

Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls (Pacific Partnership)



TONGA COUNTRY SUMMARY

Updated June 2022

Tonga is a focus country of the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls (Pacific Partnership) programme.

Violence against women and girls is recognised worldwide as a social, political, and public health problem as well as a fundamental violation of human rights. In Tonga, the prevalence of **physical or sexual intimate partner violence is higher than the global average, at 40 percent¹**.

The Pacific Partnership programme brings together governments, civil society organisations, communities, and other partners to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG), and increase access to quality response services for survivors.

Pacific Partnership Priorities in Tonga

There are three key outcomes being prioritised for the Tonga, under the programme:

1. Transforming harmful social norms to prevent violence against women and girls (led by UN Women)

Increasing evidence demonstrates that violence against women and girls is preventable, and preventable within years, not lifetimes, through appropriate and comprehensive prevention work. Stopping violence before it starts is vital as response services alone cannot address a complex social problem of this size and scope. This is best achieved by addressing the root causes of violence, using a whole-of-population level approach.

Evidence indicates that prevention interventions are more effective if they: address social norms, attitudes and

behaviour that perpetuate violence against women and girls; challenge dominant notions of masculinity linked to violent and controlling behaviours; involve all community members; and include long-term, systematic engagement across all levels of society in multiple settings.

Through Pacific Partnership, the UN Women Ending Violence Against Women and Girls programme in Tonga is supporting national partners to implement community-based prevention programmes that are grounded in Pacific and global evidence on social norms change working across individual, community and societal levels.

ABOUT PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

The Pacific Partnership is funded primarily by the European Union, and the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, and UN Women, and is led by the Pacific Community (SPC), UN Women and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

In Tonga, two of the three coordinating agencies have Pacific Partnership activities: UN Women and PIFS.

In addition to Tonga, other countries and territories in the Pacific region benefiting from the five-year programme include, but are not limited to Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.





2022-2023 prevention initiatives supported by UN Women include:

Using a whole-of-government and community approach to prevent VAWG

- **Supporting the Women's Affairs and Gender Equality Division (WAGED) with capacity strengthening through national convenings on best practice and evidence-informed interventions** and strategies to effectively mobilise communities to transform harmful attitudes, beliefs and norms regarding the acceptability of violence against women and girls.
- **Shifting the Narrative: Changing Mind Sets and Attitudes by the Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC) Tonga:** The project launched in 2020 and is part of WCCC's broader ongoing national programme that has been funded primarily by the Government of Australia's Government aid programme. Under the partnership with UN Women, through Pacific Partnership, the WCCC's national programme is explicitly focusing on:
 - » **Empowering and building the skills of young girls and boys to prevent violence against women and girls** through respectful and equal relationships initiatives that address the harmful social norms and rigid gender stereotypes.
 - » **Engaging men in violence prevention through a male advocacy model** that aims to change social norms and harmful attitudes and behaviours that harm women and children in Tonga.
 - » **Trialing and testing innovative national media and behaviour change communication strategies and approaches** to engage everyone in the general population to prevent violence against women and girls through radio and television programmes; storytelling through social media and online platforms; public talanoa sessions; podcasts designed to spark public dialogue, whilst promoting key messages on gender equality and equal power relations.
 - » **Lobbying and advocating key decision makers on the rights of women and children and practices and policies to address sexual harassment** through initiatives with the police, government, and key line ministries, such as health, police, justice, and education.

- » **Promoting a comprehensive approach to prevention through a national focus on both prevention and response** whilst adhering to a women and children human rights framework in all strategies and activities.

Using a whole-of-community approach to prevent VAWG through sports

- **'Front Row Against Violence' project to prevent violence against women and girls through youth and sports by Talita Project:** This project focuses on addressing the needs of vulnerable groups: youth, including youth outside formal education, in Tonga through youth and sports initiatives to encourage a positive shift in social norms. This is a strategic intervention as Tonga has a young population, with a median age of 22 years, and 39 percent are aged 15 years and younger. Adolescents, and young girls, are a vulnerable age group to violence, and educating and informing this age group can equip them for the future on safe, healthy and respectful relationships. Through this intervention Talitha is trialing several new youth and sports approaches, including:
 - » **Youth-led activism in which young girls and boys** aged 14-18 years old are empowered to become leaders and promote healthy, respectful and safe relationships in their schools and community; and
 - » **Supporting young women and girls to have safe and equitable access to the sport of rugby** in non-government schools and clubs, and to increase their leadership roles in sports decision-making bodies.

These and other activities aim to equip key individuals involved in rugby, with the skills and knowledge needed to encourage equal access to sport for both girls and boys, and to contribute to the longer term aim of leveraging sport to help prevent violence against women and girls in the community.

Capacity strengthening and technical support

- **The UN Women Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Technical Hub provides wraparound technical support to national and regional partners in Tonga** to ensure the highest quality programming; increased understanding of evidence-based approaches to prevention informed by Pacific and global evidence and practice; and the



development of a sustainable cadre of experts on violence against women and girls prevention and response in Tonga and the Pacific region.

2. Improving access to quality, essential services for survivors of gender-based violence (led by UN Women)

The Pacific Partnership has a key focus on ‘survivor-centred’ approaches ensuring survivors of gender-based violence can access quality response and support services. Under this area of work, UN Women will provide technical support and funding as required, and in coordination with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), Women’s Affairs and Gender Equality Division (WAGED) and the Families Free of Violence (FFOV) programme, to improve the overall governance and coordination of essential services (health, police and justice, and social services). This will involve work with government ministries and local frontline service providers to improve access to, and quality of, social services for survivors, which includes supporting innovative models to better reach women and girls in remote and low-access locations.

2022-2023 initiatives supported by UN Women include: Supporting national coordination mechanisms

- Providing technical support to the WAGED, in partnership with FFOV, to strengthen multi-sectoral service delivery coordination, including developing national Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and referral pathways to guide gender-based violence response. The national process will involve civil society and government organisations – across all sectors from health, to justice and police – developing and agreeing on referral pathways and procedures to streamline the assistance being provided to gender-based violence survivors to support them to access timely and quality services.
- Linking, where possible, Tongan partners within regional processes on gender-based violence counselling, including convenings to discuss technical implementation of the

Family Protection Act requirements on counselling such as standards, accreditation and training procedures. This will be achieved by developing regional, standardised and inclusive training that is accredited, for counsellors working with survivors and perpetrators of violence.

- Providing technical support to service providers to **strengthen their capacities to respond to gender-based violence cases.**

3. Monitoring and reporting government commitments to gender equality and ending violence against women and girls (led by PIFS)

2022-23 initiatives targeting non-state actors supported by PIFS include:

Tongan non-state actors (NSAs), including civil society organisations and women’s groups, also benefit from Pacific Partnership through **strategic engagement, capacity development for monitoring the implementation of national commitments on gender equality, and projects support through small grants.** The PIFS’ NSA component of the Pacific Partnership programme works in close concert with agencies on the following key areas (with overall approaches supported by UN Women):

- 2022/2023 Consultations for the revitalized Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration
- Encouraging CSO partners to participate in upcoming PIFS consultative mechanisms including the Annual Regional CSO Forum; the Forum Economic Ministers’ Meeting (FEMM); and the CROP Heads and NSA Executive meetings.
- Monitoring of Fiji National General Elections
- 2022 Gender Economic and Financial Workshop
- 2023 Young People’s Mock Forums – sub-regions and regional





BACKGROUND

In Tonga, the 2012 Ma'a Fafine mo e Famili National Health and Safety prevalence studyⁱ highlighted that Tongan women face various inequalities in legislative matters and work settings. Gender-based and sexual violence is believed to be seriously underreported with awareness of this issue being extremely low, especially in rural areas. The national study concluded that levels of intimate partner violence is high, with one in three ever-partnered women experiencing physical violence, and 40 percent of ever-partnered women reporting experiences of physical and/or sexual violence by a partner at least once in her life. The findings showed that Tongan women also endure high levels of coercive, controlling behaviour by men, with 87 percent of women reporting that their partner insists on knowing her whereabouts at all times, and almost two-thirds (57 percent) having to ask permission before seeking health care.

Women and girls in Tonga also experience higher levels of violence from non-partners, with 68 percent of women having experienced physical violence by a person other than their partner since age 15. The main perpetrators of violence were non-partners, specifically fathers and teachers, instead of intimate partners as commonly reported in other Pacific island countries. This is most likely connected to social norms around the acceptability of violence as discipline, which is widely considered normal.

Although Tonga remains one of the six countries globally that has not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, there is a high level of attention and political will to address violence against women and girls in Tonga. The launch of the revised national gender policy – the National Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Tonga Policy and Strategic Plan of Action: 2019-2025 – in 2019, and the passing of the Family Protection Act (FPA) in 2013, have become a critical vehicle for protection, security and justice for most victims and survivors of domestic violence, and confirms the Government of Tonga's commitment towards gender equality.

ⁱMa'a Fafine Moe Famili. INC. (2012). National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Tonga 2009: Nofu 'a Kainga. Nuku'alofa.

ⁱⁱIbid.

For more information about Pacific Partnership, email: comms.pac@unwomen.org

Imagery inspired by empowering female-specific tattoo motifs used in the Pacific region.

