?lc=en&df\[ds\]=SPC2&df\[id\]=DF\\_POP\\_DENSITY&df\[ag\]=SPC&df\[vs\]=1.0&dq=..POPULATION.&pd=2021%2C2021&ly\[rw\]=GEO\\_PICT](https://stats.pacificdata.org/vis?lc=en&df[ds]=SPC2&df[id]=DF_POP_DENSITY&df[ag]=SPC&df[vs]=1.0&dq=..POPULATION.&pd=2021%2C2021&ly[rw]=GEO_PICT)

<sup>3</sup> Calculated from SPC Statistics for Development Division Indicator tables, 2021.

strengthening universal health coverage; improving evidence generation, information sharing and use of routine data; and monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 and climate change and create a roadmap for net zero health services.

## WASH

Some of the PICTs have achieved universal access to basic water, while others are close to achieving it ahead of 2030. However, the progress towards achieving safely managed drinking-water has been slower. PICTs have also been slower in achieving sanitation goals: only about 71 per cent of the population has access to at least basic levels of sanitation five of the PICTs continue to practice open defecation and only four provide safely managed sanitation services.. Data concerning hygiene and access to handwashing facilities is limited.

Urban/rural disparities remain in terms of access to WASH services across the PICTs, with higher access and better-quality WASH services in urban areas. The availability of data on WASH in schools and in health care facilities (HCFs) vary across the PICTs, although it remains a priority to all 14 PICTs.

All 14 of the PICTs have conducted or are in the process of undertaking the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, which means there will be up-to-date WASH data, including on hygiene, in the near future.

WASH provision in several of the 14 PICTs is vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including water shortages due to droughts and low rainfall. Following COVID-19, handwashing is recognised as a necessary practice against the spread of the virus, making it a priority in several of the PICTs. In some of the PICTs, COVID-19 has reduced the strain on water supply, due to restrictions on tourism, limiting competition for resources.

Recommendations include supporting the development of a national WASH in Schools Implementation plan; improving government leadership and policy commitments; prioritising the provision of WASH in HCFs where baseline data is insufficient; and developing a regional action-plan to tackle inequalities in access to water services between rural and urban areas.

## Education

Enrolment rates across the PICTs are very high, with several of the PICTs having achieved universal access. Most children are enrolled in the correct primary classes for their age group, demonstrated by the minimal differences between gross and net enrolment rates. There are also high participation rates in the year before primary school, indicating that many children are entering primary school with a level of exposure to early years learning.

Despite a general trend of improvement in outcomes between 2015 and 2018, significant proportions of children at primary school are failing to meet the minimum standards expected for their level, particularly in literacy. This finding raises questions about the quality of education being provided.

Gender parity in enrolment has been achieved at the primary education level, with girls consistently outperforming boys in terms of educational outcomes. Participation rates drop significantly at secondary level, particularly for boys, leading to strong gender disparities in enrolment rates that have persisted over time. The unavailability of schools in remote areas continues to be a barrier to education for children, particularly at secondary level in PICTs without schools on every inhabited island.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent closure of schools has increased the need for electricity, computers and web-connectivity but stark disparities in access to all three exist between in PICTs. The full extent of the impact of the volcano eruption in Tonga on 15 January 2022 and resultant tsunami on the education system in Tonga and other affected PICTs has been devastating, with schools and curriculum materials (including textbooks and notepads) and furniture destroyed beyond use.

Recommendations include identifying issues of quality impacting outcomes for students across PICTs; commissioning research into barriers to enrolment, retention and completion at all levels of education; and investing into online and distance learning to reach students in outlying areas.

### *Child Protection*

Customary kinship and family support systems across the Pacific remain important sources of care and protection for children. Despite these protective systems, children continue to experience a range of protection violations, such as violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation at home, in school, online and in the community. In several of the PICTs, trafficking, the sexual exploitation of girls, and child marriage remain key issues of concern, as do online grooming of children and child labour. A significant number of children do not live with their biological family, but in informal arrangements, which puts them at risk. Adolescents engaging in risky behaviours such as substance abuse, dropping out of schools or suicidal ideations, is a growing concern. Social norms, including the lower status of women and children, the normalisation of violence as a way to exercise control over them and address conflicts and the prioritisation of family and community cohesion over victims' access to justice and support services, which prevents reporting of abuse, are among the underlying causes. Other contributing factors appear to be social developments, such as urbanisation and migration resulting in the breakdown of traditional support networks and children's separation from families, as well as exposure to new risks such as increased access to the internet and globalisation, leading to changes in values.

Several of the PICTs governments have made progress in recent years in strengthening the legal and policy frameworks for child protection as part of larger efforts to bolster national child protection systems, but further action is needed by many of the PICTs if the SDG goals relating to child protection are to be met by 2030.

Recommendations include strengthening the legal and policy frameworks for child protection, continued investment in strengthening the social welfare/social services workforce; supporting existing structures addressing climate change and disaster management; as well as investing in establishing or strengthening child protection management systems.

### *Social Policy*

Since 2017, PICTs have made progress in strengthening their social protection systems, but there are disparities in terms of access to social protection across the PICTs, particularly for the vulnerable. Few PICTs have non-contributory social protection schemes or cash transfers specifically for children and vulnerable persons. Recent information on poverty rates is available for very few PICTs and where new data is available, findings indicate that poverty rates have increased in some of the PICTs. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to poverty in PICTs, with higher rates of poverty for this age group compared to national averages. Educational attainment is consistently linked to poverty across the PICTs.

The impact of climate change, including an increase in extreme weather events and disasters, has caused devastation to the economy and livelihoods of persons in PICTs. COVID-19 has also exacerbated pre-existing socio-economic challenges for PICTs, especially for children and families who were already vulnerable. As a result, the monetary poverty rate is expected to be significantly higher than reported across PICTs.

Recommendations include recognising the structural causes of poverty in a particular region or sector; developing and strengthening predictable cash transfers to reduce the vulnerability of the chronically poor exposed to climate-related shocks; and carrying out regular monitoring, review and evaluation of the social protection system and social protection schemes.

### *Early Childhood Development (ECD)*

Children under 5 years of age are estimated to comprise about 25 per cent of the population of the 14 PICTs examined in this report. While several of the 14 PICTs have policies supporting children, none have a comprehensive policy framework for ECD.

Some early childhood development outcomes have been met individually by PICTs, such as universal access to sanitation achieved by Nauru, under-5 childhood mortality achieved by Fiji, and the low rate of childhood stunting in Samoa. The under-5 mortality rate is lower than the global average, although rates vary across the region depending on the circumstances of the particular PICT. Progress for other early childhood outcomes, however, has been slower across the region. Several of the PICTs have a high prevalence of stunting in children under 4 years, and low birth weight is considered a public health concern across the Pacific region. Additionally, there are high rates of anaemia among children under-5 in all of the 14 PICTs. There is, in addition, a lack of quantitative data on child protection, and a pressing need for accurate, up-to-date data on key indicators. Policies with respect to provision of early years services vary across the PICTs: while a number have Head Start programmes, only some of the 14 PICTs make ECE for under-5s compulsory.

Recommendations include supporting governments in creating, finalising and implementing national ECD policies; supporting government in protecting investments in early childhood services and programmes; and supporting and encouraging current regional ECD coordination between the PICTs.

### *Adolescents and Youth*

Most of the 14 PICTs have large and growing adolescent and youth populations. Youth is widely defined across the PICTs, typically extending beyond the international definition of 15-24 years to 15-30 years or more. Many of the PICTs have seen improvements in implementation of rights of children and youth since 2017, however adolescents and youth face a number of challenges across the PICTs. For example, there is limited access to sexual and reproductive health rights, low contraceptive prevalence, and high rates of obesity and associated non-communicable diseases. There is limited data on adolescent mental health generally across the PICTs, but that which is available indicates that it is an emerging area of concern.

Although there has been an increase in retention rates in secondary school, relatively high dropout rates in upper secondary school remain a concern in some PICTs. There are currently a high proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET), while in some PICTs many young people are engaged in informal, seasonal or temporary work.

Adolescents and youth in the PICTs continue to be exposed to all forms of violence, including bullying, sexual violence, exploitation, and intimate partner violence. A growing risk is online protection of adolescents and youth. Child marriage and adolescent pregnancies also remain high in some PICTs, as do harmful forms of labour. Youth groups, clubs and national youth congresses or summits have been established in a number of PICTs, providing the opportunity for young people to engage in dialogues among peers, policy makers and developmental partners.

Recommendations include ensuring the development of a national youth policy where appropriate, through a consultative process; establishing a multi-agency coordination body to oversee developments of youth and adolescents policy; and ensuring that adolescents and youth have avenues for meaningful engagement in political processes and decisions.



## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<i>Health and Nutrition</i> .....	4
<i>WASH</i> .....	5
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Table of Figures</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Acronyms</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>1. Context</b> .....	<b>18</b>
1.1 Geography and demographics .....	18
1.2 Government and political context .....	19
1.3 Socio-economic context.....	20
1.4 Disaster and climate risks .....	23
1.5 Gender .....	27
1.6 Legislative and policy framework .....	28
.....	31
2. Health and Nutrition .....	32
2.1 Introduction .....	32
2.2 Update .....	32
2.3 Impact of climate change .....	44
2.4 Impact of COVID-19 .....	45
2.5 Key bottlenecks and enablers.....	48
<i>Policy environment</i> .....	48
<i>Health care financing</i> .....	50
<i>Sectoral workforce and Capacity</i> .....	52
<i>Data, information and Research</i> .....	55
<i>Culture and practices</i> .....	55
2.6 Recommendations .....	56
<b>3. WASH</b> .....	<b>59</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	59
3.2 Update .....	59
<i>Water access</i> .....	59
<i>Sanitation</i> .....	62
<i>Hygiene</i> .....	64
<i>WASH in schools</i> .....	66

<i>WASH in Health Care Facilities (HCFs)</i> .....	67
<i>Legal, regulatory and institutional framework</i> .....	68
3.3 Impact of climate change.....	71
3.4 Impact of COVID-19 .....	72
3.5 Key bottlenecks and enablers.....	73
<i>Sectoral workforce and capacity</i> .....	74
3.6 Recommendations .....	76
<b>4. Education .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>4.2 Update .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<i>Access, quality and outcomes</i> .....	79
Early Childhood Education (ECE) .....	79
Primary.....	84
Secondary.....	87
<i>Equity in Education – Access and Achievement</i> .....	90
Gender .....	90
Geography .....	91
Disability.....	93
Socio-economic Status .....	94
<b>4.3 Impact of climate change</b> .....	<b>96</b>
<b>4.4 Impact of COVID-19</b> .....	<b>97</b>
<b>4.5 Key bottlenecks and enablers</b> .....	<b>98</b>
<i>Education policy environment</i> .....	98
<i>Collection and use of education data</i> .....	98
<i>Quality and capacity of teachers</i> .....	99
<i>School infrastructure</i> .....	101
<b>4.6 Recommendations</b> .....	<b>102</b>
<b>5. Child Protection .....</b>	<b>105</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	105
5.2 Update .....	105
5.3 Impact of climate change.....	115
5.4 Impact of COVID-19 .....	116
5.5 Key bottlenecks and enablers.....	116
<i>Legal and policy environment</i> .....	116
<i>Public finance</i> .....	117

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<i>Institutional arrangements for multi-sector child protection systems (including prevention and response): changes since 2017</i> .....	118
<i>Data, information and research</i> .....	121
<i>Culture and practices</i> .....	121
5.6 Recommendations .....	122
<b>6. Social Policy</b> .....	<b>125</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	125
6.2 Update .....	125
<i>Child poverty</i> .....	126
<i>Gender and equity dimensions of child poverty</i> .....	127
6.3 Impact of climate change .....	129
6.4 Impact of COVID-19 .....	129
<i>Government responses to COVID-19</i> .....	130
6.5 Key bottlenecks and enablers .....	132
<i>Policy and institutional environment</i> .....	132
<i>Economy, budget and public finance</i> .....	134
<i>Culture and practices</i> .....	135
6.6 Recommendations .....	136
7. Early childhood development (ECD) .....	139
<b>7.1 Update</b> .....	139
<b>7.2 Support and services for early childhood development</b> .....	142
<b>7.3 Recommendations</b> .....	144
<b>8. Adolescents and youth</b> .....	<b>147</b>
8.1 The situation of adolescents and youth .....	148
<i>Education, skills and employment</i> .....	150
<i>Protection</i> .....	152
8.2 Developments in law, policy and governance .....	154
8.3 Recommendations .....	157

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## Table of Figures

Figure 1: PICTs Population (Mid-2021 estimates) .....	18
Figure 2: PICTs Population, by age (% of population).....	19
Figure 3: GDP per capita (US\$) (2018) .....	21
Figure 4: Share of household income (%) 2010-2019.....	22
Figure 5: Labour force participation rate by sex, latest available year (%).....	23
Figure 6: Probability of Severe Natural Disaster occurring in the PICTs.. <b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>	
Figure 7: Pacific laws, policies and plans concerning climate change. ....	26
Figure 8: PICT International Treaty Obligations (as of January 2022).....	28
Figure 9: Mortality rates (deaths per 1000 people) across the PICTs, 2020.....	32
Figure 10: 2021 and 2015 PICT Averages for child mortality against SDG targets. ....	33
Figure 11: Under-5 Mortality Rate (2000, 2010, 2020) .....	34
Figure 12: Immunisation for vaccine preventable diseases (%) 2020 .....	35
Figure 13: Incidence of TB per 100,000 people .....	36
Figure 14: Number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, 2012-2017. ....	37
Figure 15: Adolescent birth rate (births per 1000 women aged 15-19), 2015-2020.....	38
Figure 16: Alcohol Consumption, Boys v Girls.....	40
Figure 17: Tobacco use Boys v Girls.....	40
Figure 18: Stunting prevalence (per cent) in under-5-year-olds, 2020.....	42
Figure 19: Wasting prevalence (per cent) in under-5-year-olds, 2014-2020.....	42
Figure 20: COVID-19 Stats. ....	46
Figure 21: Persons fully vaccinated per 100 population.....	37
Figure 22: % of countries with each of the 16 key SRMNCAH policies, globally and by WHO region .	49
Figure 23: Total spending on overseas medical referrals in 11 selected PICTs, 2013-2017 .....	51
Figure 24: RMNCAH workforce distribution across 15 Pacific island countries, 2016.....	53
Figure 25: Skilled health professional density per 10,000 population.....	53
Figure 26: JMP drinking-water ladder.....	47
Figure 27: Access to drinking water in the Pacific .....	61
Figure 28: JMP sanitation ladder.....	51
Figure 29: Provision of sanitation facilities, 2020 JMP estimates.....	63
Figure 30: Open defecation rates in the PICTs, 2020 estimates.....	64
Figure 30: PICTs with WASH services in HCFs, 2019 .....	67
Figure 31: JMP hygiene ladder.....	53
Figure 32: Handwashing facilities, 2020.....	54
Figure 33: Access to basic sanitation services in schools, 2019.....	55
Figure 34: PICTs with WASH services in HCFs, 2019.....	56
Figure 35: Water services provided by utility companies, 2019.....	69
Figure 36: Participation one year before the official primary entry grade, 2021.....	68
Figure 37: NER/GER, primary level, Pacific Island States.....	69
Figure 38: Average child development score across selected domains .....	70
Figure 39: NER/ GER, primary level, Pacific Island States .....	72
Figure 40: Proportion of children achieving numeracy and literacy proficiency at Year 4 and 6, 2012, 2015, 2018 (%) .....	74
Figure 41: Literacy and Numeracy Proficiency in PICTs .....	75
Figure 42: NER at secondary level (in PICTs where data available) .....	76
Figure 43: Proportion at or above the minimum expected proficiency level in literacy and numeracy, by gender .....	78
Figure 44: Trained teachers in primary and secondary education (%) .....	86
Figure 45: Qualified teachers in primary and secondary education (%).....	87
Figure 46: PICT school access to computers and internet (%).....	89
Figure 47: Key progress in Child Protection.....	105

<b>Figure 48:</b> The prevalence of child labour in some PICTs .....	111
<b>Figure 49:</b> Percentage of children that do not live with either biological parent, or just one parent, in some PICTs.....	112
<b>Figure 50:</b> Legislative progress since 2017 .....	116
<b>Figure 51:</b> Budget Allocation to Child Protection Services (in SBD - USD 1 = SBD 7.893) .....	117
<b>Figure 52:</b> Poverty Rates in Pacific Island Countries, latest available year .....	125
<b>Figure 53:</b> 2020 -2022 projected economic growth (GDP) .....	134
<b>Figure 54:</b> Proportion of children aged 3-4 years developmentally on track .....	140
<b>Figure 55:</b> Under-5 years mortality rate, 2019. ....	141
<b>Figure 56:</b> PICT average compared to highest and lowest under-5 mortality rate.....	141
<b>Figure 57:</b> Prevalence of childhood stunting in the PICTs, 2019 .....	142
<b>Figure 58:</b> Age of compulsory education in some PICTs.....	144
<b>Figure 59:</b> Definitions of youth in PICTs.....	147
<b>Figure 60:</b> Youth unemployment rate in PICTs (15 – 24 year olds) .....	150
<b>Figure 61:</b> Pacific Youth Policies .....	155

## Acronyms

<b>BNPL</b>	Basic Needs Poverty Line
<b>CapEx</b>	Capital Expenditure
<b>CCP</b>	Climate Change Policy
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of all form of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CITTI</b>	Cook Islands Tertiary Training Institute
<b>CPWG</b>	Child Protection Working Group
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>CYPFW</b>	Children, Young People and Family Welfare
<b>DOE</b>	Department of Education
<b>DPO</b>	Disabled People’s Organization
<b>DPT3</b>	Diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus
<b>ECD</b>	Early Childhood Education
<b>ECDI</b>	Early Childhood Development Index
<b>ECE</b>	Early Childhood Education
<b>ECPAT</b>	Every Child Protected Against Trafficking
<b>ELF</b>	Education Legislative Framework
<b>EMCI</b>	Emergency Management Cook Islands
<b>EMIS</b>	Education Management Information System
<b>EMP</b>	Education Master Plan
<b>ENSO</b>	El Niño Southern Oscillation
<b>EPRP</b>	Emergency Preparedness and Response Planning
<b>EQAP</b>	Educational Quality and Assessment Programme
<b>ERP</b>	Economic Response Plan
<b>ESCD</b>	Education Sector Coordination Division
<b>ESP</b>	Education Sector Plan
<b>ETSA</b>	Education and Training Sector Analysis
<b>FEdMM</b>	Forum Education Ministries Meeting
<b>FEMIS</b>	Fiji Information Management System
<b>FSM</b>	Federated States of Micronesia
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GER</b>	Gross Enrolment Ratio
<b>GHO</b>	WHO Global Health Observatory
<b>GLAAS</b>	UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water
<b>GNI</b>	Gross National Income
<b>GPI</b>	Gender Parity Index
<b>GSHS</b>	Global School-based Student Health Survey
<b>HCF</b>	Health Care Facilities
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index
<b>HIES</b>	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
<b>HPV</b>	Human Papilloma Virus
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>IE</b>	Inclusive Education
<b>JMP</b>	WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>KeHCI</b>	Kiribati Early Human Capability Index

<b>KSDIS</b>	Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey
<b>LEAP</b>	Literacy Education Advisory Committee
<b>LFP</b>	Labour Force Participation
<b>MCCA</b>	Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs
<b>MEHA</b>	Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts
<b>MHHS</b>	Ministry of Health and Human Services
<b>MHPSS</b>	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
<b>MIA</b>	Ministry of Internal Affairs
<b>MICS</b>	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
<b>MISAT</b>	Marshall Islands Standard Achievement Test
<b>MISAT IV</b>	Marshall Islands Standards Assessment Test IV
<b>MMR</b>	Maternal mortality ratio
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MoFEM</b>	Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>NAPA</b>	National Adaption Programme of Action
<b>NAR</b>	Net Attendance Rate
<b>NCD</b>	Non-communicable diseases
<b>NDC</b>	Nationally Determined Contribution
<b>NEDS</b>	National Economic Development Strategy
<b>NEET</b>	Not in Employment, Education or Training
<b>NER</b>	Net Enrolment Ratio
<b>NHRI</b>	National Human Rights Institutions
<b>NMCT</b>	National Minimal Competency Test
<b>NYC</b>	National Youth Congress
<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>ODA</b>	Overseas Development Aid
<b>ODPP</b>	Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions
<b>OOSC</b>	Out of School Children
<b>PacREF</b>	Pacific Regional Education Framework
<b>PCRAFI</b>	Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative
<b>PHP-C</b>	Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19
<b>PICTs</b>	Pacific Island Countries
<b>PILNA</b>	Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
<b>PRC4ECD</b>	Pacific Regional Council for ECD
<b>PTR</b>	Pupil-Teacher Ratio
<b>PYC</b>	Pacific Youth Council
<b>PYDF</b>	Pacific Youth Development Framework
<b>RMI</b>	Republic of the Marshall Islands
<b>RMNCAH</b>	reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health
<b>SCD</b>	Sexual Crimes Division
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SeHCI</b>	Samoa Early Human Capability Index
<b>SitAn</b>	Situation Analysis
<b>SOWC</b>	State of the Worlds Children Report
<b>SPC</b>	Pacific Community
<b>STAKI</b>	Standard Test of Achievement of Kiribati
<b>STEPS</b>	STEPwise approach to Surveillance (WHO)

<b>STI</b>	Sexually transmitted infections
<b>TB</b>	Tuberculosis
<b>TSDf II</b>	Tongan Strategic Development Framework
<b>Tu-eHIC</b>	Tuvalu Early Human Capability Index
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
<b>UHC</b>	Universal Health Care
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>USP</b>	University of the South Pacific
<b>VANSTA</b>	Vanuatu Standardized Test Achievement
<b>VAWG</b>	Violence against women and girls
<b>VESP</b>	Vanuatu Educational Support Program
<b>VWU</b>	Victim and Assistance Unit
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>YRBS</b>	Youth Risk Behaviour Survey





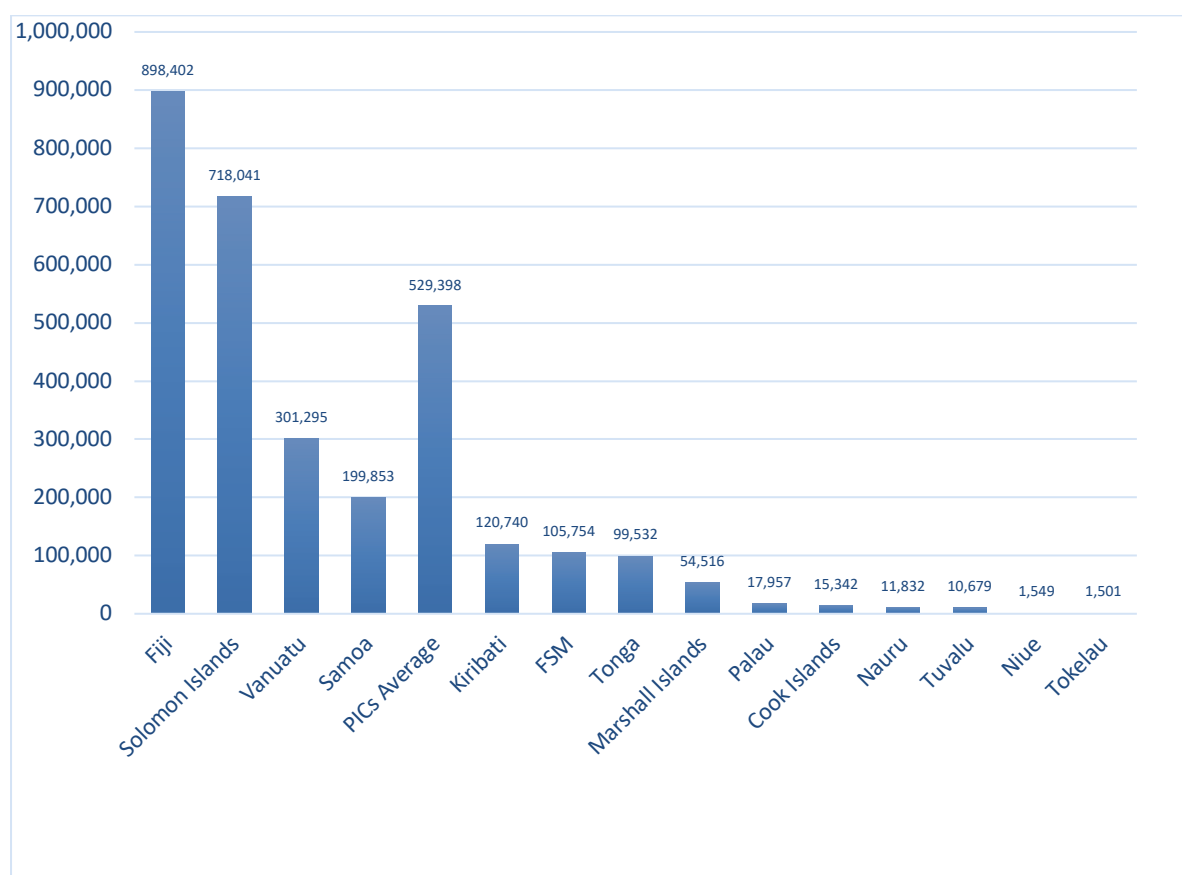
## 1. Context

### 1.1 Geography and demographics

This Situation Analysis addresses the status and protection of children across fourteen different Pacific Island Countries (PICTs), including Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The Pacific region is home to hundreds of small islands and atolls that are spread over an area equating to 15 per cent of the earth’s surface.<sup>4</sup> The total estimated population of the PICTs in 2021 was 2.7 million people.<sup>5</sup> Of the 14 islands covered by this study, approximately 43.66 per cent of the population is aged 0-19 year old.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1: PICTs Population (Mid-2021 estimates).**

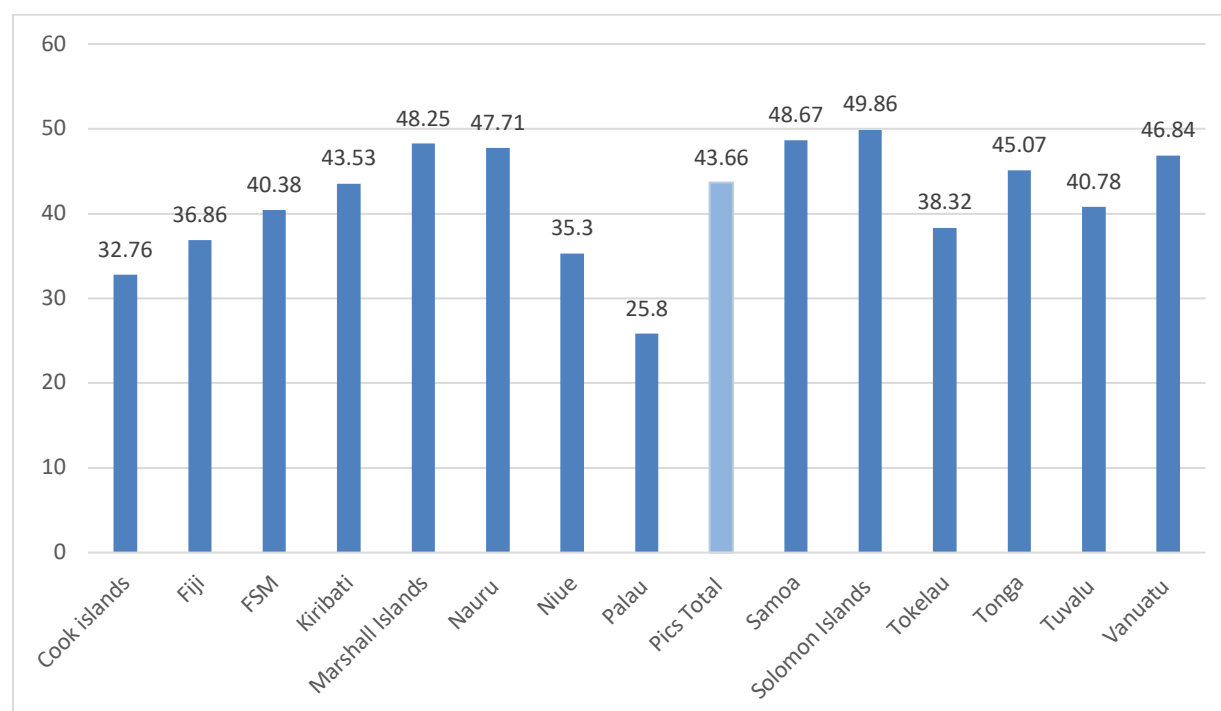


Source: SPC, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> World Bank, ‘The World Bank in the Pacific Islands, Overview: Context.’ Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pacificislands/overview#1>

<sup>5</sup> Calculated from Pacific Data Hub tables, 2021. Available at: [https://stats.pacificdata.org/vis?lc=en&df\[ds\]=SPC2&df\[id\]=DF\\_POP\\_DENSITY&df\[ag\]=SPC&df\[vs\]=1.0&dq=..POPULATION.&pd=2021%2C2021&ly\[rw\]=GEO\\_PICT](https://stats.pacificdata.org/vis?lc=en&df[ds]=SPC2&df[id]=DF_POP_DENSITY&df[ag]=SPC&df[vs]=1.0&dq=..POPULATION.&pd=2021%2C2021&ly[rw]=GEO_PICT)

<sup>6</sup> Calculated from SPC Statistics for Development Division Indicator tables, 2021.

**Figure 2: Population aged 0-19 years old, as a % of total population**

Source: SPC, 2022.

An estimated 39.3 per cent of the Pacific population lives in urban areas, though this figure varies significantly between individual countries. For example, in Nauru, 100 per cent of the population live in urban areas, compared to only 18 per cent in Samoa.<sup>7</sup> However, it should be noted that many PICTs, such as Nauru, are small and thus have a population that tends to be centred in one location.

There have not been any recent surveys into the religious demographics in the Pacific, but previous datasets have found that Christianity is the dominant religion, with Protestant and Roman Catholic churches attracting large followings in all of the PICTs.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2 Government and political context

Although the Pacific region has been subject to colonial and outside influence since the late 1700s, the majority of PICTs have been independent since the mid-1990s. As a result of European, Asian and American influence, the Pacific has a diversity of governance systems and political context, with political systems described as a “*complex blend of modern democratic principles and government systems with traditional institutions and practices, and often [on an] extremely small-scale.*”<sup>9</sup> Palau,

<sup>7</sup> World Bank Data, Urban Population (% of total population): Nauru and Samoa. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=NR-WS>

<sup>8</sup> The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions, Pacific Islands Religious Communities, 2006. Available at: <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195137989.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195137989-e-57>

<sup>9</sup> SPC, 2014. Gender relations in the Pacific Case Studies: Lessons learnt from the International Climate Initiative capacity building program. Available at:

Kiribati, FSM and Nauru are democratic republics, while the Cook Islands, Niue, Tuvalu, Samoa, Vanuatu, Fiji and Solomon Islands are parliamentary democracies. Tonga is a constitutional monarchy, the RMI operates a mixed parliamentary-presidential democracy and Tokelau exists as a non-self-governing territory of New Zealand.

Although PICTs are independent states, many have entered into free association agreements with wealthier nations. For example, the Cook Islands and Niue have entered into free association with New Zealand, and Palau, Marshall Islands and FSM are in free association with the US. These agreements see the PICT retain control over internal decision making and policy, whilst the larger nation assumes responsibility for the PICTs external affairs and defence.<sup>10</sup>

Youth participation in politics is championed by the Pacific Youth Council (PYC), a regional organisation which helps co-ordinate and support the National Youth Councils across the region. First established in 1975, the PYC's first General Assembly was held in 1996 in New Caledonia.<sup>11</sup> There are currently National Youth Councils in six of the PICTs (Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Nauru, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Niue), all of which work to promote the voices of young people on the islands.

### 1.3 Socio-economic context

Despite the fact that the PICTs economies vary in size and strength, they share a number of common characteristics. These include key export-industries, import-oriented economies, a reliance on overseas development aid (ODA), as well as shared vulnerabilities to external shocks such as natural disasters. Natural resources account for a significant proportion of export earnings, with products such as copra, coconut oil, cocoa, fruit, cava, fish, pearls, seaweed and timber dominating the export market across the region. Despite the abundance of natural resources, the PICTs still rely on imported goods and food items.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 3 illustrates the extent to which the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita varies between the PICTs. The Cook Islands, Palau and Niue recorded the highest per capita GDP of the islands in 2018, with FSM, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu showing the lowest. Between 2014-2018, the Pacific's average GDP per capita growth rate was relatively steady, ranging from 1.4 to 2.9 per cent, but the 2019-2020 period saw a precipitous decline in growth, with an overall average fall in GDP to -14.5 per cent.<sup>13</sup> This contraction has been attributed to the impact of large-scale natural disasters, such as Tropical Cyclone Harold, as well as the COVID-19 Pandemic.

[https://gendercc.net/fileadmin/inhalte/dokumente/4\\_Our\\_Work/past\\_projects/Pacific\\_Islands/Gender\\_relations\\_in\\_the\\_Pacific\\_case\\_studies.pdf](https://gendercc.net/fileadmin/inhalte/dokumente/4_Our_Work/past_projects/Pacific_Islands/Gender_relations_in_the_Pacific_case_studies.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> SPC & UNOHCHR, Human Rights in the Pacific: A Situational Analysis of 2020. Available at:

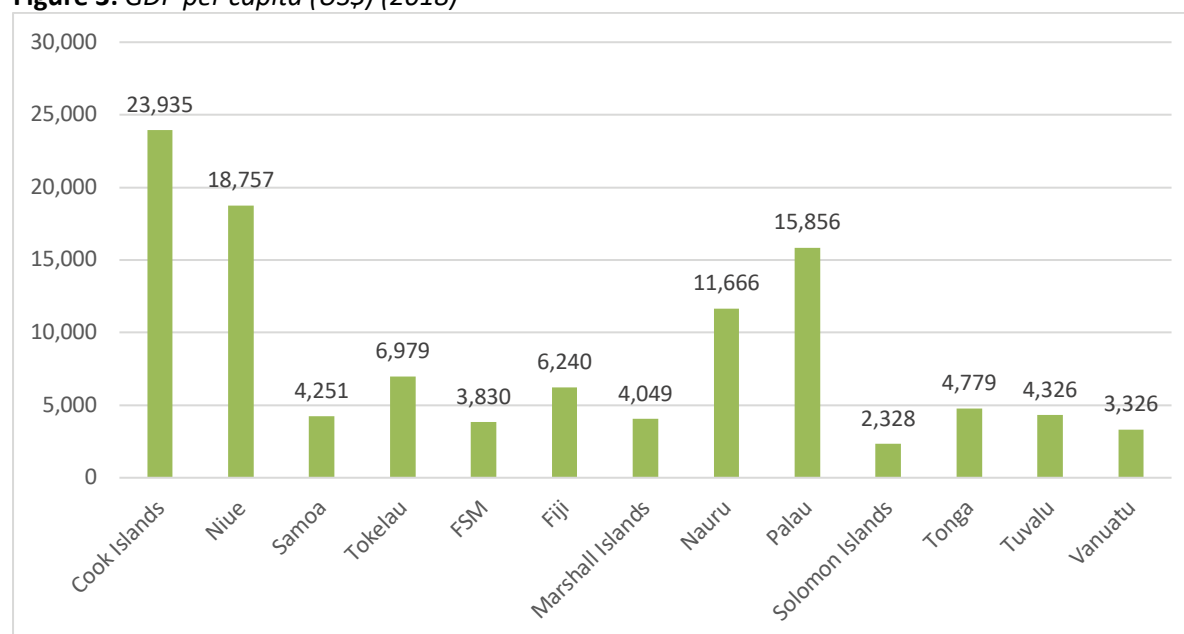
<https://www.spc.int/resource-centre/publications/the-pacific-human-rights-situational-analysis-report-2020>

<sup>11</sup> Pacific Youth Council, 'History.' Available at: <https://www.pacificyouthcouncil.org/history.php>

<sup>12</sup> Pacific Islands Monitor, IMF Asia & Pacific Department, Issue 15 October 2021.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank Data, GDP Per Capita Growth (annual %)- Pacific island small states. Available at:

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG?end=2020&locations=S2&start=2012>

**Figure 3: GDP per capita (US\$) (2018)<sup>14</sup>**

Source: SPC, 2018.

Although many of the PICTS have so far remained COVID free, containment measures and the corollary effects on global supply chains, has hugely affected PICT economies. The countries most dependent upon tourism (Fiji, Palau, Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands and Vanuatu) have suffered particularly badly, with an average GDP contraction of 6.6 per cent in 2020.<sup>15</sup> When figures are available, it is also likely to show that COVID-19 has led to a reduction in remittances flowing into the Pacific, due to reduced overseas employment opportunities and reduced migration.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the negative impact of COVID-19, the PICTs have a growing vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change is a threat to economic progress. ILO estimates suggest that the average economic cost of natural disasters in the Pacific is equivalent to 0.5 - 6.6 per cent of GDP annually.<sup>17</sup> This, paired with the effects of the pandemic and the lack of diversification in PICT economies, will limit economic development in the Pacific.

A notable source of income for PICT economies is Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). As of 2019, the average net ODA received by the PICTs was US\$55.4 million,<sup>18</sup> averaging at 9.9 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI).<sup>19</sup> However, this figure varies significantly between individual nations,

<sup>14</sup> No data available for Kiribati. Remaining data set available here:

[https://stats.pacificdata.org/vis?lc=en&df\[ds\]=SPC2&df\[id\]=DF\\_NATIONAL\\_ACCOUNTS&df\[ag\]=SPC&df\[vs\]=1.0&dq=A.USD.VU%2BTV%2BTO%2BTK%2BSB%2BWS%2BPW%2BNU%2BNR%2BFM%2BMH%2BK%2BFJ%2BCK.GDPCPC&pd=2018%2C2019&ly\[rw\]=GEO\\_PICT&ly\[cl\]=TIME\\_PERIOD](https://stats.pacificdata.org/vis?lc=en&df[ds]=SPC2&df[id]=DF_NATIONAL_ACCOUNTS&df[ag]=SPC&df[vs]=1.0&dq=A.USD.VU%2BTV%2BTO%2BTK%2BSB%2BWS%2BPW%2BNU%2BNR%2BFM%2BMH%2BK%2BFJ%2BCK.GDPCPC&pd=2018%2C2019&ly[rw]=GEO_PICT&ly[cl]=TIME_PERIOD)

<sup>15</sup> Pacific Islands Monitor, IMF Asia & Pacific Department, Issue 15 October 2021.

<sup>16</sup> SPC & UNOHCHR, Human Rights in the Pacific: A Situational Analysis of 2020.

<sup>17</sup> ILO, 2020. Pacific labour market review 2020: Pre-COVID-19 Baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery. Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/publication/wcms\\_754824.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/publication/wcms_754824.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Calculated from OECD data. Available at:

[https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=REF\\_TOTALRECPTS#](https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=REF_TOTALRECPTS#)

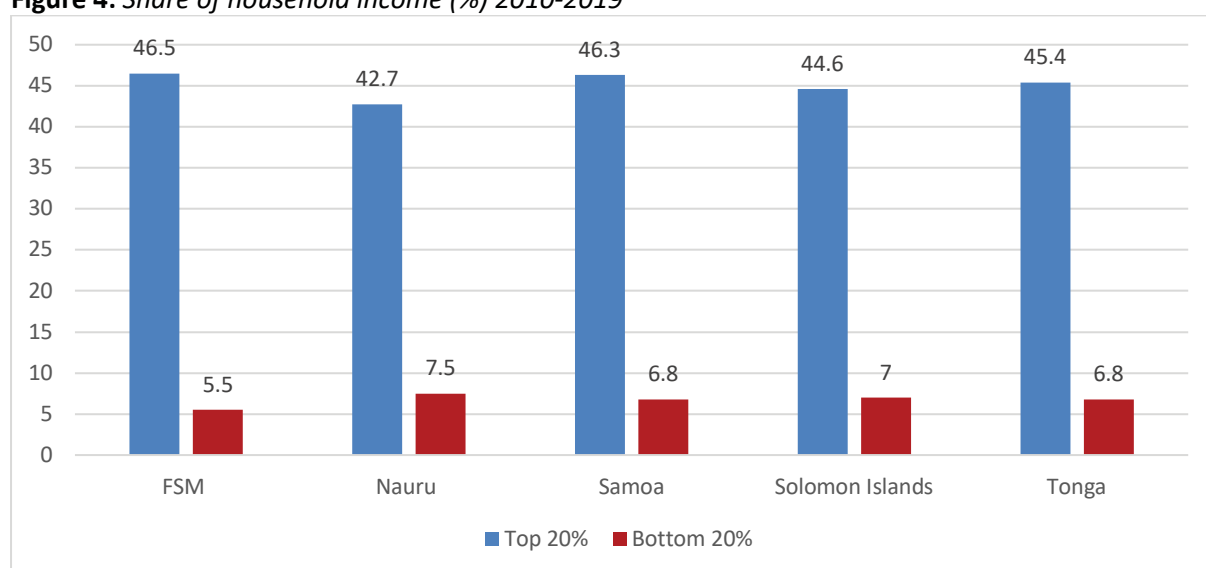
<sup>19</sup> World Bank Data, Net ODA received (% of GNI): Pacific island small states. Available at:

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ODAT.GN.ZS?locations=S2>. It should be noted that data was only available for 13 out of the 14 PICTs covered in this Situation Analysis.

with the Solomon Islands’ net ODA received as a percentage of GNI amounting to 16.5 per cent in 2019, and 55.8 per cent for Tuvalu in that seam year.<sup>20</sup>

Disrupted supply chains, travel restrictions, and the global rise in commodity prices seen as a consequence of the pandemic, has made life in the Pacific more expensive and difficult.<sup>21</sup> Economic inequality is a serious concern across the region, with current estimates reporting that 12 per cent of people in the Pacific live below the international poverty line.<sup>22</sup> There are also sizeable levels of income inequality in the PICTs. According to the Gini index,<sup>23</sup> where 0.30 to 0.35 is generally accepted as representing a ‘reasonable’ level of inequality, the PICTs average is 0.39.<sup>24</sup> Figure 4 presents data from a number of PICTs and illustrates the wide gap in household income between the poorest 20 per cent of households and the richest 20 per cent. Whilst disaggregated data is not available for the region, country level data proves that women, children, people with disabilities, and those living in rural areas are more susceptible to poverty.<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 4: Share of household income (%) 2010-2019**



**Source:** *State of the World’s Children, 2021*. (Note: no data available on Cook Islands, Niue, Palau, RMI, Tokelau, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.)

Employment is mostly concentrated around the services, agricultural, construction and manufacturing sectors.<sup>26</sup> Figure 5 indicates that labour force participation rates are low, with many PICTs having a

<sup>20</sup> Calculated from OECD data that is accessible here:

[https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDACAidataglanbyrecipient\\_new/Recipients?:embed=y&:display\\_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:toolbar=no&:showVizHome=no](https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDACAidataglanbyrecipient_new/Recipients?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:toolbar=no&:showVizHome=no)

<sup>21</sup> SPC & UNOHCHR, Human Rights in the Pacific: A Situational Analysis of 2020.

<sup>22</sup> FAO, 2021. Poverty, malnutrition and food security in Pacific Small Island Developing States. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/3/cb5758en/cb5758en.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> The Gini coefficient is a number between zero and 1, where total equality is equal to zero and total inequality (one person has everything) is equal to 1.

<sup>24</sup> FAO, 2021. Poverty, malnutrition and food security in Pacific Small Island Developing States.

<sup>25</sup> FAO, 2021. Poverty, malnutrition and food security in Pacific Small Island Developing States. It should be noted, however, much of this data comes from surveys conducted years ago, and the accuracy of these results in relation to the current situation in the Pacific is uncertain.

<sup>26</sup> ILO, 2020. Pacific labour market review 2020: Pre-COVID-19 Baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery.

rate below 60 per cent.<sup>27</sup> High unemployment rates are particularly evident in PICTs such as Samoa, Kiribati and Tuvalu, where the range is between 8.5 to 14.5 per cent.<sup>28</sup> Overall, however, the average unemployment rate for the region is 4.7 per cent, which is lower than the 2020 global average of 5.4 per cent.<sup>29</sup>

**Figure 5: Labour force participation and unemployment rates**

Country	Labour force participation rate by sex, latest available year (%)			Unemployment rate, by sex, latest available year(%)		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Cook Islands (2019)	70.4	77.8	63.4	1.3	1.6	0.9
Fiji (2016)	57.6	77	38.6	4.3	3.7	5.5
Kiribati (2015)	43.0	53.3	33.6	9.3	11.9	5.6
Samoa (2017)	43.3	55	31.5	14.5	10.6	21.3
Tonga (2018)	46.7	56.2	38.4	3.1	2.6	3.6
Tuvalu (2016)	55.4	71.2	38.3	8.5	4.6	16.2

Source: ILO, 2020.

As Figure 5 illustrates, unemployment rates are higher amongst women than men. In Tuvalu, female unemployment is almost four times that of the male unemployment rate, and in Samoa, female unemployment is double that of men. Youth unemployment rates are also between two and seven times greater than the unemployment rate amongst adults.

## 1.4 Disaster and climate risks

The islands and atolls of the Pacific have different topographies, geologies and sizes, with some being volcanic countries and others low-lying coral atolls.<sup>30</sup>

The Pacific ranks amongst one of the most vulnerable regions in the world in terms of the recurrence, severity and range of natural hazards experienced.<sup>31</sup> PICTs are susceptible to volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, cyclones, earthquakes, floods, tidal surges, landslides, droughts, forest fires and

<sup>27</sup> ILO, 2020. Pacific labour market review 2020: Pre-COVID-19 Baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery.

<sup>28</sup> ILO, 2020. Pacific labour market review 2020: Pre-COVID-19 Baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery.

<sup>29</sup> ILO, 2020. Pacific labour market review 2020: Pre-COVID-19 Baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery.

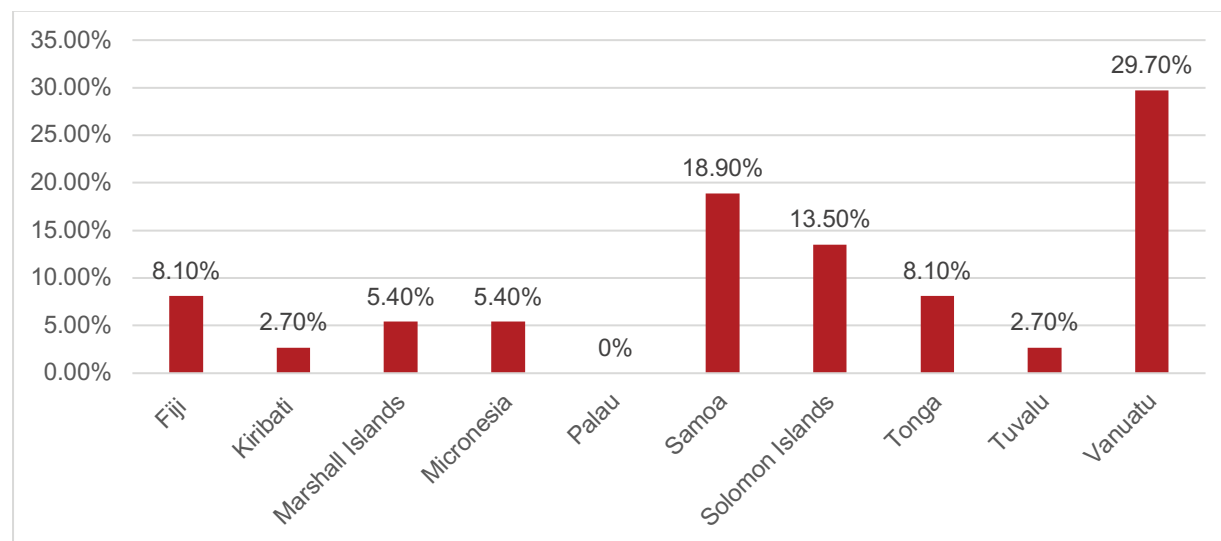
<sup>30</sup> US AID, 2018. Climate Risk Profile Pacific Islands. Available at:

[https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2018-26-Feb\\_CadmusCISF\\_Climate-Risk-Profile-Pacific-Islands.pdf](https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2018-26-Feb_CadmusCISF_Climate-Risk-Profile-Pacific-Islands.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, Factsheet: Pacific Region, 7<sup>TH</sup> November 2019.

epidemics.<sup>32</sup> Storms, cyclones and drought are the most common events, with the cause being linked to El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), a natural cycle of the climate system. The El Niño phase of ENSO not only sees increased tropical cyclone frequency and expansion of storms across the region, but also triggers drought, high rainfall and changing sea levels. Figure 6 illustrates the probability of each PICT being exposed to a severe natural disaster in any given year, with Vanuatu and Samoa being notably more susceptible than any other PICT.<sup>33</sup>

**Figure 6: Probability of Severe Natural Disaster occurring in the PICTs**



**Source:** IMF working paper, 2018.

At the time of writing of this report, an underwater volcano near Tonga has erupted, sending volcanic fallout and tsunami waves across the ocean, not only affecting Pacific countries such as Tonga, Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu, but also countries further afield such as Peru, US, Japan and New Zealand.<sup>34</sup> Though death toll and damage estimates are yet to be reported, current data suggests it is one of the largest volcanic eruptions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and has caused significant damage to almost all aspects of life for residents of Tonga. Before this, the last severe disaster to hit the region was Tropical-Cyclone Harold, a category 5 cyclone in April 2020 which affected numerous PICTs, the worst hit being Vanuatu.<sup>35</sup> The economic losses caused by the Cyclone in Vanuatu alone was estimated to be US\$600 million, which was roughly equivalent to 65 per cent of the country's GDP at the time.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, Factsheet: Pacific Region, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Lee D. et al, 'The Economic Impact of Natural Disaster in Pacific Island Countries: Adaptation and Preparedness', IMF Working Paper, No. 18/108, 2018. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2018/05/10/The-Economic-Impact-of-Natural-Disasters-in-Pacific-Island-Countries-Adaptation-and-45826>

<sup>34</sup> CNN, 'Tonga Remains Cut off after a massive eruption and tsunami. Here's what we know.' January 18<sup>th</sup> 2022. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/17/asia/tonga-volcanic-eruption-tsunami-explainer-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>35</sup> WHO, 'Tropical Cyclone Gita.' Available at: <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/tropical-cyclone-gita>

<sup>36</sup> FAO, The Republic of Vanuatu Tropical Cyclone Harold caused widespread damage to the agriculture sector, GIEWS update, 8<sup>th</sup> MAY 2020. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/3/ca8977en/ca8977en.pdf>



The last few decades has seen an increase in the amount of natural disasters affecting the Pacific, a problem that has been attributed to climate change.<sup>37</sup> Since the 1990s sea levels have risen 10-15 cm regionwide, two to four times the global average, and are expected to climb higher- between 17 and 38 cm by 2050.<sup>38</sup> Flooding and erosion of coastal lines is thus a serious threat, especially for islands that have limited freshwater resources and are composed of highly permeable soft-sediments. Scientists have also projected that by 2050, average temperatures will increase by 0.6°C - 1.4°C, with extreme temperatures and heat waves becoming a norm across the region.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, whilst tropical cyclones are expected to decrease in frequency, their intensity is likely to increase.<sup>40</sup>

Intensifying weather and worsening natural disasters pose multidimensional dangers to people in the Pacific. PICT populations tend to be concentrated in low-lying coastal areas as it offers more arable land. The rising sea levels and coastal climate change poses a direct threat to agriculture and food security.<sup>41</sup> In regard to health, not only do natural disasters have direct impacts (i.e. injury or death) on the population, but climate change will also cause an increase in water borne and vector borne diseases.<sup>42</sup> In analysing the projected effects of climate change, some scientists have posited that forced abandonment is a possible outcome for small islands.<sup>43</sup> Such recourse measures are already being put into place, as evidenced by the government of Kiribati buying land in Fiji as a possible relocation site in the case of rising sea levels.<sup>44</sup>

Natural disasters are also a threat to economic development. The World Bank found that of the 20 countries with the highest average annual disaster losses globally (scaled by GDP), 8 were PICTs: Vanuatu, Niue, Tonga, FSM, Solomon Islands, Fiji, the RMI and the Cook Islands.<sup>45</sup> In 2018, tropical Cyclone Gita, a category 4 Cyclone caused damage amounting to US\$252 million across the region.<sup>46</sup> With the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters expected in the future, Pacific economies are under threat of losing decades of development gains.

As a result of their vulnerability, Pacific leaders have become an active voice in global climate change discussions, putting considerable effort into developing international, regional and national policies and initiatives to help tackle the threats facing the islands.

Many of the PICTs are signed up to the Paris Agreements, the Kyoto Protocols and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.<sup>47</sup> Fiji, in particular, has been at the forefront of championing change. It was the first PICT to sign the Paris Agreement, as well as holding leadership

<sup>37</sup> Lee D. et al, 'The Economic Impact of Natural Disaster in Pacific Island Countries: Adaptation and Preparedness', IMF Working Paper, No. 18/108, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> US AID, 2018. Climate Risk Profile Pacific Islands.

<sup>39</sup> US AID, 2018. Climate Risk Profile Pacific Islands.

<sup>40</sup> US AID, 2018. Climate Risk Profile Pacific Islands.

<sup>41</sup> US AID, 2018. Climate Risk Profile Pacific Islands.

<sup>42</sup> US AID, 2018. Climate Risk Profile Pacific Islands.

<sup>43</sup> The World Bank, 2013. Acting on Climate Change & Disaster Risk for the Pacific.

<sup>44</sup> World Risk Report, 2020. Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WorldRiskReport-2020.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> The World Bank, 2013. Acting on Climate Change & Disaster Risk for the Pacific.

<sup>46</sup> Government of Australia, Tropical Cyclone Gita, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2018. Available at:

<https://www.dfat.gov.au/crisis-hub/Pages/cyclone-gita.aspx>

<sup>47</sup> See: United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, List of Parties that signed the Paris Agreement on 22 April. Available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/04/parisagreementsignatures/>; United Nations Treaty Collection, 7. a Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change status. Available at: [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg\\_no=XXVII-7-a&chapter=27&clang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XXVII-7-a&chapter=27&clang=en); UNDDR, Pacific islands launch Sendai Framework Monitor, 2018. Available at: <https://www.undrr.org/news/pacific-islands-launch-sendai-framework-monitor>

positions at the World Ocean Conference in 2018 and at COP-23. The climate change agenda has also impacted other priority rights areas, with the CEDAW Committee noting the need for gender perspectives to be better integrated into climate change programmes and policies.<sup>48</sup>

Many of the PICTs have actively developed and introduced national policies and plans for tackling climate change, as can be seen from Table 8. Whilst countries such as Fiji and Samoa have to up-to-date policies and plans, smaller island states such as Niue, FSM and Tuvalu have not updated or introduced new laws in recent years. In addition, although PICTs have been active on the international stage, there has been far less activity at regional level to address climate. The difficulty in developing and implementing a cohesive, focused regional plan has been attributed to the distance between the PICTs, different climate conditions and the use of different development practices.<sup>49</sup>

**Figure 7: Pacific laws, policies and plans concerning climate change.**

Country	Law/Policy/Plan
Fiji	Climate Change Act 2021, National Adaptation Plan 2018, National Climate Change Policy 2018-2030, Fiji NDC implementation Road Map (2018-2030), 20 Year development Plan (2017-2036), Green Growth Framework 2014.
Solomon Islands	National Climate Change Policy 2012-2017, National Development Strategy 2016-2035, Solomon Islands National Energy Policy 2014, National Disaster Council Act 1989.
Tuvalu	Tuvalu National Climate Change Policy, Climate Change and disaster survival fund act 2015, National Strategic Plan for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management 2012-2016.
Nauru	National Disaster Risk Management Act 2016, Framework of Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction, National Sustainability Development Strategy 2005-2025.
Kiribati	Kiribati Climate Change Policy 2018, National Disaster risk management Plan 2019, Kiribati Joint Implementation Plans for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management 2019-2028, National Framework for Climate Change and Climate Change Adaptation 2013.
Palau	Palau Climate Change Policy 2015, Actions for Palau's future Medium Term Development Strategy 2009-2014, National Disaster Risk Management Framework 2010, National energy Policy 2010.
Samoa	Samoa Climate Change Policy 2020-2030, Samoa National Energy Policy 2007, Samoa Energy Sector Plans 2017-2022, Strategy for the development of Samoa 2016-2020, Samoa Development 2040, Samoa Ocean Strategy 2020-2030.
Tonga	Tonga Climate Change Policy 2016, Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015-2025, Renewable Energy act 2008, Joint National Action Plan on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management 2010-2015.
Vanuatu	The Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016-2030, National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement 2018, Meteorology Geological Hazards and Climate Change Act no 25/2016, Vanuatu Infrastructure Strategic Investment Plan 2015-2024.
Cook Islands	Joint National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Management Climate Change Adaptation (2016-2020), National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2020, Climate and Disaster Compatible Development Policy 2013-2016.
RMI	2050 Climate Strategy, Joint National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management 2014-2018, Marshall islands: National strategic Plan 2015-2017, National Climate Change Policy Framework 2011.
Niue	Environment Act 2015, Joint National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change 2012, National Strategic Plan 2009-2013, National Climate Change Policy 2009, Agriculture Sector 2015-2019
FSM	Environmental Protection Act 2015, FSM Climate Change Act 2013, Nationwide Integrated Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Policy 2013, Energy Policy 2012
Tokelau	N/A

<sup>48</sup> i.e. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Concluding observations on the 6<sup>th</sup> periodic report of Samoa, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2018, CEDAW/C/WSM/CO/6.

<sup>49</sup> US AID, 2018. Climate Risk Profile Pacific Islands.

**Source:** *Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment*.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the existence of climate change policies and plans, there is often a lack of financial or technical capacity to implement such programmes. Greater policy measures are now being adopted to address such issues, including developing sector-specific plans to attract resources, and aligning national development plans with external aid and national budgets.<sup>51</sup> At the moment, most climate finance in the Pacific is provided through multilateral agencies. For example, the World Bank's Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative (PCRAFI) has been prominent in providing technical capacity and funds for PICTs affected by natural disasters.

## 1.5 Gender

Culture plays an important role in the Pacific Islands; it dictates how communities interact and informs people's status within society.<sup>52</sup> Although many Pacific cultures were historically matrilineal, gender norms shifted with the introduction of colonial ideologies and capitalist economics. These value systems, which are rooted in masculine ideals, now underpin PICT societies and exist as a barrier to women and girls enjoying their human rights.<sup>53</sup>

Although the PICTs are home to a variety of cultures, literature on the region recognizes that there are similar concerns regarding the discrimination and exclusion faced by women. For example, whilst women are well represented in local politics, they are noticeably absent on national platforms.<sup>54</sup> 6.4 per cent of Pacific parliamentarians are women, which is considerably lower than the global average of 25.5 per cent.<sup>55</sup> In the economic sphere, women's labour participation rates are low and unemployment rates high, despite having fairly equal education enrolment levels.<sup>56</sup>

The rate of violence against women in the PICTs is one of the highest in the world, with 60 per cent of women and girls in the region having experienced violence at the hands of a partner or family member.<sup>57</sup> Risk factors associated with gender-based violence have been exacerbated by the pandemic, with Fiji's national domestic violence helpline recorded a 500 per cent increase in calls in April 2020 compared to February 2020. Similarly, calls to the Helpline in Samoa jumped 150 per cent from the same time the previous year.<sup>58</sup> Healthcare systems have also faced criticism for their

<sup>50</sup> Data available at: <https://climate-laws.org/>

<sup>51</sup> Devadason C., Jackson L. & Cole J., *Pacific Island Countries: An early warning of Climate Change Impacts*, The Rockefeller Foundation Economic Council on Planetary Health at the Oxford Martin School, April 2019.

<sup>52</sup> SPC, 2014. *Gender relations in the Pacific Case Studies: Lessons learnt from the International Climate Initiative capacity building program*.

<sup>53</sup> Linda Peterson and Sandra Bernklau, *Human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Pacific region*, SPC, New Caledonia, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> ABD & SPC, *Gender statistics: The Pacific and Timor-Leste*, 2016. Available at: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/181270/gender-statistics-pacific-tim.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs, 'Pacific regional- empowering women and girls.' Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/development-assistance/empowering-women-and-girls>

<sup>56</sup> ILO, 2020. *Pacific labour market review 2020: Pre-COVID-19 Baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery*.

<sup>57</sup> Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs, 'Pacific regional- empowering women and girls.'

<sup>58</sup> UNDP, 'UNDP's regional response to gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic', 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021. Available at:

<https://www.pacific.undp.org/content/pacific/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2021/undp-regional-response-to-gender-based-violence-during-the-pandemic.html>

ineffectiveness in responding to gender-based issues such as sexual and reproductive health, and domestic violence.<sup>59</sup>

Countries in the region have sought to address the issues of violence and there have been attempts to tackle the discrimination faced by women and girls, best evidenced in the gender-based laws and initiatives introduced over the last two decades. Initiatives have included the ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by all the PICTs, other than Niue, Palau and Tonga, the introduction of the Millennium Development Goals; the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005-2015; The Gender Equality Declaration in 2012; Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012– 2015); and the endorsement of the Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights (2018–2030).<sup>60</sup> Despite these developments, some PICTs have failed to make any substantial commitments to tackling gender inequality. For example, only five of the PICTs (Cook Islands, RMI, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tokelau (under the jurisdiction of New Zealand) have ratified CEDAW’s optional protocol). There are also many disparities in terms of the extent to which governments have adopted national policies to enshrine their commitments.<sup>61</sup>

A notable source of funding for initiatives and services working to tackle gender discrimination in the Pacific has been the Australian Government’s ‘Pacific Women’ programme. The first programme named ‘Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development’ saw \$320 million distributed between 2012-2021, in support of improving the political, economic and social opportunities for Pacific women and girls.<sup>62</sup> A new programme has been established for 2021-2026 entitled ‘Pacific Women Lead’, which will see \$120 million committed to championing women’s leadership, rights and the effectiveness of regional gender equality efforts.

## 1.6 Legislative and policy framework

Effective legal frameworks and institutions are vital to the realisation of people’s human rights. While the extent of ratification of the nine major human rights treaties varies between States (as can be seen in figure 8 below), all of the PICTs are States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).<sup>63</sup>

**Figure 8: PICT International Treaty Obligations (as of January 2022)**

Country	International Treaty	
	Signed	Ratified/ succeeded?
Cook Islands		CEDAW, CRC, CRPD
FSM		CEDAW, CRC, CRC-OP-AC, CRC-OP-SC, CRPD, CRC-OP-AC, CRC-OP-SC

<sup>59</sup> Linda Peterson and Sandra Bernklau, *Human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Pacific region*, SPC, New Caledonia, 2015.

<sup>60</sup> Peterson L., and Bernklau S., *Human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Pacific region*, SPC, New Caledonia, 2015 and Bhagwan Rolls S., and Evans, A., *Feminist Peace and Security in Pacific Islands*, Oxfam, Oxford, 2020. Available at: <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621056/dp-feminist-peace-security-pacific-islands-210920-en.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> Helpdesk research report: *Gender in the Pacific Islands*, Governance and Social Development Research Centre. Available at: <http://gsdrc.org/docs/open/hd544.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs, ‘Pacific regional- empowering women and girls.’

<sup>63</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community & UNHCHR, *Human Rights in the Pacific: A Situational Analysis of 2020*.

Fiji	ICCPR, CED, CEDAW, CERD, CESC, CMW, CPRD	CRC, CPRD
Kiribati		CAT, CEDAW, CRC, CRC-OP-AC, CRC-OP-SC, CRPD
Marshall Islands		CAT, ICCPR, CEDAW, CERD, CESC, CRC,
Nauru	CAT, ICCPR, CERD, CRC-OP-AC, CRC-OP-SC	CAT, CAT-OP, CEDAW, CRC, CRPD
Niue		CRC
Palau	CAT, ICCPR, CED, CEDAW, CERD, CESC, CMW	CRC, CRPD
Samoa		CAT, ICCPR, CED, CEDAW, CRC, CRC-OP-AC, CRC-OP-SC, CRPD
Solomon Islands	CRC OP AC, CRC OP SC, CRPD	CEDAW, CERD, CESC, CRC
Tokelau (under jurisdiction of NZ)		ICCPR, CEDAW, CAT
Tonga	CRPD	CED, CRC,
Tuvalu		CEDAW, CRC, CPRD
Vanuatu	CED	CAT, ICCPR, CEDAW, CRC, CRC-OP-AC, CRC-OP-SC, CRPD

Source: UNHR.<sup>64</sup>

The extent to which the various treaties are implemented once ratified and compliance with the reporting requirements of the various treaties bodies differs between States. The PICTs have frequently faced criticism for delays in their reporting to treaty bodies.<sup>65</sup>

Considerable effort has also been put into aligning national laws and policies with their international treaty obligations, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and most Pacific constitutions now provide protection in many (but not all) human rights areas. Fiji domesticated the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities through the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018, whilst the Kiribati National Disability Policy and Action Plan 2018 - 2021 helped facilitate the co-ordination and monitoring of national initiatives concerning the rights of peoples with disabilities. Gender mainstreaming has been another priority issue, with Palau introducing a Gender Mainstreaming Policy in 2018 and the Marshall Islands' Gender Equality Act 2019 enshrining CEDAW obligations in domestic law.<sup>66</sup>

Many of the judicial systems used in the PICTs today were first established by colonisers and as a result, tend to reflect their systems. The judicial model typically consists of 3 levels of courts: municipal courts, superior courts and appeal courts.<sup>67</sup> In addition to this, some PICTS also have customary tribunals and courts at the village level which rely on customary traditions, though these bodies are not generally recognised as forming part of the formal legal system.<sup>68</sup>

In recent years, some of the PICTs have faced criticism over the lack of independence between the legislative, executive and judicial systems. For example, in Nauru, there have been concerns relating

<sup>64</sup> OHCHR Treaty Body Database. Available at:

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=132&Lang=EN](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=132&Lang=EN)

<sup>65</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community & UNHCHR, Human Rights in the Pacific: A Situational Analysis of 2020.

<sup>66</sup> SPC & UNOHCHR, Human Rights in the Pacific: A Situational Analysis of 2020.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Murgatroyd, Update: Introduction to researching south Pacific Law, Houser Global Law School program, October 2019. Available at:

[https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/South\\_Pacific\\_Law1.html# 2. Sources\\_ofV](https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/South_Pacific_Law1.html# 2. Sources_ofV)

<sup>68</sup> Peter Murgatroyd, Update: Introduction to researching south Pacific Law, Houser Global Law School program, October 2019.

to the exercise of undue influence and the dismissal of judges who have made unfavourable rulings against officials.<sup>69</sup> This became such an issue in the Pacific that in April 2018, New Zealand hosted a Chief Justices' Leadership Forum as part of the Pacific Judicial Strengthening Initiative, which involved Chief Justices from 13 PICTs discussing how the independence of their justice systems could be improved.<sup>70</sup>

Outside the judicial system, Pacific leaders have begun to place greater value on national human rights institutions (NHRI) to protect, monitor and raising awareness of human rights. NHRIs are now operational in Fiji, Samoa and Tuvalu, while the Cook Islands, FSM, Nauru, Palau, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu have Ombudsman Offices that carry a human rights mandate. While the establishment of these bodies is a step forward, only Samoa's NHRI currently complies with the Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions (the Paris Principles).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Peter Murgatroyd, Update: Introduction to researching south Pacific Law, Houser Global Law School program, October 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Murgatroyd, Update: Introduction to researching south Pacific Law, Houser Global Law School program, October 2019.

<sup>71</sup> Adopted by General Assembly resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/statusofnationalinstitutions.aspx>.



## 2. Health and Nutrition

### 2.1 Introduction

Over the last few decades, the PICTs have made progress in enhancing the overall health and well-being of the Pacific population. Upon comparison, however, it is evident that there are a number of endemic problems which continue to impact on Pacific health systems, with the result that a number of the PICTs are unlikely to meet all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) concerning child and maternal health and nutrition by 2030.

### 2.2 Update

#### Maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health

##### Child and Adolescent mortality rates

Neonatal mortality (0-28 days), infant mortality (under 1 year), and under-five mortality rates in the PICTs have declined continuously since the early 1990s. Figure 9 outlines the estimated mortality rates across the 14 relevant PICTs in 2020. Although there is no available data for Tokelau, it is understood that there have been no infant or child deaths over the last few years.

**Figure 9:** Mortality rates (deaths per 1000 people) across the PICTs, 2020.

Country	Neonatal death rate	Infant mortality	Under 5 mortality	Adolescent mortality (aged 15-19)
Cook Islands	3.89	6.32	7.39	5.68
Fiji	11.6	23.03	27.43	4.12
FSM	12.89	20.85	24.65	4.8
Kiribati	21.34	39.21	49.59	7.05
Nauru	18.28	23.85	28.49	5.2
Niue	13.06	20.97	24.8	4.82
Palau	7.82	15.67	16.85	7.82
RMI	14.24	25.52	30.67	5.51
Samoa	6.71	14.62	17.01	3.43
Solomon Islands	7.82	16.58	19.38	4.21
Tokelau	0	0	0	0
Tonga	4.96	9.81	11.41	3.01
Tuvalu	10.9	18.74	22	4.25
Vanuatu	10.55	21.07	24.93	4.83
PICT average	10.29	18.3	21.76	4.62

**Source:** UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality estimates, 2020.<sup>72</sup>

The above table reveals how Kiribati has the highest rate of child mortality out of all the PICTs. For neonatal mortality, Kiribati has the highest number of deaths, at 21.34 deaths per 1000 live births. This is closely followed by Nauru at 18.28 and RMI at 14.24. Kiribati also has the highest infant mortality rate, with 39.21 deaths per 1000 live births, which is almost 15 per cent higher than the next highest rate of 25.52 per cent for the RMI. This gap becomes wider when looking at under 5 mortality;

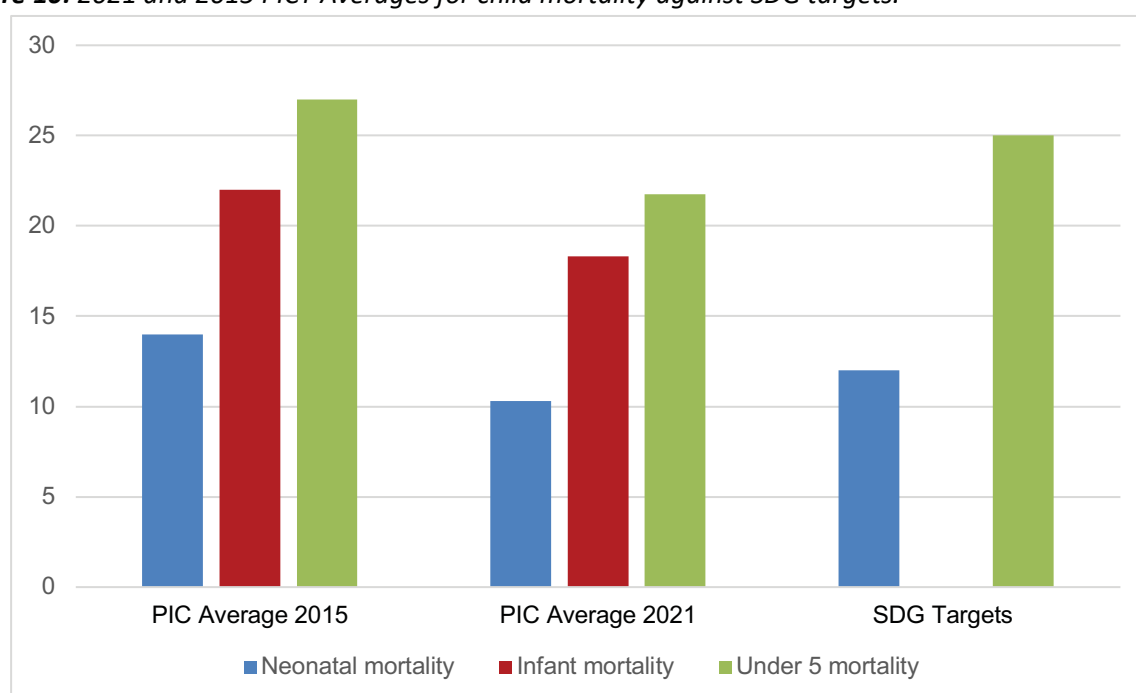
<sup>72</sup> Data available here: <https://childmortality.org/data>



Kiribati's was 49.5 deaths per 1000 live births and the RMI was the next highest at 30.67. With the exception of Tokelau, for which there are no official figures, Palau, Tonga and the Cook islands have the lowest child mortality rates across categories. Adolescent mortality rates across the Pacific are less disparate, with Palau having the highest rate at 7.82 deaths per 1000, and Tonga the lowest at 3.01.

Figure 10 compares the Pacific's current neonatal, infant and under-5 mortality rates, to the regions rates in 2015 as well as the current outlined SDG targets.<sup>73</sup> The PICTS's average neonatal mortality rate was 10.29, which is lower than the SDG target of 12 deaths per 1000 births. The region's under 5 mortality rate (21.76) is also lower than the SDG target of 25 deaths per 1000 births. SDG targets have thus been met in both circumstances, prior to the 2030 target date. Though no SDG target for infant mortality has been set, the PICT's average rate was 18 deaths per 1000 live births, which is a reduction from the 2015 amount of 22.

**Figure 10:** 2021 and 2015 PICT Averages for child mortality against SDG targets.

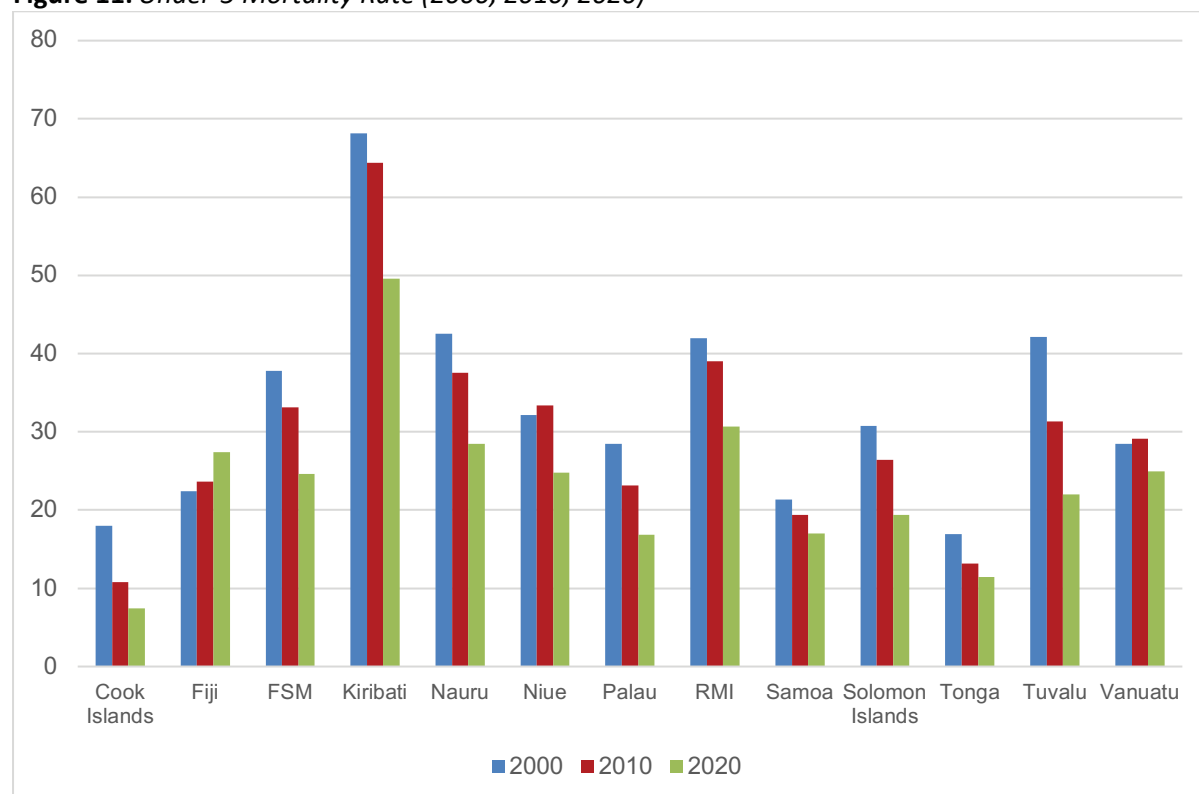


**Source:** UNICEF, *State of the World's Children, 2021*.<sup>74</sup>

Although the regional and country-level data creates an overarching image of the current situation in the Pacific, comparisons to older datasets provide a more nuanced understanding of the progress achieved. For example, Figure 11 compares the progress individual countries have experienced between 2000-2020, in regard to under 5 mortality rates. Although Kiribati has one of the highest rates of under-5 mortality, they have experienced one of the largest declines in deaths since 2000s, second only to Tuvalu. Niue and Fiji on the other hand, have gone through periods of increased rates of death amongst children under-5. Whilst Niue's rates are expected to fluctuate due to the limited number of vital events that occur in the small islands, Fiji's increase is a cause for concern.

<sup>73</sup> UNICEF, 2021. *State of the World's Children (SOWC)*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/108161/file/SOWC-2021-full-report-English.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> Available at <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021>.

**Figure 11: Under-5 Mortality Rate (2000, 2010, 2020)**

**SOURCE:** UNICEF Data Warehouse.<sup>75</sup>

A 2021 UN report on child mortality outlined how communicable and infectious diseases, premature birth and birth complications (birth asphyxia/trauma), pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria were amongst the leading causes of preventable deaths of children under 5 years old across the globe.<sup>76</sup> Despite the fact that pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria are common illnesses in the Pacific, many PICTs have failed to collect data on interventions being carried out to prevent or treat such illnesses. For example, the average percentage of children under-five with suspected pneumonia taken to a health provider in the Pacific was 75 per cent, which compares favourably to the world average of 62 per cent.<sup>77</sup> However, the Pacific average was calculated using estimates from only 5 of the PICTs (Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu), as the other countries lacked any data for this indicator. The same 5 countries, plus Tuvalu, were also the only PICTs to have data on treatments provided to children with diarrhoea. Approximately 45.67 per cent of children with diarrhoea were treated with oral rehydration salts, which is equivalent to the world average of 44 per cent.<sup>78</sup> Meaningful data on malaria treatment and prevention is also limited, but this is not seen to be an issue, as only Vanuatu and Solomon Islands (both of which collect data) are considered to be malaria-endemic countries. However, several vector-borne diseases (such as Dengue, Chikungunya and Zika)

<sup>75</sup> Available at:

[data.unicef.org/resources/data\\_explorer/unicef\\_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL\\_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=COK+FJI+KIR+MHL+FSM+NRU+NIU+PLW+WSM+SLB+TKL+TON+TUV+UZB+VUT.CME\\_MRY0T4.\\_T.&startPeriod=2019&endPeriod=2021](https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=COK+FJI+KIR+MHL+FSM+NRU+NIU+PLW+WSM+SLB+TKL+TON+TUV+UZB+VUT.CME_MRY0T4._T.&startPeriod=2019&endPeriod=2021)

<sup>76</sup> UN IGME, Levels & Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2021. Available at: [data.unicef.org/resources/levels-and-trends-in-child-mortality/](https://data.unicef.org/resources/levels-and-trends-in-child-mortality/)

<sup>77</sup> SOWC 2021.

<sup>78</sup> SOWC 2021.

are endemic in many PICTs, and data on relevant interventions (i.e. number of nets owned by households etc) could prove useful.

### Vaccine preventable diseases

Although there has been good progress in fighting vaccine-preventable diseases in the PICTs, coverage gaps still remain and often vary between countries.<sup>79</sup> Figure 12 details the immunisation coverage for vaccine preventable diseases in a selection of PICTs. The table outlines how Tonga and Nauru have close to universal coverage across nearly all of the vaccines, whilst Vanuatu has one of the lowest coverage rates in the region. Whilst the Pacific's average immunisation rates are roughly equivalent to the East Asian and Pacific averages, they prove more favourable when compared to world averages. The low coverage rate of the Rotavirus vaccine can be explained by the fact that it has been newly introduced and thus has a low pick-up rate not only in the Pacific, but also globally.

**Figure 12:** Immunisation for vaccine preventable diseases (%) 2020

Country	BCG	Dtp1	DTP3	POLIO 3	MCV1	MCV2	HEPB3	HIB3	ROTA	PCV3
FSM	84	98	83	82	79	62	88	68	40	79
Kiribati	93	99	92	91	82	57	92	92	89	91
Nauru	99	99	95	95	98	97	95	95	/	/
Palau	/	99	96	96	93	83	93	89	82	75
Samoa	99	94	79	76	57	44	72	72	/	/
Solomon Islands	82	98	94	92	81	51	94	94	41	93
Tonga	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	/	/
Tuvalu	99	99	95	90	93	85	93	93	/	/
Vanuatu	77	84	78	76	78	/	78	78	/	/
PICT average	91.5	96.6	90.1	88.6	84.4	72.25	89.3	86.7	63	84.5
East Asia and Pacific Average	93	94	92	91	92	87	92	36	3	16
World	85	87	83	83	84	70	83	70	46	49

**Source:** *State of the World's Children, 2021.*<sup>80</sup> (Data missing for Fiji, Cook Islands, RMI, Niue, and Tokelau)

Despite the overall high coverage rates, access difficulties linked to the scattered geography of the PICTs mean that immunisation coverage varies considerably between remote outer islands and the main urban areas. For example, in Solomon Islands, coverage rates for MCV vary from 90 per cent on the main island of Guadalcanal, to less than 43 per cent on the remote Rennell Island (Mugaba).<sup>81</sup>

SDG target 3.3 encourages all countries to eradicate tuberculosis (TB) by 2030. Evidence suggests that the Pacific region still has a long way to go in order to meet this goal. Figure 13 illustrates the prevalence of TB in the Pacific, and how it varies significantly between countries. TB rates are a serious

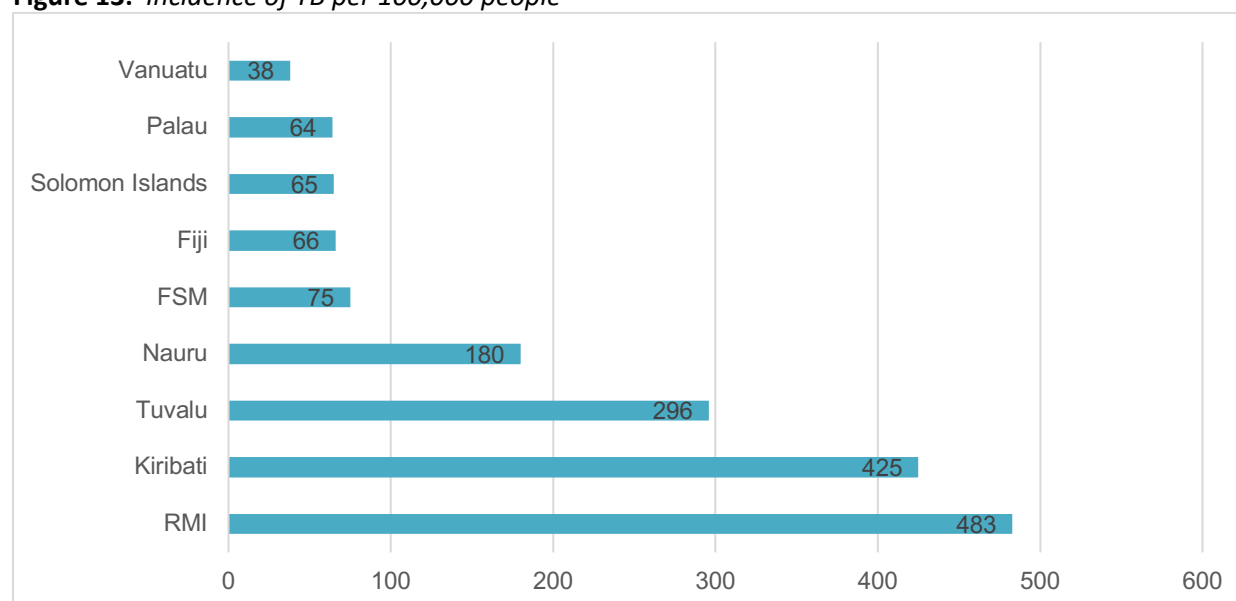
<sup>79</sup> UNICEF, 'Immunisation.' Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/immunization/>

<sup>80</sup> Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/108161/file/SOWC-2021-full-report-English.pdf>

<sup>81</sup> Tyson, S. & Clements, J. 2016. Strengthening Development Partner Support to Immunisation Programs in the Pacific - Strategic Review. Mott MacDonald. p.21

cause for concern in RMI, Kiribati and Tuvalu, existing as one of the leading causes of death in the RMI.<sup>82</sup>

**Figure 13:** Incidence of TB per 100,000 people



Source: World Bank, 2020.<sup>83</sup>

### Maternal mortality and health

SDG 3.1 states that all countries should reduce the maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030. Current country level data from the PICT's indicates that only some countries have achieved the SDG target, with others having a long way to go. The Solomon islands has the highest MMR of the region, at 104 deaths per 100,000 live births, whilst Fiji and Samoa's are much lower, at 34 and 43 respectively.<sup>84</sup> From this dataset, the average MMR for the PICTS group was calculated to be 69.2 deaths per 100,000 births, which is equivalent to the East Asia and Pacific average. However, this estimate is based on data from 7 PICTs, and thus cannot create a snapshot PICure of the Pacific as a whole. Nevertheless, the World Bank reports that the maternal mortality ratio for the Pacific Island small States has experienced a downward trend over the last few decades.<sup>85</sup> This is further corroborated by Figure 14 below, which shows how the Solomon Islands, whilst having the highest maternal mortality ratio in the region, has experienced the largest decrease in deaths between 2012-2017.<sup>86</sup>

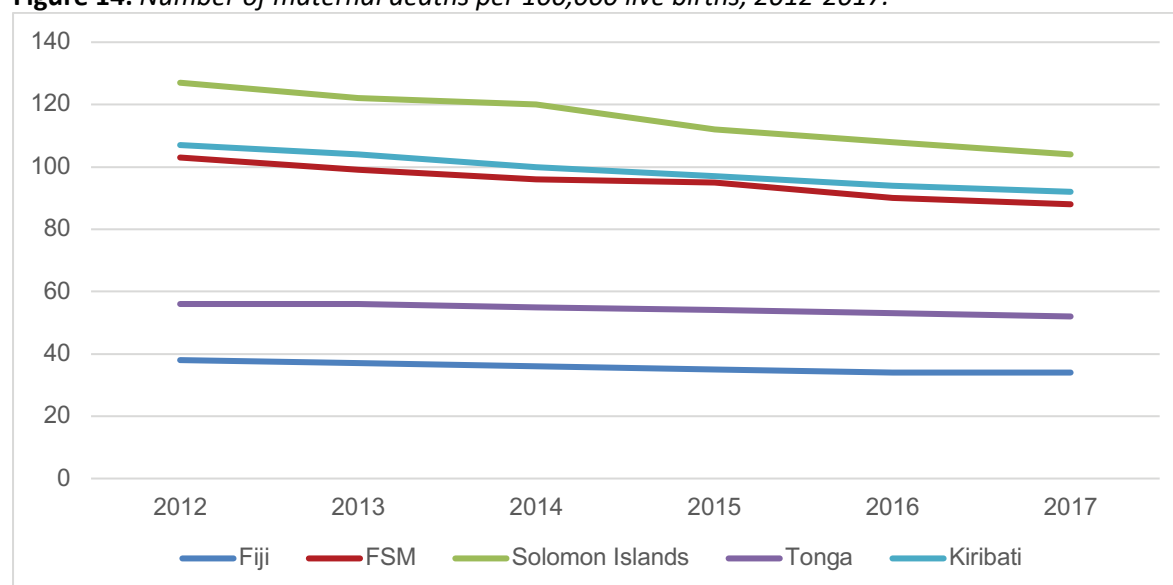
<sup>82</sup>WHO, 'Programme Budget Portal : Marshall Island.' Available at: [https://open.who.int/2018-19/country/MHL#:~:text=Tuberculosis%20\(TB\)%20is%20one%20of,has%20reported%20multidrug%20resistant%20TB](https://open.who.int/2018-19/country/MHL#:~:text=Tuberculosis%20(TB)%20is%20one%20of,has%20reported%20multidrug%20resistant%20TB).

<sup>83</sup> World Bank Data, Incidence of tuberculosis (per 100,000 people): Pacific Island Small States. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.TBS.INCD?locations=S2>

<sup>84</sup>UNICEF Data Warehouse, Maternal mortality ratio (number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births). Available at : [data.unicef.org/resources/data\\_explorer/unicef\\_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL\\_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=FJI+TU+TKL+NRU+NIU+COK+VUT+WSM+SLB+FSM+MHL+PLW+KIR+TON.MNCH\\_MMR..&startPeriod=2008&endPeriod=2022](https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=FJI+TU+TKL+NRU+NIU+COK+VUT+WSM+SLB+FSM+MHL+PLW+KIR+TON.MNCH_MMR..&startPeriod=2008&endPeriod=2022)

<sup>85</sup> World Bank Data, Number of Maternal Deaths: Pacific Island small states. Available at : <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.MMR.DTHS?locations=S2>

<sup>86</sup>UNICEF Data Warehouse, Maternal mortality ratio (number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births).

**Figure 14:** Number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, 2012-2017.

Source: UNICEF Data Warehouse.<sup>87</sup>

Ensuring access to adequate ante- and post-natal health care for mothers is crucial for reducing maternal mortality. Existing data suggests that overall coverage for ante- and post-natal health care in the PICTs is adequate. The Pacific's average antenatal coverage for at least one visit stands at 89.1 per cent,<sup>88</sup> which suggests that initial antenatal health care is accessible to a huge proportion of pregnant women. However, this average was calculated using data from 6 PICTs (Kiribati, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu) and uses the last reported rates (which ranged from 2010-2019), thus rendering this average not wholly reliable. Regardless of its reliability, this rough average, is far lower than the regional average for East Asia and Pacific, of 98 per cent.<sup>89</sup> Average antenatal coverage for at least four visits is also low, estimated to be 75.3 per cent.<sup>90</sup> This indicates that there are coverage gaps when it comes to receiving regular antenatal checks. Of the PICTs with available data, the largest disparities between coverage for at least one visit and at least four visits exist in Vanuatu and Tonga.

The overwhelming majority of pregnant women in the PICTs give birth in the presence of a skilled health professional (95 per cent)<sup>91</sup> and in a health facility (92 per cent).<sup>92</sup> In both cases, these are

<sup>87</sup>Data available at:

[https://data.unicef.org/resources/data\\_explorer/unicef\\_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL\\_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=FJI+TUV+TKL+NUR+NIU+COK+VUT+WSM+SLB+FSM+MHL+PLW+KIR+TON.MNCH\\_ANC1+MNCH\\_MMR..&startPeriod=2010&endPeriod=2022](https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=FJI+TUV+TKL+NUR+NIU+COK+VUT+WSM+SLB+FSM+MHL+PLW+KIR+TON.MNCH_ANC1+MNCH_MMR..&startPeriod=2010&endPeriod=2022)

<sup>88</sup>UNICEF Data Warehouse, Percentage of women (aged 14-49 years) attended at least once during pregnancy by skilled health personnel. Available at :

[https://data.unicef.org/resources/data\\_explorer/unicef\\_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL\\_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=FJI+TUV+TKL+NUR+NIU+COK+VUT+WSM+SLB+FSM+MHL+PLW+KIR+TON.MNCH\\_ANC1..&startPeriod=2010&endPeriod=2022](https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=FJI+TUV+TKL+NUR+NIU+COK+VUT+WSM+SLB+FSM+MHL+PLW+KIR+TON.MNCH_ANC1..&startPeriod=2010&endPeriod=2022)

<sup>89</sup> UNICEF, State of the World's Children 2021. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021>.

<sup>90</sup> UNICEF Data Warehouse, Percentage of women (aged 14-49 years) attended at least once during pregnancy

<sup>91</sup>WHO Global Health Observatory (GHO), Births attended by skilled personnel (%). Available at:

[https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/births-attended-by-skilled-health-personnel-\(-\)](https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/births-attended-by-skilled-health-personnel-(-))

<sup>92</sup> UNICEF Data Warehouse, Percentage of deliveries in a health facility. Available at:

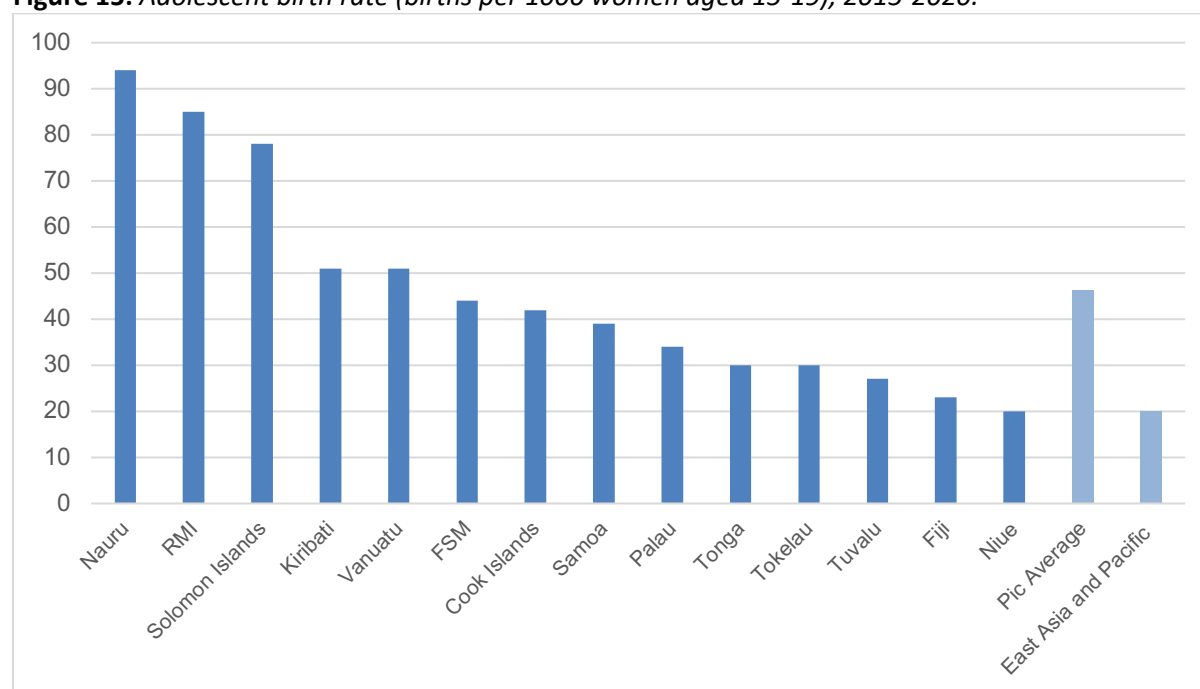
[https://data.unicef.org/resources/data\\_explorer/unicef\\_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL\\_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq](https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq)

equivalent to the East Asia and Pacific averages, which were 96 per cent and 91 per cent respectively.<sup>93</sup> Again, these regional averages, hide considerable disparities between the individual PICTs. For example, whilst 100 per cent of women delivered their babies in health facilities in Palau and the Cook islands, only 84.5 per cent of women did in the Solomon Islands. Delivery care coverage discrepancies is also present at the subnational level, with women in rural areas often experiencing lower delivery care coverage than women from urban areas.<sup>94</sup>

### Teenage pregnancy and sexual Health

There are currently high rates of teenage pregnancy in the Pacific, as illustrated in figure 15. According to UNICEF’s State of the World’s Children 2021, the average adolescent birth rate across the 14 PICTs is 46.29 births per 1000 adolescent girls aged 15-19, which is more than double the East Asia and Pacific rate of 20 births per 1000 girls.<sup>95</sup> Teenage pregnancy has the ability to negatively impact on a young woman’s educational and economic prospects, as well as those of her children. Reducing teenage pregnancy rates and increasing contraceptive prevalence is therefore a critical goal for some PICTs, namely Nauru, Solomon islands and the RMI.

**Figure 15:** Adolescent birth rate (births per 1000 women aged 15-19), 2015-2020.



**Source:** State of the World’s Children, 2021.<sup>96</sup>

Very few PICTs collect data or conduct research into contraceptive prevalence.<sup>97</sup> From the eight that do, it was found that on average 49.39 per cent of women aged 14-49 years had their family planning

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<sup>93</sup> SOWC 2021. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021>.

<sup>94</sup> UNICEF. 2013. Kiribati: Tracking Progress in Maternal and Child Survival. A Case Study Report. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/831/file/Kiribati.pdf.pdf>

<sup>95</sup> SOWC, 2021. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021>.

<sup>96</sup> Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/108161/file/SOWC-2021-full-report-English.pdf>

<sup>97</sup> Contraceptive prevalence is typically defined as the percentage of women of reproductive age who use (or whose partners use) a contraceptive method at a given point in time.

needs satisfied with modern methods.<sup>98</sup> This is much lower than the wider regional average of 62 per cent for East Asia and the Pacific.<sup>99</sup> These rates also vary significantly within the PICTs group, with the Marshall Islands reporting the highest rate at 80.5 per cent, and Solomon Islands with one of the lowest at 39.4 per cent.<sup>100</sup> The relatively low contraceptive prevalence in the PICTs region has been attributed to both demand and supply side constraints. Dominant social and religious norms existing as an underlying factor which limits demand for contraceptives.<sup>101</sup>

Data concerning the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the Pacific is also limited. Available evidence suggests that the disease burden of HIV/AIDS is currently low.<sup>102</sup> However, a 2017 study looked at trends among women from a selection of PICTs, and discovered high rates of STIs across the region.<sup>103</sup> The prevalence of Chlamydia in Fiji was estimated to be 24 per cent, in FSM it was 23.9 per cent and in Samoa it was 30.6 per cent. The prevalence of syphilis in Fiji was estimated to be 3.89 per cent, in FSM it was 1.48 per cent and 0.16 per cent for Samoa. These high STI prevalence rates indicate that there is underlying behavioural risks for HIV transmission, raising concerns of a potential increase in HIV cases in the future.

### Substance abuse

According to SDG target 3.5, all countries in the PICTs region should strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse. There is a lack of recent data on substance abuse amongst adolescents in the PICTs. UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2021 report has compiled different national datasets for comparison, which is illustrated in figures 16 and 17. Although these datasets originate from surveys that were conducted years ago, i.e. Global School Health Surveys that were carried out in the early 2010's, they are useful in conveying the extent to which substance abuse amongst young people is an issue.

<sup>98</sup> WHO-GHO, Women of reproductive age who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods (%). Available at: [www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/married-or-in-union-women-of-reproductive-age-who-have-their-need-for-family-planning-satisfied-with-modern-methods-\(-\)](http://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/married-or-in-union-women-of-reproductive-age-who-have-their-need-for-family-planning-satisfied-with-modern-methods-(-))

<sup>99</sup> SOWC 2021. Available at: [www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021](http://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021).

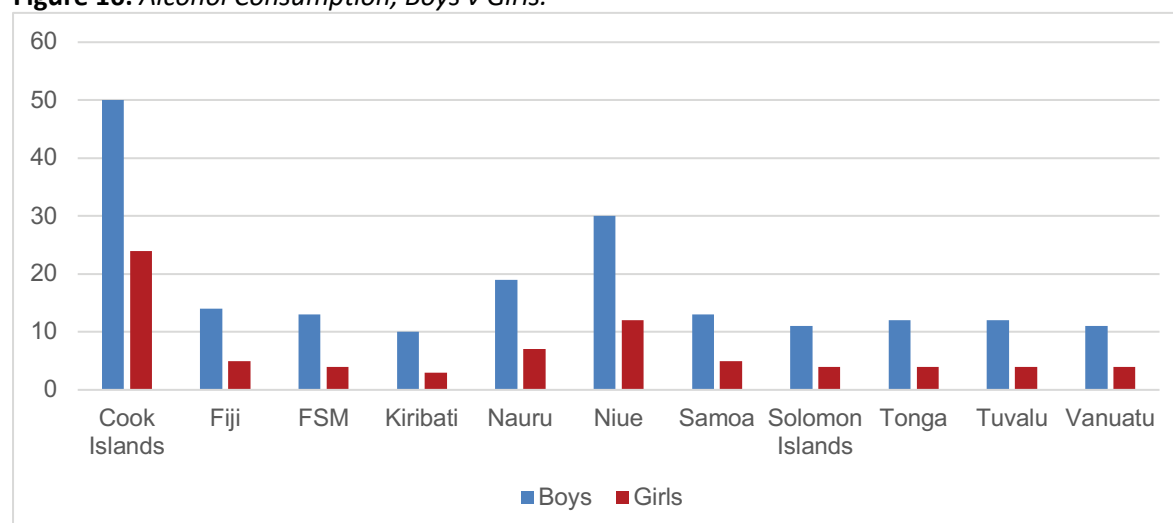
<sup>100</sup> WHO-GHO, Women of reproductive age who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods (%).

<sup>101</sup> Dawson A., 'How do PICTs add up on contraceptive, abortion and reproductive coercion? Guidance from the Guttmacher report on investing in sexual and reproductive health,' *Reproductive health*, vol 18, 68, 2021. Available at: [reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-021-01122-x#citeas](http://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-021-01122-x#citeas)

<sup>102</sup> WHO, HIV data and statistics in the Western Pacific. Available at: [www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/hiv-aids/regionaldata#:~:text=Prevalence%20and%20rates%20of%20infection,in%20the%20Region%20in%202020](http://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/hiv-aids/regionaldata#:~:text=Prevalence%20and%20rates%20of%20infection,in%20the%20Region%20in%202020).

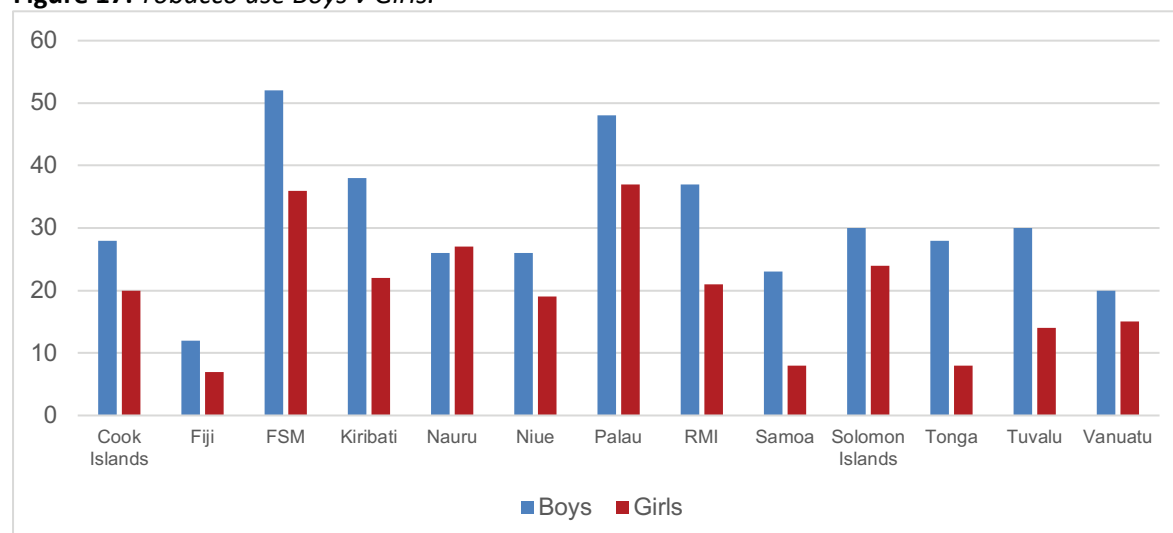
<sup>103</sup> Nishijima T et al., 'Prevalence of syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia in women in Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Samoa, 1995–2017' *Western Pac Surveillance Response J.*, 2020, 11(1). 3.

**Figure 16: Alcohol Consumption, Boys v Girls.**



**Source:** UNICEF’s State of the World’s Children 2021.<sup>104</sup> (No data available for Palau, RMI or Tokelau.)

**Figure 17: Tobacco use Boys v Girls.**



**Source:** State of the World’s Children, 2021.<sup>105</sup> (No data available for Tokelau.)

Figure 16 reveals how there are significant rates of alcohol abuse across the region, but most prominently in the Cook islands, Niue and Nauru. Their rates are worryingly high, especially because these estimates tend to underestimate the true prevalence of alcohol consumption amongst under-aged respondents, due to legal prohibitions and social desirability bias preventing respondents from accurately reporting their drinking behaviour. Tobacco use amongst youth in the PICTs appears to be more common than alcohol consumption. As illustrated in Figure 17, smoking habits appears to be high in Palau, FSM and Kiribati. However, this high usage can be attributed to dominant social norms that encourage such behaviour. For example, in Kiribati, tobacco use has deep socio-cultural roots, as the gift of tobacco (*Mweaka*) is a key part of spiritual beliefs in the Outer Islands, and in more urbanised areas, *Mweaka* is still considered polite.<sup>106</sup> Both figures illustrate how substance abuse is

<sup>104</sup> Available at <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021>.

<sup>105</sup> Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/108161/file/SOWC-2021-full-report-English.pdf>

<sup>106</sup> SPC, 2020. Cultural etiquette in the Pacific: Guidelines for staff working in Pacific communities. Available at: [https://hrsd.spc.int/sites/default/files/2021-07/Cultural\\_Etiquette\\_in\\_the\\_Pacific\\_Islands\\_0.pdf](https://hrsd.spc.int/sites/default/files/2021-07/Cultural_Etiquette_in_the_Pacific_Islands_0.pdf)



typically higher amongst boys than girls, a disparity which can also be attributed to underlying social expectations and religious norms.

### Adolescent mental health

There is a lack of recent data on the state of mental health in the Pacific region. Existing data suggests that adolescent mental health is an area of concern, with suicide rates in some countries worryingly high. A 2017 study found that young people between the ages of 12 and 18 years old had the highest rates of suicide across the Pacific ethnic groups.<sup>107</sup> A more recent study, published in 2021, provides crude suicide rates per 100,000 people for youth aged 10-19 years, standing at 16 in Kiribati, 10.8 in the FSM, 4.7 in the Solomon Islands, and 4.4 in Vanuatu.<sup>108</sup> These suicide rates suggests that mental health is a serious concern in the Pacific, and the lack of recent data or research on the area implies that it is an issue that has been hugely neglected.

### Violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is another key public health concern. Rates of VAWG in the Pacific is one of the highest in the world, with 60 per cent of women and girls in the region having experienced violence at the hands of a partner or family member.<sup>109</sup> VAWG is considered a health concern because it can be a cause of death either directly (through homicide) or indirectly, through suicide, maternal causes or HIV/AIDS. VAWG can also be a cause of morbidity, from multiple mental, physical, sexual and reproductive health outcomes, and it is also linked with known risk factors, such as alcohol and drug use, smoking and unsafe sex.

### Maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent nutrition and food systems

The Pacific region is currently plagued by the triple burden of malnutrition, whereby undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and obesity exist simultaneously within the population. SDG 2.2 encourages countries to end all forms of malnutrition by 2030. However, the high demand for imported processed foods, the growing rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the effect of climate change and COVID-19 on food systems, suggests that meeting the SDG targets will remain a challenge for the PICTs.

There are no estimates for child stunting rates for around half the PICTs, which is a significant data gap. However, existing information suggests that childhood stunting is a major problem in the region, as illustrated below in Figure 18. For the Pacific as a whole, the average stunting prevalence among children under 5 years old was an estimated 16.3 per cent in 2020, which compares favourably to the wider regional average of 22.9 per cent in Asia and Pacific.<sup>110</sup> There is, however, great disparity between individual country's stunting rates. Whilst PICTs such as Tonga, Samoa and Fiji have low rates of stunting, it is a much more serious cause for concern in the Solomon Islands, as well as the RMI. Disparities in childhood stunting rates also exist at the subnational level, though no recent data has been published on this topic. The UNICEF State of the World's Children Report in 2016 found that rural areas tended to have higher rates of stunting than urban areas, and on average, there were higher

<sup>107</sup> Tiatia-Seath J. et al, 'Suicide mortality among Pacific Peoples in New Zealand, 1996-2013'. *N Z Med J.* April 2017 130(1454). Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28449013/>

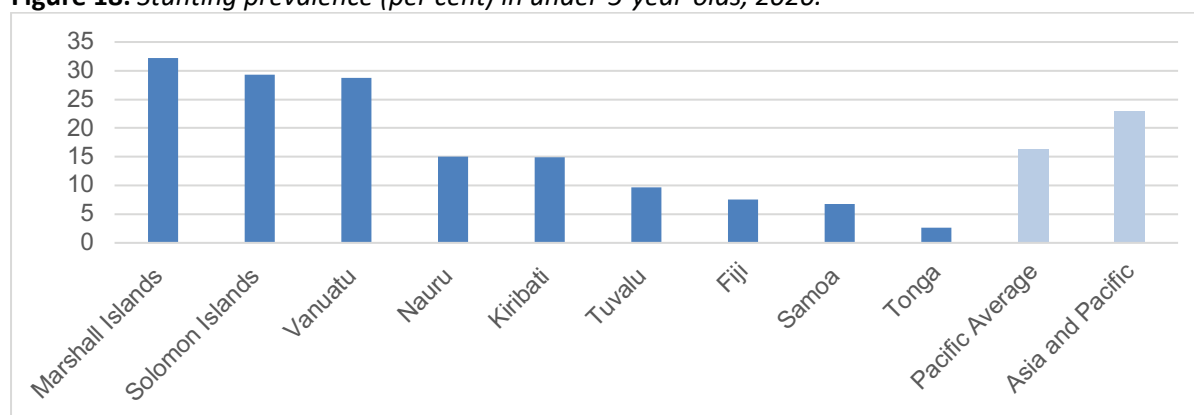
<sup>108</sup> Mathieu S., 'Suicide and suicide attempts in the Pacific islands: A Systematic Literature Review,' *Western Pacific*, 17, 2021. Available at: <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2666-6065%2821%2900192-9>

<sup>109</sup> Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs, 'Pacific Regional- Empowering women and girls.' Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/development-assistance/empowering-women-and-girls>

<sup>110</sup> FAO and UNICEF, 2021. *Asia and the Pacific- Regional overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021: statistics and trends.* Available at: <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb7494en>

rates of stunting amongst households in the poorest wealth quintile compared to households in the richest wealth quintile.<sup>111</sup> Such disparities were found to be particularly pronounced in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

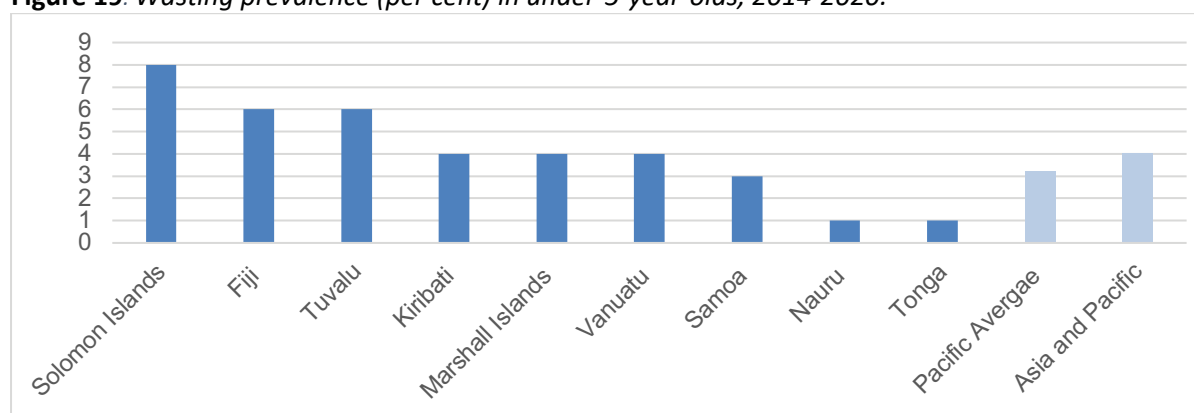
**Figure 18:** Stunting prevalence (per cent) in under-5-year-olds, 2020.



Source: FAO and UNICEF, 2021.<sup>112</sup>

In contrast to stunting, childhood wasting appears to be less prevalent in the Pacific. Figure 19 depicts available data from 9 PICTs, and it shows how Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Fiji have the worst rates of wasting among children under 5-years old. The graph also outlines how on average, wasting affects around 3.4 per cent of under 5-year-olds in the PICTs group, which is similar to the East Asia and Pacific average of 4 per cent.

**Figure 19:** Wasting prevalence (per cent) in under-5-year-olds, 2014-2020.



Source: State of the World’s Children, 2021.<sup>113</sup>

Anaemia is a more pressing issue in the Pacific. According to 2019 WHO estimates for 11 of the PICT countries, the average prevalence rate for anaemia in children aged 6-59 months was 36.6 per cent.<sup>114</sup> Although World Bank data reveals there to be a downward trend in anaemia rates over the last

<sup>111</sup> UNICEF, 2016. State of the World’s Children (SOWC). Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2016>

<sup>112</sup> FAO and UNICEF, 2021. Asia and the Pacific- Regional overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021: statistics and trends. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb7494en>

<sup>113</sup> Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021>.

<sup>114</sup> WHO-GHO, Prevalence of Anaemia among children aged 6-59 months (%). Available at: [https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/prevalence-of-anaemia-in-children-under-5-years-\(-\)](https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/prevalence-of-anaemia-in-children-under-5-years-(-)).

decade,<sup>115</sup> rates amongst women of reproductive age has increased. Between 2006-2012, rates fell from 32.3 per cent to 31.29 per cent across the Pacific, but then rose to 32.27 per cent in 2018. Although this is only a one per cent increase, the trend is concerning.

There is limited up-to-date information on the prevalence of low birth weight and underweight in the Pacific. The 2016 SOWC dataset found that 12 per cent of children in the PICTs region were born with low birth weight,<sup>116</sup> though this number was calculated from a small sample of PICTs, whose rates varied immensely. There is also limited data on the prevalence of childhood underweight, with the 2021 SOWC only listing data on 8 PICTs. Samoa has the highest rate, at 24 per cent of children born underweight, while Tuvalu and Nauru have the lowest rate at 3 and 4 per cent respectively. The average for the PICTs group was 10.13 per cent, which is double the East Asia and Pacific average of 5 per cent.<sup>117</sup>

The WHO recommends that infants are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. Breast-feeding is relatively widespread in the PICTs. On average, 59.8 per cent of newborns in the PICTs are breastfed within one hour of birth and 56.4 per cent of newborns receive exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months after birth.<sup>118</sup> This is above the 50 per cent target set out in the WHO's global nutrition targets for 2025, and for both indicators, the PICTs group compares 20 per cent more favourably to the East Asia and the Pacific averages.<sup>119</sup> Despite this, there are still considerable disparities at the country level. For example, early initiation breast feeding ranges from as high as 85 per cent in Vanuatu to as low as 15 per cent in Tuvalu, and exclusive breastfeeding ranges from 76 per cent in the Solomon Islands, to 40 per cent in Tonga and Fiji.<sup>120</sup> So whilst some countries have met the WHO global nutrition targets, others are a long way off.

NCD's, such as diabetes and chronic kidney disease, are the leading causes of death and disability in the Pacific, accounting for 80 per cent of deaths in the region.<sup>121</sup> Many NCDs are directly related to overweight and obesity, and in the Pacific, an estimated 43 per cent of the adult population is obese, which is three times the global average.<sup>122</sup> Seven of the top 10 most obese countries in the world are to be found in the Pacific, highlighting a crisis of obesity in the region. Rates of obesity and overweight amongst children is, comparably, more moderate. According to available data for 9 PICTs, 5.6 per cent of children under 5 are overweight, as against a world average of 5.7 per cent.<sup>123</sup> For the PICTs, overweight prevalence rates amongst children under 5 varies considerably, from 12.6 per cent in Tonga, to as low as 3.7 per cent in Nauru.<sup>124</sup>

Diet is the chief contributor to overweight and obesity. Traditionally, Pacific diets consisted of fresh greens, fruits and fish, but the mid 1990's saw greater trade liberalisation in the region and led to a

<sup>115</sup>World Bank Data, Prevalence of Anaemia among children (% of children ages 6-59 months): Pacific Island small states. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.ANM.CHLD.ZS?locations=S2>

<sup>116</sup> SOWC 2016.

<sup>117</sup> SOWC 2021.

<sup>118</sup> SOWC 2021.

<sup>119</sup> SOWC 2021.

<sup>120</sup> SOWC 2021.

<sup>121</sup> WHO, 'Noncommunicable diseases in the Western Pacific.' Available at: <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases>

<sup>122</sup> McCabe Centre for Law & Cancer, 'Below the Surface: law and the roots of obesity in the Pacific.' 4<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Available at: <https://www.mccabecentre.org/news-and-updates/below-the-surface-law-and-the-roots-of-obesity-in-the-pacific.html>

<sup>123</sup> FAO and UNICEF, 2021. Asia and the Pacific- Regional overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021: statistics and trends. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb7494en>

<sup>124</sup> FAO and UNICEF, 2021. Asia and the Pacific- Regional overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021: statistics and trends. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb7494en>

surge in imported processed foods.<sup>125</sup> The accessibility and affordability of such foods created a shift in diets across the Pacific, subsequently causing an increase in NCDs, stunting, micronutrient deficiencies and obesity.<sup>126</sup> Climate change has also exacerbated this issue, in that it has contributed towards the increased scarcity of arable land in low-lying atolls, with countries becoming even more dependent on imported foods for food security.

Pacific leaders and governments have taken steps to address such issues. For example, 14 PICTs have increased taxes on unhealthy foods and beverages, and two have lowered taxes on fruits and vegetables. NGOs and private sector programmes have also addressed the issue. The Pacific Kids Food Revolution has become famous for its television cooking show that promotes healthy eating, in an attempt to tackle the triple burden of malnutrition.<sup>127</sup> This show, and an additional digital campaign, has been rolled out across many PICTs, including Fiji, Palau, RMI, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Despite these efforts, obesity levels and diet-related non-communicable diseases remain a growing issue.

## 2.3 Impact of climate change

Climate change and natural disasters pose a multitude of threats to human health. There are direct impacts from natural disasters, such as injury and death from increasingly frequent or intensifying storms or heatwaves.<sup>128</sup> There is also the mental health impact: people suffer emotional turmoil as a result of experiencing a natural disaster, often resulting in population displacement, loss of land, livelihoods, and loved ones. Scientists are becoming more confident in the notion that climate change will see an increase or emergence of vector borne diseases such as dengue fever; and an increase in water and food borne diseases, such as diarrhoea, typhoid fever, and ciguatera.<sup>129</sup> For example, in the months following a severe drought in Fiji, there was a 9 per cent increase in diarrhoea outbreaks.<sup>130</sup>

Climate change and weather events are also likely to compromise food security. Crops are likely to suffer damage due to the increased number of extreme weather events, and the expected rise in temperatures and rising sea levels will make crops harder to grow or maintain, thus leading to a deterioration of domestic agriculture. This in turn is likely to lead to a greater reliance on processed, imported food items, and will thus lead to an increase in malnutrition, overweight, anaemia, or diet related NCDs.<sup>131</sup> The WHO's Multi-Country Cooperation Strategy for the Pacific 2013-2017 also

<sup>125</sup> Davila F. and Wilkes B., 'COVID-19 and food systems in Pacific Island countries' in Robins L. et al 'COVID-19 and food systems in the Indo-Pacific: An assessment of vulnerabilities, impacts and opportunities for Action.' the Australian Centre for Agricultural Research Technical Report 96, Canberra, 2020. Available at: <https://www.aciar.gov.au/publication/covid-19-and-food-systems-indo-pacific/5-covid-19-and-food-systems-pacific-island>

<sup>126</sup> Davila F. and Wilkes B., 'COVID-19 and food systems in Pacific Island countries' in Robins L. et al 'COVID-19 and food systems in the Indo-Pacific: An assessment of vulnerabilities, impacts and opportunities for Action.' the Australian Centre for Agricultural Research Technical Report 96, Canberra, 2020.

<sup>127</sup> UNICEF, 'Pacific Kids Food Revolution engages children across the region to promote health eating,' 27th September 2021. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/press-releases/pacific-kids-food-revolution-engages-children-across-region-promote-healthy-eating>

<sup>128</sup> US AID, 2018. Climate Risk Profile Pacific Islands. Available at: [https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2018-26-Feb\\_CadmusCISF\\_Climate-Risk-Profile-Pacific-Islands.pdf](https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2018-26-Feb_CadmusCISF_Climate-Risk-Profile-Pacific-Islands.pdf)

<sup>129</sup> Taylor S., 'The Vulnerability of Health Infrastructure to the Impacts of Climate Change and Sea level Rise in Small Island Countries in the South Pacific.' Health Services Insight 14, 2021, 1-7.

<sup>130</sup> US AID, 2018. Climate Risk Profile Pacific Islands.

<sup>131</sup> McIver L. et al., 'Health Impacts of Climate Change in Pacific Island Countries: A Regional Assessment of Vulnerabilities and Adaptation Priorities,' Environmental Health Perspective, 124(11), 2015, 1707-1714.

posited that climate-related health problems will disproportionately affect vulnerable demographics within society, such as the poor, the elderly, young children and people with disabilities or pre-existing illnesses.<sup>132</sup>

Climate change will create further barriers in accessing health care. Natural disasters can cause immense damage and mass disruption to health care system and delivery, when they are needed most urgently. For example, in 2016, tropical cyclone Winston damaged 88 health clinics and medical facilities in Fiji, causing an estimated F\$13.9 million in damage.<sup>133</sup> The increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters expected in the future as a result of climate change, will only see such disruption and damage worsen. Rising sea levels are also a threat; a study across 14 PICTs found that 62 per cent of critical health infrastructure was located within 500m of the coastline.<sup>134</sup> These locations make such health facilities highly susceptible to rising sea levels, high tides, storm surges and tsunamis. Furthermore the increase in climate-sensitive diseases and weak food security related illnesses, will lead to an increased demand for public health services. There is, therefore, a need to invest in and adapt medical infrastructures to ensure climate resilience.<sup>135</sup>

National governments are becoming more aware of the health challenges posed by climate change and extreme weather events and have thus introduced policies and initiatives to tackle such issues. For example, all PICTs (bar Cook Islands and Samoa) now have a Joint National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management, which explicitly addresses the elements of the health sector that need to be strengthened or prioritised. There are also a multitude of national laws that address climate change more generally, but also contain sections that refer to the health sector. For example, Kiribati's 2018 Climate Change Policy outlines the need to build the capacity of the Ministry of Health, so that it can better address issues related to climate change. Despite the introduction of laws and plans, there has been limited financial investment in bolstering health systems or educating people on the relationship between climate change and health.

## 2.4 Impact of COVID-19

As a region, the Pacific's COVID-19 response has been clear, effective, and largely well-supported by the public. During the early stages of the pandemic, national governments across the PICTs declared a state of emergency, which involved the closure of borders, enhancing the capacity of the health system and initiating active community surveillance.

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Figure 20 lists the COVID cases and deaths seen in the PICTs as of the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2022. There have been a total number of 63934 positive cases across the 14 PICTs, accounting for approximately 0.02 per cent of the group's population.<sup>136</sup> It should be noted that 97 per cent of these positive cases come

<sup>132</sup> WHO Country Cooperation Strategy for Marshall Islands 2013-2017.

<sup>133</sup> Taylor S., 'The Vulnerability of Health Infrastructure to the Impacts of Climate Change and Sea level Rise in Small Island Countries in the South Pacific.' Health Services Insight 14, 2021, 1-7.

<sup>134</sup> Taylor S., 'The Vulnerability of Health Infrastructure to the Impacts of Climate Change and Sea level Rise in Small Island Countries in the South Pacific.' Health Services Insight 14, 2021, 1-7.

<sup>135</sup> Taylor S., 'The Vulnerability of Health Infrastructure to the Impacts of Climate Change and Sea level Rise in Small Island Countries in the South Pacific.' Health Services Insight 14, 2021, 1-7.

<sup>136</sup> Calculated using data from WHO's Covid-10 Dashboard. Available at: <https://covid19.who.int/table>

from Fiji. Although the number of positive cases, deaths and vaccination rates change daily, these figures provide an insight into the current COVID-19 situation in these countries, and thus gives us an idea of how effective their COVID-19 response has been. For example, when countries have high vaccination rates and no positive COVID cases (such as Tokelau, Cook Islands and Niue), there is an implication that their COVID response strategies have been effective. Fiji's high number of cases suggests the inverse, with the national government facing much criticism in terms of its hard-line regulatory approach to vaccination and its weak public engagement.<sup>137</sup>

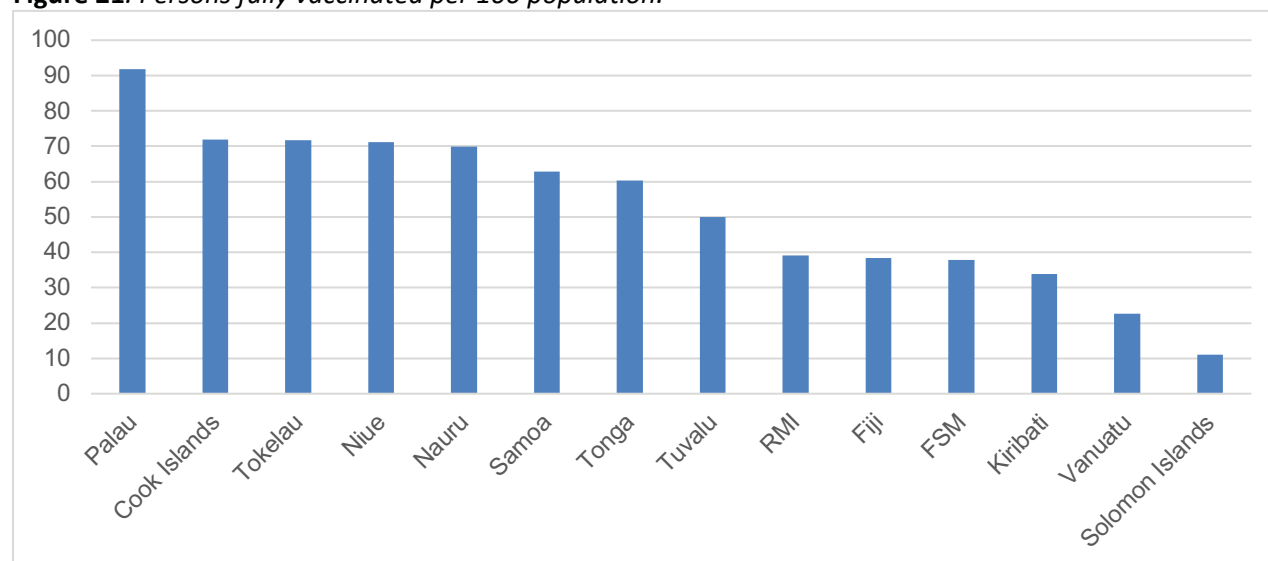
**Figure 6: COVID-19 Stats.**

COUNTRY	COVID CASES	DEATHS
Cook Islands	0	0
Fiji	62203	791
FSM	0	0
Kiribati	116	0
Nauru	0	0
Niue	0	0
Palau	898	0
RMI	4	0
Samoa	29	0
Solomon Islands	676	2
Tokelau	0	0
Tonga	1	0
Tuvalu	0	0
Vanuatu	7	0
PICTs total	63934	791

**Source:** WHO, COVID-19 Dashboard.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Transparency International, 'What Fiji's COVID-19 response tells us about integrity in emergencies,' July 2020. Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/blog/fiji-government-response-covid-19-integrity-emergencies>

<sup>138</sup> Available at: <https://covid19.who.int/table>

**Figure 21:** *Persons fully vaccinated per 100 population.*

**Source:** WHO, COVID-19 Dashboard.<sup>139</sup>

The Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 (PHP-C),<sup>140</sup> which was established in consultation with the WHO and the Pacific Community, has facilitated regional co-ordination in regard to the distribution of COVID-19 testing supplies, PPE and vaccinations. Vaccinations in the Pacific have mostly been supplied by Australia, or through the WHO's COVAX programme.<sup>141</sup> The Solomon Islands for example, has so far received 63,000 vaccination doses from Australia and a further 24,000 from COVAX.

As the PICTs have managed their COVID-19 responses relatively well, especially in comparison to other regions, this has meant that they have avoided the immediate health system pressures other countries are now experiencing. Despite this, the indirect shock of the pandemic, associated with lockdowns and an economic downturn, will impact upon public health. For example, supply chain disruptions and the inability of agricultural workers to work due to lockdowns, is a threat to food security in the Pacific. This, paired with a rise in unemployment due to economic instability, has meant that there is a greater dependence on cheap imported foods. The pandemic has subsequently seen an increase in undernourished people in the Asian and Pacific region, jumping from 322 million to 376 million in 2020.<sup>142</sup>

Medical professionals have also posited that there will be an increase in other illnesses and diseases in the future. The prioritisation of COVID-19 counter measures, means that less resources are being allocated to tackling other health issues, such as NCDs, mental health, or sexual and reproductive health.<sup>143</sup> Treatment for HIV, TB and Malaria is a particular area of concern, as there has not only been a decrease in care seeking behaviour, but there has also been a decreased availability of medicine and care in facilities, due to supply chain disruptions and fluctuating financial resource

<sup>139</sup> Available at: <https://covid19.who.int/table>

<sup>140</sup> Pacific Islands Forum, 'Pacific Islands Forum Foreign Ministers Agree to Establish a Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19', 8 April 2020. Available at: <https://www.forumsec.org/2020/04/08/pacific-islands-forum-foreign-ministers-agree-to-establish-a-pacific-humanitarian-pathway-on-covid-19/>

<sup>141</sup> Global Citizen, 'How Successful is the COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout in the Pacific?' September 3<sup>rd</sup> 2021. Available at: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/covid19-vaccine-rollout-pacific/>

<sup>142</sup> FAO and UNICEF, 2021. Asia and the Pacific- Regional overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021: statistics and trends.

<sup>143</sup> Hogan A. et al, 'Potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HIV, tuberculosis and malaria in low-income and middle-income countries: a modelling study.' *The Lancet Global Health*, Vol 8, Issue 9, July 13<sup>th</sup> 2020. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(20\)30288-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(20)30288-6/fulltext)

allocation.<sup>144</sup> It has thus been predicted that there will be an increase in such illnesses across the Pacific in the future.

## 2.5 Key bottlenecks and enablers

Although the health systems across the Pacific boast a diversity of structures, their mostly publicly funded nature means health care access has been relatively equitable for PICT populations.<sup>145</sup> However, there are a number of common barriers and bottlenecks in place that have limited progress in health care systems, and the COVID-19 crisis has only exacerbated these problems.

### Policy environment

A cohesive legal frameworks is essential to organising health systems and delivering effective coverage for reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (RMNCAH). There are a myriad of laws, policies and initiatives across the PICTs that cover this sector, and the WHO maintains a useful database which contains a collection of these documents.<sup>146</sup>

Overall, the policy environment concerning health systems in the PICTs is fairly robust, with all countries, bar the FSM, possessing a national health plan.<sup>147</sup> A 2019 UNFPA study found that each PICT on average possessed 3.5 policies or plans that specifically concerned RMNCAH.<sup>148</sup> Despite this, PICT health policy frameworks have also faced much criticism. Firstly, whilst governments have been active in introducing health policies, corresponding implementation plans often fail to be fully costed.<sup>149</sup> The 2019 UNFPA study reported that of the 54 policy documents found across the PICTs, only 22 contained plans that were fully costed. Another criticism is that policy and planning documents are often out of date,<sup>150</sup> with little indication on whether they will be updated or extended. The UNFPA study found that of the 54 policy documents found, just over half of them were published in or after 2013.

Moreover, whilst there are many health policies and plans in place across the PICTs, these frameworks are weak compared to those of other regions. A 2018 WHO survey<sup>151</sup> looked into the state of RMNCAH policies around the world, breaking up the policy areas into 16 key categories: family planning/contraception; diagnosis, treatment and counselling for STIs; comprehensive national cervical cancer prevention; antenatal care (ANC); childbirth; postnatal care for mothers and newborns; management of low-birth-weight and preterm newborns; child health and development of children;

<sup>144</sup> Hogan A. et al, 'Potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HIV, tuberculosis and malaria in low-income and middle-income countries: a modelling study.' *The Lancet Global Health*, Vol 8, Issue 9, July 13<sup>th</sup> 2020.

<sup>145</sup> WHO. 2017. Health systems development in the Pacific. Available at:

[http://www.wpro.who.int/southpacific/programmes/health\\_sector/health\\_systems/page/en/](http://www.wpro.who.int/southpacific/programmes/health_sector/health_systems/page/en/)

<sup>146</sup> Database available here: <https://platform.who.int/data/maternal-newborn-child-adolescent-ageing/national-policies?selectedTabName=Indicators>

<sup>147</sup> UNFPA, 2019. *The State of the Pacific's Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Workforce*.

<sup>148</sup> UNFPA, 2019. *The State of the Pacific's Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Workforce*.

<sup>149</sup> UNFPA, 2019. *The State of the Pacific's Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Workforce*.

<sup>150</sup> UNFPA, 2019. *The State of the Pacific's Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Workforce*.

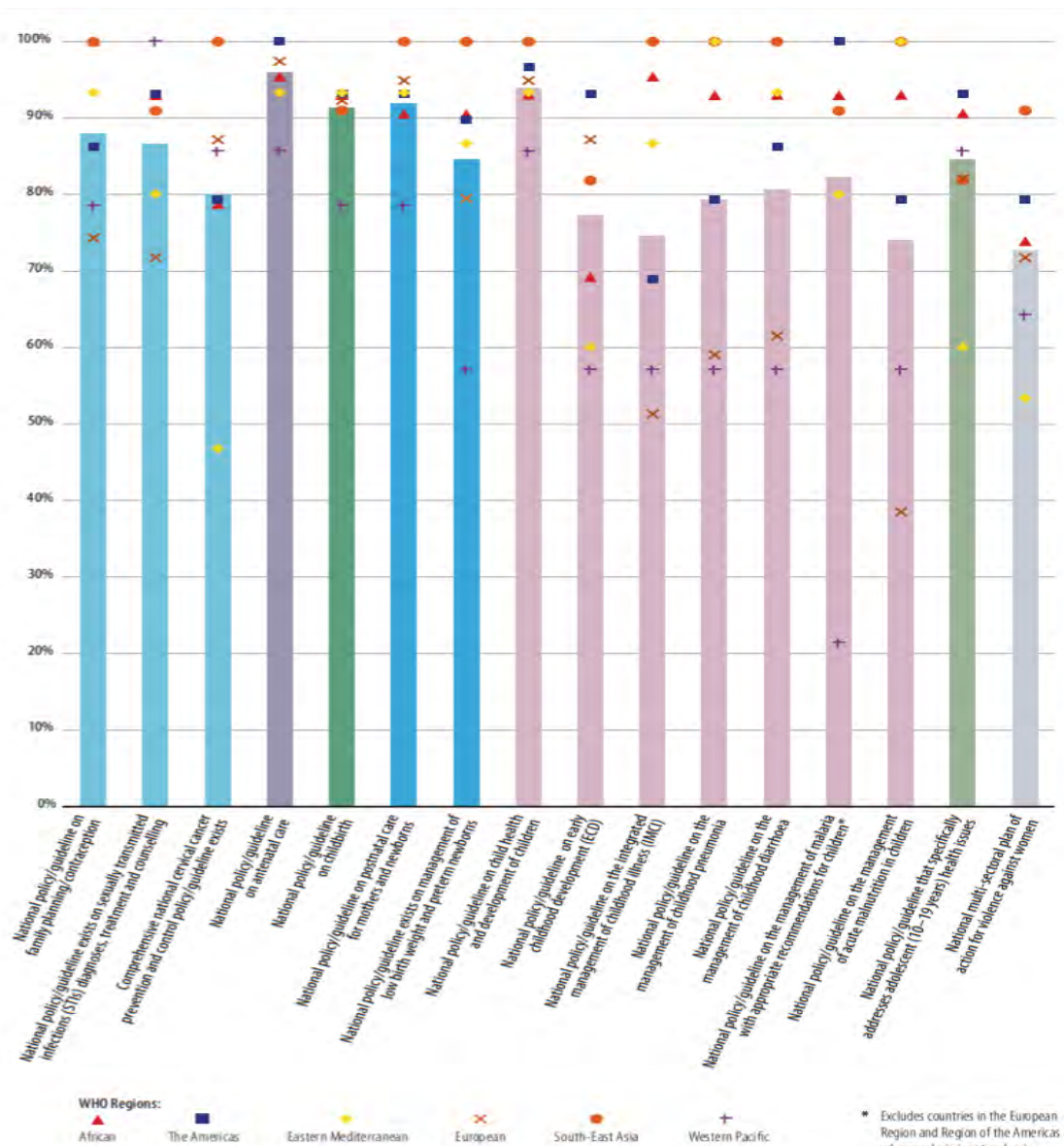
<sup>151</sup> World Health Organization, 2020. *Sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health: policy survey, 2018-2019: summary report*. Available at:

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331847/9789240004092-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>



early childhood development; integrated management of childhood illness; management of childhood pneumonia; management of childhood diarrhoea; management of malaria with appropriate recommendations for children; management of acute malnutrition in children; adolescent health issues; and availability of a multisectoral plan of action for gender-based violence. The survey found that coverage of the 16 key areas varied immensely between regions, as illustrated in Figure 22. The graph illustrates how 95 per cent of countries in the South-East Asia Region addressed all 16 policies, whilst only 69 per cent of countries in the Western Pacific Region did.

**Figure 22:** % of countries with each of the 16 key SRMNCAH policies, globally and by WHO region



Source: WHO, RMNCAH Policy Survey 2018-2019.<sup>152</sup>

There are also regional level strategies that have helped tackle health issues in the PICTs. For example, the Pacific NCD roadmap, established in 2014, outlined legislative measures and multi-sectoral interventions that were specifically tailored to tackling the rise of NCDs in the Pacific context. A 2020

<sup>152</sup> Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331847/9789240004092-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

study looked at the findings of the NCD Roadmap’s monitoring body (MANA), who are tasked with evaluating individual country’s implementation measures.<sup>153</sup> It found that whilst PICTs have introduced measures to fulfil their commitments, many of these measures were in fact rather weak. For example, of the PICTs who had introduced policies to promote healthier eating, such as taxation of sugary beverages and unhealthy foods, only 19% were considered ‘strong measures.’ Such weak measures have proved ineffective in tackling NCD’s, as evidenced in the fact that amount of deaths caused by NCDs is still on the rise.<sup>154</sup>

### Health care financing

Health expenditure is an important factor in determining health outcomes. Prior to the pandemic, the level of health spending in the PICTs was insufficient to address the health challenges faced by the region.<sup>155</sup> High travel costs associated with overseas or in-country patient referrals, the increasing financial burden of NCDs, as well as the heavy reliance on external donor assistance, were notable bottlenecks in relation to health financing. These issues have only worsened during the pandemic, as the budget is now widely being taken up with COVID-19 countermeasures.

Public health services are the main provider of health care for the PICTs population, with private sector and non-state providers playing only a small role. Over 80 per cent of PICTs health expenditure is funded by the government, through both domestic revenue and international/external financing.<sup>156</sup> Private out-of-pocket payments account for 9.3 per cent of health care expenditure, which is considerably lower than the East Asia and Pacific average of 26.19 per cent.<sup>157</sup> Such a low need for out-of-pocket payments, illustrates the extent to which PICTs health financing prioritises universal health care (UHC) coverage goals. However, it must be noted that for many PICTs, a significant source of economic income is international aid. Such reliance on external aid to fund universal health care systems, calls into question the sustainability of this funding capacity.<sup>158</sup>

According to WHO-GHO DATA, general government health expenditure as a percentage of GDP was estimated to be 5.77 per cent for the PICTs group, which is much lower than the global average of 9.56 per cent.<sup>159</sup> However, rates ranged significantly between the individual PICTs, with Fiji and Vanuatu standing at a low 2 per cent and Tuvalu at a high 18 per cent.<sup>160</sup> Across the PICTs group, government expenditure on health as a percentage of *total* government expenditure stood at 9.08 per cent and the average *per capita* expenditure on health care stood at an estimated US\$418.<sup>161</sup> Similarly to expenditure as a percentage of GDP, both of these indicators varied drastically within the PICTs group. For example, per capita expenditure on health in Palau was US\$1060, whilst the Solomon Islands was

<sup>153</sup> Kubuabolo I. et al, ‘Baseline status of policy and legislation actions to address NCD crisis in the Pacific,’ BMC Public Health, 20: 660, 2020. Available at:

<https://bmcpubhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-08795-2>

<sup>154</sup> World Bank Data, Cause of death by NCD (% of total); Pacific island small states. Available at:

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DTH.NCOM.ZS?locations=S2>

<sup>155</sup> WHO Multi-Country Cooperation Strategy for the Pacific 2013–2017. Available at:

[http://www.wpro.who.int/southpacific/who\\_pacific\\_mccs.pdf?ua=1](http://www.wpro.who.int/southpacific/who_pacific_mccs.pdf?ua=1)

<sup>156</sup> WHO Multi-Country Cooperation Strategy for the Pacific 2013–2017.

<sup>157</sup> World Bank Data, Out-of-pocket expenditure (% of current health expenditure): Pacific island small states and East Asia & Pacific.

<sup>158</sup> Matheson D., Park K., and Soakai T.S., ‘Pacific Island Health Inequities Forecast to Grow Unless Profound Changes are made to Health Systems in the Region.’ *Australian Health Review*, vol. 41, no. 5, 2017, pp. 590-598.

<sup>159</sup> World Bank Data, Current health expenditure (% of GDP): World average and Pacific island small states.

Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.CHEX.GD.ZS?locations=S2-1W>

<sup>160</sup> WHO, Global Health Expenditure Database. Available at:

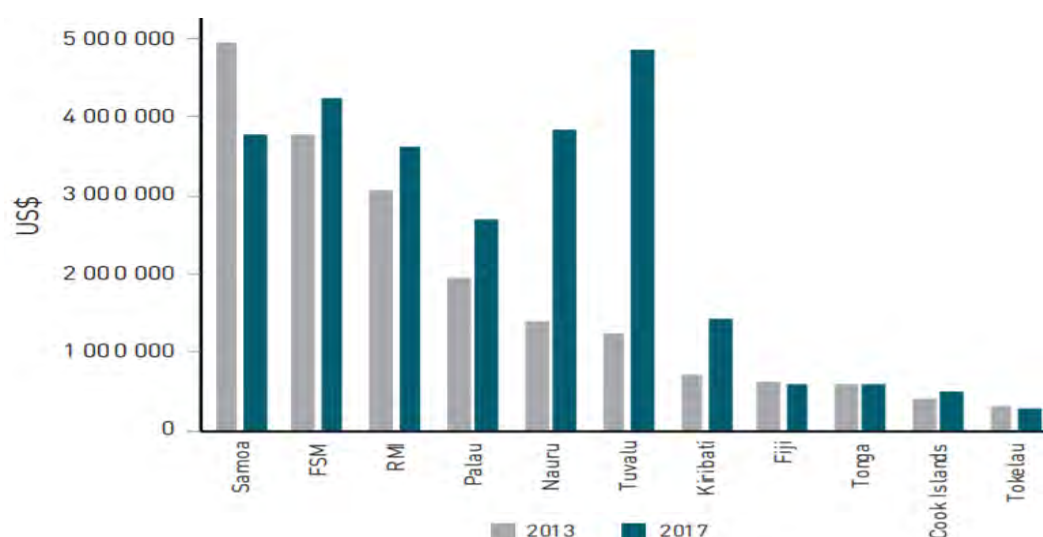
<https://apps.who.int/nha/database/ViewData/Indicators/en>

<sup>161</sup> WHO, Global Health Expenditure Database.

US\$84. For comparison, the global average health expenditure per capita was US\$1110.27.<sup>162</sup> While health expenditure is varied across the PICTs, it is, on average, low in comparison to global standards. However, it must be noted that these datasets are pre-pandemic levels (2019), so may not be reflective of the current situation when extra funding being provided in response to COVID-19 is factored in.

Before the pandemic, notable strains on public funding included the geographical spread of the PICTs, as well as the epidemic levels of diet related illnesses. Due to the underdeveloped nature of many of the PICT health systems, patients are often referred to other islands or abroad in the case of serious health issues.<sup>163</sup> This typically involves a high cost of travel; as illustrated in figure 23 below.<sup>164</sup> The rise in NCD's and other diet related illnesses has also been a concern, with Samoa's National Health Sector Plan 2008-2018<sup>165</sup> calling the growing disease burden of NCDs a critical bottleneck for the country's health care budget. The public health threats posed by climate change is also a potential strain on health financing.

**Figure 23:** Total spending on overseas medical referrals in 11 selected PICTs, 2013-2017



**Source:** Boudville A. et al, 'Overseas medical referral: the health system challenges for Pacific Island Countries', 2020.<sup>166</sup>

The effect that COVID-19 will have on public health funding is multidimensional. Large portions of the health sector budget are now allocated towards COVID response strategies, which has occurred to the detriment of funding treatment for other health issues. However, the pandemic has also meant that more significant resources and funding is being made available to the PICTs by development partners,

<sup>162</sup> World Bank Data, Current health expenditure per capita (current \$US). Available at : <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.CHEX.PC.CD>

<sup>163</sup> WHO, 'Strengthening Pacific health systems.' Available at : <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/strengthening-pacific-health-systems>

<sup>164</sup> Boudville A. et al 'Overseas medical referral: the health system challenges for Pacific Island Countries,' WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia, APO Policy brief, Vol.7 No.1 2020. Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/333363/9789290227700-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>165</sup> Available at: [http://www.wpro.who.int/health\\_services/samoa\\_nationalhealthplan.pdf?ua=1](http://www.wpro.who.int/health_services/samoa_nationalhealthplan.pdf?ua=1)

<sup>166</sup> Boudville A. et al 'Overseas medical referral: the health system challenges for Pacific Island Countries,' WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia, APO Policy brief, Vol.7 No.1 2020. Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/333363/9789290227700->

as well as additional domestic budgets being allocated to the health sector.<sup>167</sup> Though, in some instances, gaining access to such funds has meant that government loans have increased significantly. Such growing debt levels, in conjunction with the economic contraction caused by COVID-19, will likely lead to fiscal tightening in the future, and will thus affect the government's capacity for public spending on health.<sup>168</sup>

International development assistance has been a key source of funding for the PICT health systems. For example, 14 per cent of the total ODA received by the RMI between 2018-2019 went towards the health sector.<sup>169</sup> For Kiribati, around 22 per cent of their received ODA went towards their health sector, which is a sizeable amount considering that they received a net total of US\$56.7 million.<sup>170</sup> Although the PICTs experienced a phase of reduced international funding, with aid to the region shrinking by 20 per cent between 2011-2016,<sup>171</sup> the COVID-19 crisis has seen renewed international investment. For example, the EU-SPC-WFP-WHO agreement will see the EU contribute over US\$24 million to help the PICTs mitigate the effects of COVID-19.<sup>172</sup> There are predictions that health initiatives will take up the lion's share of aid that donors provide in the future.<sup>173</sup>

### *Sectoral workforce and Capacity*

The makeup and distribution of the health sectors workforce is a key aspect of effective health service delivery. Whilst there is little recent information on this area, figure 24 illustrates both the general health workforce and dedicated RMNCAH workforce distribution across 15 PICTs in 2016.

<sup>167</sup> Ruest M. and Tandon A., 'Economic impact of COVID-19 and health financing in the Pacific: The time for action is now', World Bank Blogs, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020. Available at:

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/health/economic-impact-covid-19-and-health-financing-pacific-time-action-now>

<sup>168</sup> Tandon A. et al, 'Economic Contraction from COVID-19 in the Pacific: Implications for Health financing' Health systems & reform, Vol 6., No 1. 2020. Available at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epub/10.1080/23288604.2020.1847991?needAccess=true>

<sup>169</sup> OECD, 2019. Aid at a glance: Interactive Summary Charts by aid (ODA) Recipients. Available at:

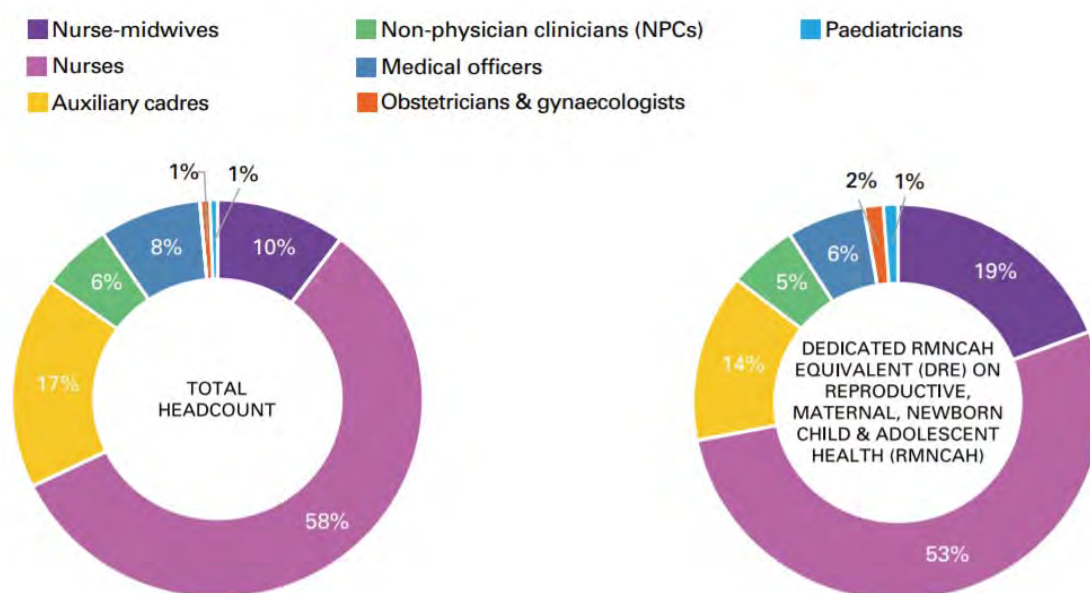
[https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDACAidatag glancebyrecipient\\_new/Recipients?:embed=y&:display\\_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:toolbar=no?&:showVizHome=no](https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDACAidatag glancebyrecipient_new/Recipients?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:toolbar=no?&:showVizHome=no)

<sup>170</sup> OECD, 2019. Aid at a glance: Interactive Summary Charts by aid (ODA) Recipients.

<sup>171</sup> Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map. Available at: <https://pacificaidmap.lowyinstitute.org/>

<sup>172</sup> SPC, WFP & WHO, 'Strengthening vital partnerships in the Pacific to support health sector responses to COVID-19', 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cook-islands/strengthening-vital-partnerships-pacific-support-health-sector-responses-covid>

<sup>173</sup> Pryke J. et al, 'Health spending and foreign aid in the pacific,' The Interpreter, 8<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Available at: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/health-spending-and-foreign-aid-pacific>

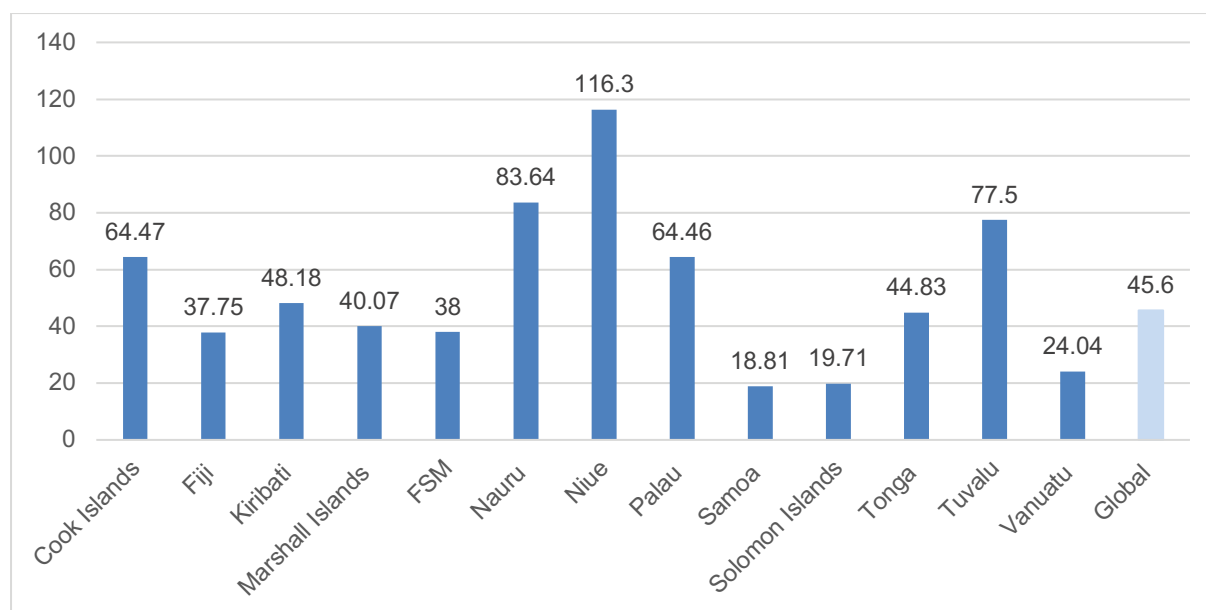
**Figure 24:** RMNCAH workforce distribution across 15 Pacific island countries, 2016.

**Source:** UNFPA, *The State of the Pacific's Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Workforce, 2019*.

It is clear that nurses make up the largest group within the health workforce, with very few specialists doctors (obstetricians/gynaecologists and paediatricians) working in the region. The prevalence of nurses is due to the fact that they are cheaper to employ, and it is easier to train them to deliver community care/cater to basic needs. In addition to workforce distribution, health worker-to-population ratios are a useful indicator of a workforce's capacity for delivery healthcare. Figure 25 lists the skilled health professional density per 10,000 population across the relevant PICTs, in comparison to the global average.<sup>174</sup> It should be noted that these data points are taken from the latest years available, i.e. Niue's being from 2008, so the figure below is not wholly reliable in reflecting current workforce densities. Nevertheless, the general image that the figure paints is that smaller island states (such as Cook islands, Nauru, Niue and Palau) tend to have strong workforce densities, which means they have the capacity to cater to their country's health needs. More populous states however, such as Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, seemingly have poor workforce densities.

**Figure 25:** Skilled health professional density per 10,000 population.

<sup>174</sup> Jim Campbell, 'SDG3.C.1 Health Worker Density and Distribution Health Worker Labour Mobility,' WHO. Available at: [https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/201802\\_unpd\\_cm16\\_sdg3\\_who.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/201802_unpd_cm16_sdg3_who.pdf)



Source: WHO- GHO.<sup>175</sup>

The high turnover of health care staff is another considerable problem in the PICTs. Due to health systems being underfunded and overburdened, many healthcare professionals in the PICTs look abroad for better working opportunities.<sup>176</sup> The subsequent reliance on expatriate health workers to fill these gaps, is a bottleneck facing a number of countries in the region.

In addition, the distribution of the workforce across the countries has faced criticism, in that there are considerable rural-urban disparities in the healthcare workforce that function in these areas. For example, in the Solomon Islands, over 75 per cent of the country's doctors were based at the National Referral Hospital or large urban clinics in Honiara, the capital city, where less than 15 per cent of the country's population resided.<sup>177</sup> When such a distribution exists, it makes it harder for rural communities and outer islands to access health care.<sup>178</sup> The inequitable distribution of the healthcare workforce is detrimental to achieving UHC goals.

Many policies and programmes have been introduced across the PICTs to tackle this issue. For example, the healthy islands vision has been key in strengthening leadership in the health sector, as well as supporting the professional development of the health workforce.<sup>179</sup> There has also been notable action at the country level, such as Vanuatu's Ministry of Health redesigning their national junior doctor training programme, to strengthen the medical capacity of the outer-island facilities.<sup>180</sup> Greater funding is being invested into training medical professionals so that workforce capacity can increase. However as such opportunities have only been introduced over the last few years, the

<sup>175</sup> Available at: <https://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.main.HWF10v>

<sup>176</sup> Mciver L. et al, 'Rocketship and the Rural Health Workforce Revolution in the Pacific: Growing Skilled Medical Generalists Across the Blue Continent,' Public Health, 8, February 2021. Available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2020.612531/full>

<sup>177</sup> Mciver L. et al, 'Rocketship and the Rural Health Workforce Revolution in the Pacific: Growing Skilled Medical Generalists Across the Blue Continent,' Public Health, 8, February 2021.

<sup>178</sup> <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/strengthening-pacific-health-systems>

<sup>179</sup> WHO, 'Strengthening Pacific health systems.'

<sup>180</sup> Mciver L. et al, 'Rocketship and the Rural Health Workforce Revolution in the Pacific: Growing Skilled Medical Generalists Across the Blue Continent,' Public Health, 8, February 2021.

effectiveness of these programmes in bolstering the health care workforce in rural or underserved areas it yet to be seen.

### *Data, information and Research*

Throughout this Situation Analysis, various data gaps in child, maternal and adolescent health indicators have been discussed. This lack of data limits the ability to understand the current situation of health and nutrition in the PICTs, as well as the functionality (or lack thereof) of PICT health systems

Such data would prove useful to inform better decision making by public health leaders, enabling them to target health spending more effectively. Not only does data collection generate information on those who use the service, but also for those who do not. For example, gender-disaggregated data can help PICT leaders and health professionals better understand the barriers faced by women that limit their access to sexual or reproductive health services, or GBV shelters. Data can help to identify and understand coverage gaps, particularly for underserved communities who may face barriers in accessing health care.

Unfortunately, PICT Health Information Systems have commonly been criticised as weak. They often lack the technology, resources and capacity to undertake regular or wide-reaching data collection, as well as organise such data in a meaningful or centralised way.<sup>181</sup> Currently, there are many useful surveys being conducted in the PICTs to understand the national health and nutrition situation, such as the Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS) and the WHO STEPwise approach to Surveillance (STEPS). Although these survey findings have proven enlightening, not all PICTs carry out such data collection. For example, only 8 of the 14 PICTs discussed in this report carry out Demographic and Health Surveys. Moreover, many of these surveys were conducted years ago, so their datasets are no longer as relevant. For example, the Cook Island's and Nauru's GSHS were both conducted in 2011, and as countries that boasted high levels of substance abuse, many policies and programmes were since introduced to tackle the problems raised. A more up-to-date GSHS would prove useful in monitoring the progress achieved over the last 11 years.

The pandemic can be seen as a good opportunity to invest in technology that facilitates data collection and retention.<sup>182</sup> This could take the form of public health surveillance systems that monitor outbreaks, hospital information systems with unique patient identification cards to improve quality of care, or more advanced financial management systems.

### *Culture and practices*

Deeply rooted socio-religious norms and misconceptions of particular diseases and health interventions, exist as barriers to health care access. This is particularly true for sexual health interventions for women. The commonly cited reasons for rejecting contraceptive use tend to be rooted in scientific misconceptions, health concerns and a mixture of cultural and religious beliefs.<sup>183</sup> Health facilities themselves have also been criticised as being culturally insensitive, with one study finding that the lack of privacy and confidentiality at facilities was a deterring factor for women and young people in the PICTs.<sup>184</sup> Understanding sociocultural influences is key to developing more

<sup>181</sup> WHO Multi-Country Cooperation Strategy for the Pacific 2013–2017.

<sup>182</sup> Tandon A. et al, 'Economic Contraction from COVID-19 in the Pacific: Implications for Health financing' Health systems & reform, Vol 6., No 1. 2020.

<sup>183</sup> Lincoln J. et al 'Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices of Family Planning Among Women of Reproductive Age in Suva, Fiji in 2017,' Journal of Women's Health Care, 07 (03), 2018.

<sup>184</sup> Lincoln J. et al 'Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices of Family Planning Among Women of Reproductive Age in Suva, Fiji in 2017,' Journal of Women's Health Care, 07 (03), 2018.

sensitive health systems that are inclusive of all people, regardless of age, gender, religion, marital or social status.

Misconceptions and misinformation are another barrier, because it has the potential to undermine a country's prevention and response efforts. For example, misinformation regarding COVID vaccines has caused much resistance to vaccination in some PICTs.<sup>185</sup> More needs to be done to crack-down on misinformation campaigns online, as well as better educate the population on health concerns and interventions.

## 2.6 Recommendations

- Fully incorporate reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health and nutrition core interventions and indicators within national health strategic plans when they are next revised. Ensure that these plans are fully costed and aligned with global and regional standards. Broaden the focus of interventions (and indicators) to include nutrition across the life course ensuring integration of school aged and adolescent nutrition. provide dedicated resources for the implementation of existing policies.
- Invest in and implement sustainable food systems for children that improve dietary diversity, promote healthy eating and regulate low nutrient foods and their marketing to children. Improve nutrition education and implement recommendations from the Food Systems Summit where relevant. Align nutrition and food system policy with global standards, institutionalising multi-sectoral coordination and investment between ministries and relevant government bodies, and investing in essential medicines and commodities for women and children.
- Strengthen UHC and focus on systemic inequities by operationalising UHC through the PHC operational framework and the Healthy Island vision.<sup>186</sup> Improve the quality of and reduce inequities in service provision, health promotion and disease prevention. Focus on reducing inequities in children's health and service provision ensuring reviews guide the adoption of more effective measures, specifically highlighting the increased vulnerabilities faced by children from poorer families, rural households, and adolescent mothers. Seek to understand why and where child health improvement has not been equitable, and develop strategies to reach underserved populations, including children with disability. A sub-national and PHC focus should facilitate this and may benefit from benchmarking to the PHC operational framework. Invest in expanding mental health services for children and adolescents. Better operationalise Role Delineation Policies where they are in place, moving beyond aspiration to implementation and place emphasis on implementing strategies that improve the quality of service for children.
- Focus on planning and prioritisation, and ensure that this promotes health systems resilience, service coverage and multi-sectoral action, as well as addresses the underlying social determinants of poor child health and nutrition. Emphasise collective prioritisation, to keep the number of activities manageable and facilitate integration within health system functions and business plans. Optimise resources through greater attention to efficiency and quality. Guide

<sup>185</sup> Dayant A., 'Forecasting vaccination in the Pacific,' *The Interpreter*, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2021. Available at: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/forecasting-vaccination-pacific>

<sup>186</sup> WHO and UNICEF, 2020. Operational framework for primary health care: transforming vision into action. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240017832>, and see also Gilbert K et al., 'Achieving UHC in the Pacific, a Closer Look at Implementation: Summary of a Report for Pacific Health Ministers,' *Health Syst Reform*, 5(1), 2018. Available at: [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23288604.2018.1537874](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23288604.2018.1537874).



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reviews with information and use of routine data that is inclusive of all population sub-groups such as adolescents and children with disability.

- Improve evidence generation, information sharing and use of routine data. Invest in data on nutrition, mental health, physical activity, and perceptions. Make data foundational to the health system and optimise through use. Instil use of routine service statistics as part of the ongoing digitalisation of the health information system, ensuring to capture data and information on sub-populations such as adolescents and children with disability. Provide greater resources to bolster the information systems. Use data and information to address systemic challenges and motivate and encourage teams. This should be both bottom up and top-down data-driven engagement. Introduce standardised reporting, encourage the development of minimum data sets for preventive and clinical services, and institute timely reporting.
- Address the social determinants of health, by building such considerations into regional, national and facility health plans, as well as reward and recognition schemes. Promote indigenous partnership and coordination arrangements with wider network groups in communities and with professional associations.
- Monitor the impacts of COVID-19 and climate change and create a road map for net zero health services. Key areas to monitor include food and water security, health service utilisation, the effects of changes in values and practices such as reduced preferences for imported food, increased local food production and, integration of COVID-19, climate change adaptation, and disaster planning including rapid activation of social protection to protect children and families from the immediate effects of frequent emergencies. Identify and invest in renewable energy solutions for the health system and its services. Continue monitoring the provision and access to essential services for children and take remedial action on evidence of a reduction as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other specific recommendations relating to individual PICTs are outlined in the WHO's climate change country profiles, which should be implemented and monitored.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> WHO Health and Climate Change Country Profiles available at: <https://www.who.int/activities/monitoring-health-impacts-of-climate-change-and-national-progress>



## 3. WASH

### 3.1 Introduction

Ensuring that all children have access to safe and affordable drinking water, as well as adequate sanitation and hygiene (WASH), is crucial for achieving a range of development goals related to health, nutrition and education.

This chapter provides an update of the current WASH situation in the 14 PICTs covered in this report, utilizing data from the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP). JMP tracks progress towards SDG WASH targets across countries, through the use of a ‘service ladders’ system to benchmark and compare progress.<sup>188</sup> Across WASH indicators, the ladder progresses from access to unimproved services, to limited services, to basic services, to safely managed services.<sup>189</sup> This globally agreed ladder approach applies to WASH access in households, WASH in Schools, and WASH in Health Care Facilities (HCFs). Achieving universal access to basic services corresponds with SDG target 1.4.1, ensuring that by 2030, households have access to basic services. SDGs 6.1 and 6.2 address progress towards safely managed services, ensuring that by 2030, populations use safely managed drinking water services (SDG 6.1.1) and an increase in the proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services (SDG 6.2.1). SDG 6.2 sets a target of ending open defecation by 2030. Additionally, WASH in different settings is linked to other SDG indicators, such as SDG 3.3 on combating water-borne diseases, SDG 3.9 on reducing water pollution and contamination. Improving WASH in HCFs is linked to SDG 3.8 on achieving universal health coverage and access to quality essential health-care services, while improving WASH in Schools is linked to SDG targets 4.1 and 4.2 on access to quality schools. Finally, achieving universal access to basic and improved WASH services requires the prioritization of climate resilience, with SDG 6.3 setting out to improve water quality globally by addressing pollution, dumping and the release of hazardous chemicals and materials.

### 3.2 Update

#### *Water access*

JMP defines basic drinking-water as ‘drinking water from an improved source, provided collection time is not more than 30 minutes for a roundtrip including queuing’, while improved water is defined as ‘Drinking water from an improved water source that is accessible on premises, available when needed and free from faecal and priority chemical contamination.’<sup>190</sup>

**Figure 26:** *JMP drinking-water ladder.*

<sup>188</sup> JMP, Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2000-2000, 2021.

<sup>189</sup> JMP, Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2000-2000, 2021.

<sup>190</sup> JMP, Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2000-2000, 2021.

SERVICE LEVEL	DEFINITION
SAFELY MANAGED	Drinking water from an improved source that is accessible on premises, available when needed and free from faecal and priority chemical contamination
BASIC	Drinking water from an improved source, provided collection time is not more than 30 minutes for a round trip, including queuing
LIMITED	Drinking water from an improved source, for which collection time exceeds 30 minutes for a round trip, including queuing
UNIMPROVED	Drinking water from an unprotected dug well or unprotected spring
SURFACE WATER	Drinking water directly from a river, dam, lake, pond, stream, canal or irrigation canal

Source: JMP, 2020.

Some PICTs have achieved universal access to basic water, namely Cook Islands, Nauru and Tuvalu, while others such as Fiji, Tokelau and Vanuatu are close to achieving that ahead of 2030, meaning that almost half of the PICTs have achieved or are close to achieving SDG 1.4.

However, the progress towards achieving safely managed drinking-water has been slower. Only two of the PICTs have high rates of safely managed water, namely Niue and Palau, while a little under half of the population in Samoa has access to safely managed water.<sup>191</sup> The results of recently completed MICS studies in five countries highlighted that on average, 70 per cent of the populations are drinking water contaminated with faecal coliforms. The rates for each of the five countries range from almost half of the population at 45 per cent in Fiji<sup>192</sup> and 47 in Samoa,<sup>193</sup> to as high as 78 per cent in Tonga,<sup>194</sup> 84 per cent in Tuvalu<sup>195</sup> and 91 per cent in Kiribati.<sup>196</sup> In 2017, 54 per cent of the population in Solomon Islands had contaminated water, while in Vanuatu the rate was 56 per cent, 44 per cent in Vanuatu.<sup>197</sup> This is in contrast with Niue, which has high rates of safely managed water, with 97 per cent of the drinking-water being free of contaminants.<sup>198</sup> There is a lack of data for the remaining PICTs. However, the available data indicates that several of the PICTs do not have access to an improved water source that fulfils the three criteria of: being accessible on the premises; available when needed; and free from contamination.

<sup>191</sup> JMP WASH data, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

<sup>192</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics, Fact Sheet (Preliminary Results), Fiji MICS, 2021, p 19.

<sup>193</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Fact Sheet - Samoa DHS - MICS 2019-20, Preliminary Results, July 2020.

<sup>194</sup> Tonga Statistics Department (TSD), The Tonga Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019.

<sup>195</sup> Central Statistics Division, Tuvalu Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-2020, Survey Findings Report, 2021.

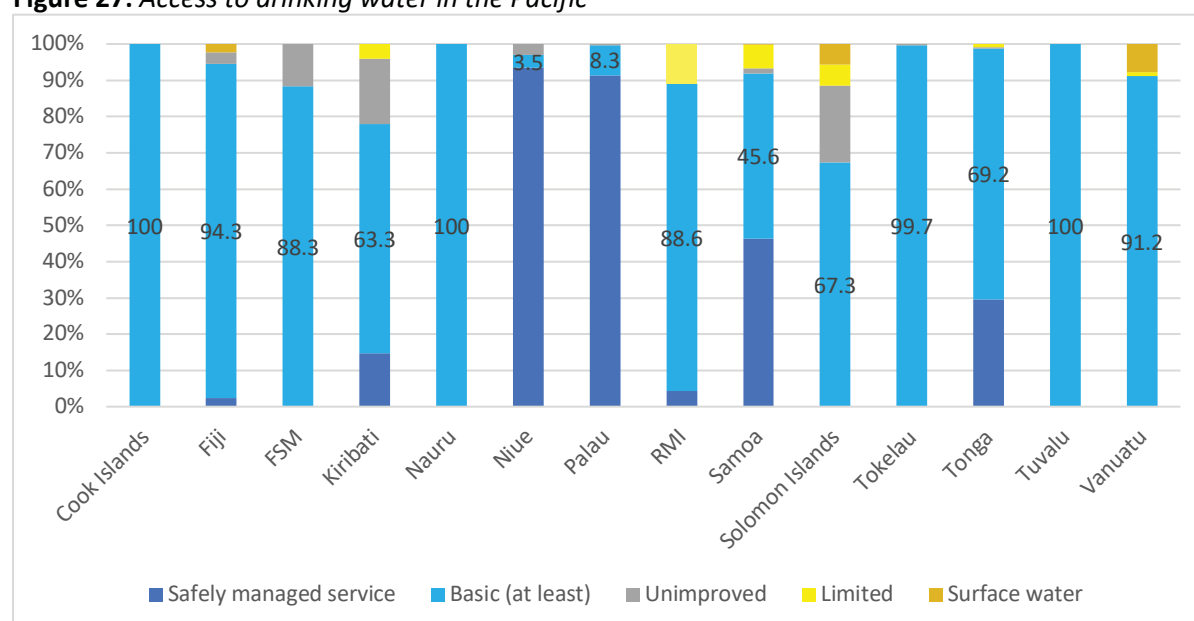
<sup>196</sup> Kiribati National Statistics Office, Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey 2018-19, Survey Findings Report, 2019.

<sup>197</sup> Pacific Community, Pacific Infrastructure Performance Indicators, 2021, p.122. Available at: <https://www.theprif.org/sites/default/files/documents/Pacific%20Infrastructure%20Performance%20Indicators%202021%20Web%200.pdf>

<sup>198</sup> Pacific Community, Pacific Infrastructure Performance Indicators, 2021, p.122. Available at: <https://www.theprif.org/sites/default/files/documents/Pacific%20Infrastructure%20Performance%20Indicators%202021%20Web%200.pdf>

Some countries have seen a decrease in basic drinking water coverage between 2000 and 2020. At a regional level, estimates for drinking-water show that 85 per cent of the PICTs had access to at least basic drinking-water in 2020.<sup>199</sup>

**Figure 27: Access to drinking water in the Pacific**



Source: JMP, 2020.

Where data is available, JMP estimates reveal significant disparities between rural and urban areas in terms of access to basic drinking water. An estimated 96 per cent of the urban population in the PICTs has access to a basic drinking water service, compared to only 78 per cent of the rural population.<sup>200</sup> Regional estimates showing a decline in access to basic drinking water services are a reflection of the decline in access to water in rural areas, from 82 per cent in 2000, down to 79 per cent in 2015 and 78 per cent in 2020.<sup>201</sup> On the other hand, access to basic drinking water in urban areas remained steady over the years, from 95 per cent in 2000 to 96 per cent in 2015 and 2020.<sup>202</sup>

Rural-urban disparities are particularly pronounced and observable in Kiribati and Solomon Islands, where the differences in improved water coverage are 31<sup>203</sup> and 32<sup>204</sup> percentage points, respectively. These figures suggest that several PICTs are still a long way from achieving SDG Target 1.4, and that improving access to basic drinking water in rural areas must be prioritised.

This disparity between urban and rural areas, could be due to user communities having primary responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the community water supply service in rural areas,

<sup>199</sup> JMP WASH data, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

<sup>200</sup> Averages calculated using data from JMP WASH, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

<sup>201</sup> Averages calculated using data from JMP WASH, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

<sup>202</sup> Averages calculated using data from JMP WASH, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

<sup>203</sup> JMP WASH data, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/table?geo0=country&geo1=KIR>

<sup>204</sup> JMP WASH data, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/table?geo0=country&geo1=SLB>

in addition to high utility costs.<sup>205</sup> This is in contrast to urban areas in some PICTs, which benefit more widely than rural areas from water supplied by a state-owned utility company.<sup>206</sup>

*Sanitation*

JMP defines access to basic sanitation services as ‘use of improved facilities that are not shared with other households’.<sup>207</sup> Safely managed sanitation services are defined as ‘use of improved facilities that are not shared with other households and where excreta are safely disposed of in situ or removed and treated offsite’.<sup>208</sup> To achieve SGD 6.2.1, PICTs need to increase access to safely managed sanitation services.

**Figure 28: JMP sanitation ladder**

SERVICE LEVEL	DEFINITION
SAFELY MANAGED	Use of improved facilities that are not shared with other households and where excreta are safely disposed of in situ or removed and treated offsite
BASIC	Use of improved facilities that are not shared with other households
LIMITED	Use of improved facilities that are shared with other households
UNIMPROVED	Use of pit latrines without a slab or platform, hanging latrines or bucket latrines
OPEN DEFECACTION	Disposal of human faeces in fields, forests, bushes, open bodies of water, beaches or other open places, or with solid waste

Source: JMP, 2020.

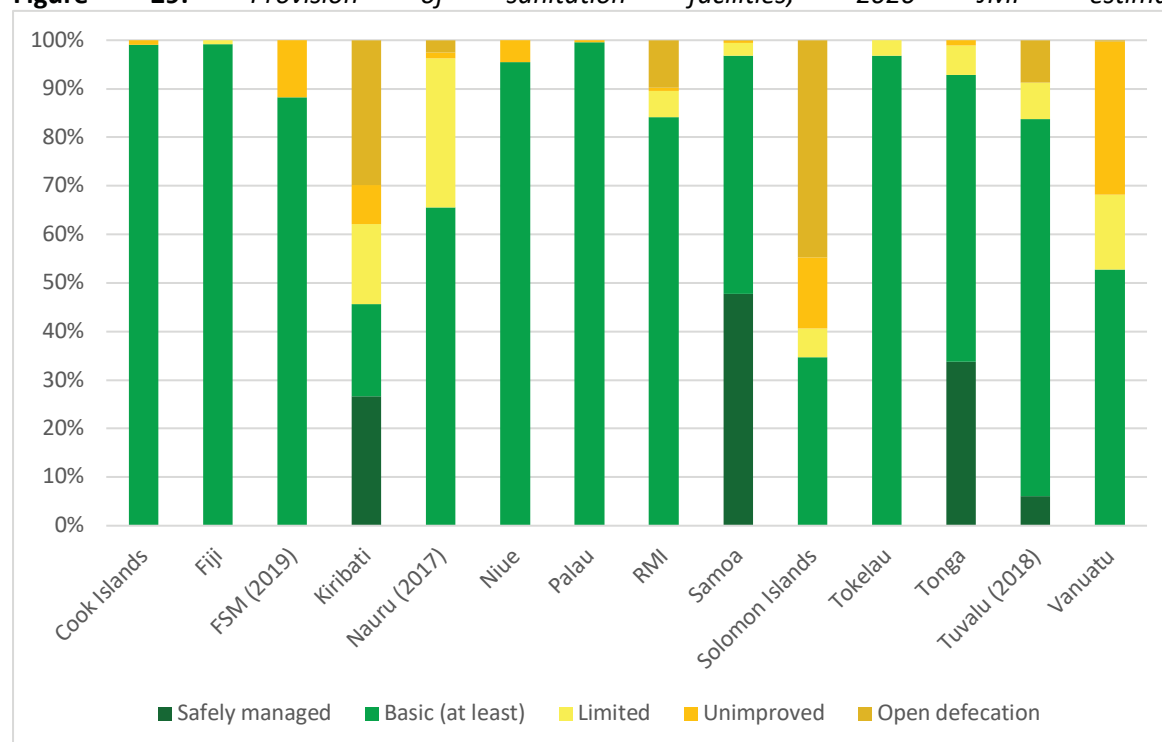
However, PICTs have been slower in achieving safely managed services, with only Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu having increased access to safely managed sanitation services.

<sup>205</sup> Fleming, Anthonj, et al., Urban and rural sanitation in the Solomon Islands: How resilient are these to extreme weather events? Geographical inequalities in drinking water in the Solomon Islands, 2020, para.140.

<sup>206</sup> Water Aid, Solomon Islands WASH Sector Analysis, 2016, p.35. Available at: [https://sirwash.weebly.com/uploads/4/2/7/6/42764129/solomon\\_islands\\_wash\\_sector\\_analysis\\_-\\_final\\_05092016.pdf](https://sirwash.weebly.com/uploads/4/2/7/6/42764129/solomon_islands_wash_sector_analysis_-_final_05092016.pdf) ; Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019). Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>207</sup> JMP, Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2000-2000, 2021.

<sup>208</sup> JMP, Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2000-2000, 2021.

**Figure 29: Provision of sanitation facilities, 2020 JMP estimates/**

Source: JMP, 2020.

According to 2020 JMP estimates, only about 71 per cent of the population of PICTs has access to at least basic levels of sanitation.<sup>209</sup> There has been a very slight improvement over the last five years, of just one per cent, from 70 per cent in 2015.<sup>210</sup> While this reveals a stagnation in improvement across the region as a whole, some countries have high rates of access to basic sanitation services, including in the Cook Islands, Palau and Fiji (where access is almost universal) and in Niue, Palau, Fiji, Samoa, Tokelau and Tonga, where it is over 90 per cent. However, there is an overall lack of data available on access to WASH services at a safely managed level. There is data available on access to safely managed water for 11 per cent of the region, while there is just 3 per cent on safely managed sanitation.<sup>211</sup>

SDG Target 6.2 calls for ending the practice of open defecation by 2030.<sup>212</sup> Most of the PICTs have met the target or are close to meeting it, with the exception of Solomon Islands and Kiribati which continue to have high rates of open defecation.<sup>213</sup> The disaggregated data indicates pronounced urban/rural disparities, with the majority of open defecation occurring in rural areas.

Since 2017, there has been some progress towards decreasing the rate of open defecation in Kiribati, declining from 34.60 per cent in 2015 to 29.8 per cent in 2020.<sup>214</sup> However, the rate in Solomon Islands increased from 41.10 per cent in 2015 to 44.8 per cent in 2020. Although the decline in the rate of open defecation in Kiribati cannot be attributed to one project, the total sanitation KIRIWATSAN

<sup>209</sup> JMP WASH data, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

<sup>210</sup> JMP WASH data, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

<sup>211</sup> Data is for Oceania – figures should be adjusted to exclude PNG; JMP, Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2000-2020, 2021.

<sup>212</sup> JMP, Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2000-2020, 2021.

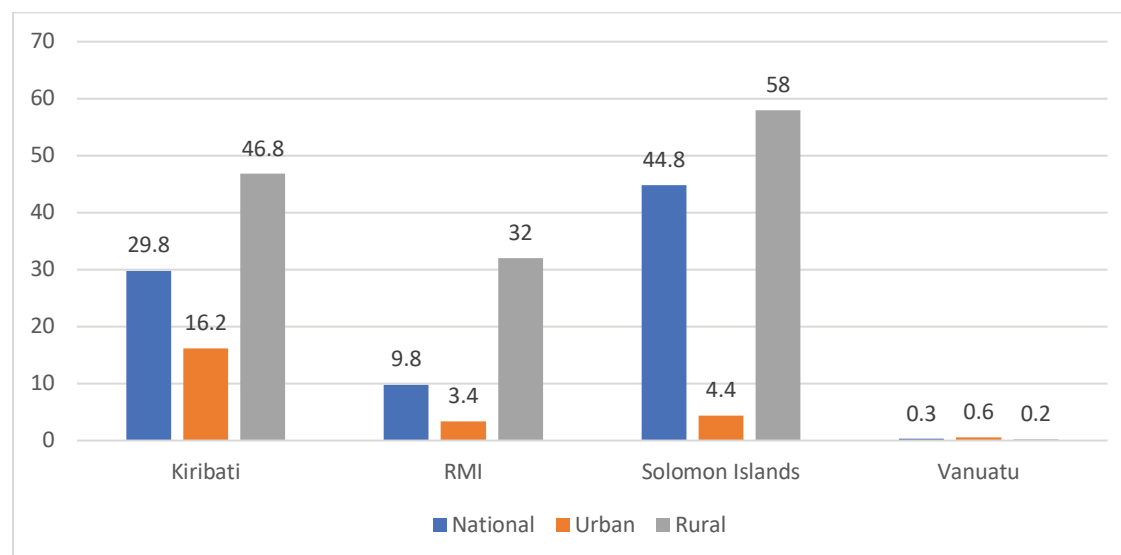
<sup>213</sup> JMP WASH data, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

<sup>214</sup> JMP WASH data for Kiribati, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/table?geo0=country&geo1=KIR>

project in Kiribati has improved access to water and sanitation facilities.<sup>215</sup> The Solomon Islands would benefit from a similar project.

As with access to basic sanitation services, there has been slow progress at a regional level in terms of decreasing the practice of open defecation. Regional estimates of open defecation stood at 17 per cent in 2000, decreasing to 15 per cent in 2015 and remaining obstinately the same in 2020.

**Figure 30:** Open defecation rates in the PICTs, 2020 estimates.



Source: JMP, 2020.

### Hygiene

JMP defines access to basic hygiene services as the availability of a handwashing facility with soap and water at home, while limited hygiene services are where soap and/or water are lacking.<sup>216</sup>

**Figure 31:** JMP hygiene ladder.

SERVICE LEVEL	DEFINITION
BASIC	Availability of a handwashing facility with soap and water at home
LIMITED	Availability of a handwashing facility lacking soap and/or water at home
NO SERVICE	No handwashing facility at home

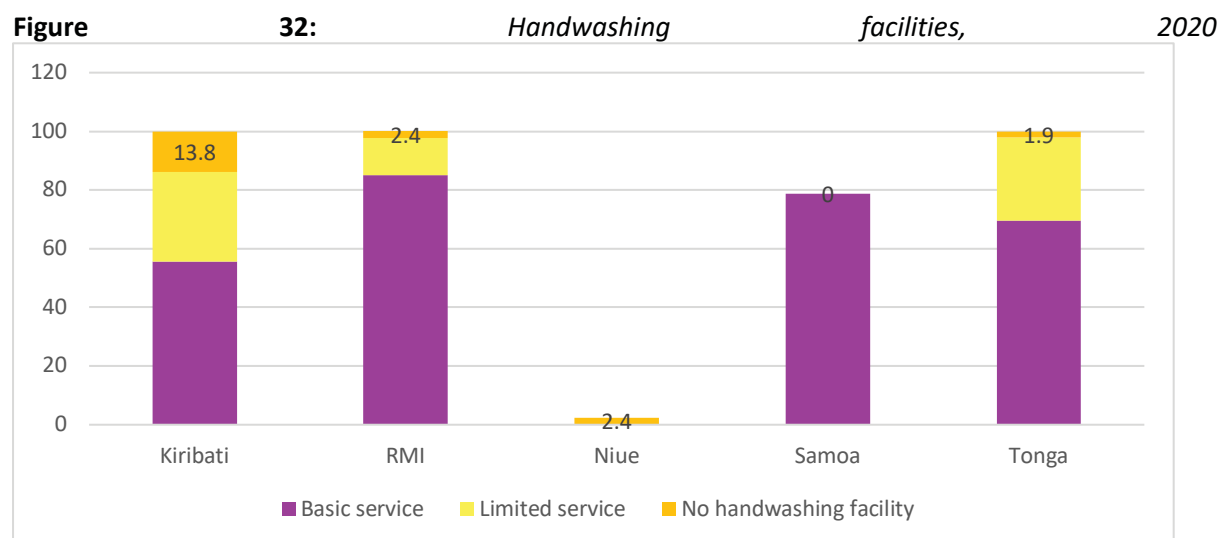
Source: JMP, 2020.

<sup>215</sup> Pacific Community, Kiribati Communities Reap Benefits of improved Water and Sanitation infrastructure, 2019. Available at: <https://www.spc.int/updates/news/2019/06/kiribati-communities-reap-benefits-of-improved-water-and-sanitation>

<sup>216</sup> JMP, Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2000-2000, 2021.



The availability of data on access to handwashing facilities in the PICTs is limited. There is some data available for Kiribati, RMI, Niue, Samoa and Tonga, however the data is incomplete. Where available, JMP estimates for 2020 reveal that there is some access to basic services for handwashing facilities, while there is limited to no access to handwashing facilities on premises in other cases.<sup>217</sup> A comprehensive set of hygiene data across the PICTs is limited.



Source: JMP, 2020.

Similar to other WASH indicators, disaggregated data for the available countries show urban/rural disparities, with urban areas having greater access to basic handwashing facilities. A higher percentage of households with no facilities for water and soap were found in rural areas in RMI, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu as compared to urban areas.<sup>218</sup> Similarly, there was a lower percentage of households with basic facilities for water and soap.<sup>219</sup>

Following the COVID-19 situation, handwashing was recognised as a necessary practice against the spread of the virus.<sup>220</sup> This made handwashing a priority in the COVID-19 policies of several of the PICTs, in addition to the scaling-up of programmes aimed at increasing hygiene awareness in the region. For example, Kiribati's COVID-19 response plan includes procuring and installing handwashing stations in HCFs;<sup>221</sup> while Niue employed awareness campaigns to improve WASH practices.<sup>222</sup> However, the availability of water and soap in PICTs remains a challenge, particularly in vulnerable communities and areas.<sup>223</sup>

<sup>217</sup> JMP WASH data, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

<sup>218</sup> JMP WASH data, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

<sup>219</sup> JMP WASH data, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

<sup>220</sup> The World Bank, COVID-19 Makes Handwashing Facilities and Promotion More Critical Than Ever, 2021. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/04/30/covid-19-makes-handwashing-facilities-and-promotion-more-critical-than-ever>

<sup>221</sup> Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) COVID-19 Response in Kiribati, 2020. Available at: [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/wash\\_covid19\\_wash\\_in\\_hcf\\_proposal\\_27march2020\\_007\\_clean.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/wash_covid19_wash_in_hcf_proposal_27march2020_007_clean.pdf)

<sup>222</sup> Asian Development Bank, Review of Opportunities for the Pacific WASH Sector: Niue WASH Summary, 2021. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/opportunities-pacific-wash-sector.pdf>

<sup>223</sup> JMP WASH data, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

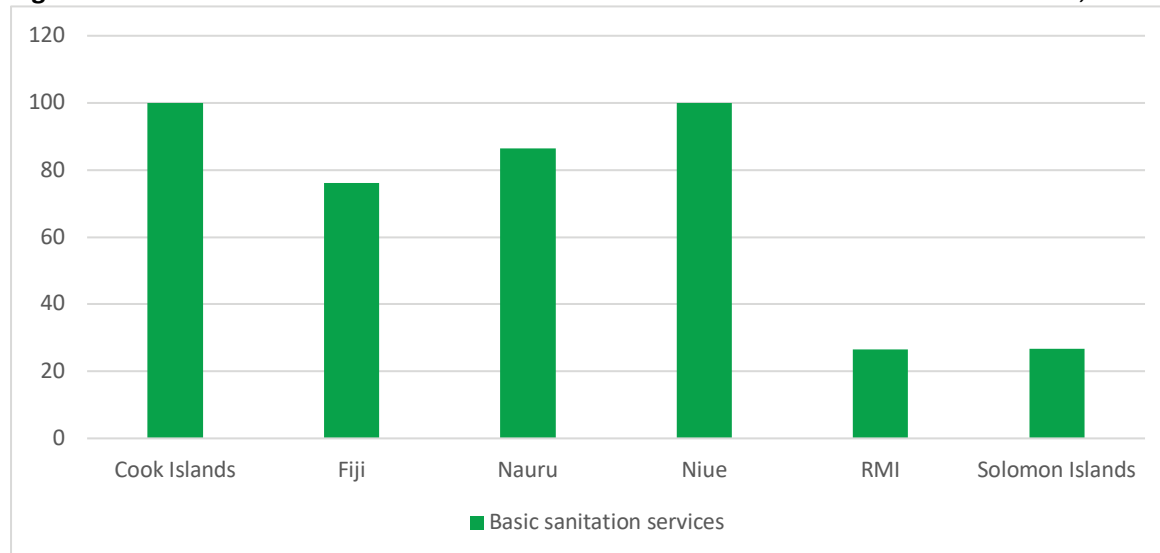
### WASH in schools

Data on WASH in schools is variable across the PICTs and even where it is available, in a number of the PICTs, the data is considered insufficient as the quality and level of services are not specified. The data should, therefore, be treated as a rough estimate. For example, data on Kiribati from 2019 shows that there is 100 per cent access to WASH services without specifying the quality of the services or whether they are basic, limited, or unimproved.<sup>224</sup> The indicated access levels in some PICTs mask challenges with the functionality of the WASH systems and the quality of the sanitation facilities.

According to JMP estimates from 2019, access to drinking-water in schools is universal in Cook Islands Niue and Samoa. In other PICs, levels of access to drinking-water in schools varies from Fiji, where 88 per cent of schools provide children with access to water, down to only 16.6 per cent of schools in the Solomon Islands. JMP estimates show that there is no access to in 25.9 per cent of schools in Kiribati, and 59.1 per cent in Vanuatu. Using this data, more than an estimated 212,858 school-age children have no access to a source of drinking-water in schools in the region.

Similar to the availability of drinking-water, access to sanitation is also limited by insufficient data in some countries. According to JMP estimates, Kiribati, Samoa and Vanuatu have universal access to sanitation services. However, this data does not specify the quality of the sanitation services nor does it disaggregate the data. This means it is not possible to determine whether the sanitation services in these cases achieve SDG 6.2 on access to sanitation in schools. Other countries have more detailed data, such as Cook Islands and Niue indicating universal access to basic sanitation services, while other countries show less coverage of basic sanitation services for school-age children, with RMI and the Solomon Islands providing access to basic services for only about a quarter of school-age children.

**Figure 33:** Access to basic sanitation services in schools, 2019.



**Source:** JMP, 2019.

In terms of hygiene and handwashing in schools, three of the 14 PICTs have universal access to improved facilities: Cook Islands, Niue and Samoa, while only 38 per cent of school-age children in

<sup>224</sup> JMP, WASH in schools, 2019. Available at: <https://washdata.org/monitoring/schools>

Solomon Islands have access to improved handwashing facilities.<sup>225</sup> In the remaining countries with JMP estimates available, service levels vary.<sup>226</sup>

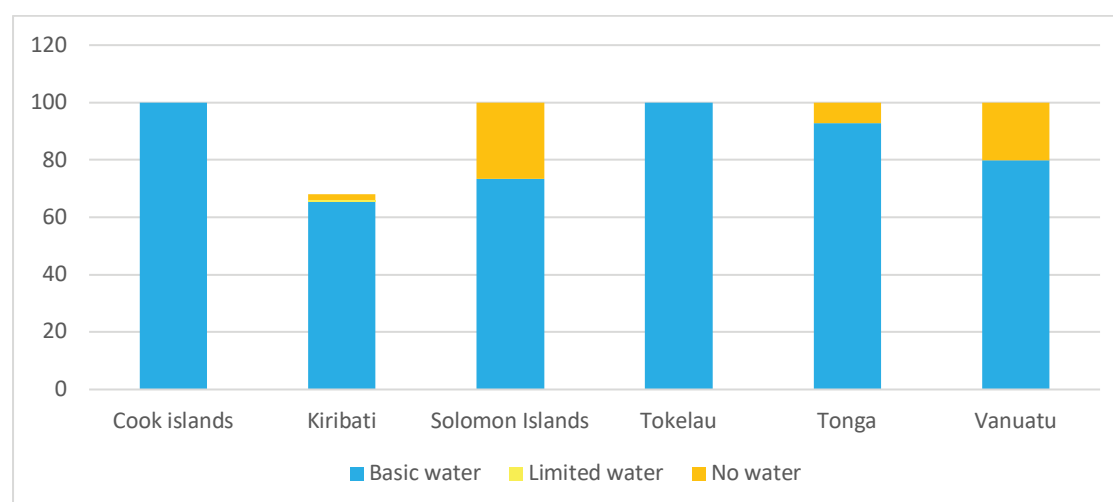
Despite the limited data, WASH in schools has been a priority in many of the 14 countries in the region. For example, WASH in schools programmes are currently being expanded in Cook Islands and Samoa as part of a national-level collaboration between health and education agencies, promoting practical measures such as the use of soap and hand towels.<sup>227</sup> However, tracking access to WASH in schools and communities is still at an early stage in the PICTs. Although there has been some notable progress in some of the PICTs, significant data gaps still exist on WASH in Schools across all four components.

### WASH in Health Care Facilities (HCFs)

Despite the critical role of WASH services in HCFs, availability of data remains limited, and investments have historically been low for WASH. COVID-19, however, has highlighted the need to redress this and to engage in extensive investment bring service levels for WASH in HCF up to appropriate standards which, under the SDG 6 universal access to WASH in HCFs includes Water Supply, Sanitation, Hygiene, Water Management and Environmental Cleaning.<sup>228</sup>

There is limited data on access to WASH services in HCFs in the Pacific, with only six of the 14 PICTs captured in the HCF WASH report of 2019. Of those six, only the Cook Islands and Tokelau have universal access to basic water services and Tonga near universal access at 92.8 per cent in health care facilities.<sup>229</sup> The data captured for Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu shows that far lower levels of coverage with no water services in some of the health care facilities.<sup>230</sup>

**Figure 7: PICTs with WASH services in HCFs, 2019.**



Source: JMP, 2019.

<sup>225</sup> JMP, WASH in schools, 2019. Available at: <https://washdata.org/monitoring/schools>

<sup>226</sup> JMP, WASH in schools, 2019. Available at: <https://washdata.org/monitoring/schools>

<sup>227</sup> Asian Development Bank, Review of Opportunities for the Pacific WASH Sector: Samoa's My WASH Kit, 2021. P.18. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/opportunities-pacific-wash-sector.pdf>

<sup>228</sup> WHO/UNICEF, Global Progress Report on WASH in Health Care Facilities: Fundamentals First, 2020, p.5. Available at: <https://washdata.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/WHO-UNICEF-2020-wash-in-hcf.pdf>

<sup>229</sup> Average calculated from 6 out of the 14 PICTs, using JMP WASH data for HCFs, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/healthcare#!/table?geo0=country&geo1=>

<sup>230</sup> JMP, WASH data for HCFs, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/healthcare#!/table?geo0=country&geo1=>

Again, this lack of data reflects the early stages of tracking WASH in communities, and HCFs in particular, with significant data gaps remaining across all five components of WASH in HCFs.

### *Legal, regulatory and institutional framework*

From a commitment perspective, Pacific island country Heads of State have repeatedly acknowledged the importance of water as an essential part of human life, human security, environment and the economy<sup>231</sup> and recognize that despite their great diversity they share the common important challenge of managing and protecting their limited and fragile water resources, and achieving and safeguarding the fundamental human right of all their citizens to safe drinking water and sanitation.<sup>232</sup>

From a policy and institutional perspective, across the 14 PICTs, the WASH Sector in the region is fragmented, with a number of government ministries leading different programme components of the sector. Data on WASH policy progress is available in the 2018/2019 UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS). Six of the 14 PICTs participated in the 2018/2019 GLAAS surveys and are represented in the 2019 report: Fiji, RMI, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Many of the 14 PICTs lack a formal regulatory framework setting out regulations and standards to support the quality and sustainability of WASH services.<sup>233</sup> For a more complete assessment of the quality of WASH policies in the region, more of the PICTs need to participate in upcoming GLAAS surveys.

Some of the PICTs have formally approved national WASH policies such as Fiji,<sup>234</sup> while others such as Nauru have policies under development or at the stage of formalisation.<sup>235</sup> Despite adopting formal policies, none of the PICTs has, as yet, managed to fully implement their policies and subsequent WASH plans. For example, the Solomon Islands has only partially implemented its rural WASH plans, while its urban WASH plans have been approved but not yet implemented.<sup>236</sup> The failure to operationalise and implement WASH policies is largely due to a lack of resources and capacity at both the national and regional level

Water is provided by utility companies across the 14 islands, all of which are state owned, excluding Vanuatu's UNELCO, which is a private company.<sup>237</sup> The Pacific Water and Wastewater Association divides utility companies into large and small utilities, based on population. Only four of the 14 PICTs have large utility companies, including Fiji's Water Authority, which provides water services to 855,300

<sup>231</sup> Pacific High-Level Dialogue on Water and Sanitation: A Call to Action, 2019. Available at: <https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/documents/blog/Call%20to%20Action%20High%20Level%20WASH%20Dialogue%202019.pdf>

<sup>232</sup> Pacific Heads of State and Heads of Delegations Message from Chiang Mai: Acting to Achieve Universal Access to Water and Sanitation in Pacific island countries, 2<sup>nd</sup> Asia Pacific Water Summit, July 2013.

<sup>233</sup> UN-WATER Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS), 2018/2019, pp.96-101.

<sup>234</sup> Rural Water and Sanitation Policy, Fiji Ministry of Infrastructure and Meteorological Services, Department of Water and Sewerage, July 2021. Available at: <https://waterauthority.com.fj/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Rural-Water-and-Sanitation-Policy-July-2021.pdf>

<sup>235</sup> UN-WATER Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS), 2018/2019, pp.82-89.

<sup>236</sup> UN-WATER Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS), 2018/2019, pp.84-89.

<sup>237</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019). Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

Fijians, with a 92.58 per cent water coverage rate.<sup>238</sup> Palau has one of the smaller utility companies: the Palau Public Utilities Board administrative authority only provides services to a population of 14,128.<sup>239</sup> The small utility water providers face significant issues with production capacity, which results in many of them providing only an intermittent supply.<sup>240</sup>

The large and small utilities also differ in terms of hours of operation. While utilities operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in larger utility companies, smaller utility companies struggle to provide continuous water services. For example, the Public Utilities Board in Kiribati, a smaller company, had an average of two hours of operation a day in 2019, compared to 24 hours a day of operation in utilities provided by utility companies across FSM.<sup>241</sup>

According to the Pacific and Wastewater Association, coverage of water services in many of the PICTs has declined in recent years, meaning there has been a decline in the supply of water. Fiji, for instance, declined from providing universal coverage to the population falling under its administration in 2014, to about 93 per cent in 2019.<sup>242</sup> The coverage was at its lowest in 2018, at about 85 per cent. Similarly, the Solomon Islands declined from 87 per cent coverage in 2011 to about 61 per cent in 2019, and was at its lowest in 2017 at about 55 per cent.<sup>243</sup> The decline in coverage could be due to the utilities not operating 24 hours a day. This would mean that the quality of water service and safe standards are not guaranteed at all hours of the day. SDG 6.1.1 towards achieving safely managed services requires that water of safe quality is available when needed.

The table below shows water services provided by utility companies across the 14 PICTs in 2019.<sup>244</sup>

**Figure 8:** *Water services provided by utility companies, 2019.*

PICT	Utility company	Water coverage, 2019	Sewage coverage, 2019
Cook Islands	Cook Islands Ministry of Infrastructure and Planning	10,300 residents	1,000 residents
	To Tatouai Vai	99.95 per cent	No data
Fiji	Water Authority Fiji	92.58 per cent	34.44 per cent
FSM	Central Yap State Public Service Corporation	100 per cent	100 per cent

<sup>238</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019), p.14. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>239</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019), p.6. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>240</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019), p.27. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>241</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019), pp. 20–21. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>242</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019), p.37. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>243</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019), p.34. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>244</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019), pp.33-37, 39-49, 51-52. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

	Chuuk Public Utilities Corporation	100 per cent	100 per cent
	Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, Korsae	75 per cent	31.88 per cent
	Northern Yap Gagil Tomil Authority	100 per cent (2013)	No data
	Pohnpei Utilities	72.78 per cent (2017)	64.94 per cent
	Southern Yap Water Authority	100 per cent (2017)	No data
Nauru	Nauru Utilities Corporation	100 per cent	No data
Niue	Niue Public Works Department	No data	No data
RMI	Majuro Water and Sewer Company (MWSC), Inc.	29.29 per cent	60.7 per cent
	Kwajalein Atoll Joint Utility Resources (KAJUR)	100 per cent (2017)	100 per cent (2017)
Palau	Palau Public Utilities Corporation	100 per cent (2017)	68.92 per cent (2017)
Kiribati	Kiribati Public Utilities Board	69.83 per cent	31.75 per cent
Samoa	Samoa Water Authority	87.84 per cent	6.68 per cent
Solomon Islands	Solomon Islands Water Authority	60.57 per cent	4.72 per cent
Tonga	Tonga Water Board	100 per cent	No sewerage service
Tokelau	Tokelau Division of Environment	No data	No sewerage service
Tuvalu	Tuvalu Ministry of Utilities and Industries	86.67 per cent	No data
Vanuatu	Unelco Vanuatu Limited	55.44 per cent	No sewerage service
	Department of Water, Vanuatu	79.17 per cent (2018)	No data

**Source:** Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, *Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019)*.

In order to achieve SDG 6.2.1, the removal and safe disposal of excreta is needed to achieve an improved level of access to sanitation facilities. While water coverage is moderate, wastewater services are considered to be substantially underdeveloped in the PICTs, with low wastewater services coverage, especially at the bigger utility companies in the region.<sup>245</sup> Fiji, with the highest coverage of wastewater services within administrative area, has a coverage rate of 34 per cent, which is significantly higher than the coverage of utilities in Solomon Islands at 5 per cent, and Samoa<sup>246</sup> at 7 per cent. Utility companies in Tonga and Vanuatu offer no sewerage services.<sup>247</sup>

The smaller utility companies also vary in their wastewater service coverage. FSM, an atoll country with services divided between six utilities has varying levels of wastewater coverage, depending on the region. For example, while Central Yap in FSM has universal coverage, Southern Yap has no sewerage and Chuck has 32 per cent coverage.<sup>248</sup> Smaller utility companies in the PICTs tend to have

<sup>245</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, *Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019)*, p.14. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>246</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, *Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019)*, p.14. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>247</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, *Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019)*, p.14. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>248</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, *Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019)*, p.19. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

higher wastewater coverage per administrative area, than those of large utility companies. Other small utilities, such as Tuvalu, offer no wastewater coverage.

Other than provision of water through the utility companies, communities rely on collection of water. Tokelau has a boreholes water supply system, with all water privately distributed. The role of Tokelau's utility authority, the Tokelau Environment Division, is to monitor water quality.<sup>249</sup>

### 3.3 Impact of climate change

All PICTs suffer from water security issues as a result of vulnerability to the adverse impacts of climate change. The region is highly susceptible to increased intensity and frequency of cyclones, El Niño Southern Oscillation effects, extreme droughts, and floods.<sup>250</sup> In some of the PICTs, rising sea levels have contaminated fresh water supplies.<sup>251</sup> The impacts of extreme climate events are projected to increase with climate change.

The main source of water across the region varies, with some relying on catchments from rivers and streams, others on rainwater harvesting,<sup>252</sup> and underground aquifers. Depending on the source of water, access to water may be relatively limited and likely to change, as the climate changes. Forced relocation may occur in some atoll islands as a result of events resulting from climate change to areas where there is better access to water, which in turn, places a strain on the use of the already limited water.<sup>253</sup>

Five of the 14 PICTs are ranked as 'most at risk of disaster' according to the 2021 World Risk Report, with Vanuatu ranking as the first amongst those most at risk. Solomon Islands is second, Tonga third and Fiji 14th. To mitigate climate change and the resulting water-security situation, many of the PICTs have participated in programmes to ensure their commitment to dealing with climate change.

Several of the 14 PICTs have included water security in their climate targets, committing to targets through the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) set by the Paris Agreement. For example, Cook Islands, Nauru and Vanuatu have included water security in their adaptation strategy, while Palau intends to strengthen the sustainability of the water situation by committing to powering the water sector with renewable energy.<sup>254</sup> Samoa has also recognised the adverse effects of climate change on the water sector and, as a result has prioritised it in the National Adaption Programme of

<sup>249</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019), p.26. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>250</sup> Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme, Effects of Climate Change on Extreme Events Relevant to the Pacific Islands. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/714530/5\\_Extreme\\_Events.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/714530/5_Extreme_Events.pdf)

<sup>251</sup> The World Bank, Acting on Climate Change & Disaster Risk for the Pacific, 2021. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/EAP/Pacific%20Islands/climate-change-pacific.pdf>

<sup>252</sup> See for example Solomon Islands: Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Solomon Islands, Healthy Village Facilitator's Guide, May 2021. Available at: [https://www.jica.go.jp/project/solomon/002/materials/ku57pq00003um0e9-att/Water\\_Sanitation\\_and\\_Hygiene.pdf](https://www.jica.go.jp/project/solomon/002/materials/ku57pq00003um0e9-att/Water_Sanitation_and_Hygiene.pdf)

<sup>253</sup> Solomon Yeo, International Institute for Environment and Development, How climate change losses could open the Solomon Islands' old wounds, 25 November 2020. Available at: <https://www.iied.org/how-climate-change-losses-could-open-solomon-islands-old-wounds>

<sup>254</sup> Regional Pacific Hub, Pacific NDCs, 2021. Available at: <https://pacificndc.org/pacific-ndcs>

Action (NAPA) and adaption projects.<sup>255</sup> The majority of the PICTs have made conditional, rather than unconditional NDC commitments. The conditions included receiving external assistance in the form of human, technological and financial resources; external funding; and capacity building.<sup>256</sup>

Additionally, some PICTs have taken steps to actively improve water-security. For example, in Kiribati, a project on improving water management was put in place, aiming to increase bulk water supply by 20 per cent.<sup>257</sup>

### 3.4 Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 has exposed key vulnerabilities in health systems, such as inadequate infection prevention and control measures, capacity and facilities. Many of the 14 PICTs remained COVID-19 free for the first year of the global pandemic, with overall protection well controlled by governments, however, at the time of writing, none of the 14 PICTs remained COVID-19 free.

COVID-19 has had an impact on the economies of several of the PICTs. Even when they were COVID-19 free, governments have not been able to protect their countries against the economic impacts of the pandemic, which in turn has an impact on WASH. As a result of the impact on the economy, WASH investment plans had to be put on pause. For example, Water Authority Fiji's 32 million USD investment program has had to be stopped until the COVID-19 situation is cleared.<sup>258</sup>

Other noticeable impacts of COVID-19 on the WASH sector have also included the disruption of plans for water providers. The quarantine restrictions led to a disruption in the supply of spare parts and disposables to several utility companies providing water in the 14 PICTs. Those PICTs that rely on importing clean water for drinking have also faced difficulty with water-security impacted through water shortage issues.<sup>259</sup>

The importance of investing in water, sanitation and hygiene is recognised across the PICTs as important to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. To mitigate the risk of COVID-19, several measures are recognized as important, with frequent and proper hand hygiene recognised as one of the most important measures that can be used to prevent infection with the COVID-19 virus. Although there have been WASH interventions as a result of COVID-19 in the form of increasing handwashing facilities and awareness programs, WASH interventions are still limited in the Pacific Islands and many of the PICTs still have insufficient WASH services and practices.

In response to COVID-19, governments in across the PICTs initially enforced school closures, although at the time of writing, many of the PICTs had opened schools.<sup>260</sup> WHO and UNICEF guidelines on

<sup>255</sup> Regional Pacific Hub, Pacific NDCs, 2021. Available at: <https://pacificndc.org/pacific-ndcs>

<sup>256</sup> Regional Pacific Hub, Pacific NDCs, 2021. Available at: <https://pacificndc.org/pacific-ndcs>

<sup>257</sup> Asian Development Bank, Kiribati: South Tarawa Water Supply Project, 2019. Available at: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-documents/49453/49453-002-iee-en.pdf>

<sup>258</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019). Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>259</sup> Catherine Wilson, Pacific's fight against Covid-19 hamstrung by lack of clean water, The Guardian. 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/29/pacifics-fight-against-covid-19-hamstrung-by-lack-of-clean-water>

<sup>260</sup> Georgia Smith, The Organization for World Peace, COVID-19 Disruptions To Pacific Islander's Education Impacts Future Development, 26 September 2021. Available at: <https://theowp.org/covid-19-disruptions-to-pacific-islanders-education-impacts-future-development/>; Sheenal Sharma, UNICEF, Children thrilled to be back



COVID-19 infection prevention and control in schools emphasize the importance of hygiene for reducing transmission and recommend all schools enforce regular handwashing, ensure daily disinfection and cleaning of surfaces, provide basic water, sanitation and waste management facilities, and follow appropriate environmental cleaning and decontamination procedures.<sup>261</sup> It is therefore critical to accelerate the progress in PICTs with the lowest coverage of WASH in schools, in order to improve school safety during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

There are also many challenges related to WASH in HCFs across the PICTs. It is recognised that in well-equipped HCFs, all medical waste products from the facilities should be segregated, stored, collected safely, and treated and disposed of through a safe system. However, a recent WHO survey across several Pacific Island Countries indicates that waste management arrangements are mostly weak. The survey also showed that proper waste segregation at source is often absent and that storage systems, including for infectious waste and disposal systems, are missing. Additionally, general environmental safety has not received needed attention, including water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. The safe disposal of waste, which is also a component of WASH in HCFs, is also considered poor raising concern as the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out is mainly planned through health systems. In addition to these challenges, there is limited technical capacity and operational guidelines based on latest evidence, in addition to a lack of WASH supplies including waste management. Although many of these challenges were present prior to COVID-19, the WASH situation is further exasperated by them in the context of COVID-19.

### 3.5 Key bottlenecks and enablers

#### Finances

A majority of the 14 PICTs have not participated in recent GLAAS reports, which limits the possibility of drawing any regional comparisons in terms of WASH finances. However, where countries have taken part, reports show that the majority of these PICTs have less than 50 per cent of the financial resources necessary to support community participation—for rural sanitation and drinking water services.<sup>262</sup>

Many of the WASH-related programmes and activities in the region are funded by external aid and are considered to be short and middle-term projects. Vanuatu in particular is reported to have had the highest dependence on foreign aid in WASH in 2017.<sup>263</sup>

Although programs resulting from external aid have provided infrastructure across the region, they are not sustainable as the external aid does not extend to maintaining the infrastructure. Therefore, long-term financial plans and policies in the region are required.

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in school, November 2021. Available at: <https://unicef.org/pacificislands/stories/children-thrilled-be-back-school>

<sup>261</sup> UNICEF, WHO, Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools, March 2020. Available at: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/key-messages-and-actions-for-covid-19-prevention-and-control-in-schools-march-2020.pdf>; UNICEF, COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness and Response WASH and Infection Prevention and Control Measures in Schools, 25 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/66356/file/WASH-COVID-19-infection-prevention-and-control-in-schools-2020.pdf>

<sup>262</sup> UN-WATER Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS), 2018/2019.

<sup>263</sup> UN-WATER Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS), 2017.

### *Sectoral workforce and capacity*

According to the 2018/2019 GLAAS report, three of the six PICTs that participated in the survey, namely Solomon Islands, Nauru and Tuvalu, have reported insufficient human resources to implement existing WASH plans, with less than 50 per cent of the needed human resources available.<sup>264</sup> Fiji indicated it has more than 75 per cent of the necessary human resources, while RMI and Vanuatu did not report on the capacity of their human resources.<sup>265</sup>

Where available, data on number of staff working in utilities vary. Fiji had 5 workers per 1,000 connections, whereas Samoa had 9 workers, and Solomon Islands had 13.<sup>266</sup> In other PICTs, islands have smaller numbers of staff due to their small size. For example, in Tokelau, the Tokelau Division of Environment has one individual per island monitoring water quality.<sup>267</sup> The standard number is 10 per 1,000 workers, meaning that islands with bigger populations, such as Fiji are understaffed. These findings contribute to the lack of progress made towards meeting the SDG targets for WASH in the region.

The 2019 GLAAS<sup>268</sup> report on Fiji highlights that though human resources assessment for urban drinking water, urban and rural sanitation were undertaken, however, there is no comprehensive capacity gap analysis available for rural water and hygiene. The report also notes that there is insufficient financial resources to implement the plan, and that the available capacity is insufficient from what is needed. The Fiji situation in many ways is illustrative of the capacity situation in several PICTs. A comprehensive approach with a sectoral capacity gap assessment and systematic prioritization and mobilization of resources will be required to meet the demand for achieving WASH as per SDGs.

### *Equity*

The support and strengthening of local community participation is a means of implementation of SDG target 6 (as 6a) and is a necessary means for the improvement of water and sanitation management.

The lack of data about menstrual hygiene management and WASH for children with disabilities is an information gap impacting on equity in the WASH sector. Disaggregated data is essential to support development of programmes for children from these vulnerable groups. Menstruating girls may miss out on education due to poor menstrual hygiene management and children with disabilities may be unable to use facilities without additional support or accommodation.<sup>269</sup> In a study looking at menstrual hygiene management, facilities were found to be inadequate to meet the needs of a

<sup>264</sup> UN-WATER Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS), 2018/2019.

<sup>265</sup> UN-WATER Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS), 2018/2019.

<sup>266</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019). Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>267</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, Benchmarking Report 2020: 10 years of Performance Improvement Recorded (2009–2019), p.26. Available at: <http://www.pwwa.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PWWA-10-years-of-improvement-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>268</sup> UN Water WHO “UN-Water global analysis and assessment of sanitation and drinking-water (GLAAS)” 2019 report. Available at: <https://www.unwater.org/publications/un-water-glaas-2019-national-systems-to-support-drinking-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-global-status-report-2019/> 23 August 2019

<sup>269</sup> See e.g. UNICEF. Supporting the Rights of Girls and Women through Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in the East Asia and Pacific Region: Realities, progress and opportunities, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), Bangkok, Thailand, 2016. Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/eapro/MHM\\_Realities\\_Progress\\_and\\_OpportunitiesSupporting\\_opti.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/eapro/MHM_Realities_Progress_and_OpportunitiesSupporting_opti.pdf)

menstruating woman and girl in the Solomon Islands, while standards were slightly higher in Fiji.<sup>270</sup> Overall, the limited data has the potential to perpetuate inequity within the WASH sector.

Community-involvement is important to achieve SDG6, specifically as SDG 6.B encourages the support and strengthening of the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management. Although there is some involvement of local communities across the PICTs, there remain challenges for vulnerable groups, including women, in the engagement with decision-making. For example, women are not generally involved in community level decision-making related to WASH in Solomon Islands. However, several PICTs are working on community participation. For example, in Niue the government engages with several groups across the island, including village councils, church councils, school children, and women groups<sup>271</sup> which leads to the involvement of the community in decision-making. Similarly, Fiji is reported to be reviewing current policies as a result of gaps noticed in data on community and user participation, following its participation in the 2018/2019 GLAAS report.<sup>272</sup> With leading role in the region, it is expected that other PICTs may follow.

### *Data, information and research*

The majority of the PICTs have participated in benchmarks for measuring WASH indicators over the years, including efforts in national monitoring. This means global estimate programmes, such as JMP, are able to draw on the available information and data to provide estimates on WASH indicators for the region.

Data gaps are a significant barrier to the implementation of WASH rights for children in the region. Some of the PICTs lack data in several areas of WASH, and sometimes where available it lacks disaggregation and comprehensiveness. Without data, it is not possible to determine trends and patterns, and to understand underlying causes or concerns, threats and opportunities.

There is a need to enhance existing data and monitoring initiatives and improve reporting. All 14 PICTs have implemented or are currently in the process of implementing Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), which have several WASH-related indicators.<sup>273</sup> Results from these surveys and comparisons drawn between countries will further enhance the quality of data on WASH in the region.

The need to enhance existing monitoring initiatives and frameworks is critical, as data collection through individual studies and surveys is expensive and irregular. If critical SDG aligned indicators can be embedded within existing country owned monitoring systems, data is likely to be more regular, cheaper to gather and more sustainable to monitor over the longer term.

### *Regional partnerships*

There are several regional partnerships, alliances and working groups centred around improving access to water, sanitation and hygiene and associated goals. These partnerships provide the space for regional support and collaboration between the 14 PICTs, such that they are enablers for the

<sup>270</sup> Burnet Institute, *The Last Taboo: Research on menstrual hygiene management in the Pacific: Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea*, 2017. Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/the-last-taboo-research-menstrual-hygiene-management-pacific-project-report.pdf>

<sup>271</sup> Niue Water Steering Committee, *Communication Strategy 2010-2013*. Available at: [https://library.sprep.org/sites/default/files/Niue\\_Communications\\_Strategy.pdf](https://library.sprep.org/sites/default/files/Niue_Communications_Strategy.pdf)

<sup>272</sup> UN-WATER *Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS)*, 2018/2019, p.76.

<sup>273</sup> UNICEF, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in the Pacific, 2021*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/stories/multiple-indicator-cluster-survey-pacific>

improvement of WASH policies and collaboration. In particular, the following partnerships are active across the PICTs:

- The **Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP)** provides high level strategic guidance on climate and disaster resilience, including through the proposed development of a Regional Engagement Strategy on Water Security and Resilience by a Technical Working Group on Water Security.
- **Pacific Health Ministers** meet biennially and are active in progressing the Healthy Islands vision to “take action to ensure universal access to safe water and sanitation”, including through the development of a Pacific Strategy on WASH for Health with the support of Heads of Health.
- The **Pacific Water and Wastewater Association (PWWA)** supports the capacity of its 31 water utility members to provide sustainable water and wastewater services, including through the convening of annual conferences and Ministerial meetings.
- The **Pacific Meteorological Council (PMC)** and convene a hydrology technical panel that advises on how to best support national capacities to collect and manage information essential to the management of water resources and water-related risks.
- The **Pacific Partnership for Atoll Water Security** is a registered partnership of eight atoll-based PICTs supported by SPC to share local knowledge and approaches to better anticipate, prepare for and withstand the impacts of drought.
- The **Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility (PRIF)** is a multi-partner coordination and technical assistance facility that includes a working group on water and sanitation to support information sharing and coordination of relevant development partner activities.
- Regional and National **WASH Clusters** are active in supporting the coordination of WASH-related disaster response at the national and sub-national levels amongst WASH Cluster partners and other actors outside the WASH Cluster.
- **Sanitation and Water for All (SWA)** is a UN-hosted global partnership of governments, civil society and development partners supporting high-level action towards meeting SDG6, currently including membership of from PNG and Fiji.

While the above partnerships are making a difference to the efforts of countries and partners, there remains a gap in ensuring that the critical learnings of partnerships such as these are communicated to leaders at all levels. There is potential scope to consolidate and align some of these partnerships around common objectives and initiatives to achieve high levels of political support and prioritization of water and sanitation across PICTs. There is also potential scope to ensure that national WASH financing strategies are considered in order to mobilize partnerships and leverage resources for improvements and universal coverage of WASH in communities, schools, and HCFs.

### 3.6 Recommendations

- Strengthen implementation of climate resilient WASH policies and strategies through ongoing and systematic support.
- Improve evidence generation, including by ensuring that regional and national monitoring systems produce regular and quality data, and the inclusion of schools and health care facilities in prioritisation and planning of data gathering of WASH indicators.
- Accelerate WASH services in institutions, including by prioritizing the provision of WASH in Schools and WASH in HCFs in countries where there is need.
- Improve government leadership and policy commitment on supporting real time monitoring of WASH indicators including MHM indicators in schools.

- 
- Support development of a national WASH in Schools Implementation Plan which includes strategies for securing political and financial support and partnerships for scaling up WASH in Schools.
  - Advocate for allocation of national budgets for subsidising WASH school improvement plans and for rolling out of WASH in Schools Tool Kits throughout the 14 PICTs.
  - Support governments of the PICTs to come up with a costed plan for improvement of WASH in HCFs including fundraising for both financial & human resources to support implementation of planned interventions.
  - Develop a regional action-plan to tackle inequalities in access to water services between rural and urban areas.
  - Promote the adoption and implementation of WASH policies and implementation plans on WASH to enable scaling of Sustainable WASH services in the region.
  - Develop strategies for regional-wide training and capacity building of staff for improving water quality monitoring and surveillance at source and distribution points.
  - Support governments to ensure that national WASH policies respond to WASH needs to reach the most vulnerable, with support to strengthening climate resilient WASH services in communities, schools and health care facilities.
  - Improve and strengthen emergency preparedness and response through the inclusion of COVID-19 responses and climate resilient solutions.
  - Strengthen global and regional partnerships, such as the Pacific Community which supports the strengthening of water security and scarcity.



## 4. Education

### 4.1 Introduction

The right to education is a fundamental human right, enshrined in Articles 28 and 29 of the CRC. Ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), in recognition of the fact that “*education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escaping poverty.*”<sup>274</sup> SDG 4 is comprised of 10 specific targets to be met by 2030, including: ensuring universal access to free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education (SDG 4.1) ensuring quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education for all (SDG 4.2); eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education (SDG 4.5); and substantially increasing the supply of qualified teachers (4.C).

In addition to these rights and targets, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES) Comprehensive School Safety Framework sets out three essential and interlinking pillars for effective disaster and risk management: safe learning facilities; school disaster management and risk reduction and resilience education.<sup>275</sup> These pillars should also guide the development of the education systems in the Pacific, in light of the natural disaster and climate risks faced by PICs.

All PICs are members of the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF), a regional initiative designed to support states to improve the quality of their education systems through enhanced regionalism and mutually beneficial partnerships with regional institutions. The Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018 – 2030 was adopted by the Forum Education Ministers in 2018. It puts forward a regional education agenda aligned with SDG 4 and other global education development agendas.

This chapter provides an update of the situation of education access, quality and outcomes across the Pacific and the key bottlenecks and enablers faced by PICs in meeting the SDGs.

### 4.2 Update

#### *Access, quality and outcomes*

##### Early Childhood Education (ECE)

In the majority of countries, early childhood education is offered to children for two years, starting at age 3. However, in some of the PICTs, including Tonga and Vanuatu, ECE starts a year later, when the child is aged 4. The differences in the age of admission as well as other differences in the administration of ECE and gaps in the data collected in each country, make it difficult to compare

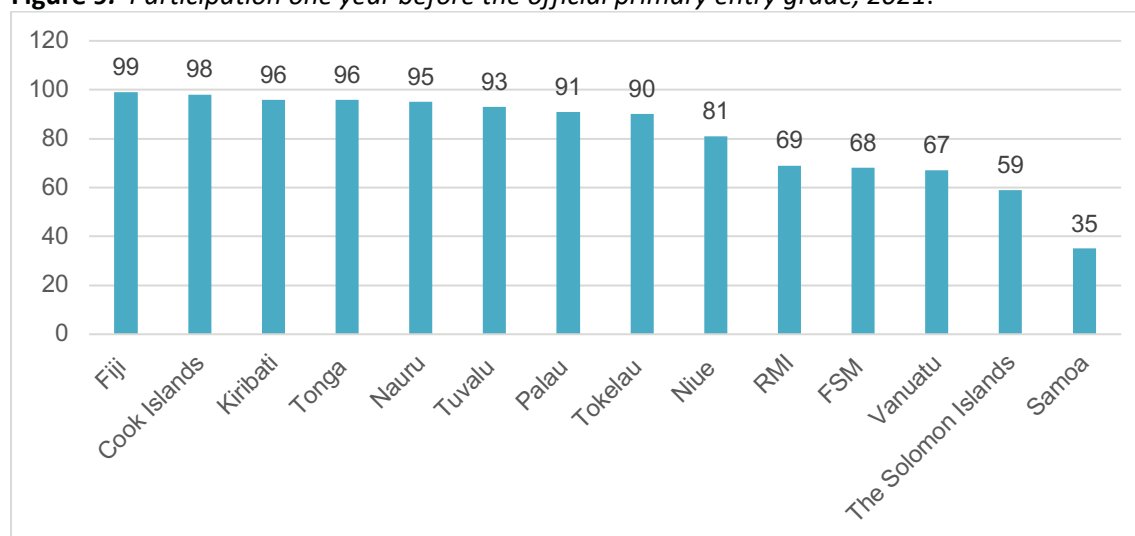
<sup>274</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Quality Education, webpage: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/> [accessed 6.5.22].

<sup>275</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster and Risk Reduction and Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector, *A global framework in support of The Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector and The Worldwide Initiative for Safe Schools*, January 2017, <[https://www.unisdr.org/files/51335\\_cssbooklet2017updated.pdf](https://www.unisdr.org/files/51335_cssbooklet2017updated.pdf)>

enrolment rates between PICTs. However, it is possible to determine the level of participation in ECE one year before the start of the official primary school age<sup>276</sup> (SDG 4.2.2).<sup>277</sup>

As can be seen in Figure 36 below, Fiji, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Tonga, Nauru, Tuvalu, Palau and Tokelau, all have participation rates higher than 90 per cent, signalling that the large majority of children enter primary school equipped with early years education experience (contributing to SDG 4.2.2).<sup>278</sup> It should be noted that in Tonga, while only 2.7 per cent of children were attending ECE in the year prior to primary entry age in 2019, 94 per cent of children in that age group were already attending primary school, leaving only 3.3 per cent out of school<sup>279</sup> and leading to an adjusted<sup>280</sup> participation rate of 96.7 per cent.<sup>281</sup> At only 35 per cent, Samoa is lagging behind for this indicator, with less than half the proportion of children attending ECE than the 7 highest performing PICTs.<sup>282</sup>

**Figure 9: Participation one year before the official primary entry grade, 2021.**



<sup>276</sup> This indicator used to measure the proportion of children who participate in one or more organised learning programmes, including programmes that offer a combination of education and care (defined as ‘a coherent set or sequence of educational activities designed with the intention of achieving pre-determined learning outcomes or the accomplishment of a specific set of educational tasks’) The age range used to calculate the indicator will vary depending on the official primary entry age in each PICT. The indicator has the benefit of capturing a broad range of pre-primary education formats, but is limited by the fact that it doesn’t account for variations intensity of the programme, particularly the number of hours children attend per week. Global SDG Indicator Platform, available at: <https://sdg.tracking-progress.org/indicator/4-2-2-participation-rate-in-organized-learning/>.

<sup>277</sup> 4.2.2 Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex.

<sup>278</sup> 4.2.2 Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex

<sup>279</sup> Tonga Statistics Department. 2020. Tonga Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Survey Findings Report. Nuku’alofa, Tonga: Tonga Statistics Department, p. 207.

<sup>280</sup> The ratio is termed “adjusted” since it also includes children attending primary education. All children age one year before official primary school entry age (at the beginning of the school year) are included in the denominator.

<sup>281</sup> Tonga Statistics Department. 2020. Tonga Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Survey Findings Report. Nuku’alofa, Tonga: Tonga Statistics Department, p. 207.

<sup>282</sup> Pacific Community, Educational Quality and Assessment Programme, *A sector analysis based on internationally comparable statistics*, SPC EQAP, Suva, 2021, p 11. Available at: <https://pacref.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Status-of-Pacific-Education-Report-2020.pdf>.



**Source:** Kiribati;<sup>283</sup> Tonga;<sup>284</sup> Vanuatu (2018);<sup>285</sup> remaining countries.<sup>286</sup>

Figure 37, below, displays available gross and net enrolment rates (GER<sup>287</sup> and NER<sup>288</sup>) across the region, though it should be noted these data are collected from different sources and for different years, limiting meaningful comparison. Tuvalu has consistently outperformed its fellow PICTs, culminating in a NER of 88 per cent in 2020.<sup>289</sup> Cook Islands had a similarly high NER (86 per cent) and GER (87 per cent) in 2020, and minimal differences between the two suggest a very low rate of under / over age enrolment at ECE level. Of concern are rates for Samoa, RMI and Fiji, all of which had a NER of lower than 40 per cent in 2020.

In Samoa, it is possible low enrolment is linked to parental concerns over the measles epidemic in 2019, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and challenges with enforcing the mandatory enrolment of four-year-olds in accordance with new education legislation. In Fiji, it should be noted that official enrolment figures do not take account of the community-based ECE centres that are neither attached nor associated with a primary school, as these do not provide data through the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS) (this is likely to explain the disparity between Fiji's high participation rate, above, and low enrolment rates). Explanations for the low uptake are less clear in the RMI. All three countries are taking steps to address barriers to enrolment at ECE level.

It is likely the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced children's ECE participation in some of the PICTs. In FSM, for instance, it is assumed the significant drop in ECE NER from 62 per cent 2019 to 50 per cent in 2020 was due to parental concerns over COVID-19.

**Figure 37:** GER and NER for Pacific Island States, multiple years.

<sup>283</sup> UNICEF, MICS Kiribati Education Fact Sheets, Analyses for learning and equity using data from Kiribati Development Indicator Survey 2018–2019 (as part of the global MICS initiative), MICS-EAGLE, 2021.

<sup>284</sup> Tonga Statistics Department. 2020. Tonga Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Survey Findings Report. Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Tonga Statistics Department, p. 207.

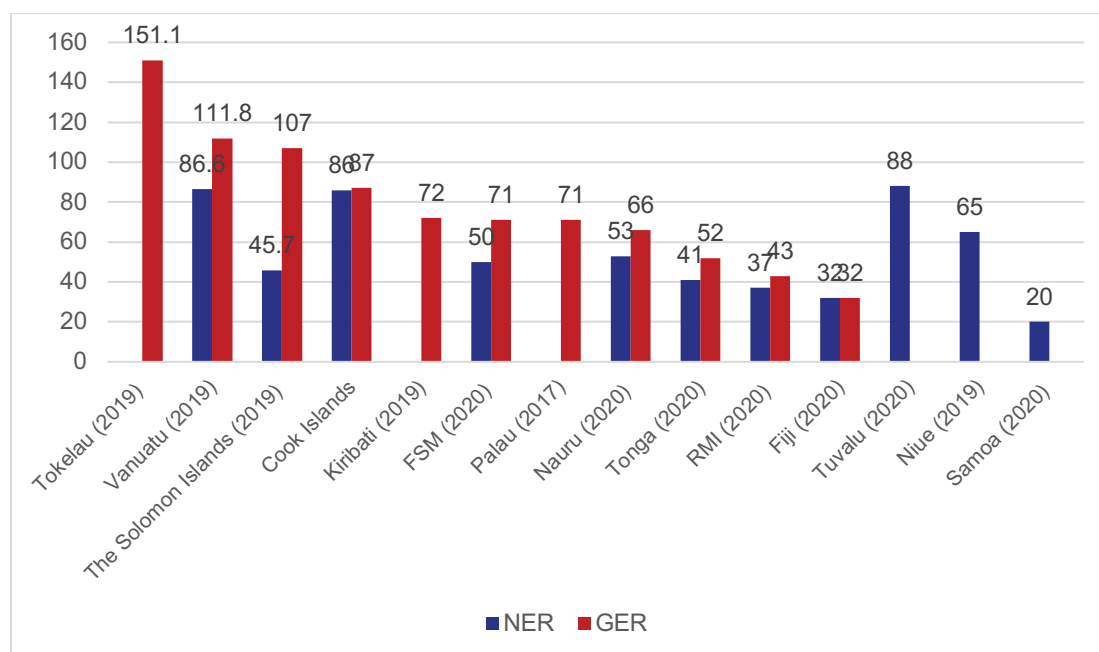
<sup>285</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 4 in the Commonwealth: Status Update Report, 2018, p. 35

<sup>286</sup> Pacific Community, Educational Quality and Assessment Programme, *A sector analysis based on internationally comparable statistics*, SPC EQAP, Suva, 2021, p 11. Available at: <https://pacref.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Status-of-Pacific-Education-Report-2020.pdf>.

<sup>287</sup> The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is the total number of pupils in a level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population of children of the official school age of that level of education. In countries where children are enrolled late, and overage or underage enrolment is common, the GER can exceed 100 per cent.

<sup>288</sup> The Net Enrolment Rate (NER) is the number of children enrolled in a particular level of education, who fall within the official age-group for that level of education, expressed as a percentage of the total population of children in that age group. The NER is a useful indicator to monitor progress in education participation, because it excludes students who are over the age of official enrolment in a particular level or year of school.

<sup>289</sup> The Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) from nationally supplied data.



Sources: Palau<sup>290</sup>; Tonga<sup>291</sup>; Vanuatu<sup>292</sup>; FSM<sup>293</sup>; Tuvalu<sup>294</sup>; Fiji<sup>295</sup>; Nauru<sup>296</sup>; RMI<sup>297</sup>; Samoa;<sup>298</sup> The Solomon Islands;<sup>299</sup> Kiribati;<sup>300</sup>

There is limited data on learning outcomes at ECE level across the region. In Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu, the early Human Capability Index (eHCI) provides a measure of the development of children in the years before they enter primary school across eight dimensions of development (below). Results highlight inadequate outcomes across the majority of indicators, particularly numeracy and formal literacy (both reading and writing), demonstrating a clear need for improvement in early educational standards in the countries assessed. Tonga and Samoa do not have disaggregated reading and writing scores, but their combined formal literacy scores were very low, at 0.44<sup>301</sup> and 0.39,<sup>302</sup> respectively. In Samoa and Kiribati, results revealed statistically significant differences across all domains of development between children who had and had not attended preschool. In other

<sup>290</sup> Calculated from: enrolment data from: Republic of Palau, Ministry of Education, *Educational Statistical Yearbook 2017*, 2017 and Pacific Community (SPC) Population Estimates.

<sup>291</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), based on nationally supplied data.

<sup>292</sup> Ministry of Education & Training, Vanuatu, *Education Statistics Report 2019*, p. 20.

<sup>293</sup> Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) National Department of Education (NDoE), *FSM Education Indicators November 2020*, Version 3.

<sup>294</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) from nationally supplied data.

<sup>295</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), based on nationally supplied data.

<sup>296</sup> Personal communication (with Secretary of Education) 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

<sup>297</sup> Government of Republic of the Marshall Islands, Ministry of Education, *Marshall Islands Education Management Information System, Education Statistic Digest 2020*, §1.5 p 24.

<sup>298</sup> Unpublished

<sup>299</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) based on nationally supplied data.

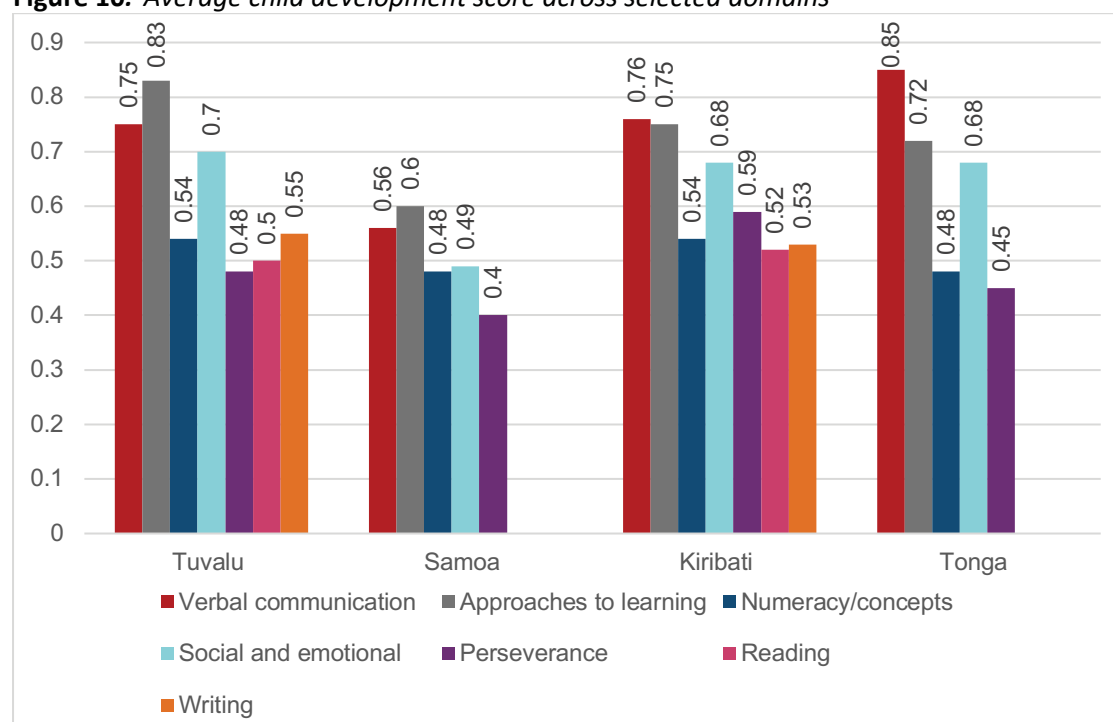
<sup>300</sup> Kiribati Ministry of Education Policy, Planning & Research Division, *Education Sector Analysis*, 2021, p 26.

<sup>301</sup> Brinkman, S. *Early Childhood Development in Tonga: Baseline results from the Tongan Early Human Capability Index*, World Bank Group, 2017, available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED589882.pdf>.

<sup>302</sup>

words, preschool was shown as having a clear and consistent positive influence on children's development.

**Figure 10: Average child development score across selected domains**



Sources: Tuvalu,<sup>303</sup> Samoa,<sup>304</sup> Kiribati,<sup>305</sup> Tonga.<sup>306</sup>

Better outcomes were demonstrated by the Fiji, Kiribati and Tonga MICS 2019. In Kiribati, 80 per cent of children aged 3-4 were developmentally on track.<sup>307</sup> In Fiji, 82.9 per cent were on track. In Tonga, children attending ECE were developmentally on track in the physical skills domain (95.4 per cent on track) and learning (94.1 per cent on track), but less likely to be on track in literacy-numeracy (61.8) and social-emotional (60.0) development.<sup>308</sup> Please refer to section 7 for further detail on early child development.

<sup>303</sup> Brinkman, S. How are Tuvalu's Children Developing? Evidence based policy recommendations for better early childhood development of Tuvaluan Children, World Bank Group, 2017, p 6. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/373411563250298102/pdf/How-are-Tuvalu-s-children-developing-Evidence-based-policy-recommendations-for-better-early-childhood-development-of-Tuvaluan-children.pdf>.

<sup>304</sup> Brinkman, S. Early Childhood Development in Samoa: Baseline results from the Samoan Early Human Capability Index, 2017, available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/32262/Main-Report.pdf;sequence=1>.

<sup>305</sup> Brinkman, S., The Status of Early Childhood Health and Development in Kiribati, Results from a population wide census, 2017.

<sup>306</sup> Brinkman, S. Early Childhood Development in Tonga: Baseline results from the Tongan Early Human Capability Index, World Bank Group, 2017.

<sup>307</sup> MICS measured child development outcomes using a tool called Early Child Development Index (ECDI), a 10-item module which measures developmental status in literacy, numeracy, physical, social-emotional, and learning domains.

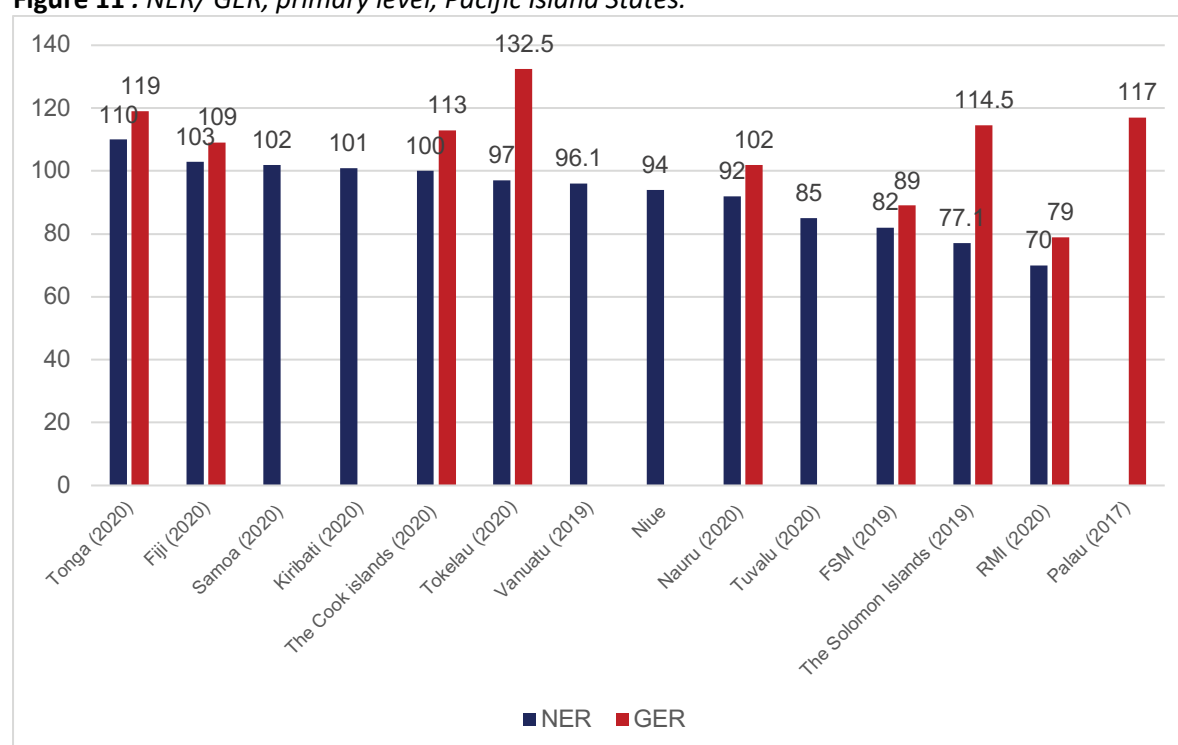
<sup>308</sup> Tonga Statistics Department (TSD), The Tonga Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, p. 202.

## Primary

Primary enrolment rates are high across the region, with NERs at or above 100 in Cook Islands, Fiji Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu, signalling universal access to primary education has been achieved in these countries. The Cook Islands have seen consistently high enrolment rates in recent years, with a NER of 100 per cent since 2015.<sup>309</sup>

As with ECE, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to be the cause of declining primary enrolment rates in certain countries, such as FSM, which saw the primary NER drop from 82 per cent in 2019 to 76 per cent and in 2020.<sup>310</sup> In RMI, GER and NER at primary-school level have steadily decreased from 92 and 82 per cent in 2017<sup>311</sup> to 79 per cent and 70 per cent in 2020.<sup>312</sup>

**Figure 11 :** NER/ GER, primary level, Pacific Island States.



<sup>309</sup> Cook Islands Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Report, 2020, available at:

<http://www.education.gov.ck/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2020-Education-Statistics-Report.pdf>.

<sup>310</sup> Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) National Department of Education (NDoE), FSM Education Indicators November 2020, Version 3.

<sup>311</sup> RMI Ministry of Education, Marshall Islands Education Management Information System, Education Statistic Digest 2020, §1.5 p 24.

<sup>312</sup> RMI Ministry of Education, Marshall Islands Education Management Information System, Education Statistic Digest 2020, §1.5 p 24.

**Sources:** Tonga,<sup>313</sup> Fiji,<sup>314</sup> Samoa,<sup>315</sup> Kiribati,<sup>316</sup> Cook Islands,<sup>317</sup> Tokelau,<sup>318</sup> Vanuatu,<sup>319</sup> Nauru,<sup>320</sup> Tuvalu,<sup>321</sup> FSM,<sup>322</sup> Solomons,<sup>323</sup> RMI,<sup>324</sup> Niue,<sup>325</sup> Palau.<sup>326</sup>

High national enrolment rates mask regional variations in certain countries. In Vanuatu for instance, whilst access to primary education has been increasing and is generally high, there are significant provincial differences in enrolment. Primary NER exceeded 100 per cent<sup>327</sup> in Sanma, Malampa and Tafea provinces, while it was less than 85 per cent in the other three provinces, including Penama where it was lowest (78.7 per cent).<sup>328</sup> In Penama, low enrolment may be linked to the Ambae explosion in 2018 with students subsequently migrating or continuing their education in other provinces.<sup>329</sup>

The relatively close gap between the NER and GER in the majority of countries suggests that most children are enrolled in the primary classes that are intended for their age group. Tokelau and the Solomon Islands are the exception, with significant GER-NER differences indicating a large proportion of under / overage children enrolled at primary level. This is likely to be driven by both late enrolment and high repetition rates in the early grades.

Data on learning outcomes at primary level are more complete than for ECE, with the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) offering the opportunity for regional comparison between participating States. The latest PILNA round (2018)<sup>330</sup> show a general trend of improvement in

<sup>313</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), based on nationally supplied data.

<sup>314</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), based on nationally supplied data.

<sup>315</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), based on nationally supplied data.

<sup>316</sup> UNICEF, MICS Kiribati Education Fact Sheets, Analyses for learning and equity using data from Kiribati Development Indicator Survey 2018–2019 (as part of the global MICS initiative), MICS-EAGLE, 2021.

<sup>317</sup> Cook Islands Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Report, 2020, available at:

<http://www.education.gov.ck/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2020-Education-Statistics-Report.pdf>.

<sup>318</sup> UNESCO UIS. Available at: <http://data.uis.unesco.org>.

<sup>319</sup> Ministry of Education & Training, Vanuatu, Education Statistics Basic Tables 2019, p. 20, available at:

[https://education.gov.vu/docs/statistics/2019%20MoET%20Education%20Statistics%20Report\\_2019.pdf](https://education.gov.vu/docs/statistics/2019%20MoET%20Education%20Statistics%20Report_2019.pdf).

<sup>320</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), based on nationally supplied data.

<sup>321</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) from nationally supplied data.

<sup>322</sup> Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) National Department of Education (NDoE), FSM Education Indicators August 2019, Version 2. Available at: <http://www.national.doe.fm/stats/assessment/>.

<sup>323</sup> Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, *Performance Assessment Report, Solomon Islands Education Statistics Digest*, 2019, p 16, available at:

[http://www.mehrd.gov.sb/MEHRD\\_Documents/Reports\\_2019/PAR-2019-Final-version\\_21.8.20.pdf](http://www.mehrd.gov.sb/MEHRD_Documents/Reports_2019/PAR-2019-Final-version_21.8.20.pdf).

<sup>324</sup> Republic of Marshall Islands, Ministry of Education, Sports and Training (MoEST) / Public School System (PSS), Education Statistics Digest 2020, §1.5 p 24, available at:

[https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/EQAP/Education/Country\\_reports/RMI/RMI\\_Education\\_Digest\\_2020.pdf](https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/EQAP/Education/Country_reports/RMI/RMI_Education_Digest_2020.pdf).

<sup>325</sup> Pacific Community, Educational Quality and Assessment Programme, *A sector analysis based on internationally comparable statistics*, SPC EQAP, Suva, 2021. Available at: <https://pacref.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Status-of-Pacific-Education-Report-2020.pdf>. P. 12

<sup>326</sup> Republic of Palau, Ministry of Education, *Educational Statistical Yearbook 2017*, p 14.

<sup>327</sup> NER exceeds 100 per cent likely due to issues related to population estimates.

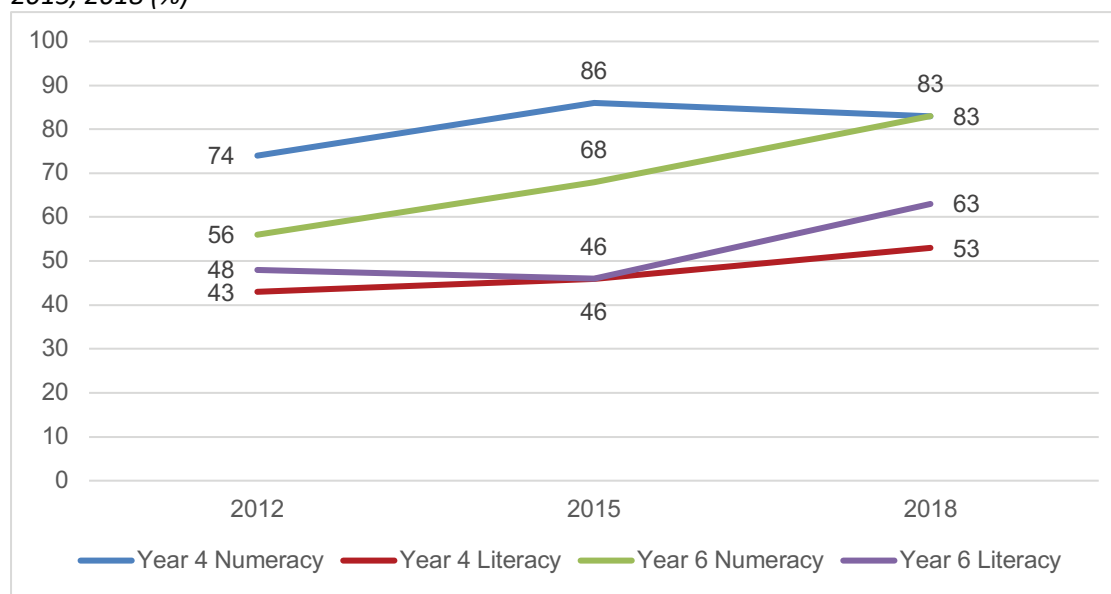
<sup>328</sup> Ministry of Education Training, Education Statistics Report 2019, p. 19.

<sup>329</sup> Ministry of Education & Training, Vanuatu, Education and Training Sector Analysis, p. 28.

<sup>330</sup> administered in all 15 PICTs to more than 40,000 students and 2000 teachers from 926 schools

outcomes, with a greater proportion of children achieving the highest proficiency level in literacy and numeracy compared to previous cycles (2012 and 2015).<sup>331</sup> In addition, the proportion of children failing to achieve the minimum standards has decreased.<sup>332</sup> Despite this, significant proportions of children in both years are failing to meet the minimum standards, particularly in literacy, as is demonstrated in figure 40 below. Girls consistently outperform boys across the region, with 15 per cent fewer boys in Year 4 and 16 per cent fewer boys than girls in Year 6 achieving the expected proficiency in literacy.<sup>333</sup>

**Figure 12:** Proportion of children achieving numeracy and literacy proficiency at Year 4 and 6, 2012, 2015, 2018 (%)



Source: PILNA data, Pacific Community, 2020.<sup>334</sup>

The Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) combined total literacy and numeracy scores from the 2018 PILNA with national Standardised Tests of Achievement results in Year 6, in order to compare outcomes between PICTs.<sup>335</sup> As demonstrated by figure 41, a notably greater proportion of children in Palau were proficient in literacy (98 per cent) and numeracy (98 per cent) by the end of Year 6 than children in any other PICT. Other than Palau and Tokelau, children tend to fare far better in numeracy than literacy in region wide, a trend which is particularly stark in Kiribati, Tonga and Tuvalu, where literacy levels are critically low. The results suggest challenges remain in achieving basic literacy and numeracy skills of primary school students in multiple

<sup>331</sup>Pacific Community, Educational Quality and Assessment Division, Pacific Islands Literacy & Numeracy Assessment 2018 Regional Report, SPC, Suva, Fiji, 2019, available at: <https://eqap.spc.int/sites/default/files/EQAP/Reports/PILNA%20Regional%20Report%202018.pdf>, p 82.

<sup>332</sup>Pacific Community, Educational Quality and Assessment Division, Pacific Islands Literacy & Numeracy Assessment 2018 Regional Report, SPC, Suva, Fiji, 2019, available at: <https://eqap.spc.int/sites/default/files/EQAP/Reports/PILNA%20Regional%20Report%202018.pdf>, executive summary.

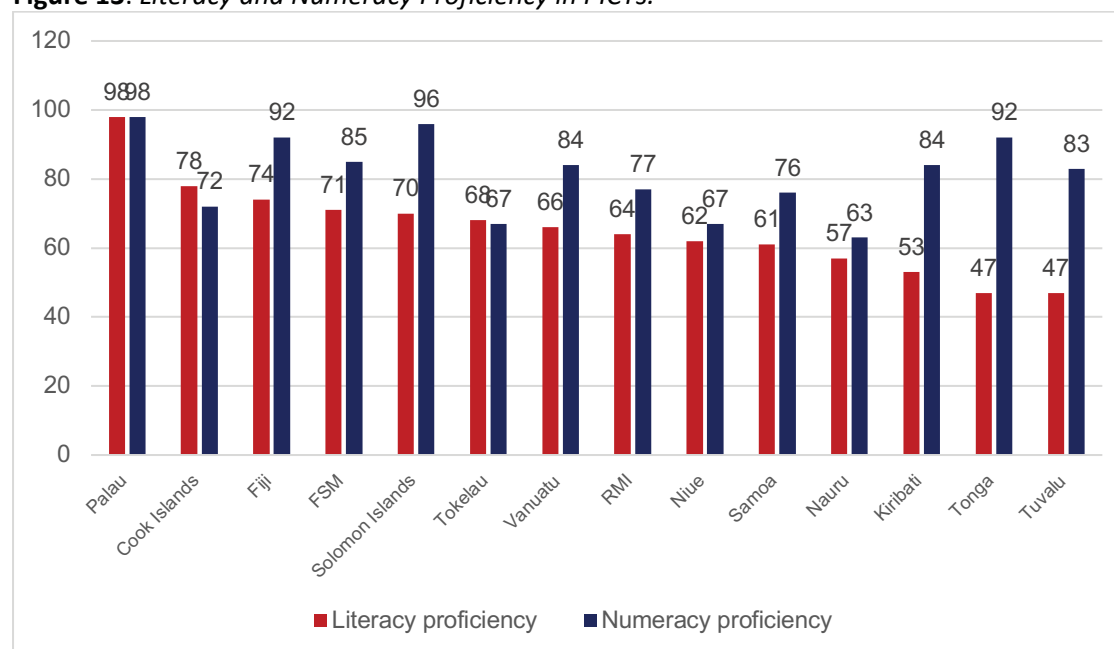
<sup>333</sup> Pacific Community, Educational Quality and Assessment Division, Pacific Islands Literacy & Numeracy Assessment 2018 Regional Report, SPC, Suva, Fiji, 2019, available at: <https://eqap.spc.int/sites/default/files/EQAP/Reports/PILNA%20Regional%20Report%202018.pdf>, p 84.

<sup>334</sup> Pacific Community, Results are in: the state of literacy and numeracy in the Pacific, Suva, 13 February 2020, available at: <https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/2020/02/results-are-in-the-state-of-literacy-and-numeracy-in-the-pacific>.

<sup>335</sup>(defined as 'the percentage of children and young people in Year 6 of primary education who achieve at least a minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics' <https://pacref.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Status-of-Pacific-Education-Report-2020.pdf>, p 14.

PICTs, raising questions about the quality of education being provided at the primary level. Issues of quality, including the qualifications held by and training received by teachers and the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of learners, are addressed in key bottlenecks and enablers section, below. Further research is required to identify and address the underlying causes of poor performance at primary level.

**Figure 13: Literacy and Numeracy Proficiency in PICTs.**



**Source:** Pacific Community, *Educational Quality and Assessment Programme, 2021*.<sup>336</sup>

## Secondary

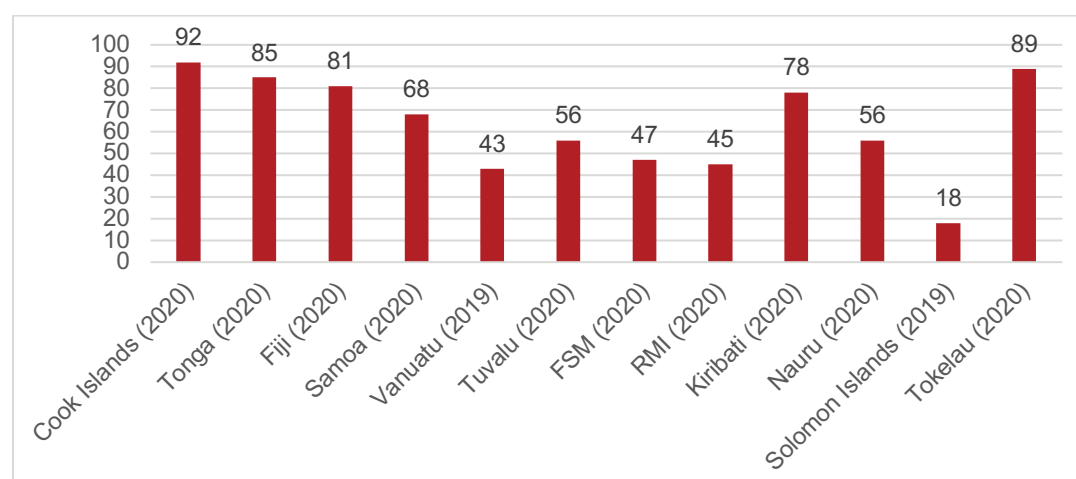
Participation tends to drop at secondary level across the region, often owing to the limited number of secondary schools in PICTs, and their positioning on different islands, meaning children have to board away from their families in order to attend. Tuvalu, for instance, has only two secondary schools (Fetavalu School and Motufoua School) to cater for children across eight inhabited islands. Lower secondary school, which increasingly can be started on the child's home island, has a completion rate of 88.5 per cent but this drops to 52.6 per cent at upper secondary level.<sup>337</sup> There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that attendance rates are low amongst enrolled students,<sup>338</sup> but official data are not available, owing to an absence of monitoring at school level and reporting to central level.<sup>339</sup>

<sup>336</sup> Pacific Community, *Educational Quality and Assessment Programme, A sector analysis based on internationally comparable statistics*, SPC EQAP, Suva, 2021. Available at: <https://pacref.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Status-of-Pacific-Education-Report-2020.pdf>.

<sup>337</sup> Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), Tuvalu 2019-20 Survey Findings Report, July 2021, p. 175.

<sup>338</sup> GoT, *Follow-up of the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, 2019* <http://unohrrls.org/custom-content/uploads/2019/12/Tuvalu-Report.pdf>

<sup>339</sup> Global Partnership for Education, *Cover Note for Covid-19 Accelerated Funding Request, | COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Application Form, 2020*, p 10.

**Figure 14:** *NER at secondary level (in PICTs where data available).*

**Sources:** Cook Islands,<sup>340</sup> Tonga,<sup>341</sup> Fiji,<sup>342</sup> Samoa,<sup>343</sup> Vanuatu,<sup>344</sup> Tuvalu,<sup>345</sup> FSM,<sup>346</sup> RMI,<sup>347</sup> Kiribati,<sup>348</sup> Nauru,<sup>349</sup> Solomon Islands,<sup>350</sup> Tokelau<sup>351</sup>

The Cook Islands and Tonga saw enrolment rates at secondary level remain very high in 2020. However, other PICTs saw secondary enrolment rates drop in 2020, for instance in Tuvalu,<sup>352</sup> Nauru<sup>353</sup>

<sup>340</sup> Analysis of data in: Cook Islands Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Report, 2020, available at: <http://www.education.gov.ck/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2020-Education-Statistics-Report.pdf>.

<sup>341</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), based on nationally supplied data for Tonga.

<sup>342</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), based on nationally supplied data for Fiji.

<sup>343</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) from nationally supplied data for Samoa.

<sup>344</sup> Vanuatu Education Statistics 2019 Basic Tables, p. 20.

<sup>345</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) from nationally supplied data for Tuvalu.

<sup>346</sup> Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) National Department of Education (NDoE), FSM Education Indicators November 2020, Version 3.

<sup>347</sup> Republic of Marshall Islands, Ministry of Education, Sports and Training (MoEST) / Public School System (PSS), Education Statistics Digest 2020, §1.5 p 24, available at: [https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/EQAP/Education/Country\\_reports/RMI/RMI\\_Education\\_Digest\\_2020.pdf](https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/EQAP/Education/Country_reports/RMI/RMI_Education_Digest_2020.pdf).

<sup>348</sup> Kiribati Education Management Information System (EMIS) data 2020. This data has not been validated, therefore there is a possibility of change.

<sup>349</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), based on nationally supplied data for Nauru.

<sup>350</sup> Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, Performance Assessment Report, Solomon Islands Education Statistics Digest, 2019.

<sup>351</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), based on nationally supplied data for Tokelau.

<sup>352</sup> NER dropped from 94 per cent in 2019 to 56 per cent in 2020 (SPC EQAP PacRef Dataset Nauru).

<sup>353</sup> In Nauru, GER has seen a steady increase over the last 5 years, with a sharp decline observed in 2020,<sup>353</sup> and the number of children identified as out of school children (OOSC) increasing as a result, from 15 per cent in 2019 to 48 per cent in 2020.<sup>353</sup>



and the Solomon Islands.<sup>354</sup> While a proportion of the drop is likely to be due to the impact of COVID-19 and school closure, enrolment rates were falling in some PICTs prior to the pandemic. In some countries, high enrolment rates mask the fact that children drop out part way through secondary school. In Fiji, the transition rate from primary to lower secondary, as well as the completion rate to the end of lower secondary, were high in 2021, at 99.4 per cent and 94.5 per cent, respectively. A sharp decline appears at upper secondary level (51.5 per cent), signalling that a significant proportion of children drop out in the second half of secondary school. This is supported by the notable disparity in the out-of-school rate at lower secondary level (3.5 per cent) in comparison to upper secondary level (28.2 per cent), and the reduction in net attendance rates between the lower and upper levels (from 82 per cent to 73 per cent).<sup>355</sup>

There is a need for further investigation into the reasons for children not enrolling or dropping out of secondary school, particularly in the later years. In Vanuatu, factors contributing to low participation rates in education include the cost of school fees, the quality of education, class sizes, parental perceptions of education, distance to travel and poor road infrastructure, disability, and the impact of disasters.<sup>356</sup>

Without the equivalent of PILNA at secondary level, student outcomes are measured by national assessments, the results of which are not readily comparable, but indicate very poor outcomes in multiple PICTs. For instance, the 2018 round of Standardised Test of Achievement in Kiribati (STAKi)<sup>357</sup> showed only 26 per cent of Form 2 children (junior secondary level –12-13 years old) met the expected standard for English, 34 per cent met the expected standard for numeracy and 77 per cent for te-Kiribati.<sup>358</sup> Secondary outcomes in Nauru, FSM and RMI are similarly concerning. In FSM, only 27 per cent of Grade 10 students met mathematics benchmarks and 43 per cent met the reading benchmarks in 2018/2019.<sup>359</sup> In Nauru, only 26 per cent of secondary students met numeracy standards in 2019.<sup>360</sup> Data from RMI Standards Assessment Test IV showed very low attainment in the Grade 10 English and Mathematics (24 per cent proficient in English and 11 per cent in Mathematics in 2019) and falling attainment in Grade 12 Mathematics from 37 per cent to 14 per cent proficient from 2015 to 2019. Only around one in four students were reading at the appropriate level for their age and between one in seven and one in nine were proficient in mathematics in 2015 and 2019 respectively.

PICTs are taking steps to address these very low rates of attainment. For instance, in Kiribati, it is hoped that ongoing revisions to the secondary curriculum, aimed at broadening the scope of subjects available, will address poor outcomes, as it has been acknowledged that the academic emphasis of the current curriculum does not meet the needs of all learners nor create pathways to employment. In contrast to many of the PICTs, data from 2021 shows an improvement in achievement in Niue, with 72 per cent of students passing New Zealand's National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). Since the national standard is the same as that taught and examined within New Zealand,

<sup>354</sup> In the Solomon Islands, the junior secondary level, GER decreased from 74.9 per cent in 2016 to 68 per cent in 2019 and NER from 39.8 per cent to 17.7 per cent. However, education Ministry has suggested that these decreases may be partly due to improvements in data quality allowing for more accurate reporting.

<sup>355</sup> Preliminary results of MICS 2021.

<sup>356</sup> Ministry of Education & Training, *Vanuatu Barriers to Education Study*, 2018, p. 9.

<sup>357</sup> The benchmarks were derived from the curriculum skill components and learning outcomes that were determined to be common across the national curricula in 15 Pacific Island countries that join PILNA (SPC/EQAP)

<sup>358</sup> Ministry of Education, Kiribati, "Report of the Standardised Test of Achievement in Kiribati, MoE, 2016-2018.

<sup>359</sup> The National Minimum Competency Standard-Based Test administered in FSM in 2018/19. Results of 2018/19 NMCT is available by accessing: <http://www.national.doe.fm/stats/assessment/>.

<sup>360</sup> Data on literacy standards at secondary level are unavailable. Conference of Commonwealth of Education Ministers (CCEM), *SGD4 Commonwealth Status Update Report*, 2018.

these results indicate that Niue's academic attainment is competitively placed in comparison with the New Zealand children.<sup>361</sup>

## Equity in Education – Access and Achievement

### Gender

Globally, a Gender Parity Index (GPI)<sup>362</sup> between 0.97 and 1.03 indicates parity between the genders. The majority of PICTs have achieved near gender parity in enrolment at primary level, with the exception of Kiribati, where the GPI for NER at primary of 1.05<sup>363</sup> indicates slight gender disparity in favour of girls, and similarly with Samoa, with a primary GPI NER of 1.07.<sup>364</sup> A stronger gender disparity in favour of girls is evident at secondary level in most PICTs. In Tuvalu, for instance, secondary NER in 2020 was 65 per cent for girls, far exceeding the 49 per cent for boys, and leading to a GPI of 1.33 in favour of girls.<sup>365</sup> Although there has been a significant reduction in GPI from greater than 2 in 2015/16, the imbalance at secondary level is one that has persisted over time. In Kiribati in 2020, the GPI for NER at junior secondary and senior secondary level was 1.09 and 1.41, respectively.<sup>366</sup> The same disparity exists in Tonga (1.17),<sup>367</sup> Palau (1.21),<sup>368</sup> FSM (1.14), Vanuatu (1.17), Samoa (1.23)<sup>369</sup> and RMI (1.22).<sup>370</sup>

In terms of academic achievement, girls tend to overall to outperform boys at the primary level region wide, as is demonstrated by the results of the most recent PILNA round, below, in addition to national level learning assessments (see, for example, Cook Islands,<sup>371</sup> Kiribati,<sup>372</sup> Tonga,<sup>373</sup> Tuvalu,<sup>374</sup> and Vanuatu).<sup>375</sup> Available data suggests this disparity in outcomes in favour of girls is one that persists

<sup>361</sup> New Zealand Qualifications Authority, NCEA Annual Summary Report: Attainment by the Numbers 2020, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Publications/stats-reports/NCEA-Annual-Summary-Report-2020.pdf>.

<sup>362</sup> The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is a 'ratio of female to male values of a given indicator. A GPI between 0.97 and 1.03 indicates parity between the genders. A GPI below 0.97 indicates a disparity in favour of males. A GPI above 1.03 indicates a disparity in favour of females.'

<sup>363</sup> Education Management Information System (EMIS) data 2020. This data has not been validated, therefore there is a possibility of change.

<sup>364</sup> Education Management Information System (EMIS) data 2020. This data has not been validated, therefore there is a possibility of change.

<sup>365</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) from nationally supplied data.

<sup>366</sup> Education Management Information System (EMIS) data 2020. This data has not been validated, therefore there is a possibility of change.

<sup>367</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), based on nationally supplied data.

<sup>368</sup> Republic of Palau, Ministry of Education, *Educational Statistical Yearbook 2017*, 2017, p 14.

<sup>369</sup> Data from Pacific Community (SPC EQAP) based on nationally supplied data.

<sup>370</sup> Government of Republic of the Marshall Islands, Ministry of Education, Marshall Islands Education Management Information System, Education Statistic Digest 2020, p 24.

<sup>371</sup> Cook Islands Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Report, 2020, available at: <http://www.education.gov.ck/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2020-Education-Statistics-Report.pdf>.

<sup>372</sup> Ministry of Education Policy, Planning & Research Division, *Education Sector Analysis*, 2021, p 89.

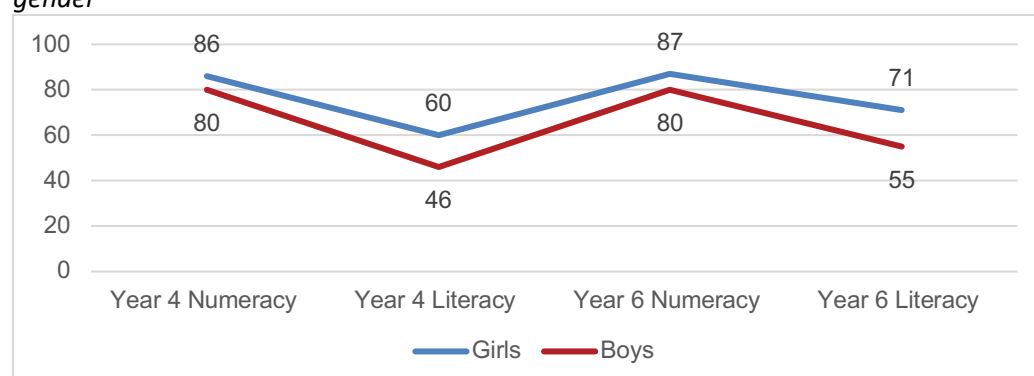
<sup>373</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), based on nationally supplied data.

<sup>374</sup> Tuvalu: Follow-up of the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, p.22, <http://unohrlls.org/custom-content/uploads/2019/12/Tuvalu-Report.pdf>

<sup>375</sup> Ministry of Education & Training, Vanuatu, Education and Training Sector Analysis, p. 134.

into secondary school, for instance in Kiribati,<sup>376</sup> though there is too little gender-disaggregated data to make a region wide assessment.

**Figure 15:** Proportion at or above the minimum expected proficiency level in literacy and numeracy, by gender



Source: The Pacific Community, 2018.<sup>377</sup>

There is very little recent research investigating the causes of gender disparities in access and learning outcomes, but it is likely that social norms and gender expectations have a role to play in causing the differential success in access and outcomes. The ‘Gender counts: sub-regional report for the Pacific’ report suggests that gender stereotypes, such as the perception that girls are better behaved and more studious in comparison boys, may lead to increased teacher attention for girls and, in turn, better outcomes.<sup>378</sup> The same report suggests that the cause of the gender disparities in education favouring girls in Fiji, RMI and Vanuatu, may result from the expectation upon boys to enter the workforce at an early age to provide for the family.<sup>379</sup> In relation to Tuvalu, the World Bank has suggested that gender norms, coupled with a lack of parental supervision, and increased encouragement on girls rather than boys to focus on their school work, may cause disparities in primary school attainment.<sup>380</sup> The Barriers to Education study in Vanuatu conducted in 2018 noted that girls’ completion rate to the end of primary school reduced to a greater extent than it did for boys in 2016, following Tropical Cyclone Pam. In their analysis of this pattern, the report authors suggest this indicates ‘when family income is impacted by external events such as disasters, school fees for boys’ education is still prioritised over girls’.<sup>381</sup>

## Geography

Only a few PICTs have geographically disaggregated enrolment rates, but where data are available they indicate a prominent disparity in favour of urban schools. In Solomon Islands in 2019 for instance,

<sup>376</sup> Kiribati Ministry of Education, Report of the Standardised Test of Achievement in Kiribati conducted in 2015 with Years 4, 6 and 8 students, (STAKI 2015), February 2016, available at:

<https://www.mfed.gov.ki/sites/default/files/2015%20STAKI%20National%20Report%20v1.0.pdf>.

<sup>377</sup> Pacific Community, Educational Quality and Assessment Division, Pacific Islands Literacy & Numeracy Assessment 2018 Regional Report, SPC, Suva, Fiji, 2019, available at:

<https://eqap.spc.int/sites/default/files/EQAP/Reports/PILNA%20Regional%20Report%202018.pdf>.

<sup>378</sup> UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women, ‘Gender counts: sub-regional report for the Pacific’, 2018, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/3616/file/Gender%20Pacific.pdf>, p 78.

<sup>379</sup> UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women, ‘Gender counts: sub-regional report for the Pacific’, 2018, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/3616/file/Gender%20Pacific.pdf>, p 78.

<sup>380</sup> World Bank, World Bank, *TuLEP Project Information Document*, 2020, p 8.

<sup>381</sup> Vanuatu development Service for Ministry of Education & Training, *Vanuatu Barriers to Education Study*, 2018. Available at:

[https://education.gov.vu/docs/policies/20181114%20EN%20Barriers%20to%20Education\\_2020.pdf](https://education.gov.vu/docs/policies/20181114%20EN%20Barriers%20to%20Education_2020.pdf).

there was a nearly 27 percentage point difference in primary NER between Honiara, where enrolment was highest (98.6 per cent), and Guadalcanal province, where it was lowest (71.7 per cent). The difference was even starker for junior secondary, where NER ranged from 70.7 per cent in Honiara to 20.1 per cent in Central province and there was a 24-percentage point gap between Honiara and the province with the next highest NER, Isabel (46.8 per cent).<sup>382</sup> This disparity is likely to be due in part to families from outside Honiara preferring to enrol their children in urban schools for secondary level education. In Tuvalu, where there are only two secondary schools, located on the islands of Funafuti and Vaitupu, students who grow up elsewhere are required to leave their home islands and board for the period of secondary education.

The unavailability of schools in remote areas continues to be a barrier to education for children. In RMI, around one in four teenagers are currently unable to access secondary education within a reasonable daily travel distance from their home, and further anecdotal evidence suggests that internal student migrants (e.g. boarders) are adversely affected by the experience of living in crowded urban areas like Majuro and Ebeye as well as challenges associated with living with extended family.<sup>383</sup>

The remote and dispersed island geography of FSM, with more than 600 islands spread across a longitudinal distance of 2,700km, poses challenges to ensuring an equitable supply of education services, especially for the non-compulsory education levels. Although secondary schools are often equipped with boarding facilities and school feeding programmes to accommodate students from the outer islands and lagoon areas, the capacity of these schools is not enough to accommodate all primary school graduates.<sup>384</sup> Delivering education to a widely dispersed area creates challenges in resource allocation: providing adequate services to the outer island schools consumes a sizable portion of the DoE's annual budget.<sup>385</sup>

There are also notable geographical differences in pupil: teacher ratio within PICTs. Although a low pupil: teacher ratio is positive, in that it allows the teacher to provide more time and attention to each individual student, the teachers recruited to outlying and remote islands are less likely to be fully qualified. In Palau, all but four schools at elementary level have a pupil: teacher ratio of less than 10:1, dropping to an average pupil teacher ratio of 3.3:1 amongst outlying schools.<sup>386</sup> As the school population decreases in line with the overall population (low growth rate and high migration), the ability to fully staff more remote schools with qualified teachers will become harder. In Cook Islands, Schools in the Pa Enea, particularly those in the north, can struggle to recruit and retain sufficient teaching staff, owing to the limited access of this area to goods and services, and isolation. The MoE incentivises these positions by meeting the cost of travel, providing a housing allowance and an annual salary top up of between 7 and 15 per cent (dependent on the island). Even with this, fully staffing these schools is a challenge, as is offering a full curriculum, particularly at secondary level. As a result,

<sup>382</sup> Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, Performance Assessment Report, Solomon Islands Education Statistics Digest, 2019, p 17.

<sup>383</sup> Republic of Marshall Islands, Education Sector Plan, 2020-23, p 69.

<sup>384</sup> Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) Department of Transportation, Communications and Infrastructure (2004) FSM Infrastructure Development Plan FY 2004-2023.

<sup>385</sup> Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) National Department of Education (NDoE) Education Sector Analysis of the Federated States of Micronesia, 2020.

<sup>386</sup> Republic of Palau, Ministry of Education, *Educational Statistical Yearbook 2017*, p 27, [https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitalibrary-docs/files/13/13f302f6cfcdd0a507d427f32299a8f.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=X08z3ytNC0r3bhdO4%2FYH%2BsRJOjYYtociqslJ2v8hXI%3D&se=2022-07-03T15%3A04%3A05Z&sp=r&rsc=public%2C%20max-age%3D864000%2C%20max-stale%3D86400&rsc=application%2Fpdf&rscd=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22Palau\\_Education\\_Statistical\\_Yearbook\\_2017.pdf%22](https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitalibrary-docs/files/13/13f302f6cfcdd0a507d427f32299a8f.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=X08z3ytNC0r3bhdO4%2FYH%2BsRJOjYYtociqslJ2v8hXI%3D&se=2022-07-03T15%3A04%3A05Z&sp=r&rsc=public%2C%20max-age%3D864000%2C%20max-stale%3D86400&rsc=application%2Fpdf&rscd=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22Palau_Education_Statistical_Yearbook_2017.pdf%22).

pupils in remoter areas face a choice: a lesser quality of education but staying at home, or a more comprehensive, higher quality education on Rarotonga, requiring them to live away from home.

Not surprisingly, given the barriers faced by children outside urban areas, available data suggests that children in rural areas are at a disadvantage in terms of academic achievement compared to students in urban areas. In RMI, in the 2019, MISAT outcomes amongst children on outer islands were roughly one third lower than their urban counterparts in Grades 3, 6 and 8.<sup>387</sup>

## Disability

Very few PICTs routinely collect and publish disability disaggregated school enrolment and attendance data. In FSM, in 2019, there were 1,761 students with disabilities enrolled from ECE to Grade 12, accounting to 6.7 per cent of the entire school enrolment in FSM. The Education Data Digest for 2018 reported that 95 per cent of students with disabilities were placed in regular schools.<sup>388</sup> The remaining 5 per cent were either at home or in a special education school center (such as in Kosrae which has a special day-school). In RMI, there were 421 children with a disability enrolled in schools in 2020.<sup>389</sup> With respect to these children's education, evidence suggests little discrepancy between their participation in mainstream school environments and that of children who did not live with disabilities, with 83 per cent of male students with disabilities and 85 per cent of female students spending 80 per cent or more of the day learning in a regular class. In Fiji, in 2021, there were 2,168 (1,394 boys and 774 girls) students with disabilities enrolled in Fiji schools. Of these, 916 (42 per cent) are enrolled in 17 special schools, while the rest are enrolled in 398 mainstream inclusive schools.<sup>390</sup>

Promoting Inclusive Education (IE) is high on the agenda for governments across the region, and the majority of PICTs have either explicitly legislated against discrimination in enrolment or attendance on the basis of disability (such as in Cook Islands and Tokelau) and/or introduced supplementary policies on IE. Most recently, during 2020/21, the Tuvaluan government developed a Disability Inclusive Education Policy which is intended to be followed by a supporting policy framework (guidelines) and implementation plan.

Some PICTs have taken concrete steps towards implementation of inclusive education policies, such as in Tokelau, where inclusive education is embedded in the Ministry's annual plan and is operationalized through an inclusive education policy implementation plan and in Cook Islands, where the Education Ministry's budget includes financial support for advocacy, teacher aides, training, assistive technologies and itinerant specialist support as well as a full time Advisor for Inclusive Education based at the MoE to coordinate services and support. Other PICTs have been slower to implement inclusive education policies and plans. In Vanuatu, the MoET has developed an Inclusive Education Policy (2010 - 2020), and inclusive education priorities are included in the annual plan and in Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Plan 2020-2030. However, there is no budget allocated for inclusive education. Stakeholders also report that although inclusive education is an important agenda, it is not sufficiently reflected in existing policies.<sup>391</sup> In Tonga, although an Inclusive Education

<sup>387</sup> Government of Republic of the Marshall Islands, Ministry of Education, Marshall Islands Education Management Information System, Education Statistic Digest 2019, p. 22 (Note: Higher levels were not included in this analysis)

<sup>388</sup> Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) National Department of Education (NDoE), Education Data Digest 2017/18, 2018.

<sup>389</sup> Government of Republic of the Marshall Islands, Ministry of Education, Marshall Islands Education Management Information System, Education Statistic Digest 20, §7.1, p.113

<sup>390</sup> 2021 enrolment data shared by the Special Education Unit of the Ministry of Education.

<sup>391</sup> UNICEF and Regional Taskforce on Inclusive Education, Pacific Regional Review on Inclusive Education, 2020-2021 (draft Report), p. 63

policy framework was put in place in 2007, the need for better care and support for vulnerable people and disabled children particularly has been identified.<sup>392</sup>

Many PICTs have mandatory training on inclusion in pre-service programmes, though the proportion of practicing teachers who report regular professional development in this area ranges vastly. In Tokelau and Fiji, 90 per cent<sup>393</sup> and 80 per cent<sup>394</sup> of teachers, respectively, are reported to have participated in in-service training on inclusive education at least once a year, which is very high in comparison to other PICTs such as Cook Islands (45 per cent),<sup>395</sup> FSM (40 per cent),<sup>396</sup> Samoa (10 per cent) and, notably, Tuvalu, where only 5 per cent (2020) of practicing teachers report participating in in-service training on inclusion.<sup>397</sup> Despite increasing inclusive education training for teachers, the classroom pedagogy to fully support inclusion is not fully embedded or practiced in all PICTs. In Tonga, the pedagogy to support inclusion in the classroom is still emerging with many teachers finding it new and challenging.<sup>398</sup>

In Vanuatu, although a number of teachers have been trained in making adaptations to their lessons to suit the needs of children with disabilities, for the most part teachers lack this knowledge and do not understand the learning needs of children with different type of disabilities.<sup>399</sup> In addition, there are very few resources for children with disability who continue to face disability-related barriers including physical access to school facilities, teaching inclusion and curriculum inclusion, discrimination.<sup>400</sup> In Tonga, a number of further steps are needed for inclusion to be a reality. These include improving access to specialists; support for the transition of children with disabilities from primary to secondary school; developing pathways for children with disabilities who have limited ways of communicating; and improving approaches for learning and assessment for students with disabilities.<sup>401</sup>

### Socio-economic Status

No data are available on educational access and learning outcomes of children coming from different wealth quintiles in Cook Islands, FSM, Palau, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Vanuatu.

In Kiribati, while socio-economic status is not strongly related to access to education at ECE and primary levels, it is strongly related to attendance at junior and senior secondary level. While there is only a 2 percentage point difference in the adjusted net attendance rate (ANAR)<sup>402</sup> between children in the lowest wealth quintile and the highest wealth quintile at ECE level and primary level, the difference increases to 22 percentage points at junior secondary level and 36 percentage points at

<sup>392</sup> Ministry of Finance and National Planning, *Tonga Strategic Development Framework, 2015-2025*, p.69

<sup>393</sup> UNICEF, 2021, 'Inclusive Education Country Profile – Tokelau', pp.3-4.

<sup>394</sup> Fiji Inclusive Education Country Profile, UNICEF 2021, draft.

<sup>395</sup> Data provided by country for 2021 Regional IE Review.

<sup>396</sup> Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Country Profile from Regional Inclusive Education Review, UNICEF 2021(draft).

<sup>397</sup> UNICEF and Regional Taskforce on Inclusive Education, *Pacific Regional Review on Inclusive Education, 2020-2021, (draft report)*.

<sup>398</sup> UNICEF PRIEF and PacREF, *Inclusive Education Country Profile (Tonga), 2021*.

<sup>399</sup> UNICEF and Regional Taskforce on Inclusive Education, *Pacific Regional Review on Inclusive Education, 2020-2021 (draft Report)*, p. 57.

<sup>400</sup> Ministry of Education & Training, *Vanuatu Barriers to Education Study, 2018*, p. 11.

<sup>401</sup> UNICEF PRIEF and PacREF, *Inclusive Education Country Profile (Tonga), 2021*.

<sup>402</sup> Adjusted net enrollment is the number of pupils of the school-age group for primary education, enrolled either in primary or secondary education, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group.

senior secondary level.<sup>403</sup> The learning outcomes for foundational literacy and numeracy measured for children aged 7 to 14 years also shows disparities among the children in the highest quintile and children in the lowest four quintiles. While the proportion of children (aged 7-14 years) in the highest wealth quintile with foundational learning skills in reading is 54 per cent, that of the other four quintiles is 33 per cent, 33 per cent, 27 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively.<sup>404</sup>

In Fiji, while government initiatives such as the removal of school fees, transportation assistance and direct support for children living below certain income thresholds has helped bridge the gap in attendance over the years, there is still a significant gap in the attendance rates and learning outcomes of children from the poorest quintile compared to those in the richest wealth quintile. There is parity in attendance rates at the primary level between children from the poorest and the richest quintiles (1.01), but children from the richest quintile have a higher attendance rate at the secondary level with the disparity increasing between lower (0.91) to upper secondary (0.71).<sup>405</sup>

In Tuvalu, there is evidence to suggest that socio-economic status has a less significant impact on learning outcomes. In the 2016 Tu-eHCI, Tuvalu stood out as an exception amongst least economically developed countries, in that it was the only one for which higher eHCI scores were not observed amongst children born to better educated mothers. Nevertheless, the World Bank has suggested that the indirect costs associated with school attendance (uniforms, stationery, transport, exam fees, etc.) contribute to secondary drop-out rates amongst Tuvaluan students.<sup>406</sup> This suggestion is supported by the recent 2019/20 MICS survey which shows little disparity in net attendance rate<sup>407</sup> by socio-economic status at primary level, but a disparity at secondary level, with a net attendance rate of only 41.2 per cent for students in the bottom 40 per cent of the wealth index compared to 57 per cent for students in the top 60 per cent.<sup>408</sup>

In Samoa, the adjusted net attendance ratio for both primary and secondary level is highest for children in the richest wealth quintile, and lowest for children in the poorest, with a greater disparity at secondary level.<sup>409</sup> However, these disparities are not evident for all measures of education access and completion. Primary school completion rate is comparable for all quintiles, while gross intake to the last grade of lower secondary is highest for the middle quintile (98.7 per cent), followed by the poorest quintile (85.4 per cent) and then the richest quintile (80.9 per cent).<sup>410</sup>

<sup>403</sup> UNICEF, MICS Kiribati Education Fact Sheets, Analyses for learning and equity using data from Kiribati Development Indicator Survey 2018–2019 (as part of the global MICS initiative), MICS-EAGLE, 2021.

<sup>404</sup> UNICEF, MICS Kiribati Education Fact Sheets, Analyses for learning and equity using data from Kiribati Development Indicator Survey 2018–2019 (as part of the global MICS initiative), MICS-EAGLE, 2021.

<sup>405</sup> Fiji Multiple Indicator Cluster Study (MICS) 2021, [https://mics.unicef.org/news\\_entries/199/JUST-RELEASED:-FIJI-2021-PRELIMINARY-RESULTS](https://mics.unicef.org/news_entries/199/JUST-RELEASED:-FIJI-2021-PRELIMINARY-RESULTS).

<sup>406</sup> World Bank, TuLEP Project Information Document, 2020, p 6.

<sup>407</sup> Number of pupils in the official age group for a given level of education who attend school at that level expressed as a percentage of the population in that age group.

<sup>408</sup> Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), Tuvalu 2019-20 Survey Findings Report, July 2021, p 179.

<sup>409</sup> Samoa Multiple Indicator Cluster Study, 2019-2020, p. 301, 313, available at: <https://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/4170>.

<sup>410</sup> Samoa Multiple Indicator Cluster Study, 2019-2020, p. 314, available at: <https://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/4170>.

In Palau, the human development index (HDI) Education Index as of 2020 is 0.855<sup>411</sup> and if adjusted for inequality is calculated as 0.839 which would suggest that socio-economic status does not significantly impact education.<sup>412</sup>

### 4.3 Impact of climate change

The acute vulnerability of PICTs to climate change-induced weather events and natural disasters impacts upon children's access to education. Those living on the low-lying outer islands are particularly vulnerable to climate change-induced displacement due to eroding coastlines and high tides which can disrupt school attendance. School infrastructure is also vulnerable to damage by natural disasters and sea level rise. Tonga is one of the world's most exposed countries to climate change and natural disasters. In 2018, TC Gita, a category 4 system, made landfall on Tongatapu and Eua causing a total damage and loss of T\$19 million in the Education Sector. A Rapid Assessment conducted by the Ministry of Education and Training (MET) found that across Tongatapu and 'Eua, approximately 60 per cent of early childhood education (ECE) centres, 75 per cent of primary schools, 88 per cent of secondary schools, and 56 per cent of tertiary institutes were directly affected.<sup>413</sup> On top of this loss, Tonga suffered devastating damage as a result of the volcano eruption in Tonga on 15 January 2022 and resultant tsunami. Early reports have detailed catastrophic damage to infrastructure across Tonga, with every single school in the country impacted by the eruption, and curriculum materials (including textbooks and notepads) and furniture destroyed beyond use.<sup>414</sup> The disaster has also impacted schools in neighbouring PICTs, including Fiji, where tsunami waves caused significant damage to school infrastructure.<sup>415</sup>

The education sector in other PICTs have also suffered damage due to storms. In 2015, TC Pam, a category-5 cyclone, made landfall in Vanuatu and damaged an estimated 50 to 60 per cent of schools in the country. Children attending severely damaged schools were accommodated in temporary learning spaces (tents) for almost three years. A decline in GER at all levels of education since 2016 is partly attributed to the effects of TC Pam, as well as to a volcanic eruption in Ambae in October 2017 which displaced approximately 11,700 people.<sup>416</sup> Most recently, TC Harold hit Vanuatu, as well as Fiji, Solomon Islands and Tonga, in April 2020, damaging over 1,000 schools in Vanuatu alone.

In 2016, TC Winston, the strongest recorded cyclone in the Pacific crossed the Fiji Islands, again causing devastating damage along its path. It was estimated that 494 schools were damaged or destroyed. Rebuilding of schools after tropical cyclone Winston took more than 3 years. Internal displacement of people, teachers and students has also become more common and prolonged as the severity of cyclones and the consequent damage increases. In April 2020, Fiji experienced TC Harold a level 4

<sup>411</sup> Education index is an average of mean years of schooling (of adults) and expected years of schooling (of children), both expressed as an index obtained by scaling with the corresponding maxima.

<sup>412</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Reports, Palau. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/PLW>.

<sup>413</sup> Tonga Education Cluster Response Plan, Tropical Cyclone Gita, 5 March 2018.

<sup>414</sup> Save the Children, Parents and teachers race to clear ash from schools wrecked by Tonga volcano, News and Press release, ReliefWeb, 25 January 22, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/tonga/parents-and-teachers-race-clear-ash-schools-wrecked-tonga-volcano>.

<sup>415</sup> Movono, L. 'Fiji rebuilds after tsunami damage', 3:10 pm on 20 January 2022, RNZ, available at: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/459874/fiji-rebuilds-after-tsunami-damage>.

<sup>416</sup> Ministry of Education & Training, Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan, 2020-2030, p. 8.



cyclone and in December 2020, TC Yasa a category 5 cyclone inflicted severe damage to more than 123 and 119 schools respectively.<sup>417</sup>

In response to climate induced threats, PICTs have developed a number of national disaster and climate risk reduction policies, plans and legislation, with most either developing or planning to develop sector specific climate change and disaster risk resilience strategy or incorporating strategies to address climate-induced risks into education sector plans. Some PICTs have established emergencies coordination structures, such as the education in emergencies clusters in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Fiji, and the Education Sector Coordination Division (ESCD) in Samoa. In Kiribati, despite the existence of climate risk policies, there is limited centralised planning with regard to disaster preparation, response and recovery. Despite the certainty of continued impact of climate change in Kiribati, the expected impact on the education system has not been analysed or accounted for in education sector planning.

#### 4.4 Impact of COVID-19

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of schools for varying periods across PICTs. Schools in Fiji have seen extended closure periods, first between April and June 2020 and later from April 2021 until January 2022. Some PICTs saw enrolment fall, with COVID-19 assumed to be the cause, such as in Nauru, where there was a marked increase in the number of children identified as out of school children (OOSC), particularly at the secondary level, between 2019 and 2020. In Tuvalu, COVID-19 resulted in many secondary-school boarders returning to their home islands and their subsequent accommodation into larger classes in their local primary school. This has strained the pastoral and educational resources of primary schools. While the majority of schools reopened on 27 April 2020 (with secondary schools following suit on 15 June), hesitancy amongst students and staff over the safety of their return to school constituted a continuing impact on education throughout the remainder of the school year.<sup>418</sup>

PICTs responded by developing national COVID-19 response plan strategies and plans to prepare education systems for the current and future pandemics, focussing on keeping schools safe for children to attend, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children at home, ensuring equity in access to education and creating education systems that are resilient to future disruptions. PICTs have invested in home-based learning and technology, with varying levels of success. In Fiji, it was reported that teachers were given too little time to prepare for homebased teaching and families encountered challenges in the delivery of remote education. In Palau, teachers and students were provided with laptops and tablets and training was put in place for teachers, principals, parents and students on how systems would work. In Samoa, a range of short TV lessons were developed and were both broadcast and made available online. A learning management system (Moodle) has been licenced for schools and considerable training put in place for teachers. Devices for both teacher and student use were procured and provided. The intent is to make the use of IT a part of normal day-to-day classroom learning so if students are required to learn from home during further closures, they will already have a level of familiarity and confidence in learning online.

<sup>417</sup> UNICEF Education COVID-19 Case Study: Fiji and Vanuatu – Responding to overlapping emergencies, 18 November 2020. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lac/en/media/20166/file>.

<sup>418</sup> Global Partnership for Education, *COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Application Form Tuvalu*, 2020, p 15.

## 4.5 Key bottlenecks and enablers

### *Education policy environment*

Education systems in PICTs are administered through a combination of education legislation, education sector plans and strategies, policies on a range of issues (e.g., inclusive education policies, gender equity in education, education in emergencies) and development plans and frameworks, which tend to include the improvement of quality and access to education as a key priority. Recent legislative updates include the Tuvaluan Education Bill, which is currently in the process of being finalised. In addition to its focus on the provision of quality education, the Bill makes specific reference to marginalised groups and implementing its international obligations as part of its purpose. In Solomon Islands, a new Education Bill, the proposed Education Legislative Framework, was due to go before Parliament in late 2021 and, once passed and in force, will lead to significant systemic change to education from ECE up to Year 12. One of the expected changes is a shift towards greater autonomy for local education authorities and school leaders in the management of both schools and teachers.

### *Collection and use of education data*

While all PICTs are investing in the use of a centralized EMIS (education management information system) to replace manual filing systems, the sophistication of national-level systems differs across countries, with some of the most basic systems relying on hard copy data being collected at the school level and sent to the central education office. Other countries such as Fiji and Vanuatu have integrated different data sources and have the capacity to allow students direct access to student-level data such as external exam results.<sup>419</sup>

Most PICTs produce education statistical digest reports based on EMIS data, though the frequency of publications vary between PICTs. In Cook Islands, MoE publishes an annual statistics report, with all reports since 2000 available on the MoE's website. In Tonga, however, the last statistical digest was published in 2014.

Key data collection challenges in Tonga include reliance on paper-based data collection methods in schools, which MET officers have to then input digitally, absence of connectivity between datasets, and siloed responsibility for education data collection (though staff of the EMIS division were transferred from the Ministry to the office of the Minister in 2020 to give some additional focus to this work). In FSM, the ability to monitor progress in education and provide effective support from the state department is hampered by challenges in acquiring reliable data at the school level stemming from insufficient processes and tools for data collection among the four States, as well as late submissions of data between schools and the DoE at national and State levels. This challenge is a particular issue for the outer islands, where modes of data transmission heavily rely on radio and the very few school visits conducted by state department officials.

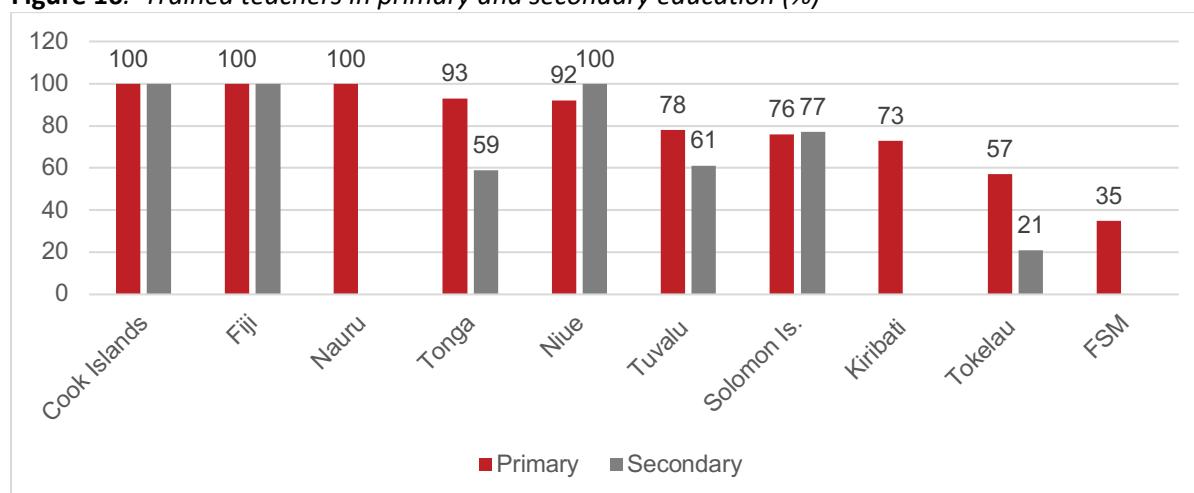
In Solomon Islands, a major limitation of their Education Management Information System (SIEMIS) is that it does not allow education authorities and schools to update information during the year or to access their own data. To address this, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development is currently in the process of transitioning from SIEMIS to an open-source web-based EMIS (Open-EMIS), although initial trials have been delayed due to COVID-19. Once implemented, it is anticipated that Open-EMIS will support more accurate and timely collection and use of data.

<sup>419</sup> Naisoro, T. 'EMIS, a game changer for Pacific education systems,' Pacific Community, Suva. Available at: <https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/blog/2021/03/emis-a-game-changer-for-pacific-education-systems>.

### Quality and capacity of teachers

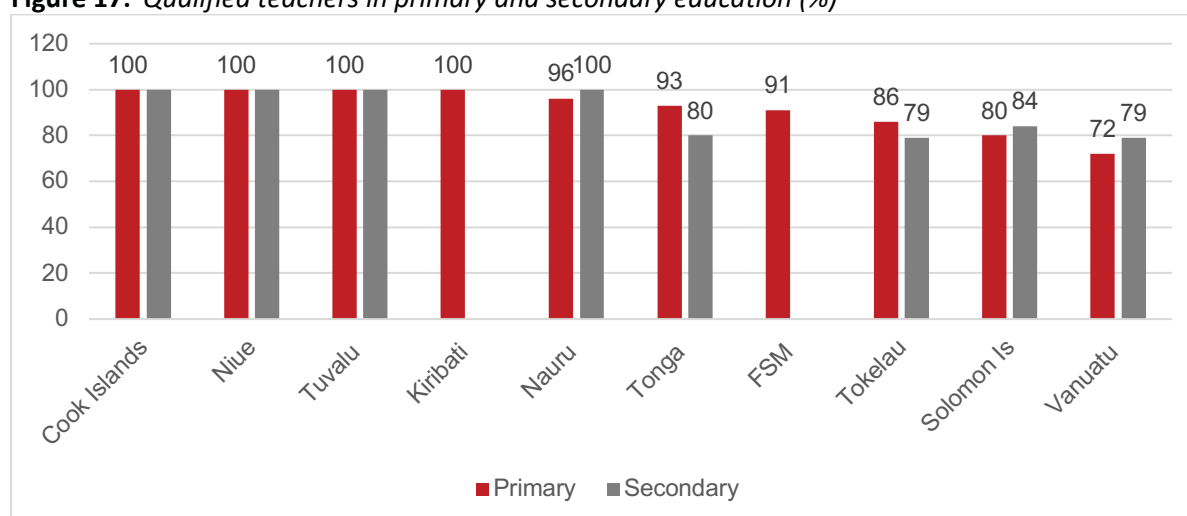
The two main indicators of the quality of teaching are the proportion of teaching workforce that are pedagogically trained and the proportion that are academically qualified. Available data on these indicators for the region are displayed in Figures 44 and 45, below, though the variability of the country-level training requirements and academic qualification requirements significantly limits comparability of these data.

**Figure 16: Trained teachers in primary and secondary education (%)**



Source: Pacific Community, 2021.<sup>420</sup>

**Figure 17: Qualified teachers in primary and secondary education (%)**



Source: Pacific Community, 2021.<sup>421</sup>

In the Cook Islands, there is a requirement that teachers are registered and meet the national teacher standards, and, from 2014 onwards, all teachers required a degree. Practicing teachers who do not have a degree are provided financial support to upgrade their qualifications. They may maintain registration if they are actively working towards their degree. Those that do not successfully complete at least one paper per year are placed on 'provisional registration' or 'limited authority to teach' which

<sup>420</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), *Status of Pacific Education*, 2021, pp 26-27.

<sup>421</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), *Status of Pacific Education*, 2021, pp 28.

limits their opportunity for any management positions or access to other opportunities such as sabbatical.

In Tuvalu, while 100 per cent of the teaching workforce are qualified, significantly fewer have completed the training required to be certified (78 per cent at primary versus 61 per cent at secondary).<sup>422</sup> This disparity between levels is likely to be a reflection of the additional teaching qualification now required for certification at secondary level (previously, secondary school teachers were only required to have a qualification in the area of their teaching). Until 2020, the Tuvaluan and Fijian government had a jointly funded scheme for early retiree Fijian teachers to teach in Tuvalu which allowed for Tuvaluans to travel to Fiji for further study without leaving a vacancy. This scheme has not been operational during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As can be seen, the proportion of trained teachers in Tokelau is vastly lower than other PICTs, especially at secondary level, where less than a quarter (21 per cent) of the teaching workforce are trained. This is despite investment from the Department of Education in capacity building and professional development for teachers and principals.<sup>423</sup> An old report cited the following factors as contributing to the problem: budgetary constraints limiting the availability of professional training opportunities; teachers being unable to attend training courses on different atolls (due to expense and inconvenience).<sup>424</sup> For female teachers, it was suggested that childcare responsibilities get in the way of teachers professional development.<sup>425</sup> In the absence of recent evidence on the causes of the persistently low rates of training, it is assumed some of these challenges may have persisted over time.

Pupil:teacher ratios impact upon the quality of education delivered as they dictate the amount of time and attention the teacher is able to dedicate to each individual student. Pupil:teacher ratios vary greatly between PICTs. The highest is Nauru, where the average ratio across levels of 35:1 creates a stress on the system in case any teacher is absent due to sickness. At primary level in particular, class sizes are reaching critical levels, with a PTR of 43:1 in many classrooms. The PTR at ECE and secondary level is 21:1 and 37:1 respectively.<sup>426</sup> The Department of Education in Nauru is seeking to attract new national teachers and retain existing or former teachers (as most teachers come from Fiji through regional recruitment), though COVID-related restrictions are impeding this strategy. In contrast, RMI has impressively low pupil:teacher ratios for the region, standing at 10:1 in primary schools and 8:1 in secondary schools, however these ratios quickly change when accounting for only qualified or certified teachers. At primary school level, there are 16 pupils for every qualified teacher and 22 for every certified teacher. For secondary education, the ratio stands at 12:1 for both certified and qualified teachers.<sup>427</sup>

<sup>422</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), *Status of Pacific Education*, 2021, pp 26-27.

<sup>423</sup> Tokelau Government, Department of Education. Available at: <https://www.tokelau.org.nz/Tokelau+Government/Government+Departments/Department+of+Education.html/>.

<sup>424</sup> Swain, P. Ulu, A. rethinking Tokelau Education, Tokelau and the role of New Zealand Volunteers, July 2000-June 2010.

<sup>425</sup> Swain, P. Ulu, A. rethinking Tokelau Education, Tokelau and the role of New Zealand Volunteers, July 2000-June 2010.

<sup>426</sup> Personal communication, Department of Education, 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

<sup>427</sup> Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) Ministry of Education, Sports and Training (MoEST) / Public School System (PSS), Education Statistics Digest 2020, 4.1, available at: [https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/EQAP/Education/Country\\_reports/RMI/RMI\\_Education\\_Digest\\_2020.pdf](https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/EQAP/Education/Country_reports/RMI/RMI_Education_Digest_2020.pdf).

## School infrastructure

PICTs require significant investment in school infrastructure to drive down class sizes and ensure all students can be comfortably accommodated in school. In Nauru, more classrooms are also needed, in order to reduce class sizes to levels that will allow for the equitable provision of quality learning and teaching. In Vanuatu, current secondary school infrastructure is insufficient to accommodate all students of secondary school age, contributing to lower enrolment rates at the secondary level.<sup>428</sup> Some classrooms are constructed using local or traditional materials, such as bamboo and thatch, while many others are semi-permanent structures which are largely not cyclone-resistant.<sup>429</sup> More recent infrastructure projects have focused on constructing cyclone-resistant classrooms following Ministry of Education and Training guidelines, including a number of projects since 2015 related to TC Pam recovery efforts.

According to the FSM Infrastructure Development Plan 2004-2023, public elementary and secondary schools are generally poorly maintained with lack of power and water supplies. Many schools, particularly in Chuuk State, are in a severely deteriorated condition. There are severe shortages of school furniture, blackboards or whiteboards, wall maps, equipment, tools, utensils and books. These shortages appear to derive from inadequate sector and individual facility management, in particular a lack of recurrent budgeting as a standard practice. Few schools have diversified capacity, such as an auditorium, covered sports area, cafeteria, music rooms or adequate facilities for vocational training, home economics, and arts and crafts.<sup>430</sup>

COVID-19 has increased the need for electricity, computers and web-connectivity in schools and at home in order to support remote learning. However, the limited data available highlights stark disparities in access to all three amongst schools in PICTs (below). The lowest rates are for the Solomon Islands, where web-connectivity reaches only 7 per cent of schools, due to the fact that internet cable network only reaches major population centres, and only 18 per cent of schools have access to computers for teaching and learning.<sup>431</sup> In RMI, 70 per cent of schools are dispersed over the remaining atolls and islands making up a hard-to-cover geographical area with little to no internet connectivity, though there is an ongoing project to improve this.<sup>432</sup>

**Figure 18:** *PICT school access to computers and internet (%)*

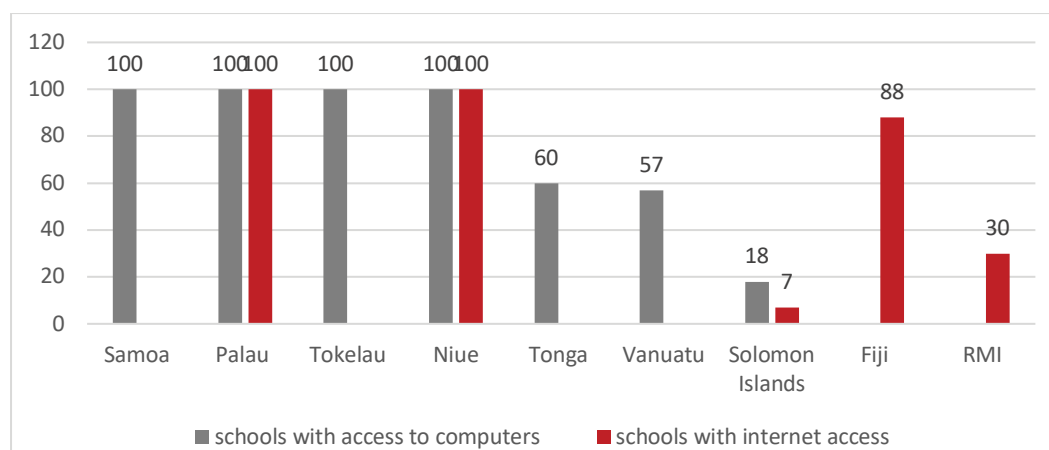
<sup>428</sup> Ministry of Education & Training, Vanuatu, Education and Training Sector Analysis, p. 32.

<sup>429</sup> Ministry of Education & Training, Vanuatu, Education and Training Sector Analysis, p. 143.

<sup>430</sup> Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Department of Transportation, Communications and Infrastructure (2004) FSM Infrastructure Development Plan FY 2004-2023, available at [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/27083\\_fsmidpfy0423book.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/27083_fsmidpfy0423book.pdf).

<sup>431</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 4 in the Commonwealth: Status Update Report, 2018, pp. 40, 46.

<sup>432</sup> Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) Ministry of Education, Sports and Training (MoEST) / Public School System (PSS), Education Statistics Digest 2020, p 3.1, available at: [https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/EQAP/Education/Country\\_reports/RMI/RMI\\_Education\\_Digest\\_2020.pdf](https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/EQAP/Education/Country_reports/RMI/RMI_Education_Digest_2020.pdf).



Source: Fiji<sup>433</sup>, RMI,<sup>434</sup> Solomons,<sup>435</sup> Vanuatu<sup>436</sup>, Samoa,<sup>437</sup> Palau,<sup>438</sup> Tonga,<sup>439</sup> Tokelau,<sup>440</sup> Niue.<sup>441</sup>

As is noted in section 3.2, there is varying availability of data on WASH in schools and data that are available tends not to include detail on the quality of services provided. Despite progress made in specific PICTs for certain indicators (please refer to section 3.2 for a detailed breakdown of available data), more needs to be done to ensure universal access to adequate WASH facilities for school children across the region. For instance, according to JMP data (2019), an estimated 212,858 school-age children have no access to a source of drinking-water in schools. PICTs must continue to prioritise the provision of proper WASH facilities for all schools and ensuring WASH in schools is monitored, based on globally agreed JMG WASH in Schools indicators, though the national EMIS systems.

#### 4.6 Recommendations

- Identify issues of quality that are impacting upon outcomes for students across PICTs and implement programmes to mitigate these;
- Commission research into barriers to enrolment, retention, and completion at all levels of education; design and implement strategies to improve completion and reduce out-of-school children, paying specific attention to the most vulnerable children. A particular focus should be given to the cause of gender disparities in access at secondary school and in learning outcomes at primary schools;

<sup>433</sup> Schools in Fiji have highest internet connection levels, with 64 per cent of all schools provided with reasonable internet access. It should be noted that a further 24 per cent have variable, intermittent access.

<sup>434</sup> Pacific Community (SPC), The Status of Pacific education. A sector analysis based on internally comparable statistics, 2021 p. 10, available at:

[https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/EQAP/Education/Regional\\_Reports/Status\\_of\\_Pacific\\_Education\\_Report.pdf](https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/EQAP/Education/Regional_Reports/Status_of_Pacific_Education_Report.pdf)

<sup>435</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 4 in the Commonwealth: Status Update Report, 2018, pp. 40, 46.

<sup>436</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 4 in the Commonwealth: Status Update Report, 2018, pp. 40, 46.

<sup>437</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) data, 2020.

<sup>438</sup> Palau (Republic of Palau, Ministry of Education, Educational Statistical Yearbook 2017, 2017, p. 39.

<sup>439</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) data, 2020.

<sup>440</sup> UNESCO UIS, 2020. Available at <http://data.uis.unesco.org>. [Accessed 29 April 2022].

<sup>441</sup> UNESCO UIS, 2020. Available at <http://data.uis.unesco.org>. [Accessed 29 April 2022].

- Invest in options for online and distance learning to support schools in outlying areas so that they are better able to provide quality learning and meet the needs of all students;
- Continue and expand the ongoing and planned efforts to review collection and use of education data, develop a fit-for-purpose data collection system and build capacity to regularly analyse, report and use data for decision-making purposes;
- Review, revise and implement Inclusive Education Policies (in PICTs that haven't already) including attention to ongoing professional development of teachers on approaches to inclusion, learning programmes, pathways and assessments for students with a disability.





## 5. Child Protection

### 5.1 Introduction

Children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation under the CRC (Articles 19 and Articles 32-36). Child protection rights also include the right to birth registration (Article 7 of the CRC) and due process and protection rights for children in conflict with the law (Articles 37 and 40). While the CRC requires States to support parents to care for and raise their children, it also recognises that there will be times where parents or carers are not able to do this in line with the best interests of their child. In these circumstances, Article 9 provides that States must be able to resort to judicial intervention in order to protect children from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. When children are deprived of family care, either temporarily or permanently, they are entitled to special protection and assistance and to alternative care.<sup>442</sup>

The Sustainable Development Goals<sup>443</sup> (SDGs) sets specific target for child protection in relation to violence against women and girls (5.2), harmful traditional practices (5.3), child labour (8.7), provision of safe spaces (11.7), violence and violent deaths (16.1), abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children (16.2) and birth registration (16.9). The SDGs also promote strengthened national institutions for violence prevention (16.a).

This chapter provides an overview of the child protection risks facing children across the Pacific, as well as the key bottlenecks and enablers in relation to child protection and children's access to justice.

### 5.2 Update

This table is a summary of key progress made since the previous Child Protection Situational Analysis (SitAn) was conducted in 2017.<sup>444</sup> The first column is a list of key child protection issues. The second is the key finding of the 2017 SitAn. The third column is the key finding of the current SitAn.

**Figure 19: Key progress in Child Protection**

Child Protection Issue	Key Findings from Previous Child Protection SitAn, 2017	Key Findings from Current SitAn 2018 - 2021
Corporal punishment in the home	<p>General forms of assault are prohibited, however corporal punishment in the home is permitted across the region.</p> <p>There is a high prevalence of corporal punishment in Pacific households. In Child Protection Baseline Studies conducted in 5 PICTs, the average percentage of parents who reported using violent discipline against their children aged 2-14 in the past 12 months is 77 per cent.</p>	<p>No change in legislation.</p> <p>The high prevalence of corporal punishment at home persisted. New data from MICS in 5 PICTs conducted between 2018-2021 show that parents used corporal punishment on their children 1-14 years in the past 12 months, with an average of 77 per cent in the 5 PICTs.</p>

<sup>442</sup> Article 20(2), Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>443</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Available at: <<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment>>

<sup>444</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, Pacific Office, Situation Analysis of Children in the Pacific Island Countries, December 2017, pp. 8-10.

Corporal punishment in schools	Outlawed in all PICTs except Solomon Islands and Niue, although the practice continues in most countries	No change in laws however several PICTs have strengthened child protection in national education systems.
Intimate partner violence	Violence against women is commonplace. Almost half of women in 11 PICTs experienced life-time intimate partner violence.	Violence against women remains commonplace. New data from MICS in 4 PICTs held between 2018 to 2020, showed that women aged 15 to 49 years experienced intimate partner violence (physical or sexual) in their life-time, ranging from 20 to 54 per cent in the 4 PICTs.
Violence against children in schools	Just under half of students aged 13 to 15 surveyed in 11 PICTs had experienced bullying within the previous 12 months.	Violence against children in schools remains commonplace, although no new data was available except for Tonga (2017) which showed that 38 percent of students had experienced bullying in the past 12 months.
Child marriage and child labour	Legislative gaps include unacceptably low minimum ages of marriage, which are lower for girls than for boys in eight of the PICTs, and gaps in child labour and exploitation legislation	In Niue, a Family Protection Bill (2018) has been drafted, which reportedly sets 18 as the minimum age for marriage. In the Solomon Islands there is a review of the Marriage Act to increase the marriage age to 18. In FSM, Pohnpei State passed legislation in 2019 raising the marriage age to 18 years.
Minimum age of criminal responsibility	The minimum age of criminal responsibility in all PICTs is below the 'absolute minimum age' of 14 recommended by the CRC Committee, while in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau and Samoa, children can 'age out' of the child justice system at 16	Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Kiribati have drafted Bills to revise their Juvenile Justice legislations, including to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility and eliminate the rule on <i>doli incapax</i> for 10 to 14-year olds, and address other legislative gaps in the system for children in conflict with the law.
Informal justice mechanisms	Informal justice mechanisms are practiced in all PICTs and pose a rights risk, particularly to child victims, who may be encouraged to 'reconcile' without accessing justice.	No change.
Community awareness, attitudes, and practice	Community and cultural norms, attitudes and traditions enable – but also act as barriers and bottlenecks to – the realisation of the protection of children across the PICTs, playing a strong, often negative role in the situation of women and children.	No change.

**Source:** Situation Analysis (SitAn) of Children in the PICTs, December 2017 and updated SitAns for 14 PICTs conducted in 2021.

### *Violence against women*

SDG 5.2 has the target of ending all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation, by 2030.

Across the PICTs, violence against women continues to be a major human rights violation which has a significant impact on children. Children witnessing domestic violence is a form of emotional abuse,

and children raised in a violent environment are more likely to be neglected or subjected to various forms of abuse or exploitation. Moreover, a significant number of girls below 18 years of age are directly subjected to intimate partner violence. In Samoa, the 2019-2020 MICS found that 40 per cent of women and girls aged 15 to 49 had experienced some form of violence (physical, sexual or emotional) from an intimate partner. In addition, 5.7 per cent experienced physical violence during pregnancy.<sup>445</sup> In Tuvalu, the 2019-2020 MICS found that 43.5 per cent of women had experienced physical, emotional or sexual violence by their intimate partner.<sup>446</sup> In addition, 8.7 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 years had experienced sexual violence by their intimate partner.<sup>447</sup> In Kiribati, the 2018-2019 Social Development Indicator Survey revealed that young girls were vulnerable to violence by their husbands or partners. Of the ever-married girls surveyed, aged 15 to 19 years, 75 per cent had experienced physical, emotional or sexual violence by a husband or partner.<sup>448</sup> In Tonga, the 2019 MICS survey found that 26.4 per cent<sup>449</sup> of married women experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence committed by their intimate partner. Only one in five women experiencing physical or sexual violence sought help.

### *Violence against children*

The use of physical discipline in homes and in schools remains widely acceptable across the Pacific, making it unlikely that SDG 16.2 (ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children) will be met by 2030.

Tuvalu's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) revealed that an alarming 79.7 per cent of children aged 1 to 14 years experienced violent discipline, and 5.4 per cent experienced severe physical punishment.<sup>450</sup> In Fiji, four in five children (80.5 per cent) aged 1-14 years experienced physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month.<sup>451</sup> In Kiribati, the 2018-2019 Social Development Indicator Survey found that the vast majority (92 per cent) of children, both girls and boys, aged 1-14 years had experienced some form of violent discipline.<sup>452</sup> Increasing urbanisation, may however, be having a positive impact on parenting practices, with fewer agreeing that : "physical punishment was necessary to bring up a child properly" in the capital, South Tarawa, than in rural areas.<sup>453</sup>

In Tonga children experience significant levels of violence in their homes. Most children (86.6 per cent) are subjected to violent methods of discipline, with 79 per cent experiencing physical punishment and 73 per cent psychological aggression. More than one in five (23 per cent) have experienced severe

<sup>445</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Fact Sheet - Samoa DHS - MICS 2019-20 (Preliminary Results – July 2020), p. 21.

<sup>446</sup> Central Statistics Division, Tuvalu Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-2020, Survey Findings Report, 2021, p. 271.

<sup>447</sup> Central Statistics Division, Tuvalu Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-2020, Survey Findings Report, 2021, p. 271.

<sup>448</sup> Kiribati National Statistics Office, Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey 2018-19, Survey Findings Report, 2019, p. 380.

<sup>449</sup> Tonga Statistics Department, Tonga Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Survey Finding, 2020, p. 327.

<sup>450</sup> Central Statistics Division, Tuvalu Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-2020, Survey Findings Report, 2021, p. 193.

<sup>451</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics, Fact Sheet (Preliminary Results), Fiji MICS, 2021, p 19.

<sup>452</sup> Kiribati National Statistics Office, Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey 2018-19, Survey Findings Report, 2019, pp. 287-289.

<sup>453</sup> The Equality Institute, South Tarawa Health Living Study: An Impact Evaluation of the Strengthening Peaceful Villages Violence Prevention Intervention in Kiribati, 2019, p. 16.

physical punishment.<sup>454</sup> Children's right to be free from corporal punishment remains a contentious issue and physical discipline is widely accepted, particularly in the home.<sup>455</sup>

In Samoa, the 2019-2020 MICS found that over 90 per cent of children aged 1 to 14 years, experience some form of violent discipline, with 82 per cent experiencing physical punishment and 20 per cent severe physical punishment. As with Kiribati, support for physical punishment of children is lower in urban areas (74.8 per cent) as compared to rural areas (80.2 per cent), but remains relatively consistent across all wealth quintiles.<sup>456</sup> Groups identified as being particularly vulnerable and at risk of family violence included persons with disabilities, "fa'afafine"<sup>457</sup> and persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, with reports that young boys showing feminine traits are often subjected to severe violence at the hands of their own families.<sup>458</sup>

In other countries in the Pacific there is an absence of data on violence against children. In Niue, Tokelau, the Cook Islands and FSM, there are no updated data on the nature and extent of violence against children and broader child protection issues. In the Cook Islands, the 2018 State Party Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child acknowledges that children experience violence and outlines various government measures designed to prevent and respond to violence against children.<sup>459</sup> In FSM, the government has acknowledged that violence against children is a key public health concern and that available data suggest it is a significant problem.<sup>460</sup> In its 2020 Concluding Observations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about the high level of abuse of children, including domestic violence, emotional abuse and sexual abuse, and the significant underreporting of such cases, owing to stigma and other reasons.<sup>461</sup> Similarly, in the Marshall Islands, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its 2018 Concluding Observations, expressed concern that corporal punishment continues to be widely practiced and accepted in society as a means of disciplining children and is not explicitly prohibited in the home and in alternative care and day-care settings.<sup>462</sup>

### *Child sexual abuse and exploitation*

Across the PICTS there is an absence of data about the sexual abuse of children, except data on sexual abuse of girls in MICS findings on violence against women. In part, this is due to widespread social norms that prevent discussions about it, which in turn, significantly restricts opportunities for the reporting and documentation of it.

<sup>454</sup> Tonga Statistics Department, Tonga Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Survey Finding, 2020, p. 233.

<sup>455</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Initial report submitted by Tonga under article 44 of the Convention, due in 1997, CRC/C/TON/1, July 2018, para 276.

<sup>456</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Samoa Demographic and Health Survey-Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, (DHS-MICS) 2019-2020, pp. 469-472.

<sup>457</sup> Fa'afafine refers to people who identify themselves as having a third gender or non-binary role in several countries in the Pacific.

<sup>458</sup> Samoa Office of the Ombudsman/ National Human Rights Institute, National Inquiry Report into Family Violence, 2018, p. 17.

<sup>459</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Combined second to fifth periodic reports submitted by the Cook Islands under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2018, 2019, paras 72, 109-110.

<sup>460</sup> Federated States of Micronesia, SDG Working Group, Department of Resource and Development, First Voluntary National Review on the 2030, Agenda for Sustainable Development, June 2020, p. 57.

<sup>461</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the second periodic report of the Federated States of Micronesia, CRC/C/FSM/CO/2, April 2020, para 38.

<sup>462</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of the Marshall Islands CRC/C/MHL/CO/3-4, February 2018, para 18.

In the Solomon Islands, findings from a 2019 survey indicate a significant reluctance to report sexual exploitation and trafficking of children to government authorities, and a prevailing view that these are internal family matters. Community knowledge of laws relating to sexual consent, marriage and trafficking is low, and the capacity of social welfare officers and the police to conduct community awareness is constrained by lack of human, financial and logistical resources.<sup>463</sup> In Tonga, discussions about sexual abuse are considered ‘taboo’. Cases will often not be reported for fear of bringing ‘shame’ to the family.<sup>464</sup> Similarly in Palau, sexual abuse is a deeply taboo topic, especially when it occurs within the family, and it often becomes known only when a pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection occurs in a child.<sup>465</sup>

In Solomon Islands, there have been reports of girls, who after being sexually exploited, being ostracised from their communities and having to move to urban centres and engaging in commercial sex to earn a livelihood.<sup>466</sup> In Fiji, children are sexually exploited including through clubs, brothels, motels and massage parlours.<sup>467</sup> The ECPAT report revealed that adolescent girls were exploited in prostitution as a means of providing income for their families, with family members and close friends frequently acting as facilitators or offenders. The report also found that both boys and girls in street situations engaged in prostitution as a survival strategy. Anecdotal evidence suggests that sexual exploitation of children occurs with foreigners in the hospitality, tourism, seafaring including fishing and shipping industries, and that taxi drivers function as brokers connecting girls with local clients.

In Kiribati, the fishing industry continues to be linked to cases of sexual exploitation of children, with cases of girls as young as 14 years reported to have been sexually exploited by crews from foreign fishing vessels, either on the vessels themselves or in local bars and hotels. Taxi drivers reportedly play a role as facilitators.<sup>468</sup> In FSM girls are reportedly exploited through commercial sex with the crewmembers of fishing vessels and with foreign construction workers. In some cases, taxi drivers or family members facilitate ‘girls’ exploitation. Cases tend not to be reported due to social stigma and ‘victims’ fear of possible repercussions in their home communities.<sup>469</sup>

### *Child marriage*

The prevalence of child marriage varies significantly across the Pacific, with some countries reporting a decrease in child marriage, while others are reporting an increase. Overall, the PICTs are unlikely to meet SDG target 5.3 which has the target of eliminating all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. One of the indicators for SDG 5,3 is the proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18.

In Samoa, child marriage is decreasing. The percentage of women aged 20 to 24 who were married before the age of 18 dropped from 10.8 per cent in 2014 to 7.4 per cent in 2019. Of the girls aged 15

<sup>463</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Community Health and Mobility in the Pacific, Solomon Islands Case Study, 2019*, pp. 20-36.

<sup>464</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Initial report submitted by Tonga under article 44 of the Convention, due in 1997, CRC/C/TON/1, July 2018, para 524.

<sup>465</sup> Government of Palau, *Child Protection Systems Assessment and Mapping, (draft report, 2021)*.

<sup>466</sup> Walk Free, *Murky Waters: A Qualitative Assessment of Modern Slavery in the Pacific Region, 2020*, p. 24.

<sup>467</sup> ECPAT, *Fiji Country Overview, A Report on the Scale, Scope and Context of Sexual Exploitation of Children, June 2019*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>468</sup> ECPAT, *Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism, Pacific Regional Report*, p. 22.

<sup>469</sup> US State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021*, p. 393.

to 19 who participated in the 2019-2020 MICS, 7.8 per cent were married, with 0.1 per cent married before the age of 15, as compared to 0.4 per cent in 2014.<sup>470</sup>

In Tonga, child marriage is on the rise. The percentage of women aged 20 to 24 who were first married before the age of 18 increased from 5.6 per cent in 2012 to 10.1 per cent in 2019. Of the people aged 15-19 years who were surveyed, 3.4 per cent of girls and 1.8 per cent of boys were already married or in a union.

In Kiribati, child marriage and teenage pregnancies remain an issue of concern. The 2018-2019 Social Development Indicator Survey revealed that 18.4 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 years were first married or in union before age 18, and 2.4 per cent before the age of 15. Of the girls aged 15 to 19 years surveyed, 10.7 per cent were currently married or in a union, and 9.4 per cent had a child or were pregnant.

In contrast, in Fiji, child marriage and teenage pregnancy are of low prevalence with just four per cent of women 20-24 years of age married before 18 and less than four per cent of women 20-24 years of age having had a live birth before 18.<sup>471</sup>

In other Pacific countries, such as the Marshall Islands, there is limited data on child marriage although the practice appears to be common. In its 2018 Concluding Observations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child raised concerns about the prevalence of customary child marriages, which particularly affect girls in the outer islands.<sup>472</sup> Similarly, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has expressed its concern that customary marriages are exempt from the minimum age requirement of 18 years in the Marshall Islands, and that most women and girls were forced to enter into customary marriages, especially when they were pregnant.<sup>473</sup> Child marriage remains widely accepted at the community level.<sup>474</sup>

One of the findings of the Kiribati study may resonate across many PICTs. Socio-economic status appears to be a key determinant of child marriage. Women aged 20-49 years with secondary school education are less likely to be married or in a union before age 18 compared to those who have no education. There are also rural-urban disparities, with one in women aged 20-24 years in rural areas being first married or in a union before age 18 compared to one in seven women aged 20-24 years in urban areas.

### *Child labour*

SDG 8.7 requires States to take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, eradicate forced labour and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms. The prevalence of child labour varies significantly across the PICTs. For several countries, data on child labour is either not current or non-existent. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the term 'child labour' is defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and mental development. This includes work that is 'mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and

<sup>470</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Samoa Demographic and Health Survey- Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, (DHS-MICS), 2019-20, p. 353-356.

<sup>471</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics, Fact Sheet (Preliminary Results), Fiji MICS, 2021, p. 19.

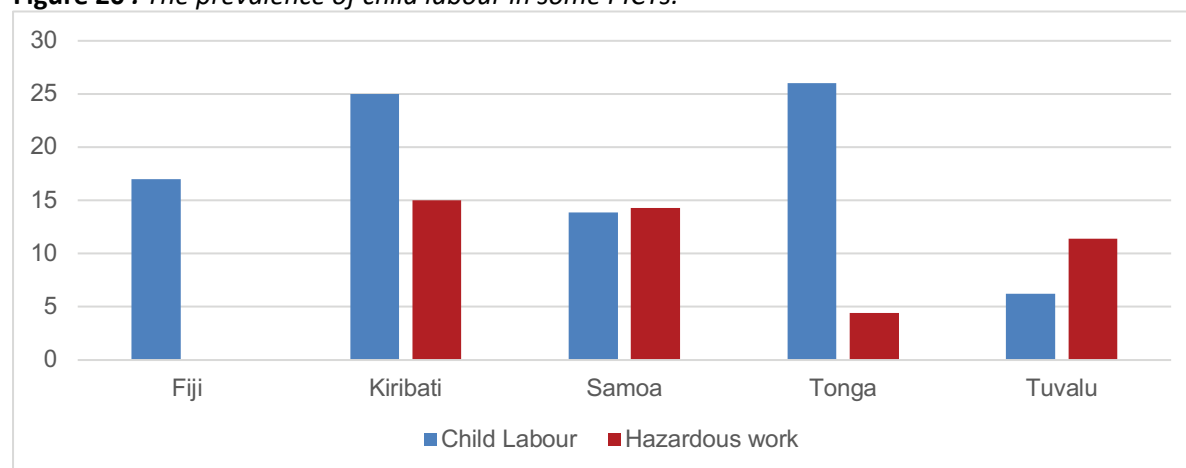
<sup>472</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of the Marshall Islands CRC/C/MHL/CO/3-4, February 2018, para 21.

<sup>473</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, concluding observations on the combined initial third periodic reports of the Marshall Islands, CEDAW/C/MHL/CO/1-3, March 2018, paras. 46-47.

<sup>474</sup> Human Rights Council, UN Stakeholders Submission to UPR process Marshall Islands, 2015, para 27.

harmful to children'. It includes work that interferes with their schooling. The worst forms of child labour: "involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to fend for themselves on the streets of large cities – often at a very early age."<sup>475</sup>

**Figure 20** : *The prevalence of child labour in some PICTs.*



**Source:** *Fiji MICS; Kiribati National Statistics Office; Samoa MICS; Tonga MICS; Tuvalu MICS.*

Accelerated action is required to achieve the child labour targets of the SDGs.

### *Children's access to justice*

SDG 16.3 has the target of promoting the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensuring equal access to justice for all.<sup>476</sup> Across the PICTs the situation of children in contact with justice systems as alleged offenders, witnesses and victims varies greatly.

In the Marshall Islands, available data suggests that a sizeable number of children continue to appear before the courts, most of them charged with status offences. Of the 91 juvenile cases filed in the Majuro District Court in 2020, 58 cases involved curfew violations and a further 25 involved underage drinking and alcohol-related charges. Only two juvenile cases were filed in the High Court in 2020, and since 2006 the Republic has filed no more than four High Court juvenile cases in a year.<sup>477</sup>

In Fiji, data from the Juvenile Court shows an increase in the number of children appearing before the juvenile courts between 2019 and 2020.<sup>478</sup> The number of cases increased from 461 newly initiated cases in 2019, to 864 new cases in 2020. However, approximately 20 per cent of those cases were for children not complying with a lawful order, which includes an order relating to COVID-19 restrictions. In both years, most children (60 per cent and 71 per cent respectively) were charged with

<sup>475</sup> Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>476</sup> To measure progress in reaching this target, two global indicators are used. The first indicator is the proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms. The second is unsentenced detainees as a proportion of overall prison population.

<sup>477</sup> The Judiciary of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, 2020 Annual Report, p. 27, 38. Available at: <https://rmicourts.org/annual-reports/>

<sup>478</sup> Fiji Judicial Department, Juvenile Court National Summary, Criminal Cases Initiated, Disposed, and Pending from January to December 2019, and from January to December 2020.

property offences, absconding, and other non-violent crimes. Of the children found guilty by the court, only 6 per cent received a custodial sentence in 2019 and 11 per cent in 2020.<sup>479</sup>

In Kiribati, available data from the Police Service suggests that the number of children formally charged with an offence remains low. Between January and October 2019, there were 42 juvenile cases managed by police in South Tarawa, including two girls. Between January to December 2020, around 154 juvenile cases were dealt with by police in South Tarawa, all but seven of whom were boys. No information was available about the alleged crimes.

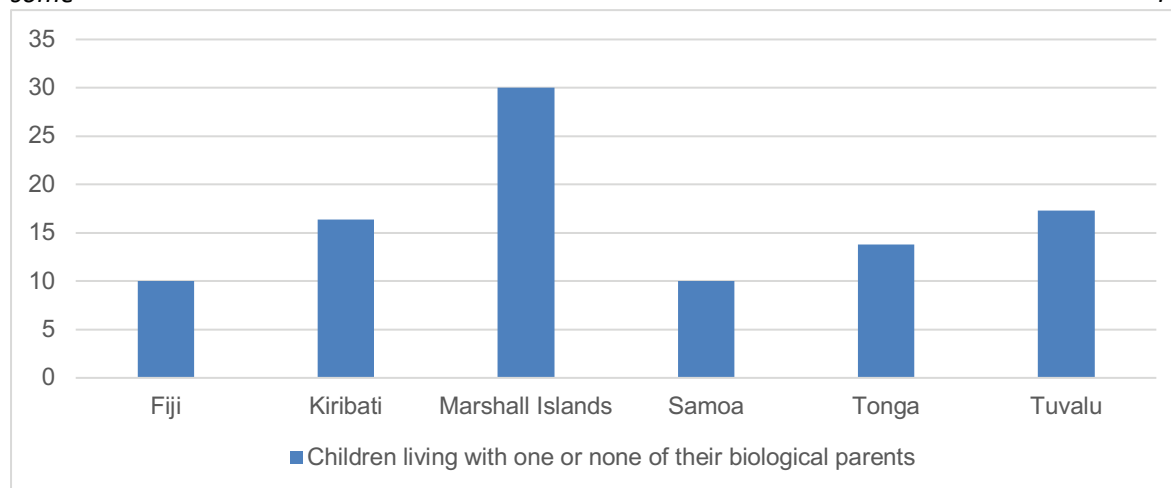
There is limited data on children and justice issues in many of the PICTs. In FSM, no accurate data on the number of Micronesian children in conflict with the law are available. In its 2019 State party report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the government estimated that over 500 children had been charged with offences in the preceding two years, with the majority of cases involving misdemeanours such as drunk and disorderly conduct, traffic violations, malicious mischief and simple assault. However, the government acknowledged that these numbers may not be accurate.<sup>480</sup>

There is even more limited data on the situation of child witnesses and victim across the PICTs, with Fiji being an exception. In 2019, there were 183 and in 2020 165 child victims of sexual offences assisted by Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP), amounting to just under 70 per cent of victims of sexual offences overall.<sup>481</sup>

### Family separation

Recent data shows that while the number of children not living with a biological parent remains high in the PICTs, it is falling in several countries.

**Figure 21:** Percentage of children that do not live with either biological parent, or just one parent, in some PICTs.



**Source:** Fiji MICS; Kiribati Demographic and Health Survey; Pacific Community and UNHCR; Samoa MICS; Tonga MICS; Tuvalu MICS.

<sup>479</sup> Fiji ODPP Media Update, ODPP Rape and Sexual Offences Statistics, 1 January-31 December 2020 and 1 January-31 December 2019. Available at: <https://odpp.com.fj/media-updates-2/>.

<sup>480</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Second periodic report submitted by Micronesia (Federated States of) under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2000, CRC/C/FSM/2, March 2019, para 168.

<sup>481</sup> Fiji ODPP Media Update, ODPP Rape and Sexual Offences Statistics, 1 January-31 December 2020 and 1 January-31 December 2019. Available at: <https://odpp.com.fj/media-updates-2/>.



In Kiribati, a considerable number of children do not live with their biological parents, but this has dropped from 22.3 per cent in 2009<sup>482</sup> to 16.4 per cent in 2019.<sup>483</sup> In Tonga, the number of children not living with either of their biological parents has reduced from 17.9 per cent in 2012 to 13.8 per cent in 2019, and those who living in an adoptive or fostering arrangement is down from 29.4 per cent to 26.2 per cent.<sup>484</sup> In Samoa, 10 per cent of children do not live with either of their biological parents (down from 13.6 per cent in 2014), with 7 per cent having at least one biological parent living abroad, and 9 per cent living with adopted, foster or step-parents.<sup>485</sup>

In the Marshall Islands, a considerable number of children continue to live separated from their parents, partly driven by a drastic rise in inter-island and out-migration, with a significant number of people opting to migrate to Majuro, to Kwajalein or to the US to seek better health care, education and job opportunities, or to join other family members.<sup>486</sup> As a result, a high proportion of children and young people do not live with both biological parents. Almost a third of children (30 per cent) under the age of four do not live with their biological parent, and more than one in ten (11 per cent) have one or both parents living abroad.<sup>487</sup>

In the Marshall Islands, media reports in 2018-2019 highlighted stories of fraudulent inter-country adoptions, with individuals—both nationals and foreigners—profiting from the inter-country adoption of babies. In 2019, Utah authorities charged a man for transporting more than 40 pregnant women from the Marshall Islands and charging parents in the USA tens of thousands of dollars for the adoption of the women's new-borns.<sup>488</sup>

In Tuvalu, 17.3 per cent of children do not live with either parent,<sup>489</sup> and 8 per cent of households have an adopted, orphan or foster child under the age of 18.<sup>490</sup> In Fiji, the 2021 MICS revealed that 10 per cent of children aged 0-17 were living with neither biological parent. In addition, 5.6 per cent of children have one or both biological parents who have died. A further 2.9 per cent of children had at least one biological parent living abroad.<sup>491</sup>

In other countries in the Pacific, there is limited data but well documented cultural practices dealing with issues related to family separation. In Palau, there is a complex system of traditional adoption as well as 'informal' adoption in which children are passed by their biological parents to other family members – most often the maternal grandmother. The frequency and ease of adoption, both formal and informal, has both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, the system ensures no child is homeless. On the negative side, living apart from biological parents can create stress within

<sup>482</sup> Kiribati Demographic and Health Survey, 2009. Available at: [https://pacificdata.org/data/dataset/spc\\_kir\\_2009\\_dhs\\_v01\\_m](https://pacificdata.org/data/dataset/spc_kir_2009_dhs_v01_m).

<sup>483</sup> Kiribati National Statistics Office, Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey 2018-19, Survey Findings Report, 2019, p. 72.

<sup>484</sup> Tonga Statistics Department, Tonga Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Survey Finding, 2020, p. 95.

<sup>485</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistic, Fact Sheet - Samoa DHS-MICS 2019-2020, Preliminary results July 2020, p. 7.

<sup>486</sup> Pacific Community and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Human Rights in the Pacific: A Situational Analysis 2020, p. 120.

<sup>487</sup> Pacific Community, Gender Equality Where do we stand? Republic of the Marshall Islands, 2018, pp. 5, 11.

<sup>488</sup> Republic of the Marshall Islands, Legislative Compliance Review: Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2020, p. 85.

<sup>489</sup> Central Statistics Division, Tuvalu Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-2020, Survey Findings Report, 2021, p. 63.

<sup>490</sup> Central Statistics Division, Tuvalu Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-2020, Survey Findings Report, 2021, p. 65.

<sup>491</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics, Fact Sheet (Preliminary Results), Fiji MICS, 2021, p. 6.

the host household and has been recognized within the community as one factor that places children at risk of violence.<sup>492</sup>

### *Birth registration*

Only a few PICTs have almost complete birth registration, making it unlikely that SDG 16.9, which has a target of providing birth registration to all will be met fully across the region.

Several countries have maintained a high level of birth registration. In the Cook Islands the birth registration rate was 100 per cent in 2017.<sup>493</sup> In Kiribati, an estimated 91.6 per cent of children under age five years have their births registered. This rate is a slight decline from the 2009 birth registration rate of 93.5 per cent. In contrast the number of registered children who do not have a birth certificate decreased from 57 per cent to 32.6 per cent between 2009 and 2018. In Tonga the estimated coverage of registration has been maintained at over 98 per cent for the past twenty years.<sup>494</sup> In Palau, between 2012 and 2018, birth registration completeness when compared to health records had remained at approximately 95 per cent.<sup>495</sup>

In other PICTs progress towards meeting SDG 16.9, of birth registration for all by 2030 remains a challenge, though progress is evident. In Samoa, the percentage of children under the age of 5 whose births are registered has increased from 58.6 per cent in 2014 to 66.9 per cent in 2019 and the number of registered children who are without a birth certificate has dropped from 13 per cent to 7.9 per cent.<sup>496</sup> In Tuvalu, the 2019-2020 MICS revealed that significant progress had been made in birth registration, with the number of children under 5 whose births were registered increasing from 49.9 per cent in 2007<sup>497</sup> to 87.2 per cent in 2019.<sup>498</sup> The number of children with birth certificates has increased substantially from 4.7 per cent in 2007 to 79 per cent in 2020.<sup>499</sup>

In FSM, rates of birth registration vary significantly between States. Kosrae reportedly has complete registration coverage, but other States are lagging behind, largely due to geographic difficulties in reaching the registration office.<sup>500</sup>

Social exclusion is impacting birth registration rates in a number of the PICTs. A survey conducted in Kiribati showed that about half of mothers or caregivers with an unregistered child do not know how to register their child's birth. This is particularly the case in rural areas.<sup>501</sup> In Tonga, children who are

<sup>492</sup> Government of Palau, Child Protection Systems Assessment and Mapping, (draft report, 2021).

<sup>493</sup> Cook Islands Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Report, 2021.

<sup>494</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Initial report submitted by Tonga under article 44 of the Convention, due in 1997, CRC/C/TON/1, July 2018, para 233.

<sup>495</sup> Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Palau, [https://sdd.spc.int/digital\\_library/civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-palau-2021](https://sdd.spc.int/digital_library/civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-palau-2021).

<sup>496</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Samoa Demographic Health Survey 2014, p. 32; Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Samoa Demographic and Health Survey- Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, (DHS-MICS), 2019-20. p. 339.

<sup>497</sup> Central Statistics Division, Tuvalu Demographic Health Survey, 2007, p. 18.

<sup>498</sup> Central Statistics Division, Tuvalu Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-2020, Survey Findings Report, 2021, p. 191.

<sup>499</sup> Central Statistics Division, Tuvalu Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-2020, Survey Findings Report, 2021, p. 191.

<sup>500</sup> Pacific Community and United Nations Children's Fund, Civil registration and vital statistics in the Federated States of Micronesia, 2021, p. 4.

<sup>501</sup> Kiribati National Statistics Office, Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey 2018-19, Survey Findings Report, 2019, p. 286.

most at risk of not being registered are those born out of wedlock, because of the stigma that is often attached to their birth, and children who are subject to customary adoption immediately after birth.

### *Online safety*

Across the PICTs, there is limited data about children's safety online. In Palau, a recent report on children's digital safety highlighted emerging online risks to children. The report found that four out of five (82.1 per cent) children reported having encountered sexual images over their social media accounts in the past year, while three out of five (60 per cent) had received sexual content over their social media account. Parental knowledge of the range of risks and potential harms that children are exposed to online appeared limited.<sup>502</sup>

## **5.3 Impact of climate change**

Assisting children in the context of an emergency must address both their immediate needs and protect them from long-term harm. In the context of PICTs, the humanitarian response is directly linked to climate change risks, hazards and vulnerabilities such as the increasing frequency and intensity of cyclones, flooding, landslips, droughts and rising sea levels. The impact of these natural disasters exposes children to separation from family/caregivers, injuries, psychological distress and death, while secondary impacts include disruption in accessing basic services, loss of the caregiver's livelihood and food insecurity. Natural disasters disrupt the social and legal order and strain local capacity to keep vulnerable children safe from neglect, abuse and exploitation. A key element of climate change related to disaster response is the establishment of Child-Friendly Spaces which promote children's right to play, psychosocial well-being and a sense of normalcy.

Protecting children in humanitarian situations requires governments to establish effective coordination mechanisms for the protection of children, including prevention, identification and response to specific cases of child abuse and neglect. For example, between 2018 and 2021, Fiji experienced several tropical cyclones, during which news articles confirmed that children as young as 10 years of age experienced sexual violence whilst residing in evacuation centres. Issues with women's, girls' and boys' safety whilst residing at evacuation centres were also reported.<sup>503</sup>

Few countries in the PICTs have, as yet, included child protection issues in their planning frameworks to address climate change. For example, in Tonga the main emergency preparedness and response documents are the Emergency Management Act (2007),<sup>504</sup> Tonga Strategic Development Framework (2015-2025), the Joint National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management,<sup>505</sup> and the Tonga Climate Change Policy (2016).<sup>506</sup> These plans, policies and strategic documents do not implicitly nor explicitly address the child protection climate related risks in the preparedness, response and recovery phases of disaster risk reduction/management cycle. This is a critical bottleneck for the protection of children in humanitarian situations in most PICTs.

<sup>502</sup> UNICEF, Child Online Protection in Palau, 2020, (unpublished).

<sup>503</sup> <https://www.fijitimes.com/safety-of-women-girls-children-in-evacuation-centres/>, 8 January 2021.

<sup>504</sup> Tonga, Tonga Emergency Management Act, 2007.

<sup>505</sup> Tonga, Tonga Strategic Development Framework II (2015-2025) & Joint National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management.

<sup>506</sup> Tonga, Tonga Climate Change Policy, 2016.

## 5.4 Impact of COVID-19

Across the PICTs the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted children's rights to protection. Decreasing budget allocations to social services, COVID-19 movement restrictions coupled with limitations on the provision of face-to-face child protection services, especially in the more inaccessible areas, has meant that children are left unprotected and vulnerable to abuse, neglect, exploitation and increased mental health and psychosocial distress. In several PICTs, NGO's have reported that domestic violence within home settings has increased since the start of the pandemic, with vulnerable children often confined at home with their abusers and limited access to existing reporting mechanisms.

Specific Child Protection Working Groups (CPWG) or combined working groups for Gender Based Violence and Child Protection (GBV/CPWG) or broader Protection Cluster Working Groups operate in the PICTs, other than in the Cook Islands and Palau. For example, the Fiji Safety and Protection Cluster acts as the inter-agency coordination mechanism for planning, implementation and monitoring the COVID-19 response to child protection concerns. It sits within the National Disaster Management Office and has representation from international non-governmental organizations, local NGOs, UN agencies and civil society organizations. In Kiribati, these functions are provided by the Child Protection Working Group.

Despite these challenges, in several countries, the pandemic has built the momentum for a deeper integration of child protection in COVID-19 and broader humanitarian planning, as well as provided an opportunity for visibility of child protection concerns and establishment or strengthening of child protection system components in development context. For example, in Kiribati momentum has led to the integration of child protection and child focused mental health and psychosocial support into the overall scope of work undertaken by the lead Ministry. In FSM in 2020, the Protection Cluster developed the Pohnpei Response and Referral Pathway and service directory for responding to gender-based violence, child protection issues, and concerns of vulnerable groups in the context of COVID-19. This material has since evolved to the Pohnpei Response and Referral Pathway for adult and child survivors of violence in both regular and emergency contexts.<sup>507</sup>

## 5.5 Key bottlenecks and enablers

### Legal and policy environment

Over 70 per cent of PICTs have child protection legislation, either as a standalone law, or as chapters within civil codes, and more than half have family protection or domestic violence legislation. Since 2017, PICTs have passed a raft of legislation relating to the protection of children as can be seen in figure 50 below, as part of their overall aim of improving their child protection system.

**Figure 22: Legislative progress since 2017.**

Country	Progress
Cook Islands	Parliament approved changes to the national Constitution with respect to the status of adopted children in 2021.
FSM	In FSM in 2019, Pohnpei passed the Act Raising the Age of Consent from 16 to 18, which also raised the age of marriage to 18. <sup>508</sup>

<sup>507</sup> UN Human Rights Council, National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21, Federates States of Micronesia, A/HRC/WG.6/37/FSM/1, January 2021, para 95.

<sup>508</sup> Act Raising the Age of Consent from 16 to 18, S.L. No. 9L -105-19.

Fiji	The Online Safety Act 2018, updated legislation to address online abuse of children, and a new Adoption Act was passed in 2020.
Kiribati	In 2021, a new Youth Justice Bill was drafted.
Marshall Islands	In 2021, amendments to the Criminal Code and the Child Rights Protection Act were drafted.
Samoa	A Child Care and Protection Bill was finalised in 2020 and is awaiting review by the Attorney General for endorsement by the Parliament. In addition, the Samoa Law Reform Commission has recently undertaken a comprehensive review of family laws. The report highlights gaps in relation to child custody, maintenance and adoption. <sup>509</sup>
Solomon Islands	The legal framework for handling children in conflict with the law is currently under review, with a new Youth Justice Bill under development. In addition, the Solomon Islands is reviewing the Marriage Act with the aim of increasing the age of marriage to 18.
Tonga	The Ministry of Justice undertook a review of adoption laws in 2018 and has recommended that a comprehensive new adoption law be prepared.
Tuvalu	A Child Welfare and Protection Bill has been drafted and is pending parliamentary approval.
Vanuatu	Consultations are underway to draft a new Child Care and Protection Bill, and an Adoption Bill has been drafted to provide more concrete guidance on the domestic and inter-country adoption processes. A new Cyber Crime Act, was passed in 2021, criminalising a range of online abuses against children. A new Juvenile Bill was drafted in 2021.

### Public finance

In all PICTs, the limited financial investment in child protection systems combined with little publicly available data on government budget allocations for child protection are critical bottlenecks for child protection systems and the protection of children from harm. For example, in Nauru, the lead Ministry reports that it receives a budget allocation from government to conduct prevention activities and provide response services, as well as to cover the cost of nine staff members. However, these figures are not publicly available. In Samoa, in 2020 the budget for child protection was merged within the budget for social development, making it difficult to determine the level of government investment in the child protection system. In the Cook Islands there is no specific budgetary allocation for child protection, which is however covered by Child and Family Services under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Line-ministries implement interventions through their individual budgetary allocations, but there is limited information available on the nature of that expenditure.

Notable exceptions are the Solomon Islands and Fiji. In the Solomon Islands, the below table provides an indication of budget allocation to child protection services under the Social Welfare Division of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

**Figure 23:** Budget Allocation to Child Protection Services (in SBD - USD 1 = SBD 7.893).

Year	Requested	Approved
2018	600,000	600,000
2019	1,600,000	1,600,000
2020	741,000	741,000
2021	455,000	455,000

<sup>509</sup> Samoa Law Reform Commission, Review of the Family Laws of Samoa, Discussion Paper, 2019, p. 9.

**Source:** *MHMS and SWD.*

In Fiji for the 2021-2022 fiscal year, the total budget allocation to the MWCPA, the lead Ministry for child protection, has seen a significant reduction of 6.8 per cent compared to the previous fiscal year, due to COVID-19.<sup>510</sup> The Children's Services Unit under the Social Welfare Department of the MWCPA, has a small budget to run response services, prevention activities and training of personnel (around USD 150,000 a year), which is not sufficient and does not allow for adequate fulfilment of its mandate. The MWCPA programme funding for vulnerable population groups include Child Protection Allowance (FJD 11.3 million), the Child Helpline (FJD 180,000) and the Child Protection Programme (FJD 50,000).

*Institutional arrangements for multi-sector child protection systems (including prevention and response): changes since 2017*

In Fiji, in 2020-2021 the National Coordination Committee for Children revised its terms of reference and structure, which now includes a sub-committee on child protection, however they are yet to be finalised and endorsed. In addition, in 2020, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation has undertaken a review of its organisational structure and developed a ten-year costed plan to gradually increase and strengthen the child welfare workforce, including upgrading the Children's Services Unit to a Children's Department.

In FSM, a workshop was organized in 2019, bringing together representatives from health, social affairs, education and justice sectors from across the country to discuss child protection issues and develop a roadmap for child protection system strengthening. The same year, FSM developed an End Violence against Women Policy and National and State Action Plans to support implementation, with a commitment to increasing access to safe and effective response services, particularly for women and girls who are most vulnerable. Further, in 2021, the President's National Advisory Council on Children was re-activated.<sup>511</sup>

In Kiribati in 2019, under the leadership of Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports and Social Affairs, a multi-sectoral Child Protection Working Group was established to function as the national coordination mechanism for the child protection system. Between 2018 and 2019, several outer-island Child Protection Working Groups were established.

Samoa's first National Child Care and Protection Policy (2020-2030) and the accompanying multi-sectoral National Action Plan 2020-2030 were finalized and endorsed by the Cabinet in 2020.

In the Marshall Islands the government recently endorsed the establishment of a National Child Protection Task Force to provide oversight, advice and coordination of all national efforts on child protection. In 2020, the lead Ministry initiated the process of consultations for developing a Child Protection Policy and Implementation Plan for how the country's child protection system will be progressively implemented.<sup>512</sup> In addition, the National Taskforce on Human Trafficking has developed a National Action Plan (2021) which contains key activities aimed at strengthening capacity to identify and respond to trafficking cases.

<sup>510</sup> Fiji Ministry of Economy, Budget Estimates 2020-2021 and Fiji Budget Estimates 2021-2022, pp. 149-150.

<sup>511</sup> Federated States of Micronesia, SDG Working Group, Department of Resource and Development, First Voluntary National Review on the 2030, Agenda for Sustainable Development, June 2020, p. 117.

<sup>512</sup> In its 2018 Concluding Observations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child encouraged the Marshall Islands to develop a child protection policy, through a participatory process, and undertake regular assessments of the effectiveness of its implementation, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of the Marshall Islands CRC/C/MHL/CO/3-4, February 2018, para 6.

In Nauru, in 2018, a Child Protection System Concept Note was prepared, outlining the Government's vision for the national child protection system and providing the basis for inter-agency collaborative partnerships. This confirmed the role of the Child Protection Division as the lead agency responsible for child protection services, under the Department of Women's and Social Development Affairs.

In Tuvalu, in 2020, responsibility for child protection shifted from the Ministry of Home Affairs and Rural Development to the Ministry of Health, Social Welfare and Gender Affairs.

Vanuatu's National Child Protection Policy 2016 – 2026<sup>513</sup> provides an over-arching framework for the development of the child protection system, and reinforces the Government's commitment to developing comprehensive prevention, early intervention and response services for children. In 2018, the Policy was reviewed, and a detailed inter-agency implementation plan was developed. However, the plan has not been finalised or costed.

There has also been progress in strengthening case management guidelines and related procedures. In Fiji, procedures for responding to children in need of protection have been strengthened through a review and update of the Inter-Agency Guidelines on Child Abuse and Neglect in 2020. Child protection case management procedures are being updated and the Standards for Children's Homes were revised in 2020.

In Kiribati, inter-agency child protection guidelines (Child Protection Referral Pathway) were developed in 2018 and finalised and endorsed by Cabinet in June 2021.

In Nauru, in 2018, a Child Protection Referral Pathway to guide multi-sectoral responses to cases of children in need of protection, and terms of reference for the Child Protection Working Group were drafted but are yet to be finalised and endorsed by Government.

In Tonga, in 2021, the Ministry of Internal Affairs' Women's Affairs and Gender Equality Division launched the National Service Delivery Protocol for Responding to Cases of Gender-Based Violence. The Protocol outlines principles and procedures for an inter-agency response to cases of gender-based violence, including violence against children.

Four of the PICTs have made progress in introducing multi-sectoral plans to strengthen the child protection system, including Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru and the Solomon Islands, but all of them need to be finalised and endorsed. For example, in Nauru, a Multi-sector Child Protection Workplan (2019-2021) has been developed, setting out concrete actions to be taken by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Education and Training, Department of Health and Medical Services, and Nauru Police Force in the prevention and provision of child protection services. In the Solomon Islands, the Child and Family Welfare System Multi-Sectoral Implementation Plan (2018) includes concrete commitments from the education, health, justice and disaster risk management sectors to strengthen their capacity to contribute to child protection prevention and response.

Palau does not yet have a national coordination body responsible for coordinating child protection initiatives, apart from the Family Protection Act Coordination Group. However, the Group's members have expressed a general commitment to expand the Group's role to incorporate child protection as a more sustainable approach to addressing violence against children than creating a separate group

<sup>513</sup> Vanuatu Ministry of Justice and Community Services, Vanuatu National Child Protection Policy 2016 – 2026.

for children.<sup>514</sup> Tonga also lacks a national coordination mechanism for child protection and the National Coordinating Committee for Children established in 1997 is not fully functional.

### *Integration of child protection in the education sector*

A notable trend across several PICTs (includes Kiribati, Fiji, Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands and the Solomon Islands) is the effort to strengthen child protection and end corporal punishment and bullying within educational establishments. For example, in Kiribati, child protection has been integrated into the Kiribati Education Sector Analysis 2020. In 2019 the Ministry of Education developed a Child Safe Schools Policy to ensure the well-being and protection of children in educational settings. The Policy outlines procedures for preventing, reporting, and referral of misconduct and child abuse in schools, and for identification and referral of child protection concerns experienced by students in the home or community. Together with the Policy, the Ministry also developed the Child Protection Code of Conduct for School Staff, School Anti-Bullying Policy, Child Safeguarding in Schools Policy, Child Protection in Schools Referral Protocol, and the School Disciplinary Protocol, which are all in their final stages of review and validation. A draft action Plan to implement the Child Safe Schools Policy was developed in 2021 and is under review. Similarly, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have developed a child protection in schools policy and are working on the implementation plan. In several countries, teachers have been trained on child protection on an adhoc basis.

These efforts align with the new Global Leaders Statement<sup>515</sup> from the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, issued in July 2021, which identified six key policy priorities to enable countries to achieve the child protection related targets of the 2030 SDGs,<sup>516</sup> one of which is to make schools safe, non-violent and inclusive.

### *Children's access to child-friendly justice*

Across the region, steps are being taken to improve guidance on children's access to child-sensitive justice.

Fiji is particularly notable for the steps taken to ensure child friendly justice. In 2019, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions issued revised Guidelines on Prosecuting Child Sexual Abuse Cases and Other Crimes Against Children. In addition, the Judicial Department issued a comprehensive Bench Book on Children, providing guidance to judges and magistrates on handling cases involving children in conflict with the law, child victim/witness, and children involved in family and child protection cases. A full-time Juvenile Court has been established in Suva, and screens are used (in all courts) while live-

<sup>514</sup> Government of Palau, Child Protection Systems Assessment and Mapping, (draft report, 2021).

<sup>515</sup> Global Partnership to End Violence, TOGETHER TO #ENDVIOLENCE LEADERS' STATEMENT, < <https://www.end-violence.org/together-endviolence-leaders-statement#the-statement>>, accessed on 28 July 2021

<sup>516</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, < <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>, accessed on 28 July 2021



link facilities are used (in select courts) to facilitate children's testimony and reduce secondary victimization. In addition, the Fiji Police Force has established the Juvenile Bureau (in all Divisions) and the Child Abuse and Sexual Offences Unit. The same year, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions expanded and renamed its Child Protection Division to Sexual Crimes Division. This is a specialist unit responsible for prosecuting sexual and gender-based violence (including child sexual abuse) and other crimes where children are victims. The Office of Public Prosecutions has also established a Victim and Witness Assistance Unit (ODPP-VWU) to ensure that support and assistance are provided to child victims throughout the criminal process.<sup>517</sup>

Other PICTs who have taken steps towards child friendly justice include Kiribati in 2021, when the Police Service issued revised Standard Operating Procedures on Young Victims and Witnesses and in Tonga, where a draft five-year Law and Justice Sector Plan with provisions designed to improve access to child-sensitive justice, but at the time of writing it has yet to be finalised and endorsed. In addition, the Kiribati Police Domestic Violence and Sexual Offences Unit has been renamed to Domestic Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Unit in 2020 to expand its mandate to include all other crimes involving children.

In the Cook Islands some progress has been made in improving children's access to justice and ensuring specialized handling of children's cases. A Community Police Unit and specialized Domestic Violence Unit have been set up within the Police Force, and cases of children under the age of 16 alleged to have committed an offence are heard by the Children's Court, which is physically separate from other Courts.

### *Data, information and research*

In Tonga, Tuvalu, Fiji, Kiribati and Samoa, MICS reports are providing insights into a range of child protection issues, including child discipline, family violence, child labour, child marriage, and children's living arrangements. However, effective planning, policy development and monitoring of child protection systems is hampered by a lack of centralised child protection information management systems, and limited data on the number of children reported as victims of abuse and neglect. A notable exception is the child protection system in Fiji, which has capacity to record and analyse data on child protection. In a few countries, attempts have been made to gather knowledge and data on child protection. In Palau, between 2020 and 2021, the government undertook a comprehensive assessment and mapping of child protection services. The final report will be used to inform the child protection system design and national Child Protection Policy development. In Samoa, the national inquiry into family violence provided significant insights into key child protection issues. In Tuvalu, the Child Protection Baseline Study conducted in 2019, provided qualitative and quantitative information about child protection issues and existing response mechanisms.

### *Culture and practices*

Children continue to occupy a central place in PICT societies. Customary kinship and family support systems remain important sources of care and protection for children. Despite these protective systems, children continue to experience a range of protection violations, such as violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation at home, in school, online and in the community.

In Tonga, children are a symbol of continuity and hope for a family, and responsibility for raising a child commonly lies not only with the parents, but with the broader extended family. The extended

<sup>517</sup> ODPP website. Available at: <https://odpp.com.fj/sexual-crimes-division/>

Tongan family has traditionally ensured that children are not deprived of a family environment.<sup>518</sup> In the Marshall Islands, family is paramount with several community practices designed to keep children safe, including ‘big families/shared responsibilities,’ which is a traditional method for involving the extended family in the protection and care of children. In Palau, children are surrounded by multiple layers of protection. The first line of protection in Palau is the family, clan, and community, and the bedrock of social protection remains the traditional system of “caring and sharing” based on kinship.<sup>519</sup> In Vanuatu, the ‘wantok,’ or extended family and community system, acts as an important social safety net for children.

However, women and children have a lower status than men and boys in many societies and violence is seen as an accepted way of exercising control over them. Further, many cultures prioritise family harmony and community cohesion over access of individual victims of abuse to justice and support services. Against this backdrop, a key challenge is that children and families reportedly tend to ‘cover up’ acts of violence or abuse to protect the reputation of the family, clan or village.<sup>520</sup>

Despite these challenges, PICT community leaders, extended families and other social support networks remain an important social safety net for children and families facing difficulties and have an essential role to play in the child protection system. While several cultural changes have taken place due to modernisation and Western influences, there is a powerful sense of family and community which is a key strength of the child protection system at the community level.

What is required is a scaling up of efforts to reinforce positive community caring practices and to challenge cultural practices that are harmful to children.

## 5.6 Recommendations

### *Legislation, policy and planning*

- Strengthen the legal and policy frameworks for child protection, including by enacting the various child protection related laws and policies that have stalled, and develop costed plans to guide their implementation. This should include prioritising frameworks that will accelerate efforts for achieving the child protection targets of the SDGs.
- Continue to promote multisectoral responses for child protection, including violence against children, by investing in the justice, health, education, and humanitarian sectors to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate child protection interventions as part of coordinated and harmonised national child protection systems. This should include identifying, testing and scaling up high impact interventions that can meet the child protection targets of the SDGs.
- Develop strategies for strengthening foster care and other kinship and family-based alternatives to family separation.
- Develop and implement child online safety policies through government and private sector engagement and increase investment to tackle grooming and the distribution of child sexual abuse material and sexual abuse, including preventing, detecting and stopping all activities that may harm children online.

<sup>518</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Initial report submitted by Tonga under article 44 of the Convention, due in 1997, CRC/C/TON/1, July 2018, paras 32-35, 285.

<sup>519</sup> Government of Palau, Child Protection Systems Assessment and Mapping, (draft report, 2021).

<sup>520</sup> Fiji NCCC Stakeholders’ Workshop on the Child Protection System, Suva, 24 February 2017.

### *Social service/social welfare workforce and service delivery*

- Continue to invest in strengthening the social welfare/social services workforce, including progressively increasing the number of specialised child welfare and child protection personnel at sub-national levels, with country specific strategies to ensure that families and children in isolated areas such as outer islands can access this workforce.
- Strengthen case management and referral protocols for child survivors of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect.
- Strengthen case management and referral protocols for children in conflict with the law, including updating SOPs and investing in training, including the promotion of increased practice of police diversion, the training of judicial officers and in the training of lawyers.

### *Climate Change, COVID-19 and Child Protection*

- Devise, implement and monitor strategies to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to integrate child protection into emergency preparedness and response, including for climate change and COVID-19 preparedness and response.
- Devise and implement strategies to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders across all sectors (Education, Health, Social Welfare, Justice, Judiciary, FBOs, CSOs etc.) in the area of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) to identify, respond to and refer children who are experiencing distress as a result of emergencies or child protection issues.
- Support existing structures addressing climate change and disaster management to further engage vulnerable groups actively and purposefully, inclusive of children, to contribute to policy development and complaint mechanisms to address any breach of children's rights to protection either directly or indirectly linked to climate related risks.

### *Culture and practices and behaviour change*

- Prevent behaviours that cause harm to children by investing in the protective functions of community leaders, faith leaders, and community support networks through sustained community-based outreach programmes.
- For all PICTs, devise, implement, monitor and evaluate comprehensive behaviour change communication strategies and plans to promote gender equality and respectful relationships, strengthen positive parenting and community practices and to eliminate harmful practices such as 'cultural taboos' around the discussion and reporting of child sexual abuse.
- Develop and implement interventions aiming at empowering adolescents with life skills to prevent risky behaviours.

### *Data, research and knowledge generation*

- Invest in establishing or strengthening Child Protection Information Management Systems to collect national data on the situation of children, including prevalence of child protection issues, child protection cases reported, as well as risk and protective factors, such as children's health, education, family status.
- Harmonise and consolidate data collection regimes from relevant key ministries such as health, education, welfare and justice and through community mechanisms.



## 6. Social Policy

### 6.1 Introduction

Overall, since 2017, PICTs have made progress in strengthening their social protection systems, but there are disparities in terms of access to social protection across the PICTs, particularly for the vulnerable. Relatively few PICTs have non-contributory social protection schemes or transfers specifically for children and vulnerable persons.

### 6.2 Update

Poverty rates in PICTs can be observed through data obtained in Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES). Most recent data indicates that monetary poverty rates vary from 0 per cent (Tokelau) to 41 per cent (Federated States of Micronesia; FSM). However, recent information on poverty rates is available for very few PICTs. Where new data is available, findings indicate that poverty rates have increased: in Fiji (from 28 per cent in 2013-14 to 30 per cent in 2019-20)<sup>521</sup>; Samoa (from 19 per cent in 2013 to 23 per cent in 2018-2019)<sup>522</sup>, and FSM (41 per cent in 2013-14 compared to 31 per cent in 2005).<sup>523</sup> Table 45 shows poverty rates in each PICTs according to the latest HIES.

**Figure 24: Poverty Rates in Pacific Island Countries, latest available year**

Country (year)	Poverty Rate (%)
Cook Islands (2005-06) <sup>524</sup>	28
Fiji (2019-20) <sup>525</sup>	30
FSM (2013-14) <sup>526</sup>	41
Kiribati (2006) <sup>527</sup>	22
Nauru (2012-13) <sup>528</sup>	24
Niue (2002) <sup>529</sup>	13
Palau (2005-06) <sup>530</sup>	25

<sup>521</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2019-20 Household Income and Expenditure Survey. Available at: [https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/images/documents/2007\\_Census\\_of\\_Pop\\_Housing/Population-Censuses-and-Surveys/2019-20\\_Household\\_Income\\_and\\_Expenditure\\_Survey\\_Preliminary\\_Release.pdf](https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/images/documents/2007_Census_of_Pop_Housing/Population-Censuses-and-Surveys/2019-20_Household_Income_and_Expenditure_Survey_Preliminary_Release.pdf)

<sup>522</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Samoa's Second Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, 2020, p.31. Available at: <https://samoa.un.org/en/52796-samoas-second-voluntary-national-review-im> Tonga Statistics Department, 'Assessing progress towards the eradication of poverty in the Kingdom of Tonga', 2018, p.6. <https://www.tonga.gov.tg/images/stories/development-sustainable-development-goals>

<sup>523</sup> Government of FSM Office of the Statistics, Poverty Profile of the Federated State of Micronesia 2013-2014. Available at: [https://www.fsmstatistics.fm/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2013\\_FSM\\_Poverty\\_Profile.pdf](https://www.fsmstatistics.fm/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2013_FSM_Poverty_Profile.pdf)

<sup>524</sup> UNICEF: Situation Analysis of children in Cook Islands, 2017, <https://coraminternational.org/situation-analyses-of-children-in-the-pacific-island-countries/>.

<sup>525</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2019-20 Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

<sup>526</sup> Government of FSM Office of the Statistics, Poverty Profile of the Federated State of Micronesia 2013-2014.

<sup>527</sup> KNSO and UNDP Pacific, 'Kiribati Analysis of the 2006 HIES', 2010, [https://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/library/sustainable-development/Kiribati\\_2006\\_Household\\_Income\\_Expenditure\\_Survey.html](https://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/library/sustainable-development/Kiribati_2006_Household_Income_Expenditure_Survey.html)

<sup>528</sup> UNDP, Nauru Hardship and Poverty Report 2012-2013, [https://nauru-data.sprep.org/system/files/Nauru\\_UNDP\\_Hardship%20and%20Poverty%20Report\\_2012\\_2013.PDF](https://nauru-data.sprep.org/system/files/Nauru_UNDP_Hardship%20and%20Poverty%20Report_2012_2013.PDF)

<sup>529</sup> Niue Statistics Office, Poverty in Niue, 2017. Available at: <https://niue.prism.spc.int/social/poverty-in-niue/>.

<sup>530</sup> Palau Office of Planning and Statistics and UNDP Pacific Office. 2008. *Analysis of the 2006 Household Income and Expenditure Survey: Final report on the estimation of basic needs poverty lines, and the incidence*

RMI (2019-20) <sup>531</sup>	8
Samoa (2018-19) <sup>532</sup>	23
Solomon Islands (2012-13) <sup>533</sup>	13
Tokelau (2015-16) <sup>534</sup>	0
Tonga (2015-16) <sup>535</sup>	27
Tuvalu (2010) <sup>536</sup>	26
Vanuatu (2019-20) <sup>537</sup>	16

### Child poverty

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to poverty in PICTs, with higher rates of poverty for this age group compared to the national average. For example, poverty rates in Fiji (2019-20) are 44 per cent for children aged 0-14 compared to 30 per cent overall.<sup>538</sup>

In addition to the limited recent data on child poverty, there are also differences in how data is analysed to understand child poverty. This causes difficulties in comparing poverty rates between PICTs: some PICTs assess the percentage of children below the basic needs poverty line (BNPL) (e.g. Fiji),<sup>539</sup> some examine the percentage of children in the bottom income and/or expenditure deciles (e.g. Solomon Islands), while a few countries have taken steps to assess multidimensional child poverty beyond the BNPL (e.g. Tonga).<sup>540</sup> Countries also disaggregate data using different age categories (e.g. Nauru assess poverty for age 0-4, 5-14 and 15-29<sup>541</sup>, whereas RMI assesses poverty for age 0-10 and 10-20).<sup>542</sup>

Nonetheless, data consistently shows that children in PICTs are vulnerable to poverty. The impacts of poverty are more significant for children, and there is growing evidence that children experience

*and characteristics.* Available at: <https://www.palau.gov.pw/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Palau-Poverty-Analysis.pdf>.

<sup>531</sup> RMI Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office (EPPSO). Poverty Assessment Country Chapter: Republic of Marshall Islands (Analysis of 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES)). Available at: [https://www.rmieppso.org/eppso\\_files/HIES2021/RMI-Poverty-Chapter.pdf](https://www.rmieppso.org/eppso_files/HIES2021/RMI-Poverty-Chapter.pdf)

<sup>532</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Samoa's Second Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, 2020, p.31.

<sup>533</sup> Solomon Islands Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2012-2013. Available at: <https://www.statistics.gov.sb/statistics/demographic-statistics/household-income-and-expenditure-surveys>

<sup>534</sup> Tokelau National Statistics Office, Tokelau 2015/16 Household Income and Expenditure Survey. Available at: <https://www.tokelau.org.nz/site/tokelau/files/TokelauNSO/HIES/2015-16TokelauHIES-Report4Bprint.pdf>

<sup>535</sup> Tonga Statistics Department, 'Assessing progress towards the eradication of poverty in the Kingdom of Tonga', 2018.

<sup>536</sup> World Bank, Tuvalu Poverty Rate. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=TV>

<sup>537</sup> Vanuatu National Statistics Office, Vanuatu 2019-2020 NSDP Baseline Survey Hardship Report, 2021. Available at: [https://vnso.gov.vu/images/Pictures/NSDP\\_Baseline/Analysis/Report/Hardship\\_report.pdf](https://vnso.gov.vu/images/Pictures/NSDP_Baseline/Analysis/Report/Hardship_report.pdf)

<sup>538</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2019-20 Household Income and Expenditure Survey

<sup>539</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2019-20 Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

<sup>540</sup> Tonga Statistics Department, 'Assessing progress towards the eradication of poverty in the Kingdom of Tonga', 2018.

<sup>541</sup> UNDP, Nauru Hardship and Poverty Report 2012-2013

<sup>542</sup> RMI Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office (EPPSO). Poverty Assessment Country Chapter: Republic of Marshall Islands (Analysis of 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES)).

poverty more acutely than adults and that the negative impacts on their development can have profound and irreversible effects into adulthood.<sup>543</sup>

### *Gender and equity dimensions of child poverty*

While there is limited recent data examining variations in poverty rates in the PICTs, in a number of the countries the national average rates of poverty mask inequalities, with poverty rates varying substantially between different households. One of the most common variations in poverty rates is between those living in urban versus rural areas. Across PICTs, persons living in rural locations are at increased risk of living in poverty. For example, in Fiji, 20 per cent of households in urban areas were living in poverty compared to 42 per cent in rural areas.<sup>544</sup> In Kiribati, the 2018-19 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) indicated that 0 per cent of the population in urban areas fall in the lowest wealth quintile, compared to 43 per cent of households in rural areas.<sup>545</sup>

Data from HIES in several PICTs indicates that larger households are more vulnerable to poverty, and that poverty rates increase particularly with the number of children in the household. For example, in FSM, 29 per cent of households with one to two children are living in poverty, compared to almost 43 per cent with three to four children, and 68 per cent with five or more children.<sup>546</sup> In the Fiji 2019-20 HIES, the poverty rate for households with three or more children is estimated at 44 per cent compared to 22 per cent for households with one child,<sup>547</sup> with the same pattern also evident in Kiribati<sup>548</sup> and Samoa.<sup>549</sup>

Poverty analyses consistently indicate that educational attainment is linked to poverty in PICTs, with higher education levels making households less likely to be living in poverty. For example, in Vanuatu, poverty rates are 51 per cent in households in which the highest level of education is class 0-2, compared to less than one per cent where a household member has a university degree.<sup>550</sup> Some countries see the same pattern when looking at the education level of the household head; for example, in Fiji, 38 per cent of persons who live with a household head that has only completed primary education were living below the poverty line, compared to only five per cent living with a household head who has completed postgraduate education.<sup>551</sup> These patterns are likely to be linked to employment undertaken by those at different educational levels. In Fiji, poverty rates are higher for those who live with household heads that are family/community workers (44 per cent), compared to those who are self-employed (34 per cent) or are wage/salary earners (23 per cent).<sup>552</sup> Additionally, in FSM, more than 60 per cent of workers in the public sector (i.e. where the lowest rates of poverty are observed at 21 per cent) have tertiary level education, compared to only 13 per cent of workers producing for their own consumption (47 per cent poverty rate).<sup>553</sup>

<sup>543</sup> See e.g. Roos, L., et. al., 'Poverty and early childhood outcomes', 143(6) *Paediatrics*, June 2019.

<sup>544</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2019-20 Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

<sup>545</sup> MICS, *Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey 2018-19*, Survey Findings Report.

<sup>546</sup> Government of FSM Office of the Statistics, *Poverty Profile of the Federated State of Micronesia 2013-2014*.

<sup>547</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2019-20 Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

<sup>548</sup> World Bank, *Kiribati Poverty and Equity Brief* (2018), p. 1.

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/767551528203422506/pdf/Kiribati-poverty-and-equity-brief-spring-2018.pdf>

<sup>549</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics, *Samoa's Second Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, 2020*, p.31.

<sup>550</sup> Vanuatu National Statistics Office, *Vanuatu 2019-2020 NSDP Baseline Survey Hardship Report, 2021*.

<sup>551</sup> Fiji, HIES 2019-2020.

<sup>552</sup> Fiji, HIES 2019-2020.

<sup>553</sup> Government of FSM Office of the Statistics, *Poverty Profile of the Federated State of Micronesia 2013-2014*, [https://www.fsmstatistics.fm/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2013\\_FSM\\_Poverty\\_Profile.pdf](https://www.fsmstatistics.fm/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2013_FSM_Poverty_Profile.pdf).

One of the key issues relating to poverty is gender. Female-headed households are consistently shown to have higher rates of poverty than male headed households across PICTs. For example, in RMI, 10 per cent of female headed households live in poverty compared to 7 per cent of male headed households.<sup>554</sup> A key driver of this pattern is thought to be the vast gender inequalities in terms of economic activity and labour force participation. Across many PICTs, labour force participation is substantially lower for women than men (79 per cent for men and 38 per cent for women in Fiji).<sup>555</sup> Further, in the PICTs, women disproportionately work in informal sectors, and are less likely to own businesses, particularly large enterprises.<sup>556</sup> Inequalities in labour force participation and formal employment also lead to unequal access to social protection. For PICTs where the data shows no clear gender dimension to poverty (e.g. Vanuatu), it has been noted that other factors may mask such gender dimensions, such as the assumption of an equal distribution of resources within households, or a higher percentage of male-headed households in poorer rural areas.<sup>557</sup>

Recent research has also shown that gender and education have played a role in the economic impact of COVID-19 in PICTs. For example, a study conducted by the World Bank in Solomon Islands showed that women were more likely to have lost their jobs than men: 25 per cent of women reported losing their jobs compared to 22 per cent of men, with 10 per cent of women reporting losing jobs specifically due to COVID-19, compared to 8 per cent of men.<sup>558</sup> Those with tertiary education were less likely to report job losses than those with primary or secondary education. Conversely, in Samoa, individuals with higher education saw greater reductions in income due to COVID-19.<sup>559</sup>

The lack of any recent data available to enable analysis of the variation in poverty rates among different types of households (number of dependents, single-headed etc.) or by identity characteristics (gender, disability, etc.) in several PICTs (including Niue, Tokelau and Solomon Islands) represents a significant gap, limiting the extent to which measures to address poverty can be effectively targeted.

Children with a disability are among those groups of children most affected by poverty. Unfortunately, most household surveys across the PICTs do not collect data on disability, creating a knowledge gap. It has been suggested, however, that children with disabilities are vulnerable to poverty, face challenges in accessing basic services and face a high risk of social exclusion.

Children from poor households will need to overcome incredible odds to escape poverty. Vulnerable and rural families struggle to access basic goods and services, many of which are available in urban centres. This ranges from food and water supplies to electricity to education and health services. Rural and outer islands populations are disproportionately affected by limited access to social services, which exacerbates inequality and exclusion.

<sup>554</sup> EPPSO, Poverty Assessment Country Chapter: Republic of Marshall Islands.

<sup>555</sup> World Bank data, Labour force participation rate, Fiji, 2019. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ACTI.MA.ZS?locations=FJ> (male) and <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=FJ> (female).

<sup>556</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics, Population and Housing Census 2017.

<sup>557</sup> Vanuatu National Statistics Office, Vanuatu 2019–2020 NSDP Baseline Survey Hardship Report, 2021.

<sup>558</sup> The World Bank, Solomon Island High Frequency Phone Survey on COVID-19: Results from Round 1, 2020 Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/167041607012187892/pdf/Solomon-Islands-High-Frequency-Survey-on-COVID-19-First-Round-Results.pdf>

<sup>559</sup> UN RCO, Samoa COVID-19 Socio-economic impact assessment: Key findings, August 2021, p2. Available at: [https://samoa.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/Samoa%20SEIA%20Key%20Findings%20v10\\_Final%20%28Sep%20%202021%29.pdf](https://samoa.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/Samoa%20SEIA%20Key%20Findings%20v10_Final%20%28Sep%20%202021%29.pdf)



## 6.3 Impact of climate change

The impacts of climate change, including an increase in extreme weather events and disasters, have caused devastation to the economy and livelihoods of persons in PICTs. While there are variations in risk for natural disasters, the vast majority of PICTs are extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change, with several PICTs experiencing extreme weather events since 2017, at significant costs. For example, on average, natural disasters cause damage costing 8 per cent of GDP in Solomon Islands,<sup>560</sup> and a mean annual damage of 43 per cent of GDP in Vanuatu.<sup>561</sup> PICTs are also vulnerable to droughts, freshwater scarcity, rising sea levels and ocean acidification (which can result in coral bleaching). These changes are likely to be damaging to PICT economies, particularly those with a high reliance on tourism for the economy (e.g. Palau).<sup>562</sup> Financial losses in PICTs will increase as climate-related extreme weather events and natural disasters increase in frequency and intensity as a result of climate change.

Most recently, several PICTs have been impacted by Tropical Cyclone Harold, which occurred in April 2020 and caused severe damage across multiple PICTs. In Vanuatu, Tropical Cyclone Harold caused damages equal to almost 65 per cent of Vanuatu's GDP, impacting more than 50 per cent of the population and damaging schools, health facilities and public buildings, houses, powerlines and crop production.<sup>563</sup> The cyclone also caused considerable damage to Tonga, affecting 27 per cent of the population and resulting in losses of more than 12 per cent of Tonga's GDP.<sup>564</sup> In January 2022, an eruption on Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai caused a tsunami, causing catastrophic damage to Tonga but also across many of the Islands.

Those who are already vulnerable, including children, the elderly, low-income communities, those facing discrimination, and those with disabilities are at greater risk in extreme weather and climate events.<sup>565</sup> While richer households have the capacity to buffer themselves from the economic impacts of natural disasters, through for instance, using savings or borrowing money, poorer households may be forced to cut back on items that are essential to wellbeing, such as food, housing, education or health care.<sup>566</sup> This can have significant impacts on the ability for families to ensure the wellbeing of children.

## 6.4 Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing socio-economic challenges for PICTs, especially for children and families who were already vulnerable. COVID-19 has threatened the livelihood of many Pacific islanders. Hence, the monetary poverty rate is expected to be significantly higher than reported in the

<sup>560</sup> IMF, *The Economic Impact of Natural Disasters in Pacific Island Countries: Adaptation and Preparedness*, 2018.

<sup>561</sup> IMF, *The Economic Impact of Natural Disasters in Pacific Island Countries: Adaptation and Preparedness*, 2018. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2018/05/10/The-Economic-Impact-of-Natural-Disasters-in-Pacific-Island-Countries-Adaptation-and-45826>

<sup>562</sup> PIRCA, *Climate Change in Palau: Indicators and Consideration for Key Indicators*. 2020. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/climate-change-in-palau-pirca-2020-low-res.pdf>

<sup>563</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The Republic of Vanuatu: Tropical Cyclone Harold caused widespread damage to the agriculture sector*, 2020. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/vanuatu/republic-vanuatu-tropical-cyclone-harold-caused-widespread-damage-agriculture-sector>

<sup>564</sup> World Bank press release, 16 December 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/12/16/30-million-in-support-for-tongas-most-vulnerable>

<sup>565</sup> PIRCA, *Climate Change in Palau: Indicators and Consideration for Key Indicators*. 2020. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/climate-change-in-palau-pirca-2020-low-res.pdf>

<sup>566</sup> World Bank, *Climate assessment vulnerability: Making Fiji climate resilient*, 2017.

most recent HIES across PICTs. UNICEF has conducted multiple COVID-19 socio-economic impact assessments (SEIA) to estimate changes in poverty rates as a result of the pandemic, highlighting that poverty rates are expected to be above their pre-COVID-19 levels for several years if no responsive social protection programmes are established. For example, an SEIA of Solomon Islands estimates that between 24,000 and 35,000 individuals have fallen into poverty in 2020, with the number of children in poverty estimated to have increased from 50,000 pre-COVID-19 to between 55,000 and 77,000.<sup>567</sup> There have been increases in food poverty, and families have struggled to afford education costs.<sup>568</sup> An SEIA for Fiji also estimates that poverty rates will have increased from 24.2 per cent pre-COVID-19 to up to 31.3 per cent at the end of 2020, although it is predicted to fall to between 24.5 and 26 per cent in 2022.<sup>569</sup> However, children are more likely to fall into poverty due to COVID-19, with child poverty rates standing 9.9 percentage points higher than the overall population post-COVID-19, compared to 7.9 percentage points higher pre-COVID-19.<sup>570</sup> An SEIA in Samoa showed that 11 per cent of households have lost their job due to COVID-18, and 17 per cent of households reported a reduction in income.<sup>571</sup> Loss of income as a result of COVID-19 alongside increased costs threaten the food security, nutrition, essential healthcare, learning and protection for children and families. The downturn in the economy in the Asia Pacific Region and globally will also have a negative impact on PICTs' main source of revenues and economic growth.

### *Government responses to COVID-19*

Government responses to COVID-19 have varied across PICTs, although there are many similarities in the forms of social protection provided during this time. Many PICTs implemented financial support and measures for businesses, including loans, rental relief packages, reductions in interest rates and tax relief, particularly for small and medium enterprises (e.g. Solomon Islands, FSM),<sup>572</sup> in addition to employer reimbursements (Vanuatu),<sup>573</sup> and support for businesses in the tourism industry (e.g. wage subsidies and tax rebates in Kiribati).<sup>574</sup>

Overall, formal sector workers had greater access to social protection during this time, with several PICTs providing support through national provident funds. Countries such as Fiji<sup>575</sup> and Samoa<sup>576</sup> provided unemployment benefits through national provident funds to formal workers who were unable to work or had lost jobs during or post-lockdown. Some PICTs provided funding specifically for those affected by the collapse of tourism due to border closures, and other industries affected by

<sup>567</sup> UNICEF, Socio-economic impact assessment of COVID-19 for Solomons Islands, 2020. Unpublished Report.

<sup>568</sup> The World Bank, Solomon Island High Frequency Phone Survey on COVID-19: Results from Round 1, 2020.

<sup>569</sup> UN Pacific, Socio-economic impact assessment of COVID-19 in Fiji, July 202, p.39. Available at: <https://pacific.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/200901%20SEIA%20Fiji%20-%20Consolidated%20Report%20-%20FINAL%20%28002%29.pdf>

<sup>570</sup> UN Pacific, Socio-economic impact assessment of COVID-19 in Fiji, July 2020, p.38

<sup>571</sup> UN RCO, Samoa COVID-19 Socio-economic impact assessment: Key findings, August 2021, p2.

<sup>572</sup> ADB, 'ADB Provides \$14 Million Grant to Help FSM Respond to COVID-19', 13<sup>TH</sup> November 2020. Available at: <https://www.adb.org/news/adb-provides-14-million-grant-help-fsm-respond-covid-19>

<sup>573</sup> UNESCAP, COVID-19 Policy Response. Available at: [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/2021-03/Vanuatu\\_COVID%20Country%20profile%20230321.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/2021-03/Vanuatu_COVID%20Country%20profile%20230321.pdf)

<sup>574</sup> ADB, 'ADB Provides \$14 Million Grant to Help FSM Respond to COVID-19', 13<sup>TH</sup> November 2020. Available at: <https://www.adb.org/news/adb-provides-14-million-grant-help-fsm-respond-covid-19>

<sup>575</sup> Fiji Times, COVID-19: Government pays out \$6.3m so far for \$90 assistance program. Available at: <https://www.fijitimes.com/covid-19-government-pays-out-6-3m-so-far-for-90-assistance-program/>

<sup>576</sup> IMF, 'Policy Responses to Covid-19: Samoa'. July 2021. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19>

restrictions such as the hospitality sector (e.g. a moratorium on contribution payments and 20 per cent early withdrawal for persons employed in Samoa).<sup>577</sup>

Fewer countries provided income support for informal workers, although a number of countries introduced temporary or one-time cash transfer programmes for informal workers, including Fiji (FJ\$50-90)<sup>578</sup>, and FSM.<sup>579</sup> Another example of support benefiting informal workers includes the introduction of a temporary universal basic income throughout the period of the state of emergency in Tuvalu.<sup>580</sup>

Few PICTs provided funding specifically targeting women, children and marginalised groups, but have done so for vulnerable groups to lessen the impact of COVID-19. Vanuatu implemented an 'Unblocked Cash' transfer programme, targeting those most vulnerable to the economic impacts of COVID-19 and Tropical Cyclone Harold, including persons with disabilities.<sup>581</sup> The Government of Tonga's economic and social stimulus package included social welfare payments to elderly Tongans, people living with disabilities, and support for secondary school students to stay in school.<sup>582</sup> Nauru also implemented a range of financial measures to support children's education through the pandemic.<sup>583</sup> Some governments introduced additional temporary or one-time payments to individuals already in receipt of benefits, such as pension, child allowance or disability allowance (including Fiji<sup>584</sup>, Cook Islands<sup>585</sup> and Nauru).<sup>586</sup>

Some PICTs have provided assistance for food, whilst several have tried to reduce the impact of COVID-19 by providing support to increase home production, agricultural productivity and subsistence. For example, Fiji implemented cash for work and cash for agriculture programmes.<sup>587</sup> Solomon Islands introduced price reductions and freight subsidies for copra and cocoa buyers to encourage economic productivity in villages.

<sup>577</sup> World Bank, Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19: A real-time review of country measures, May 2021. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33635>

<sup>578</sup> Fiji Times, COVID-19: Government pays out \$6.3m so far for \$90 assistance program.

<sup>579</sup> ADB, 'ADB Provides \$14 Million Grant to Help FSM Respond to COVID-19', 13<sup>TH</sup> November 2020. Available at: <https://www.adb.org/news/adb-provides-14-million-grant-help-fsm-respond-covid-19>

<sup>580</sup> Tuvalu National COVID-19 Economic Financial Measure. Available at: [https://mfed.tv/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TuvaluNationalCovid19\\_EconomicFinancialMeasures\\_FINAL.pdf](https://mfed.tv/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TuvaluNationalCovid19_EconomicFinancialMeasures_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>581</sup> Oxfam, 'UnBlocked Cash Project: using blockchain technology to revolutionize humanitarian aid.' Available at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/unblocked-cash-project-using-blockchain-technology-revolutionize-humanitarian-aid>

<sup>582</sup> Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19: A Real-Time Review of Country Measures, working paper, May 2021, p.586 <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/281531621024684216/pdf/Social-Protection-and-Jobs-Responses-to-COVID-19-A-Real-Time-Review-of-Country-Measures-May-14-2021.pdf>

<sup>583</sup> Nauru 2020-2021 National Budget Estimate. Available at: <https://naurufinance.info/2020-21-budget/#:~:text=Nauru%20operates%20on%20a%20cash,with%20a%20small%20surplus%20balance>.

<sup>584</sup> Ministry of Economy, 2020-2021 Supplementary National Budget (COVID-19 Economic Response and Stimulus).

<sup>585</sup> World Bank, Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19: A real-time review of country measures, May 2021. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33635>

<sup>586</sup> Nauru 2020-2021 National Budget Estimate. Available at: <https://naurufinance.info/2020-21-budget/#:~:text=Nauru%20operates%20on%20a%20cash,with%20a%20small%20surplus%20balance>.

<sup>587</sup> Fiji Government, 3,000 FARMERS EARMARKED TO BENEFIT FROM 'CASH FOR CULTIVATION' PROGRAMME, 2021. Available at: <https://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/News/3,000-FARMERS-EARMARKED-TO-BENEFIT-FROM-%E2%80%98CASH-FOR>

## 6.5 Key bottlenecks and enablers

### *Policy and institutional environment*

Several PICTs have made progress in developing an effective and comprehensive social protection system since 2017, but there remains a great disparity in the provision of social protection schemes across the different PICTs. Whilst some PICTs have strong formal protection systems with comprehensive social assistance schemes for vulnerable children, those with disabilities and the elderly (e.g. Cook Islands),<sup>588</sup> overall the lack of comprehensive social protection systems in PICTs is a significant gap. Several PICTs have no social assistance programme for those living in poverty and vulnerability, while in others, social protection systems remain fragmented. Many social protection programmes remain targeted at narrowly defined groups and have limited reach. Some PICTs lack a central authority or inter-agency body charged with policy-making for the social protection system.

Social protection schemes in PICTs have been criticised for operating on a scheme-based logic with little coordination between the different schemes and institutions.<sup>589</sup> Particularly in the context of diminishing traditional support systems and an intensifying climate crisis, the absence of a comprehensive social protection system that effectively targets those most in need is a significant gap for many PICTs. Lack of social assistance programmes that target vulnerable populations impairs the ability of PICTs to lift their people out of poverty and create improved conditions for economic growth.

Whilst social protection in PICTs remains fragmented, several countries have embarked on significant developments to their social protection system since 2017. For example, Samoa has developed a draft of its first National Social Protection Policy, with a particular focus on strengthening social protection for the vulnerable. In addition, UNICEF and the Government of Tokelau are currently conducting a national assessment of the social protection system, which will inform the development of social protection policies in Tokelau and other PICTs.<sup>590</sup>

Much of social protection in PICTs is dependent on membership and contributory payments to national superannuation funds. Social insurance, provided through a national provident fund and workers compensation scheme, is limited to formal sector workers, and excludes the majority of workers who operate in the informal economy – it is therefore not targeted to the poorest members of society. However, recently, certain PICTs have made developments to increase access to social protection for persons in informal employment. The Solomon Islands National Provident Fund developed a new scheme, ‘youSave’, to enable informal workers to make contributions on a voluntary basis; 50 per cent of their contributions are only accessible when the worker reaches the age of 55 years, but 50 per cent can be withdrawn up to four times per year.<sup>591</sup> This development will increase the percentage of the population able to access social protection, when they are in need of their savings, although there is currently no data on the uptake of the scheme. A further new scheme started in August 2021 in Vanuatu: ILO, in partnership with the Vanuatu National Provident Fund, Vodafone and United Nations Capital Development Fund, launched an innovative mobile app to allow

<sup>588</sup> Asian Development Bank: The Social Protection Indicator for the Pacific, 2019. Available at:

<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/513481/spi-pacific-2019.pdf>

<sup>589</sup> UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and ILO, *Global research on governance and social protection: Case studies on Mauritius and Fiji*, 2020, p. 19.

<sup>590</sup> Social Policy Research Institute, ‘Projects: Tokelau- National Assessment of the Social Protection System.’ Available at: <https://spriglobal.org/portfolio/tokealusp/>

<sup>591</sup> SINPF YouSave scheme, Available at: <https://www.sinpf.org.sb/index.php/members-services/yousave.html>; Global Dynamics of Social Policy, *The Solomon Islands’ Social Policy Response to Covid-19: Between Wantok and Economic Stimulus Package*, 2021

informal workers to make direct payments into their contributory scheme with their mobile phone.<sup>592</sup> Contributions can also be made by residents of Vanuatu who have taken seasonable employment outside Vanuatu. Similar mobile schemes are being planned for Fiji and Tonga.<sup>593</sup>

Several countries have universal pension schemes or have increased pension support coverage since 2017. For example, as of May 2020, Fiji had extended the social pension scheme to cover all persons over the age of 65 not otherwise receiving pension support, resulting in 88 per cent coverage of the older population.<sup>594</sup> The Samoan Government has also recently (2021-2022) increased the benefits provided through the universal pension scheme, which guarantees an income for all older persons in Samoa, including cash transfers, free medicine and travel benefits.<sup>595</sup> Other PICTs with universal pension schemes include Niue<sup>596</sup> and Kiribati.<sup>597</sup>

Although few PICTs have non-contributory social protection schemes specifically targeting poor and vulnerable persons, including children, there has been marked improvement in the coverage of social protection schemes for children in recent years. For example, the coverage of Fiji's Care and Protection Allowance has almost doubled since 2017: from 4,608 children in 2014 to 8,183 children in 2020.<sup>598</sup> In 2020, Samoa designed its first social protection programme directly aimed at supporting persons with disability, a significant step in improving social protection for the vulnerable.<sup>599</sup> Niue has multiple conditional social cash transfers for children, including a child allowance, an infant grant, a special welfare benefit for young mothers, persons caring for the elderly or those who have lost their job due to illness or other reasons<sup>600</sup> and a disability allowance.<sup>601</sup> The Cook Islands is one of the few PICTs that target social assistance payments to children, with benefits to children being universal for children up to age 12 (or 16 with disabilities), and families receiving additional Christmas bonuses.<sup>602</sup>

One of the most common forms of social protection in PICTs is education support, though once again this differs between countries. For example, Solomon Islands has a fee waiver for all primary and secondary school children, which takes the form of an educational fee waiver provided to schools on behalf of students.<sup>603</sup> Samoa also has a school fee grant programme to provide free education for

<sup>592</sup> ILO, 'Innovation to increase access to social security in Vanuatu.' Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/suva/public-information/WCMS\\_818273/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/suva/public-information/WCMS_818273/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>593</sup> ILO, 'Innovation to increase access to social security in Vanuatu.' Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/suva/public-information/WCMS\\_818273/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/suva/public-information/WCMS_818273/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>594</sup> Fijivillage (2020), in UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and ILO, *Global research on governance and social protection: Case studies on Mauritius and Fiji*, 2020, p. 18.

<sup>595</sup> AusAID, 'Poverty, Vulnerability and Social Protection in the Pacific', 2012, p. 30. The scheme is administered through the National Provident Fund Amendment Act 1990. Available at:

<https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/publications/poverty-vulnerability-and-social-protection-in-the-pacific-the-role-of-social-transfers/>

<sup>596</sup> IPC-IG & UNICEF, *Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific: Inventory of non-contributory programmes*, 2019

<sup>597</sup> *Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific*, 2019, p.233

<sup>598</sup> International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth and UNICEF, *Social protection in Asia and the Pacific: Inventory of non-contributory schemes*, 2019, p. 226 and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and ILO, *Global research on governance and social protection: Case studies on Mauritius and Fiji*, 2020, p. 19.

<sup>599</sup> Joint SDG Fund, 'Samoa Designs first Disability focused social protection program' November 2020.

Available at: <https://jointdsgfund.org/article/samoa-designs-first-disability-focused-social-protection-program>

<sup>600</sup> IPC-IG & UNICEF, *Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific: Inventory of non-contributory programmes*, 2019.

<sup>601</sup> IPC-IG & UNICEF, *Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific: Inventory of non-contributory programmes*, 2019.

<sup>602</sup> International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth and UNICEF, *Social protection in Asia and the Pacific: Inventory of non-contributory schemes*, 2019, p.217,

<https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/706/file/Social-Protection-in-Asia-and-the-Pacific.pdf>

<sup>603</sup> IPC-IG & UNICEF, *Social protection in Asia and the Pacific: Inventory of Non-contributory programmes*, 2019.

primary and secondary age school children, provided through cash transfers directly to schools.<sup>604</sup> RMI provides a number social assistance programmes to support the education of vulnerable children (particularly those with disabilities), including school meals, and a special education programme to meet the costs of transport, wheelchairs and other needs to ensure that children are able to access free and appropriate education.<sup>605</sup> Nauru implements a school feeding programme to provide lunches to all school aged children.<sup>606</sup>

### *Economy, budget and public finance*

PICTs face several barriers to economic growth, including distance from global markets, a limited and fragile resource base, sparsely distributed land and population, inability to achieve economies of scale, political instability, vulnerability to changes in the global economy and vulnerability to natural disasters, which cause economic shocks.<sup>607</sup> Slow economic growth and exposure of the economy to shocks has led to a poverty of opportunity in PICTs. A small number of PICTs have political affiliation and ‘free association’ with other countries, that have resulted in a degree of social and economic protection from the challenges faced by PICTs, such as Tokelau and Niue’s free associations with New Zealand.<sup>608</sup> These free associations provide financial assistance, as well as access to a number of social protection benefits, particularly for citizens residing in New Zealand.

The majority, though not all of PICTs economies have suffered a recent period of negative growth as a result of COVID-19. Nauru has been an exception and has continued to see economic growth (0.8 per cent in 2020 and 1.5 per cent in 2021),<sup>609</sup> as have Kiribati and Tuvalu. Table 49 shows PICT economic forecasts for 2020-2022. Economic contractions in PICTs due to COVID-19 have far-reaching implications on public finance and human capital development. The pandemic has adversely impacted levels of domestic finance, foreign aid, and remittances. Disruptions to export markets, supply chains and travel restrictions will adversely affect disposable incomes. Government tax collections, higher unemployment, lower foreign demand for merchandise exports and the closure of tourism industries are all expected to negatively affect financial and insurance activities, construction, manufacturing, public administration, real estate, education and professional, scientific and technical activities in PICTs. It is important to acknowledge that, given the scarring effects of the pandemic, it will take several years for PICTs economies to reach the pre-COVID level of real GDP. Declines in GDP and revenue inevitably limit the fiscal space for social protection schemes in PICTs.

**Figure 25: 2020 -2022 projected economic growth (GDP)<sup>610</sup>**

Country	2020 growth (%)	2021 projected growth (%)	2022 projected growth (%)
Cook Islands <sup>611</sup>	-5.9	-26.0	7.1
Fiji <sup>612</sup>	-15.7	-5	8.8

<sup>604</sup> IPC-IG & UNICEF, Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific: Inventory of non-contributory programmes, 2019. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/706/file/Social-Protection-in-Asia-and-the-Pacific.pdf>

<sup>605</sup> Asian Development Bank, The Social Protection Indicator: Assessing Results for the Pacific, 2016. p. 29.

<sup>606</sup> IPC-IG and UNICEF, Social protection in Asia and the Pacific, 2019,

<https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/706/file/Social-Protection-in-Asia-and-the-Pacific.pdf>.

<sup>607</sup> AusAID, *Poverty, vulnerability and social protection in the Pacific: The role of social transfers*, 2012. p. 4

<sup>608</sup> Government of Tokelau, ‘Consolidated Sector Report for the Period to 30 June 2015’.

<sup>609</sup> ADB, Asian Development Outlook GDP Growth Rate, August 2021. Available at:

<https://www.adb.org/countries/nauru/main>

<sup>610</sup> Tokelau and Niue data unavailable

<sup>611</sup> Asian Development Bank Outlook November 2021: <https://www.adb.org/countries/cook-islands/main>

<sup>612</sup> ADB Outlook, Fiji. Accessed January 2022 <https://www.adb.org/countries/fiji/economy>

FSM <sup>613</sup>	-3.9	-1.1	2.0
Kiribati <sup>614</sup>	0.6	0.3	2.3
Nauru <sup>615</sup>	0.8	1.5	1.0
Palau <sup>616</sup>	-10	-8	10
RMI <sup>617</sup>	-2.6	-3.3	4.0
Samoa <sup>618</sup>	-3.2	-9.2	3.1
Solomon Islands <sup>619</sup>	-4	2	5
Tonga <sup>620</sup>	-0.8	-5.3	1.8
Tuvalu <sup>621</sup>	1.0	2.5	3.0
Vanuatu <sup>622</sup>	-8.5	-3	5

### Culture and practices

Other non-State forms of social protection exist in PICTs and should be considered in the development of policies and systems on social protection. Informal extended family and community systems provide important safety nets. Religious organizations, NGOs and community-based organizations, remain relatively strong and assist people when needed. Several PICTs have social support, such as Wantok (extended family and communities) in Vanuatu<sup>623</sup>, and the bubuti system in Kiribati. However, traditional safety nets are limited in their ability to respond to aggregate shocks.

Remittances also act as an important support to social protection for many PICTs. For example, remittances in Samoa have substantially increased from 20 per cent of GDP in 2017 to nearly 30 per cent GDP in 2020, supporting economic resilience to Cyclone Gita in 2018, the 2019 measles outbreak and the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>624</sup> There is variability in the role of remittances, with remittances accounting for lower income in some PICTs (e.g. 1 per cent of income in Vanuatu)<sup>625</sup>, compared to a

<sup>613</sup> Asian Development Bank, 'FSM and ADB: Economic Indicators for the FSM.' Available at:

<https://www.adb.org/countries/micronesia/economy>

<sup>614</sup> Asian Development Bank Economic Forecast, Kiribati, accessed September 2021. Available at:

<https://www.adb.org/countries/kiribati/main#data>

<sup>615</sup> ADB, Asian Development Outlook GDP Growth Rate, August 2021. Available at:

<https://www.adb.org/countries/nauru/main>

<sup>616</sup> Asian Development Bank Outlook April 2021. Available at: <https://www.adb.org/countries/palau/main>

<sup>617</sup> Asian Development Bank, Economic Indicators for the Marshall Islands. Available at:

<https://www.adb.org/countries/marshall-islands/economy>

<sup>618</sup> ADB, 'Economic Outlook', Available at: <https://www.adb.org/offices/south-pacific/economy#samoa>, accessed November 2021

<sup>619</sup> IMF, Solomon Islands: Country profile, accessed September 2021. Available at:

<https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/SLB#countrydata>

<sup>620</sup> ADB Tonga Economic Forecast, accessed 05 October 2021,

<https://www.adb.org/countries/tonga/main#data>

<sup>621</sup> ADB, Tuvalu Economic Outlook, accessed January 2022. Available at:

<https://www.adb.org/countries/tuvalu/main>

<sup>622</sup> Asian Development Bank, 'Vanuatu and ADB', April 2021. Available at:

<https://www.adb.org/countries/vanuatu/main>

<sup>623</sup> Asian Development Bank, Vanuatu Civil Society Briefs, 2017. Available at:

<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/233661/csb-vanuatu.pdf>

<sup>624</sup> UNESCAP, Policy Brief: Informal and Traditional Social Protection in Samoa, 2021, p.28. Available at:

<https://www.unescap.org/kp/2021/informal-and-traditional-social-protection-samoa>

<sup>625</sup> Vanuatu National Statistics Office, Vanuatu 2019–2020 NSDP Baseline Survey Hardship Report, 2021.

very high percentage of GDP in others (e.g. 41 per cent in Tonga).<sup>626</sup> However, remittances are insufficient to address the needs of children and families.

Informal social safety nets have been an important protection mechanism during COVID-19. A study by the World Bank indicated that informal safety nets were the most common form of assistance during COVID-19 in Solomon Islands: 29 per cent of households had received monetary assistance from a family member or friend, 19 per cent received assistance from a church or religious body, and 10 per cent received assistance from a community-based organization.<sup>627</sup>

Many PICTs have a high subsistence culture, which can both provide protection from, and be a risk factor for poverty and hardship. For example, in Vanuatu, subsistence agriculture accounts for over a quarter (26 per cent) of all jobs; however, individuals with a higher percentage of their income earned through subsistence farming are significantly more likely to be living in hardship.<sup>628</sup> In FSM<sup>629</sup> and Fiji<sup>630</sup> poverty rates are highest for workers involved in subsistence production (47 per cent). However, for some countries (such as Niue), the extent of reliance on subsistence food crops and fishing has been noted as a key factor protecting populations against extreme forms of poverty.<sup>631</sup> Subsistence and extended family and community support have been shown to protect a substantial proportion of the Tongan population from experiencing deprivation: in 2018, a quarter of households had a low income but were not deprived as a result of these support mechanisms.<sup>632</sup>

Traditional social support systems may be effective in responding to shocks faced by individual households (e.g. illness, unemployment), but they are weak in responding to persistent, community-wide shocks such as COVID-19 or a natural disaster. Increasing urbanisation, the increasing monetisation of Pacific economies, increasing rural/urban and overseas migration, and fragmentation of community-based social networks has undermined traditional systems of social protection and put these systems under increased stress.<sup>633</sup>

## 6.6 Recommendations

- Maintain fiscal space for social protection expenditure
- Shift toward an adaptive, resilient and shock responsive social protection system, which considers the changing nature of climate-related shocks and stresses.
- Place emphasis on transforming as well as protecting productive livelihoods, and adapting to changing climate conditions rather than simply reinforcing coping mechanisms.
- Recognise the structural causes of poverty in a particular region or sector, permitting more effective targeting of vulnerability to multiple shocks and stresses.

<sup>626</sup> ILO, Pacific Labour Market Review 2020: Pre-COVID-19 baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery, 2020, p.17

<sup>627</sup> The World Bank, Solomon Island High Frequency Phone Survey on COVID-19: Results from Round 1, 2020.

<sup>628</sup> Vanuatu National Statistics Office, Vanuatu 2019–2020 NSDP Baseline Survey Hardship Report, 2021.

<sup>629</sup> Government of FSM Office of the Statistics, Poverty Profile of the Federated State of Micronesia 2013-2014, [https://www.fsmstatistics.fm/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2013\\_FSM\\_Poverty\\_Profile.pdf](https://www.fsmstatistics.fm/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2013_FSM_Poverty_Profile.pdf).

<sup>630</sup> Fiji, HIES 2019-2020.

<sup>631</sup> PIFS, 'Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report', 2015, p. 70.

<sup>632</sup> Tonga Statistics Department, 'Assessing progress towards the eradication of poverty in the Kingdom of Tonga', 2018, p.24

<sup>633</sup> UNESCAP, Policy Brief: Informal and Traditional Social Protection in Samoa, 2021



- Incorporate a rights-based rationale for action, stressing equity and justice dimensions of chronic poverty and climate change adaptation, in addition to an instrumentalist rationale based on economic efficiency.
- Use research from both the natural and social sciences to inform the development and targeting of social protection policies and measures in the context of both geophysical and changing climate-related hazards.
- Develop / strengthen predictable cash transfers to reduce the vulnerability of the chronically poor exposed to climate-related shocks and stresses and prevent the use of damaging coping strategies.
- Develop a comprehensive and shock responsive National Social Protection Strategy including management information system for social protection by consolidating the governance structures and ensuring the system includes a growing number of social transfers that benefit children and families in need.
- Carry out regular monitoring, review and evaluation of the social protection system and social protection schemes.



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YOUR CHILD  
EUMONIA.  
YOUR CHILD WITH THREE DOSES OF  
WEEKS, 3 MONTHS AND 8 MONTHS

## 7. Early childhood development (ECD)

### 7.1 Update

Children under 5 years of age are estimated to comprise about 25 per cent of the population of the 14 Pacific Countries and Territories (PICTs) examined in this report.<sup>634</sup> This is roughly 644,028 of an estimated population of 2,565,034.<sup>635</sup>

Some early childhood development outcomes have been met individually by PICTs, such as universal access to sanitation achieved by Nauru,<sup>636</sup> under-5 childhood mortality achieved by Fiji, and the low rate of childhood stunting in Samoa. However, the progress for other early childhood outcomes has been slower across the region.

The Human Capital Index calculates risks associated with early childhood development. According to estimated averages from data available on 9 of the 14 PICTs,<sup>637</sup> a child born in the region today will only be 49 per cent as productive when he or she grows up as a child could be if he or she enjoyed complete education and full health. This means that children in the Pacific are bound to achieve only about half of their full potential due to significant gaps in basic services. Further, based on the same data, the average learning-adjusted years of school for children in the region is only 6.6 years of total primary and secondary years of education. Across the region, it is estimated that an average of 83.4 per cent of 15-year-olds will survive until age 60. This statistic is a proxy for the range of health risks that a child born today would experience as an adult under current conditions.

Some of the PICTs have completed MICS over the last years, which provides data for the Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI), showing whether children aged 3-4 years are developmentally on track in at least three domains: literacy-numeracy, physical, socioemotional and learning domains. The remaining PICTs are in the process of implementing MICS.<sup>638</sup> Results from these surveys and comparisons drawn between countries will help illuminate the status of young children in the region and support the development of targeted ECD programmes to reach the most marginalized.

While data is not available for all 14 PICTs, the data that are available indicate varying degrees of development across the region, with Tuvalu having a percentage of only 68.6 per cent of its children developmentally on track.<sup>639</sup>

<sup>634</sup> Averages calculated from: Countdown to 2030, Early Childhood Development. 2020. Available at: <https://nurturing-care.org/>

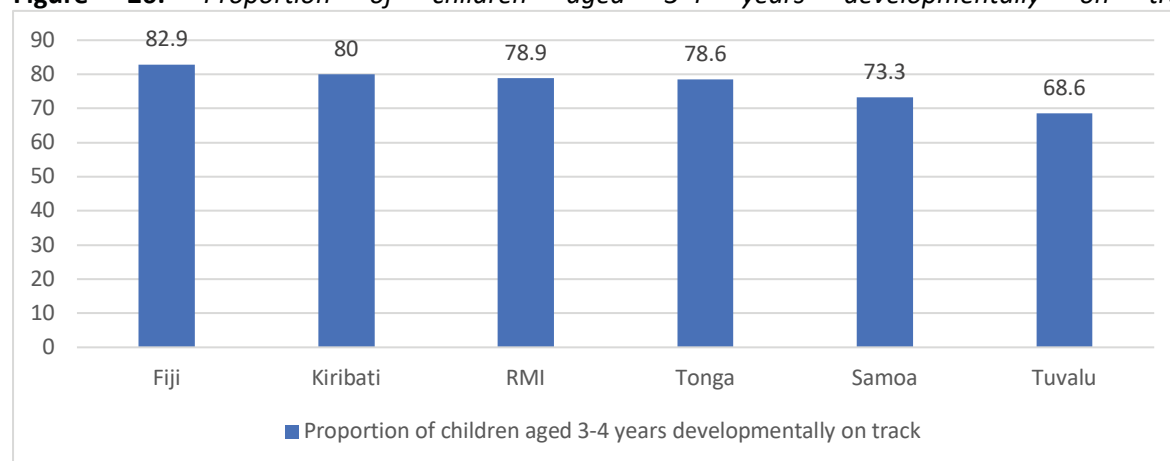
<sup>635</sup> Averages calculated from: Countdown to 2030, Early Childhood Development. 2020. Available at: <https://nurturing-care.org/>

<sup>636</sup> JMP WASH, Nauru data, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data>

<sup>637</sup> Averages calculated from country profiles from: The World Bank, Human Capital Index, 2020. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/human-capital>

<sup>638</sup> UNICEF, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in the Pacific, 2021. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/stories/multiple-indicator-cluster-survey-pacific>

<sup>639</sup> Early Childhood Development Index 2020.

**Figure 26:** Proportion of children aged 3-4 years developmentally on track.

Source: ECDI.

Children in the PICTs have a long way to go to meet related SDGs, across a number of developmental indicators. For example, there is a relatively high coverage of immunisation in the PICTs at a national level, however, immunisation rates face significant inequities at subnational level. In Vanuatu, some provinces have coverage rates as low as 39 per cent for the BCG vaccine although the region is considered to have an immunisation rate that is higher than the global average of 83 per cent.

Children are faced with many factors associated with significant risk to development. Some of these risks include poverty, malnutrition, poor health and exposure to violence.<sup>640</sup> Corporal punishment remains common across PICTs, with many children reported to be exposed to family violence. In Fiji, for example, 80.5 per cent of children ages 1-14 years have reportedly experienced physical punishment.

The under-5 mortality rate for the 14 PICTs is at a rate of 24.5 (per 1000 deaths) compared to the global average of 38.<sup>641</sup> Cook Islands, with an under-5 mortality rate of 8 (per 1000 deaths) has the lowest rate in the region.<sup>642</sup> On the other hand, Samoa, with the second lowest rate after Cook Islands has almost double the rate at 15 (per 1000 deaths), followed by Tonga and Palau at 17.<sup>643</sup> Kiribati stands at a rate of 51 (per 1000 deaths), followed by RMI at 32.<sup>644</sup> This indicates that the circumstances for young children differ across the region, with possible links to nutrition and the quality of services including health infrastructure.

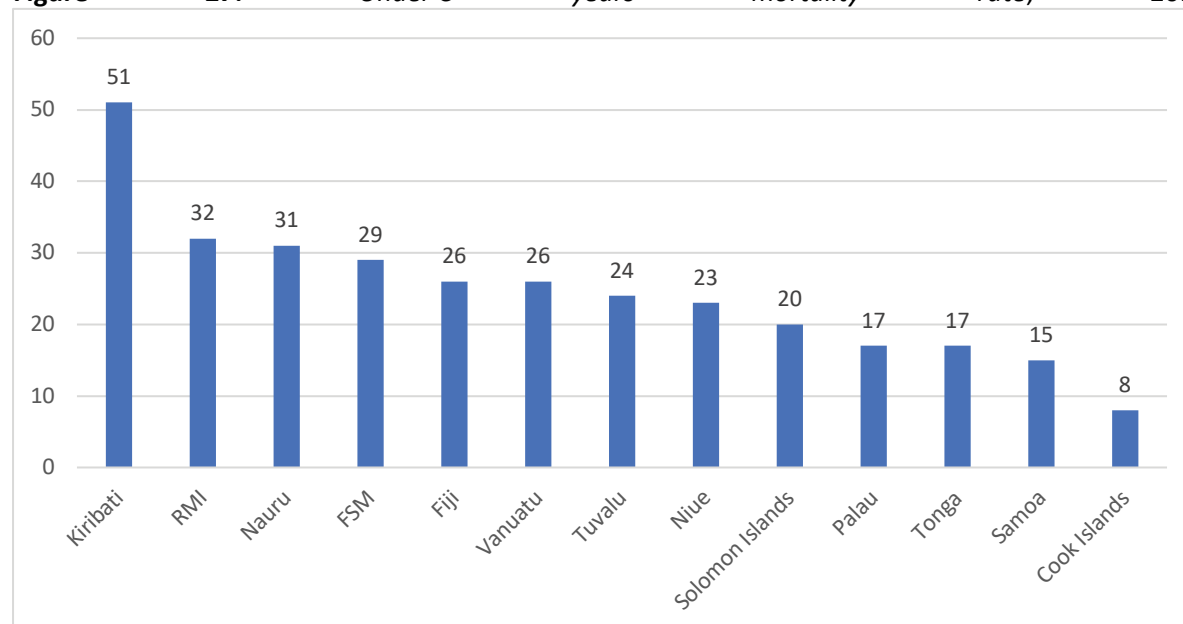
<sup>640</sup> S. P. Walker, T. D. Wachs, J. M. Gardner et al., "Child development: risk factors for adverse outcomes in developing countries," *Lancet*, vol. 369, no. 9556, pp. 145–157, 2007.

<sup>641</sup> Average calculated from: UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children report*, 2019. Note that the average does not include Tokelau, which does not have data in the SOWC.

<sup>642</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children report*, 2019.

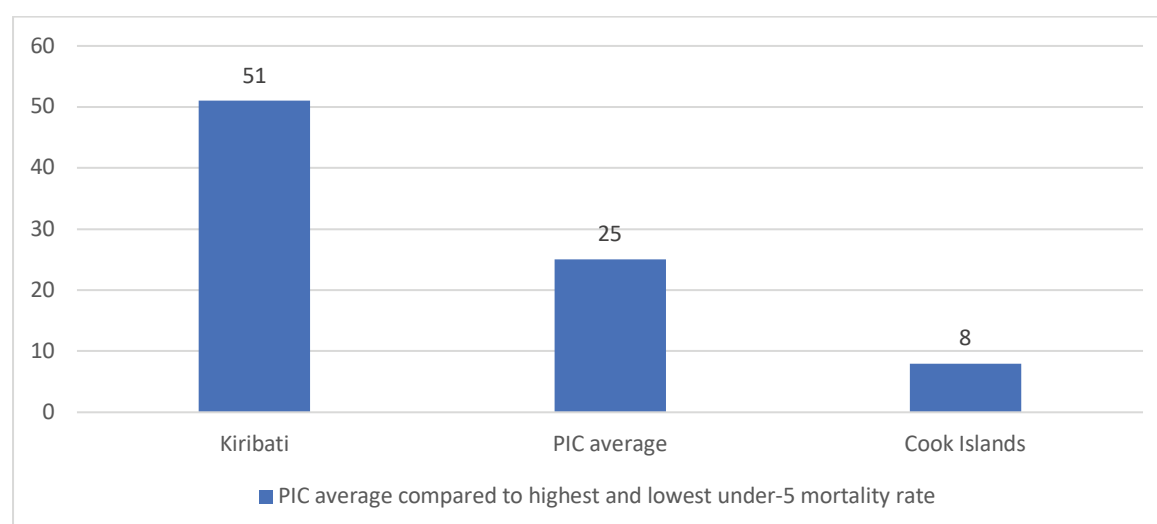
<sup>643</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children report*, 2019.

<sup>644</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children report*, 2019.

**Figure 27: Under-5 years mortality rate, 2019.**

Source: SOWC, 2019.

Other data indicating threats to development include the maternal mortality rate, nutrition, and childhood stunting. Data on the maternal mortality rate in the 14 PICTs is limited, such that a regional estimation is not possible. However, where data are available, rates range between 34 per 100,000 live births in Fiji, 52 in Tonga, and 72 in Vanuatu.<sup>645</sup> Post-natal check-ups contribute to the care of young children, and to the detection of risks to development in the form of malnourishment. Again, there are limited data available in the 14 PICTs, making impossible to calculate an estimated average for the region. There is evidence though that a majority of pregnant women in the 14 PICTs attend antenatal care visits.<sup>646</sup>

**Figure 28: PICT average compared to highest and lowest under-5 mortality rate**

Source: SOWC, 2019.

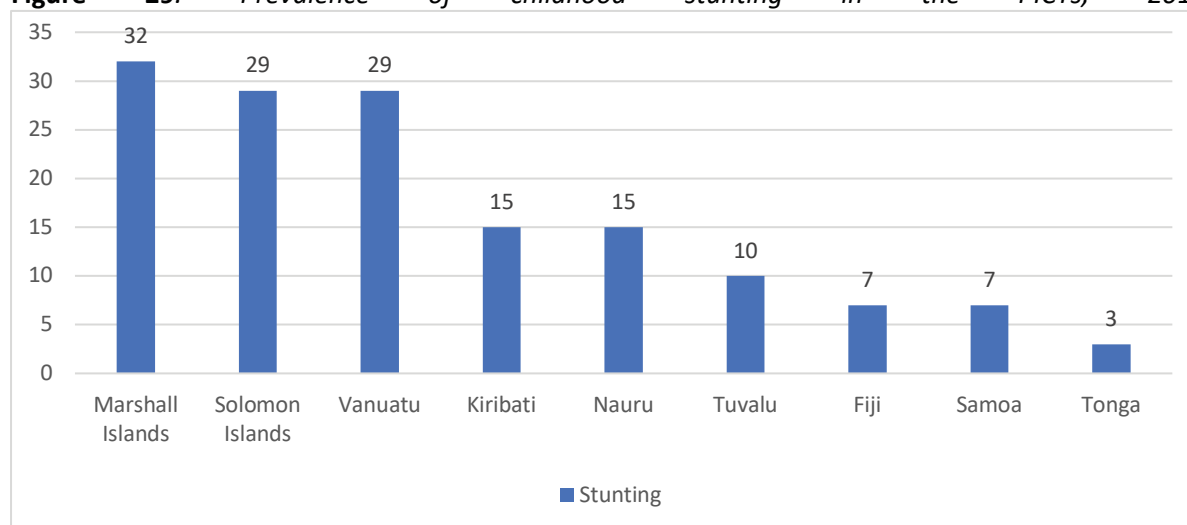
<sup>645</sup> WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNPD (MMEIG). 2019.

<sup>646</sup> UNICEF, The State of the World's Children report, 2019.

Malnutrition is a risk factor to ECD, putting a child at risk of poor brain development, low immunity, and weak learning outcomes.<sup>647</sup> An indication of the rate of malnutrition can be obtained by looking at stunting, wasting and obesity. Globally, 45 per cent of under-5 deaths are linked to undernutrition.<sup>648</sup>

Childhood stunting for young children is an issue in the Pacific region with several having a high prevalence of stunting in children under 4-years. Although the average rate of stunting in the PICTs is 16, which is lower than the world average of 22 per cent, some of the PICTs have extremely high rates such as RMI at 32 per cent, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu at 29 per cent.<sup>649</sup> Additionally, in every country in the Pacific there are high rates of anaemia among children under-5.<sup>650</sup>

**Figure 29:** Prevalence of childhood stunting in the PICTs, 2019.



**Source:** SOWC, 2019.

Low birth weight also presents a significant threat to childhood development and is considered a public health concern in the Pacific region. Few of the 14 PICTs have data available on the prevalence of low birth weight.<sup>651</sup> Several of the PICTs tend to not weigh babies at birth, making it difficult to assess and monitor a child's early development. PICTs that tend to not weigh babies at birth include Samoa, with 24 per cent of born babies being weighed at birth, Vanuatu at 14 and Fiji at 11<sup>652</sup> - all figures which are below the world average of 29.

## 7.2 Support and services for early childhood development

Although several of the 14 PICTs have policies supporting children, none of the PICTs have a comprehensive policy framework for ECD. This leaves critical services and programmes for young

<sup>647</sup> UNICEF, Poor diets damaging children's health in the Pacific, warns UNICEF, 2019. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/press-releases/poor-diets-damaging-childrens-health-pacific-warns-unicef>

<sup>648</sup> World Health Organisation, Malnutrition, 2021. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/malnutrition>

<sup>649</sup> UNICEF, The State of the World's Children report, 2019.

<sup>650</sup> UNICEF, Poor diets damaging children's health in the Pacific, warns UNICEF, 2019. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/press-releases/poor-diets-damaging-childrens-health-pacific-warns-unicef>

<sup>651</sup> UNICEF, The State of the World's Children report, 2019.

<sup>652</sup> UNICEF, The State of the World's Children report, 2019.

children without a mandate for comprehensive action. An ECD policy framework is important considering the long-lasting impacts of early experiences to individual and socio-economic wellbeing.<sup>653</sup>

All 14 PICTs are members of the Pacific Regional Council for ECD (PRC4ECD), an inter-governmental body, comprised of Ministers and Permanent Secretaries from across the finance and social sectors of the member states.<sup>654</sup> All 14 of the PICTs have endorsed the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD (2019), a 9-point action agenda to mobilise resources and improve delivery for young children and families,<sup>655</sup> and several have developed, or are in the process of developing policies that address children's issues with multi-sectoral costed action plans. For example, Kiribati is developing a National ECD Policy and Action Plan, with plans to launch these ECD policy tools by mid-2022. Similarly, Solomon Islands has a national ECD Committee which is overseeing the development of an ECD policy and costed action plan. FSM is also currently developing a national ECD policy with state-level costed action plans. Despite these initiatives, a number of the PICTs have yet to develop ECD policies and action plans and establish mechanisms to coordinate across sectors for ECD. The lack of robust policy tools to support the development of young children remains a gap that needs to be filled in the region.

Services for young children and families in PICT countries are generally spread across a range of ministries, without clear mechanisms for whole-of-government planning and service delivery. Early contact with children, specifically during the first 1,000 days, typically starts with services from the Ministry of Health or its equivalent. The Ministry of Education or its equivalent has jurisdiction for children entering basic education, which starts at age 5 in the majority of the 14 PICTs. Across the PICTs, there is support and services provided by ministries to parents and caregivers, however national or scaled-up programmes to support parents and caregivers so they can provide nurturing care to young children are missing.

Some of the PICTs provide maternity benefits, but these are generally of short duration. Most PICTs do not have paid paternity leave or family care leave for parents nor policy initiatives for childcare services.<sup>656</sup>

Several of the PICTs have brought early childhood education (ECE) within the scope of the formal education system, making it compulsory. Only some<sup>657</sup> of the 14 PICTs mandate that the age of

<sup>653</sup> Daelmans et al., Early childhood development: the foundation of sustainable development, The Lancet, 2017. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)31659-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(16)31659-2/fulltext)

<sup>654</sup> UNICEF, 15 Pacific Island governments take a giant step forward on Early Childhood Development, 23 October 2019. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/15-pacific-island-governments-take-giant-step-forward-early-childhood-development>

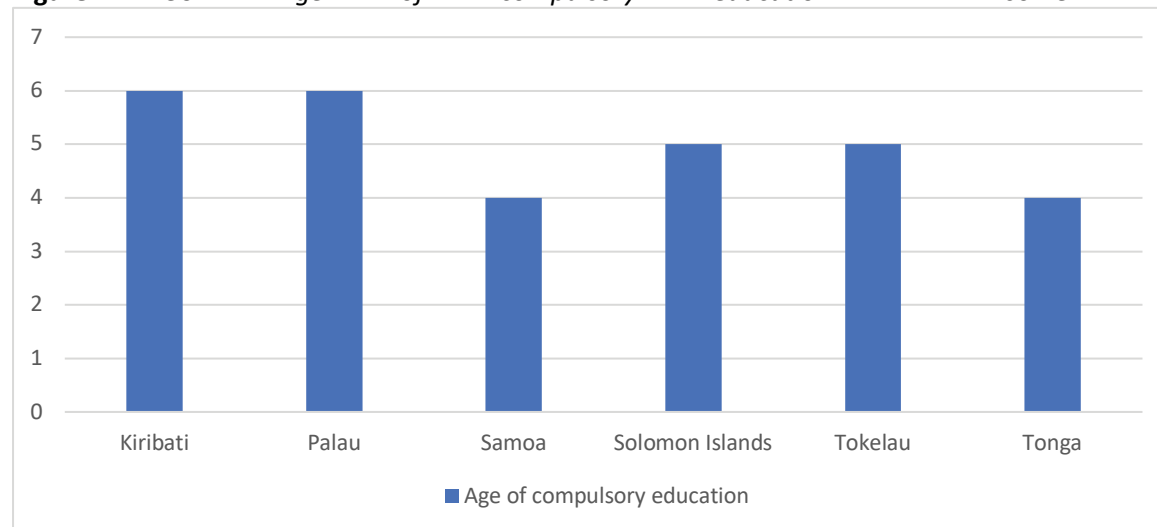
<sup>655</sup> UNICEF, 2019 Pacific Early Childhood Development (ECD) Forum Implementing Pasifika Call to Action on ECD, 23-25 October 2019. Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/1771/file/2019%20Pacific%20Early%20Childhood%20Development%20\(ECD\)%20Forum%20Report.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/1771/file/2019%20Pacific%20Early%20Childhood%20Development%20(ECD)%20Forum%20Report.pdf)

<sup>656</sup> Countdown to 2030, Early Childhood Development. 2020. Available at: <https://nurturing-care.org/>

<sup>657</sup> Government of Tokelau and UNDP, 'Tokelau Millennium Development Report 2012', pp. 15–16; Government of Tokelau, 'Department of Education'; New Zealand ERO, 'National Evaluation of Education Provision in Tokelau'; New Education Bill after 40 years, Solomon Islands Government, 2021. Available at: <https://solomons.gov.sb/new-education-bill-after-40-years/>

compulsory education starts before the age of 5, including Tonga (age 4),<sup>658</sup> Samoa (age 4),<sup>659</sup> Niue (age 3 years and 9 months).<sup>660</sup>

**Figure 30:** Age of compulsory education in some PICTs.



**Source:** Education acts for Tokelau, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Samoa; CRC Concluding Remarks on Niue.

Overall, the region can do more to ensure that all children benefit from a seamless continuum of care throughout the early years. All young children need to be well nourished and healthy, receive proper care, stimulation and opportunities for early learning, and grow up in nurturing environments, protected from all kinds of violence, abuse, neglect and conflict. Care must also extend to pregnant mothers and to the families that raise young children. The evidence is clear: the benefits of quality ECD interventions are high, while the costs of inaction are severe.<sup>661</sup>

### 7.3 Recommendations

- Support governments in creating, finalizing and implementing national policies that are now being developed in several PICTs through political commitment, adequate resourcing, and nationwide support for implementation.
- Support the strengthening of policy mandates for ECD by supporting PICTs embedding them in legislation and multi-sectoral policy frameworks that provide a strong mandate for action and buffer against changing political priorities.
- Support governments in protecting and rebuilding investments in early childhood services and programmes.
- Support the financing of ECD investments across the PICTs, through a prudent and progressive expansion of national fiscal resources, adopting multi-sector cost-sharing approaches where relevant, and linking resourcing strategies to climate finance and COVID-19 facilities where appropriate.

<sup>658</sup> The Education Act of 2013, Tonga.

<sup>659</sup> The Education Amendment Act of 2019, Samoa.

<sup>660</sup> Concluding observations on the initial report of Niue, adopted by the Committee at its sixty-second session (14 January–February 2013). Para 61.

<sup>661</sup> Daelmans et al., Early childhood development: the foundation of sustainable development, *The Lancet*, 2017. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)31659-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(16)31659-2/fulltext)



- Support governments in strengthening provision of quality parenting and family support by increasing child-rearing resources and competencies – including enhancing early stimulation and responsive care practices and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of parents.
- Identify opportunities to institutionalize parenting programmes into national and local-level systems, building on existing service delivery platforms.
- Support and encourage current regional ECD coordination between the PICTs through forums to meet and share experiences.



## 8. Adolescents and youth

Many of the PICTs define youth quite broadly and the age category of youth typically extends beyond the international definition of 15 – 24 years, as set out in table 55, below. In particular, youth is typically considered to extend up to or even beyond 30 years of age.

**Figure 31: Definitions of youth in PICTs.**

Country	Definition of youth	Source
Cook Islands	15 – 24 years <sup>662</sup>	National Youth Policy 2021 – 2026: <i>‘Te Mana O Te Mapu’</i> (The Power of our Youth as Nation Builders).
Fiji	15 – 34 years	National Youth Policy, 2021 – 2025 (awaiting adoption).
FSM	15 – 34 years	National Youth Policy, 2017 – 2023.
Kiribati	15 – 30 years	National Youth Policy, 2018 – 2022.
Nauru	15 – 34 years	National Youth Policy, 2009 – 2015.
Niue	[Unknown]	-
Palau	15 – 35 years	National Youth Policy, 2016 – 2021.
Samoa	18 – 35 years	National Youth Policy 2009 – 2015.
Solomon Islands	15 – 34 years	National Youth Policy, 2017 – 2030.
RMI	12 – 24 years	RMI draft National Youth Policy, 2021-2025 (awaiting adoption).
Tonga	15 – 34 years	National Youth Strategy, 2014 – 2019.
Tokelau	[Unknown]	-
Tuvalu	15 – 35 years	National Youth Policy, 2015 – 2019.
Vanuatu	12 – 30 years <sup>663</sup>	National Youth Development Policy, 2012-2022

The reason for adopting a wider age definition is associated with social and cultural norms that see youth as a wider / older age group and the belief that age should not be considered a limiting factor in determining who can or cannot participate in youth programmes and activities.

Most of the 14 PICTs have quite large and growing adolescent and youth populations.<sup>664</sup> In Fiji, individuals between the age 15 and 35 years make up about 34 per cent of the total population – an increase from 20 per cent in 1996.<sup>665</sup> Individuals aged 15 to 35 years make up about 39.7 per cent of the total population in Tuvalu.<sup>666</sup> In Samoa, individuals aged 10 and 34 constitute just over 30 per cent of the total population of 195,979.<sup>667</sup> Nauru and Kiribati also have large youth populations (persons

<sup>662</sup> However, the National Youth Policy recognizes that those between 25 and 34 years old are also considered youth and are members within respective youth groups throughout Rarotonga and the Pa Enua.

<sup>663</sup> However, the National Youth Development Policy states that the Policy’s definition is also flexible, and it is recognized that the category of youth can include those aged under 12 years and over 30 years depending on individual needs and cultural and traditional definitions of youth.

<sup>664</sup> Exceptions are Palau, Cook Islands and Niue. Individuals aged 15 – 24 years represent only 6.7 per cent of the population in Cook Islands, 13.4 per cent of the population in Palau and 14 per cent in Niue: UNFPA, *State of Pacific Youth*, p. 6; UNESCAP, *The State of Human Development in the Pacific: A Report on Vulnerability and Exclusion in a Time of Rapid Change*, 2014, p. 48.

<sup>665</sup> Republic of Fiji, *5-year and 20-year National Development Plan*, November 2017, section 2.1.

<sup>666</sup> Tuvalu Youth Stakeholder Committee, *Terms of Reference*.

<sup>667</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics and UNPFA Pacific Sub-Regional Office, *2016 Population and Housing Census: Samoa Youth Monograph*, 2020. Available at: [https://www.sbs.gov.ws/images/sbs-documents/info-graphics/SYM/youthmonograph\\_FINAL\\_web\\_19aug.pdf](https://www.sbs.gov.ws/images/sbs-documents/info-graphics/SYM/youthmonograph_FINAL_web_19aug.pdf)

aged 15 – 29 years make up 28 per cent of the population in Nauru<sup>668</sup> and in Kiribati, persons aged 15 – 24 years constitute is 21,539 or 18 per cent of the total population<sup>669</sup>).

The growing youth population in these countries has huge potential to help drive socio-economic growth, provided the right enabling environment is put in place to foster their knowledge and skills and provide them the right opportunities.

## 8.1 The situation of adolescents and youth

In some areas of adolescent and youth development, many of the PICTs have seen improvements over the past five years. However, challenges remain, and some new challenges are emerging.

### Health

Available data suggest that there is limited access to **sexual and reproductive health** rights among adolescents and youth. Data indicate low contraceptive prevalence in many PICTs, along with relatively high adolescent fertility rates. In Solomon Islands, low contraceptive prevalence (29 per cent for married women) contributes to high rates of adolescent fertility, estimated at 78 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19.<sup>670</sup> Samoa's very low contraceptive prevalence rate (with only 29.4 per cent of demand satisfied for modern contraception<sup>671</sup>) contributes to moderately high rates of adolescent fertility (at 55 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19) and sexually transmitted infections.<sup>672</sup> The adolescent birth rate is also quite high in RMI, relative to other PICTs, at 85 per 1,000 women aged 15 – 19 years.<sup>673</sup>

In several other PICTs, while the contraceptive prevalence rate is higher, adolescent fertility rates nonetheless remain high. In Nauru, the contraceptive prevalence rate is 42.5 per cent and demand satisfied is 59 per cent,<sup>674</sup> both of which are in the higher range for the PICT region. Despite this, Nauru's total fertility rate is estimated at 3.7 and the adolescent birth rate is 105.3 per 1000 women aged 15–19 years.<sup>675</sup> In Fiji, contraceptive prevalence is high by PICT standards (38.4 per cent<sup>676</sup>); however, while recent data are limited, older data suggest low knowledge and contraceptive use among adolescents who are sexually active.<sup>677</sup> There has also been a recent upward trend in reported HIV incidence in Fiji, especially among young people and women.<sup>678</sup>

<sup>668</sup> Pacific Community, Population in Nauru, 2021.

<sup>669</sup> 2020 Kiribati Population and Housing Census, Provisional results. Available at: <https://kir20phc.prism.spc.int/>

<sup>670</sup> Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, Solomon Islands Ministry of Health and Medical Services and the Pacific Community. 2017. Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey, 2015.

<sup>671</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics and the Samoa Ministry of Health. 2021. Samoa Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019-20, Survey Findings Report.

<sup>672</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics and the Samoa Ministry of Health. 2021. Samoa Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019-20, Survey Findings Report.

<sup>673</sup> UNICEF, Republic of the Marshall Islands: Integrated Child Health and Nutrition Survey, 2017.

<sup>674</sup> UNICEF, Republic of the Marshall Islands: Integrated Child Health and Nutrition Survey, 2017.

<sup>675</sup> WHO, UHC and SDG Country Profile: Nauru, 2018. Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272317/WPR-2018-DHS-014-nru-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>676</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2017 indicator tables.

<sup>677</sup> See Second Generation Surveillance Surveys of HIV, other STIs and Risk Behaviours in Fiji 2008, in Fiji Adolescent Health Situational Analysis 2016, p.21.

<sup>678</sup> UNAIDS et al. (2020) HIV/AIDS Data Hub for the Asia Pacific.

Limited data exists on **adolescent mental health** throughout the PICTs; however, available data indicate that it is an emerging area of concern. In Fiji, for instance, rates of suicide ideation increased two-fold from 2015 to 2017 across all age groups.<sup>679</sup> Mental health issues are also a cause for concern among adolescents and youth in Palau, where a 2017 survey found that 38 per cent of middle school students and 25 per cent of high school students reported seriously considering suicide.<sup>680</sup> In Cook Islands, 16.1 per cent of students had reportedly attempted suicide at least once, according to a survey conducted in 2015.<sup>681</sup> Although there are no recent data on adolescent mental health in Tokelau, data from 2014 indicate that there are considerable mental health issues among adolescents with around 27 per cent of pupils surveyed having attempted suicide in the 12 months prior to the survey.<sup>682</sup>

Across many PICTs, **rates of obesity and associated non-communicable diseases** are a significant public health concern. In countries for which data are available on overweight and obesity among adolescents (0 – 19 years) specifically, rates are very high, at: 50 per cent in FSM;<sup>683</sup> 51 per cent in Samoa;<sup>684</sup> 59 per cent in Niue (5 – 19 year olds);<sup>685</sup> and 62 per cent in Palau<sup>686</sup> and Cook Islands.<sup>687</sup> Where data on overweight and obesity among adolescents are not available, rates among the adult population are a cause for concern, as are risk factors and rates of non-communicable diseases. In Tonga, overweight among the adult population is estimated at 93.2 per cent with 77.1 per cent considered obese.<sup>688</sup> 67.9 per cent of the adult population is estimated to be at moderate to high risk of developing a non-communicable disease.<sup>689</sup> A survey in 2017 found that adolescents (age 13 years onwards) were at increased risk of non-communicable disease, with increased rates of poor diet and low rates of physical activity, as well as alcohol and drug consumption.<sup>690</sup> Cook Islands has the second highest rates of premature death and associated disability among PICTs and there is high risk of developing non-communicable diseases.<sup>691</sup> RMI also has high rates of overweight among adults (estimated at 80 per cent)<sup>692</sup> and the highest rate of premature death relative to other PICTs.<sup>693</sup>

<sup>679</sup> MHMS (2018) Health Status Report 2017.

<sup>680</sup> CDC, Youth Risk Behaviour Survey, 2017. Available at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/results.htm>

<sup>681</sup> UNFPA, Young people of the Cook Islands, Analysis of the 2011 Population and Housing Census, February 2015. Available at: [http://www.mfem.gov.ck/images/New\\_Stats\\_Website/12.Other\\_Content/Youth/Youth-Monograph-Report- -Young-people-of-the-Cook-Islands\\_reduced.pdf](http://www.mfem.gov.ck/images/New_Stats_Website/12.Other_Content/Youth/Youth-Monograph-Report- -Young-people-of-the-Cook-Islands_reduced.pdf)

<sup>682</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund, Situation Analysis of Children in Tokelau, UNICEF, Suva, 2017.

<sup>683</sup> UNICEF, The State of the World’s Children (SOWC), 2019.

<sup>684</sup> UNICEF, The State of the World’s Children (SOWC), 2019.

<sup>685</sup> WHO, 2019. Nutrition Landscape Information System. Available at:

<http://apps.who.int/nutrition/landscape/global-monitoring-framework?ISO=niu>

<sup>686</sup> UNICEF, The State of the World’s Children (SOWC), 2019.

<sup>687</sup> UNICEF, The State of the World’s Children (SOWC), 2019.

<sup>688</sup> World Bank, Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Roadmap Report, World Bank Group, July 10, 2014.

Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/534551468332387599/Non-Communicable-Disease-NCD-Roadmap-Report>

<sup>689</sup> Government of Tonga and WHO, Tonga NCD Risk Factors STEPS Report, 2017. Available at:

<https://extranet.who.int/ncdsmicrodata/index.php/catalog/713/related-materials>

<sup>690</sup> Government of Tonga 2010 Global School-Based Student Health Factsheet, 2014. Available at:

[https://www.who.int/ncds/surveillance/gshs/TOH2017\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](https://www.who.int/ncds/surveillance/gshs/TOH2017_fact_sheet.pdf)

<sup>691</sup> World Bank, Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Roadmap Report, World Bank Group, July 10, 2014,

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/534551468332387599/Non-Communicable-Disease-NCD-Roadmap-Report>

<sup>692</sup> World Bank, Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Roadmap Report, World Bank Group, July 10 2014; UNICEF, Republic of the Marshall Islands: Integrated Child Health and Nutrition Survey, 2017.

<sup>693</sup> World Bank, Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Roadmap Report, World Bank Group, July 10 2014.

### Education, skills and employment

In terms of **education**, PICTs have generally seen an increase in retention rates among adolescents at the secondary level, though relatively high dropout rates in upper secondary school remain a concern in some PICTs.<sup>694</sup> Many PICTs have also seen a rise in enrolment in technical-vocational training among adolescents and youth. However, education quality is a cause for concern in some countries. In Samoa, the pass rate for the Year 12 and 13 assessments<sup>695</sup> is particularly low for Mathematics (seven per cent for Year 12 and nine per cent for Year 13).<sup>696</sup> In RMI, only around one in four students were reading at the appropriate level for their age and between one in seven and one in nine were proficient in mathematics in 2015 and 2019 respectively.<sup>697</sup> In FSM, only 43 per cent of Grade 10 students met the reading benchmarks and only 27 per cent of Grade 10 students met the mathematics benchmarks in 2018/19.<sup>698</sup> In Tokelau, only 27 per cent of students passed mathematics; 37 per cent of students passed Tokelauan; and 40 per cent of students passed English in 2012.<sup>699</sup>

There is a mismatch between the educational curriculum and the labour force needs across the PICTs, limiting the suitability and relevance of education and hampering the ability of youth to access quality jobs. For instance, the Committee on the Rights of the Child noted, in 2014, that the education system in Fiji is not well adapted to the needs of the community or labour force, contributing to unemployment among school leavers.<sup>700</sup>

Rates of **youth unemployment** vary across the PICTs, from 1.1 per cent in Solomon Islands<sup>701</sup> to 31.9 per cent in Samoa, as set out in the table below. It is likely that youth unemployment rates will have increased from the rates presented below, owing to the contraction of the economy due to COVID-19 and related travel and movement restriction.

**Figure 32: Youth unemployment rate in PICTs (15 – 24 year olds)**<sup>702</sup>

<sup>694</sup> For instance, in Samoa, of all adolescents who commenced Year 9 in 2014/15 and 2013/14, only 53.6 per cent completed Year 12 and 45.7 per cent Year 13 respectively: Samoa, Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, *Education Statistical Digest 2019*, MESC, 2020; in FSM the survival rate from Grade 1 to Grade 12 is only 51 per cent for males and 60 per cent for females: The expected surviving percentage of the cohort starting in Grade 1 reaching Grade 12. Source: FSM NDoE (2020) FSM Education Indicators November 2020, Version 3.

<sup>695</sup> The Samoa School Certificate and Samoa School Leaving Certificate.

<sup>696</sup> Assessment results data is found in Appendix 1 of ESP 2019-24. Results given by gender were aggregated and calculated with respect to the gender ratio given in the document. 'Total' pass rates in the case of Year 12 and 13 results were ignored owing to errors.

<sup>697</sup> Data from the Grade 10 MISAT IV: Marshall Islands Public School System, Digest of Education Statistics 2018-2019, p.20. Available at: [https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitallibrary-docs/files/dd/dd517206331e0be3982611a77831f335.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=n5oOiUykS0gFPBDUiMPGVbpx391IZOZ0HPMH8bAyrqM%3D&se=2022-10-26T12%3A08%3A09Z&sp=r&rsc=public%2C%20max-age%3D864000%2C%20max-stale%3D86400&rsc=application%2Fpdf&rscd=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22RMI\\_Education\\_Digest\\_2019.&df%22](https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitallibrary-docs/files/dd/dd517206331e0be3982611a77831f335.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=n5oOiUykS0gFPBDUiMPGVbpx391IZOZ0HPMH8bAyrqM%3D&se=2022-10-26T12%3A08%3A09Z&sp=r&rsc=public%2C%20max-age%3D864000%2C%20max-stale%3D86400&rsc=application%2Fpdf&rscd=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22RMI_Education_Digest_2019.&df%22)

<sup>698</sup> Results of 2018/19 NMCT. Available at: <http://www.national.doe.fm/stats/assessment/>

<sup>699</sup> New Zealand ERO, 'National Evaluation of Education Provision in Tokelau', p.13

<sup>700</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations: Fiji, 13 October 2014, CRC/C/FJI/CO1-2, para. 59(c).

<sup>701</sup> However, it has been noted that youth unemployment is difficult to measure accurately in Solomon Islands, owing to levels of informal work and limited data on livelihood incomes: The Commonwealth, *2020 Global youth development report*, 2021, Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

<sup>702</sup> There were no recent data available on youth unemployment rates in FSM, Niue, Palau, RMI or Tokelau.

<b>Cook Islands</b>	3.5% (2019) <sup>703</sup>
<b>Fiji</b>	11.9% (2019) <sup>704</sup>
<b>Kiribati</b>	17% (2015) <sup>705</sup>
<b>Nauru</b>	13.3% (2013) <sup>706</sup>
<b>Samoa</b>	31.9% (2017) <sup>707</sup>
<b>Solomon Islands</b>	1.1% (2019) <sup>708</sup>
<b>Tonga</b>	8.9% (2018) <sup>709</sup>
<b>Tuvalu</b>	20.6% (2016) <sup>710</sup>
<b>Vanuatu</b>	4.8% (2010) <sup>711</sup>

Youth unemployment rates are typically considerably higher than unemployment rates overall. Also, it should be noted that many young people are engaged in informal, seasonal or temporary work which does not enable them to further their skills. The informal sector also lacks legislative and union protection and conditions can be poor.<sup>712</sup> Around half of youth in Solomon Islands and Kiribati, and 28 per cent in Tonga are estimated to be working in vulnerable jobs – own-account and contributing family work associated with limited legal and social protection and income security.<sup>713</sup> According to the most recent HIES in Nauru (2012 – 13), less than half of young people (15–29 years) were engaged in formal government (29 per cent) or private sector (16.4 per cent) work. Among working youths in Fiji, around 40 per cent are employed in a job that does not match their educational level, leading to migration to pursue employment opportunities abroad, contributing to ‘brain-drain’.<sup>714</sup> In Samoa, lack of employment opportunities and a mismatch of skills leads to young people seeking overseas work opportunities, ultimately keeping youth unemployment high in Samoa and also leading to ‘brain drain’.<sup>715</sup>

The proportion of youth who are **not in employment, education or training (NEET)**, where data are available, tends to be quite high. Kiribati has the Pacific’s highest rate of youth who are NEET, at 47 per cent - demonstrating that a large proportion of youth are not in employment for reasons other

<sup>703</sup> LO, Pacific labour market review: Pre-Covid baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery, 2020, ILO: Geneva, p 39.

<sup>704</sup> ILO and ABD, *Tackling the Covid-19 youth unemployment crisis in Asia and the Pacific*, 2020, p. 21.

<sup>705</sup> LO, Pacific labour market review: Pre-Covid baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery, 2020, ILO: Geneva, p 39.

<sup>706</sup> World Bank Data, 2013. Available at:

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.NE.ZS?locations=NR>

<sup>707</sup> LO, Pacific labour market review: Pre-Covid baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery, 2020, ILO: Geneva, p 39.

<sup>708</sup> World Bank Data, 2019. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=SB>

<sup>709</sup> LO, Pacific labour market review: Pre-Covid baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery, 2020, ILO: Geneva, p 39.

<sup>710</sup> LO, Pacific labour market review: Pre-Covid baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery, 2020, ILO: Geneva, p 39.

<sup>711</sup> LO, Pacific labour market review: Pre-Covid baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery, 2020, ILO: Geneva, p 39.

<sup>712</sup> Investing in Youth Policy, *Sharing good practices to advance policy development for young people*, 2011, page 41.

<sup>713</sup> ILO, Pacific labour market review: Pre-Covid baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery, 2020, ILO: Geneva.

<sup>714</sup> Fiji Adolescent Health Situational Analysis 2016, page 19.

<sup>715</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics and UNPFA Pacific Sub-Regional Office, 2016 Population and Housing Census: Samoa Youth Monograph, 2020. Available at: [https://www.sbs.gov.ws/images/sbs-documents/info-graphics/SYM/youthmonograph\\_FINAL\\_web\\_19aug.pdf](https://www.sbs.gov.ws/images/sbs-documents/info-graphics/SYM/youthmonograph_FINAL_web_19aug.pdf)

than education.<sup>716</sup> In Samoa, rates of adolescents and youth who are NEET are quite high, particularly among female youth. According to the latest Census data (2016), the levels of NEET were 13.2 per cent (males) and 18.7 per cent (females) in the 15 – 19 year age group and this rose to 25 per cent for males and 57.7 per cent for females aged 20 – 24 years.<sup>717</sup> In Tonga<sup>718</sup> and Vanuatu,<sup>719</sup> around 30 per cent of youth are NEET. 30.3 per cent and of youth are NEET.

### Protection

Adolescents and youth in the PICTs continue to be exposed to **all forms of violence**, though data are often quite limited. Peer violence, including bullying, is an issue of increasing concern. According to recent data reported by the National Substance Abuse Advisory Council, schools in Fiji recorded over 6,000 cases of bullying in 2019.<sup>720</sup> In Tuvalu, a 2013 school-based survey found high rates of bullying (27 per cent) and physical fights (71 per cent) leading to severe injuries (46 per cent).<sup>721</sup> A 2015 study found that half of Nauru's children aged 13 to 15 years had been in a physical fight at school one or more times in the previous year, with more than one in three seriously injured at least one time, and 39 per cent had been bullied.<sup>722</sup> Bullying in schools is also an area of ongoing concern in Palau: according to the most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS),<sup>723</sup> 60 per cent of middle school students and 20 per cent of high school students report being the victims of bullying.

While bullying remains an area of concern, some progress appears to have been made in addressing bullying in schools. In Samoa, the percentage of students aged 13-15 who reported being bullied has dropped significantly from 74 per cent in 2011 to 38.2 per cent in 2017.<sup>724</sup> The percentage of children aged 13 to 15 reporting that they had been bullied in Tonga also dropped from 50 per cent in 2010 to 38 per cent in 2017. However, levels of bullying and peer violence in schools remain a concern in both countries.<sup>725</sup>

**Sexual violence of adolescents** is also an issue across PICTs. In Tuvalu, the 2019-2020 MICS indicated that 8.7 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 years had experienced sexual violence by their intimate partner. Sexual violence is a concern in Nauru: of women who reported child sexual abuse as part of a 2014 Family Health and Safety Study, 11.5 per cent stated that the abuse first occurred in adolescence (between the ages of 10 and 14).<sup>726</sup> In the 2019-2020 MICS in Samoa, 7.3 per cent of girls aged 15 to 19 reported experiencing sexual violence, and 1.5 reported sexual violence by the age of 15. The national inquiry into family violence reported that sexual abuse of children has reached

<sup>716</sup> LO, Pacific labour market review: Pre-Covid baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery, 2020, ILO: Geneva.

<sup>717</sup> Samoa Bureau of Statistics and UNPFA Pacific Sub-Regional Office, 2016 Population and Housing Census: Samoa Youth Monograph, 2020, p.44. Available at: [https://www.sbs.gov.ws/images/sbs-documents/info-graphics/SYM/youthmonograph\\_FINAL\\_web\\_19aug.pdf](https://www.sbs.gov.ws/images/sbs-documents/info-graphics/SYM/youthmonograph_FINAL_web_19aug.pdf)

<sup>718</sup> ILO, Pacific labour market review: Pre-Covid baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery, 2020, ILO: Geneva.

<sup>719</sup> ILO, Pacific labour market review: Pre-Covid baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery, 2020, ILO: Geneva, p. 8.

<sup>720</sup> 'Horrorific viral video reveals 'crisis' of school bullying in Fiji', *The Guardian*, 10 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/10/horrorific-viral-video-reveals-crisis-of-school-bullying-in-fiji>

<sup>721</sup> Global School-Based Health Survey (GSHS), WHO 2013.

<sup>722</sup> Global School-Based Student Health Survey, 2011

<sup>723</sup> CDC, Youth Risk Behaviour Survey, 2017. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/results.htm>

<sup>724</sup> Global School-Based Student Health Survey, Samoa 2017

<sup>725</sup> GSHS 2017 and 2010.

<sup>726</sup> Government of Nauru and UNPFA, 'Nauru Family Health and Support Study', 2015.



‘epidemic’ proportions in Samoa.<sup>727</sup> In the recent MICS carried out in Tonga, 2.8 per cent of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 reported having experienced sexual violence.<sup>728</sup> The United Nations Joint Programme submission to the 2014 Universal Periodic Review of Vanuatu reported that Vanuatu has one of the highest rates of incest amongst girls aged 15 years in the region.<sup>729</sup>

**Exploitation** of adolescents is another area of concern, though robust data are limited. A recent ECPAT report raised significant concerns about sexual exploitation of adolescents in Fiji, including through clubs, brothels, motels and massage parlours, and technology is increasingly playing a role, with some children being “on call” through mobile network groups of offenders.<sup>730</sup> Reports have also raised concerns about sexual exploitation of Fijian children in hospitality and tourism, logging and fishing sectors, including child marriage and forced marriage and domestic servitude and prostitution in Fiji’s logging sector.<sup>731</sup> Forms of sexual and other exploitation have also been documented in Solomon Islands, with a focus in recent years on sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in communities impacted by logging and mining. In a recent survey in logging areas, 26 per cent of respondents had heard of children under the age of 15 in their area engaging in transactional sex.<sup>732</sup> The national inquiry into family violence in Samoa raised concerns about commercial sexual exploitation of children (both boys and girls) including in the tourism industry.<sup>733</sup> Concerns have also been raised about girls being sexually exploited by foreign fishermen and other seafarers in some PICTs.<sup>734</sup>

A growing risk is **online protection** of adolescents and youth; however, data are very limited, and it has been noted that there is an urgent need for further research into online abuse of adolescents in the Pacific.<sup>735</sup> According to a recent report on Palau, children are commonly encountering situations online where sexual information, images and videos are solicited from them, or where they are engaged in unwanted sexual conversation.<sup>736</sup>

**Intimate partner violence** also affects adolescents and youth in the Pacific. According to the Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey (SDIS), 2018-2019, adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years experienced all forms of intimate partner violence at a higher rate than the national average, and at higher rates than any other age category. Of the girls surveyed in this age category, 71 per cent had experienced some form of violence by a husband or partner. The Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (2017) also found relatively high rates of intimate partner violence amongst adolescents in Palau. Among high school students, on average 14 per cent reported having been physically coerced to having sex against their will, while 34 per cent of boys and 25 per cent of girls reported having been coerced into other forms of intimacy (e.g., kissing and touching). Thirty per cent of boys and 20 per cent of girls

<sup>727</sup> Ombudsman & NHRI, National Inquiry Report into Family Violence, 2018, p. 13.

<sup>728</sup> Tonga MICS 2019.

<sup>729</sup> Compilation of UN information. Universal Periodic Review: Vanuatu, 2014. Para.23. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/PAGES/VUSession5.aspx>

<sup>730</sup> ECPAT, *Fiji country overview: A report on the scale, scope and context of the sexual exploitation of children*, 2019, p. 9 – 10.

<sup>731</sup> Walk Free Foundation, *Murky Waters: A Qualitative Assessment of Modern Slavery in the Pacific Region*, 2020, p.20.

<sup>732</sup> IOM, *Community Health and Mobility in the Pacific: Solomon Islands Case Study*, 2019, p. XV.

<sup>733</sup> Ombudsman & NHRI, National Inquiry Report into Family Violence, 2018, p. 13.

<sup>734</sup> Walk Free, *Murky Waters: A Qualitative Assessment of Modern Slavery in the Pacific Region*, 2020, p. 24.

<sup>735</sup> ECPAT, *Fiji country overview: A report on the scale, scope and context of the sexual exploitation of children*, 2019, p. 9 – 10.

<sup>736</sup> UNICEF, *Child Online Protection in Palau*, 2020.

reported having been intentionally hurt by someone whom they were involved with in a dating relationship.<sup>737</sup>

Rates of **child marriage and adolescent pregnancies** remain high in some PICTs. In Tuvalu, the 2019-2020 MICS showed both early marriage and teen pregnancies were a cause for concern, with 9.3 per cent of women between the ages of 15 and 19 already married and 8.3 per cent of girls aged 15 to 19 having begun childbearing.<sup>738</sup> The 2015 DHS survey in Solomon Islands found that 5.6 per cent of women were married before the age of 15, and 21.3 per cent before the age of 18.<sup>739</sup> Child marriage is also an issue of concern in Kiribati, where 18.4 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 years were first married or in union before age 18, and 2.4 per cent before the age of 15 according to a recent survey. Child marriage remains an issue in Tonga. The percentage of women aged 20 to 24 who were first married before the age of 18 increased from 5.6 per cent in 2012 to 10.1 per cent in 2019. Of the girls who were married, more than one in 10 (11.8 per cent) were married to someone who is 10 or more years older.<sup>740</sup> In its 2018 Concluding Observations on RMI, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child raised concerns about the prevalence of customary child marriages, which particularly affect girls in the outer islands.<sup>741</sup> Child marriage and commercial sexual exploitation also affect adolescents in Vanuatu. Women and girls are at risk of debt-based coercion in sex trafficking and domestic servitude via the customary practice of bride-price. Child marriage is reportedly used to retain land or inheritance, and sometimes requires that the groom's family swap a daughter for marriage in return.<sup>742</sup>

Adolescents involved in **harmful forms of labour** also remains an issue in some PICTs. The 2019-20 MICS survey in Tuvalu revealed concerns about children involved in harmful labour, with a quarter of older children (26.1 per cent of children aged 12 to 14 and 24.5 per cent of children aged 15 to 17) working under hazardous conditions. Concerns have also been raised about the dangers of children becoming involved in the fishing industry.<sup>743</sup> The US Department of Labor 2019 Country Report on the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Vanuatu found that, although research is limited, there is evidence of children in Vanuatu engaged in the worst forms of child labour, including forced domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation, and dangerous tasks in the forestry industry.<sup>744</sup>

## 8.2 Developments in law, policy and governance

A range of laws and policies cover the different areas of concern to adolescents and youth set out above, and this is detailed in other sections of this report. In addition, many PICTs have National Youth Policies that are in force, or in development, as illustrated in the table below. These Policies bring

<sup>737</sup> CDC, Youth Risk Behaviour Survey, 2017. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/results.htm>

<sup>738</sup> United States Department of Labor, *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labour – Tuvalu*, 2016. Available at: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/tuvalu>

<sup>739</sup> DHS 2015.

<sup>740</sup> Tonga MICS 2019; DHS 2012.

<sup>741</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of the Marshall Islands, CRC/C/MHL/CO3-4, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2018, para 21.

<sup>742</sup> US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021, p. 602-603; Walk Free Foundation, *Murky Waters: A Qualitative Assessment of Modern Slavery in the Pacific Region*, 2020, p. 26, 30, 46.

<sup>743</sup> United States Department of Labor, *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labour – Tuvalu*, 2016. Available at: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/tuvalu>

<sup>744</sup> United States Department of Labor, *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labour – Vanuatu*, 2019. Available at: [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child\\_labor\\_reports/tda2019/Vanuatu.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2019/Vanuatu.pdf)

together different sectors, Ministries and institutions to facilitate a more holistic or integrated approach to the coordination of youth development.

**Figure 33: Pacific Youth Policies**

	Status of youth policy	Details
<b>Cook Islands</b>	In place.	National Youth Policy, 2021 – 2026: <i>'Te Mana O Te Mapu'</i> (The Power of our Youth as Nation Builders)
<b>Fiji</b>	Developed, but yet to be adopted.	National Youth Policy, 2021 – 2025 ( <i>awaiting adoption</i> )
<b>FSM</b>	In place.	National Youth Policy, 2017 – 2023.
<b>Kiribati</b>	In place.	National Youth Policy, 2018 – 2022
<b>Nauru</b>	No policy in place (being developed).	A new national youth policy is in development, following the lapse of the previous National Youth Policy, 2009 – 2015.
<b>Niue</b>	In place.	A National Youth Policy is in place in Niue; however, researchers were unable to cite a copy of the Policy.
<b>Palau</b>	In place, but soon to end.	National Youth Policy 2016 – 2021
<b>Samoa</b>	No policy in place (being developed).	A new national youth policy is in development, following the lapse of the National Youth Policy 2009 – 2015.
<b>Solomon Islands</b>	In place.	National Youth Policy 2017 – 2030
<b>RMI</b>	Developed, but yet to be adopted.	National Youth Policy for RMI (2021 – 2025) ( <i>awaiting adoption</i> )
<b>Tonga</b>	No policy currently in place.	The National Youth Strategy 2014 – 2019 has lapsed.
<b>Tokelau</b>	No policy currently in place.	No Youth Policy in place.
<b>Tuvalu</b>	No policy in place (being developed).	A new national youth policy is in development, following the lapse of the previous National Youth Policy, 2015-2019.
<b>Vanuatu</b>	In place.	National Youth Development Policy 2012 – 2022

Most of the PICTs have a designated Ministry or Department with responsibility for youth development at the national level. In addition, in Cook Islands, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu, multi-agency coordinating bodies are in place to develop and guide the implementation of youth policy and programmes.

There are a range of youth participation platforms across the PICTs, which provide a space for youth to engage in the development and implementation of policies and programmes that concern them. Youth Councils exist at the national level in a number of countries, as do youth summits and other engagement mechanisms.

National Youth Congresses or Summits have been established in Fiji, FSM, Kiribati, RMI and Tonga to provide the opportunity for young people to engage in dialogues amongst peers, policy makers and development partners focused on advancing the national youth agenda across various areas including strengthening resilience and climate action at both local and national level.

In Solomon Islands, the National Youth Congress (NYC) acts as a Quasi-Government Organization to represent youth's views and concerns and to be responsible for the implementation of the Solomon Islands National Youth Policy. Revitalizing Provincial Youth Councils is also underway in capital area and provinces such as Guadalcanal, Malaita and Western Provinces. The national youth parliament provides the opportunity for young people to engage in dialogue amongst peers, policy makers, national stakeholders and development partners focused on advancing the national youth agenda across various areas.<sup>745</sup> The Tuvalu National Youth Council, with 16 members and one observer as of 2020, is recognized as a key youth advocate partner on coordination of national youth policies and supporting the youth agenda. The Council has not been functional in the past few years but was recently revived through the appointment of the new executive members. The Council now works in close collaboration with the Government in trying to support youth initiatives. The FSM Youth Council is a key partner in the implementation of the National Youth Policy. The Policy also recognizes other youth stakeholders in the country at National and State levels. The National Youth Council of Palau is an NGO that aims to be 'the focal body of all youths and young people of Palau'.<sup>746</sup> They are a member of the regional Pacific Youth Council and serve as link between the youth in Palau and the Government, Regional and International youth bodies.

Youth groups and clubs also exist at the local / community level across the PICTs. In Fiji, the Government through its Ministry of Youth and Sports, encourages youth volunteering activities and community services through the formation of youth clubs. There are approximately 600 Youth Clubs officially registered and approved by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The Marshall Islands Youth Service Corps Act 2016 establishes a national Youth Service Corps for the provision of a voluntary period of service to the Republic to promote community development, conservation-related activities, activities and remuneration for those without employment, not enrolled as a student at any level and related purposes. The Act recognizes males between 20 and 25 years as members of the Corps.<sup>747</sup>

However, it has been noted that effective engagement with adolescents and youth in policy and other decision-making varies across and within the PICTs. For instance, in 2020, the Committee on the Rights of the Child<sup>748</sup> expressed its concerns on the lack of participation of children in the traditional *Falekaupule* meetings in Tuvalu where decisions relating to education and health are made. Therefore, they remain excluded from decision-making processes that affect them, including in the family, community and schools.

UNICEF has been supporting a digital platform for young people called 'U-Report' by using innovative mobile technologies to enhance adolescent and youth participation in several PICTs.

<sup>745</sup> Pacific office in Fiji. Available at: [www.pacific.undp.org](http://www.pacific.undp.org)

<sup>746</sup> Youth Policy, Factsheets, Palau. Available at: <http://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/palau/>

<sup>747</sup> Republic of Marshall Islands, Youth Service Corps Act, 2016. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/109307/135553/F1925420978/MHL109307.pdf>

<sup>748</sup> CRC/C/TUV/CO/2-5 – Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined second to fifth periodic CRC reports of Tuvalu.

## 8.3 Recommendations

- Ensure, through a consultative process, the development and – where applicable, adoption and implementation of a national youth policy, with accompanying action plan and monitoring and reporting framework;
- Consider establishing a multi-agency coordination body to oversee developments of youth and adolescent policy and programmes or – where applicable – ensure that existing coordinating bodies are sufficiently resourced and mandated to work effectively on youth development; and
- Ensure that adolescents and youth have avenues for meaningful engagement in political processes and decisions affecting them in communities and at the national government and sub-national level.

UNICEF PACIFIC MULTI COUNTRY OFFICE  
3RD FLOOR, FDB BUILDING  
360 VICTORIA PARADE  
SUVA, FIJI

