



IN BRIEF



# GENDER EQUALITY BRIEF FOR 14 PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES



Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) are working to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. They are increasingly engaging on normative platforms related to gender equality and women's empowerment, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and the 2030 Agenda. PICTs have also made commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment through the Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED), the Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights (2018-2030), the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, the SAMOA Pathway, through ratification of human rights conventions, and the passing of national gender policies and legislation. Despite much progress, discrimination against women and gender inequality are regarded as the most pervasive and prevalent human rights violations in the Pacific.

## Women's Human Rights

The [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 for the protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women through the elimination of distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex. Of the 14 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) analysed in this brief, [11 have ratified the Convention](#). Palau has signed but not ratified CEDAW, while Niue and Tonga have not signed the Convention. Further protection for the rights of women and girls is provided through treaties such as the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC) and the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD). The CRC has been ratified by all analysed countries except Tokelau, while the CRPD has been ratified by all countries except Tonga, which has signed but not ratified the CRPD, and Niue, which has not signed the CRPD.

The Constitutions of the majority of Pacific Island countries contain provisions against discrimination on the basis of sex and gender. These protections, however,

may in some cases be limited and therefore not fully aligned with commitments made under CEDAW. For example, although [Tuvalu's Constitution](#) states that every person is entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms regardless of sex, it does not mention sex or gender as protected grounds in the Constitutional definitions of discrimination. [Niue's Constitution](#) does not contain any provisions to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex or gender.

Under Article 15 of CEDAW, women and men must be treated equally before the law, including in relation to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile, and in their rights to conclude contracts and administer property. Across the region, however, women's land rights and access to property vary widely. Some restrictions stem from discriminatory inheritance laws, traditional customs and practices, and laws regarding the division of marital property following a divorce. For instance, land inheritance laws in [Palau](#), [Tonga](#), and [Tuvalu](#) favour male heirs. Women may be excluded from decisions regarding indigenous and shared land through traditional decision-making processes favouring men. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women have noted examples of such practices in [Fiji](#) and in [Solomon Islands](#). Women's access to property and land may further be restricted through divorce laws which do not take into account non-financial contributions.

In addition to discriminatory legislation, women's access to land and participation in decision-making regarding land matters may be impacted by customary practices. A number of Pacific Island countries formally recognise customary law practices, which may be at odds with the commitments made under CEDAW. There have been efforts to address discriminatory customary practices in some countries: in Vanuatu, for example, the [2013 Custom Land Management Act](#) allows for the participation of women in customary institutions which are involved in decision-making regarding land matters. Nevertheless, further progress is required in order to ensure that both *de facto* and *de jure* equality exists in relation to women's access to land.

Despite the restrictions many women face in their access to property and land across the region, there are instances in which matrilineal and matriarchal societies allow the participation of women in decision-making regarding land, or even favour the land rights of women over men. In the Federated States of Micronesia, for

example, [land use rights are inherited through the mother's clan](#). In the Republic of the Marshall Islands, [female clan-heads participate in community meetings deciding on land matters](#).

Several countries in the Pacific region are in free association with other states such as New Zealand (Cook Islands and Niue) or the United States of America (Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands). As such, these countries have agreements either granting automatic citizenship rights to their citizens – as is the case with the [Cook Islands](#) and [Niue](#), for example – or granting immigration rights, as seen in the [agreement between the USA and the Marshall Islands](#). Tokelau is a non-self-governing territory of New Zealand. There is no evidence of gender-discriminatory laws regarding immigration and citizenship in these countries.

Some PICTs have discriminatory citizenship laws. In Kiribati, the [Constitution](#) states that male citizens can confer their nationality to non-national spouses while female citizens cannot. Children born abroad to I-Kiribati men are considered to be citizens, while children born abroad to I-Kiribati women do not have citizenship automatically. In Solomon Islands, the 1978 Citizenship Act, which contained discriminatory legislation – including [acquisition and loss of citizenship according to marriage that only applied to women](#) – was repealed with the introduction of the [2018 Citizenship Act](#).


Laws regarding sexual consent vary significantly between, and sometimes within, countries. Among the 14 countries covered in this brief, the lowest age of consent is found in the [Yap and Kosrae states of the Federated States of Micronesia, at age 13](#). In [Niue](#), [Tokelau](#), [Tonga](#), and [Tuvalu](#), the age of consent is defined for girls (at between 15 and 16) but there is no specified minimum age of consent for boys. This can result in a lack of protection for boys against sexual violence and exploitation.



The highest age of consent is found in the [Chuuk and Pohnpei states of the Federated States of Micronesia](#), where the minimum age for engaging in sexual conduct was raised to 18 in recent years with the intention of providing additional protection to children. As [noted](#)

[by the United Nations Children's Fund \(UNICEF\) in 2017](#), however, a high legal age of consent may result in teenagers being prosecuted for engaging in consensual sexual activity with other teenagers. Young people engaging in consensual sexual activity may be protected by peer consent provisions in criminal laws. In RMI, for example, the age of consent is 16. However, under the [2011 Criminal Code](#) it is legal for teenagers between the ages of 14 and 16 to consent to sexual conduct with a person who is less than three years older than them. [Fiji](#), [Kiribati](#), [Nauru](#), and [Palau](#) have similar peer consent provisions. Marriage exemptions, whereby consent by a minor who is below the age of consent is permitted in situations where the minor is married to an adult, exist in [Samoa](#) and [Palau](#), as well as in Cook Islands' [2017 Draft Crime Bill](#).

The legal marriage age is the same for men and women in eight of the 14 countries: [Cook Islands](#) (21, or 16 with parental consent); [Fiji](#) (18); [Kiribati](#) (21, or 18 with parental consent); [Nauru](#) (18); [Republic of the Marshall Islands](#) (18); [Solomon Islands](#) (18, or 15 with parental consent); [Tonga](#) (18, or 15 with parental consent); and [Tuvalu](#) (21, or 18 with parental consent). In the state of Pohnpei in the [Federated States of Micronesia](#), the minimum age for marriage is 18 for both men and women. For the remaining countries and states, the legal marriage age is lower for women than for men. In the states of Kosrae and Chuuk in the [Federated States of Micronesia](#), the legal marriage age is 16 for women and 18 for men. Additionally, the legal marriage age with parental consent is 16 for women and 18 for men in [Samoa](#) (without consent: 19 for women, 21 for men), [Tokelau](#) (without consent: 18 for women, 21 for men), and [Vanuatu](#) (without consent: 21 for both women and men). In [Niue](#) the legal age of marriage without consent is 21 for men and 19 for women, however with parental consent the legal marriage age is 18 for men and 15 for women. In the state of [Yap in the Federated States of Micronesia](#) there is no minimum legal marriage age stipulated under state law. Additionally, some countries permit customary marriages with no specified minimum age requirement. An example of this is seen in [Palau](#). Marriages involving non-citizens in Palau are subject to minimum age requirements of 16 for girls and 18 for men – providing there is parental permission from the girl's mother. Two Palauan citizens, however, may engage in a customary marriage with no legal age limit.

## Legal Marriage Age in PICTs

Internationally accepted age:  18 years

	 For women	 For men
Cook Islands	16 with consent 21 without consent	16 with consent 21 without consent
<b>FSM</b>		
Chuuk state	16	18
Kosrae state	16	18
Pohnpei state	18	18
Yap state	No minimum age	No minimum age
Fiji	18	18
Kiribati	15 with consent 18 without consent	15 with consent 18 without consent
Nauru	18	18
Niue	15 with consent 19 without consent	18 with consent 21 without consent
Palau*	16 with consent 18 without consent	18 with consent 18 without consent
RMI	18	18
Samoa	16 with consent 19 without consent	18 with consent 21 without consent
Solomon Islands	15 with consent 18 without consent	15 with consent 18 without consent
Tokelau	16 with consent 18 without consent	18 with consent 21 without consent
Tonga	15 with consent 18 without consent	15 with consent 18 without consent
Tuvalu	18 with consent 21 without consent	18 with consent 21 without consent
Vanuatu	16 with consent 21 without consent	18 with consent 21 without consent

\*Customary marriages permitted with no minimum age requirements.

Source: UN Women Gender Equality Country Briefs

In [Kiribati](#), where the elopement of a young couple is accepted as a common-law marriage, 11% of women aged 15-19 were married or in a union in 2019. In the [Republic of the Marshall Islands](#) – where the legal marriage age was raised in 2016 from 16 to 18 for girls – 26.3% of women aged 20-24 in 2007 were married before age 18, with 5.5% married before age 15. Conversely, in the [Cook Islands](#), marriage before age 20 is believed to be uncommon, and the average age of first marriage in 2011 was 31.8 for both men and women.

Same-sex sexual conduct [has been decriminalized](#) in Fiji, Nauru, Niue, Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Tokelau, and has never been criminalized in the Federated States of Micronesia or Vanuatu. Although it is criminalized in other PICTs, [typically it is not prosecuted in practice](#). According to a [2016 report](#) by the Asia Pacific Forum and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), however, laws relating to ‘vagrancy, public nuisance, national security, public morality, obscenity, indecency and public order’ in the region are frequently used to target individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). Additionally, same-sex civil unions, marriage, adoption, and LGBT service in the military [are prohibited](#).

Fiji has [comprehensive anti-discrimination laws](#), including a constitutional prohibition on discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, making it an exception among the 14 PICTs. In addition to Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu are all signatories of the UN Human Rights Council’s 2011 *Joint Statement on Ending Acts of Violence and Related Human Rights Violations Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. There have been [reports](#) of mistreatment and human rights violations of people of diverse SOGIESC backgrounds in the region, including the ‘punitive rape of women perceived to be lesbian’ and ‘bullying in schools [which] denies young people a safe access to education’. UNDP is working across the Pacific region to sensitise parliamentarians and support legislative reform.

## Governance and Participation in Public Life

Under Article 7 of the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW), State Parties must take all appropriate measures to ensure that women have equal rights and opportunities to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy. Women should be able to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government on equal terms with men.

Women's overall representation in national parliaments across the region is low. The [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#) state that, as of 1 March 2022, the average proportion of women in national parliaments in the Pacific Islands was 6.0%. This was the lowest of any global region and was significantly below the global average of 26.1%. Of the 14 PICTs analysed in this brief, 44 of the 453 seats in national legislatures were held by women in March 2022, with women therefore holding 9.7% of the total seats.

The importance of Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) – such as parliamentary quotas or reserved seats for women – is recognised under CEDAW. Under General Recommendation 25, the CEDAW Committee state that, in certain circumstances, such measures will be required in order to address gender imbalances. The purpose of TSMs is to accelerate the equal participation of women in political, economic, social, cultural and civil fields in order to achieve *de facto* as well as *de jure* equality. Samoa is the only one of the 14 analysed countries and territories to have [introduced temporary special measures](#) in their national parliament, with a 10% quota introduced in 2013. Vanuatu [introduced temporary special measures at a local level](#) in 2013, with the reservation a proportion of Municipal Council seats for women. In 2014, Solomon Islands introduced the [Political Parties Integrity Act](#), which states that at least 10% of a political party's candidates must be women in order for the party to contest an election. However, a political party is not bound by this obligation if they do not receive enough applications from female candidates to fulfil it.

The political systems across the 14 PICTs are varied. Most Pacific Island countries are constitutional democracies. In many cases, parliamentary systems are combined with traditional leadership or clan systems that have varying levels of influence on legislation, policy and culture. The Kingdom of Tonga is unique in the Pacific region in that it is an [independent hereditary constitutional monarchy](#). Prior to constitutional reforms in 2010, the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, and Governors were appointed by the monarch, and written assent from the monarch was required for all new laws. Most of the monarch's executive powers were ceded in the 2010 constitutional reforms.

All 14 PICTs have universal suffrage with a minimum voting age of between 18 and 21.<sup>1</sup> Although there are no direct laws explicitly prohibiting women's political participation in these countries, women generally have lower levels of political participation than men and may in some cases be discouraged from engaging in politics due to cultural or economic factors. Women may be deterred from standing as candidates due to a [lack of time, financial resources, or social capital](#). Social norms in which women are expected to defer to men may act as a further barrier to women's full political participation. Female political candidates and politicians report experiencing online and offline violence, including [character assassinations, defamatory accusations of a sexual nature](#), and [sexist comments](#). Women with familial political ties sometimes encounter fewer barriers to political participation: for example, [several elected female politicians in the region are the wives or widows of male former legislators](#).

Even in matrilineal and matriarchal Pacific Islands societies in which women hold specific positions of power within their families, clans, or communities, women are under-represented in local and national government. Despite this, a number of women hold positions at the highest levels of political office. In 2015, [Dr Hilda Heine was elected as the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands](#), becoming the first female Head of State/Government in any Micronesian country. Elsewhere within the Pacific region, the [Honourable Fiame Naomi Mata'afa became the first female Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa](#) in 2016 and was subsequently elected as the first female Prime Minister of Samoa in 2021. In Palau, [Senator Jerrlyn Uduch Sengebau-Senior was elected as the Vice President](#) in 2020. The [Honourable Teima Onorio served as Vice President for Kiribati](#) for three consecutive terms between 2003 and 2016.

Women's participation in traditional leadership roles varies across the cultures of the Pacific region, and there is a lack of comprehensive data on the issue. In Tuvalu, 10% of members of the island decision-making entity *Falekaupule* were women in 2018; in Fiji in 2019, 7% of village chief positions were held by women. In some countries, traditional leadership roles are formally integrated with contemporary politics. In the Cook Islands,

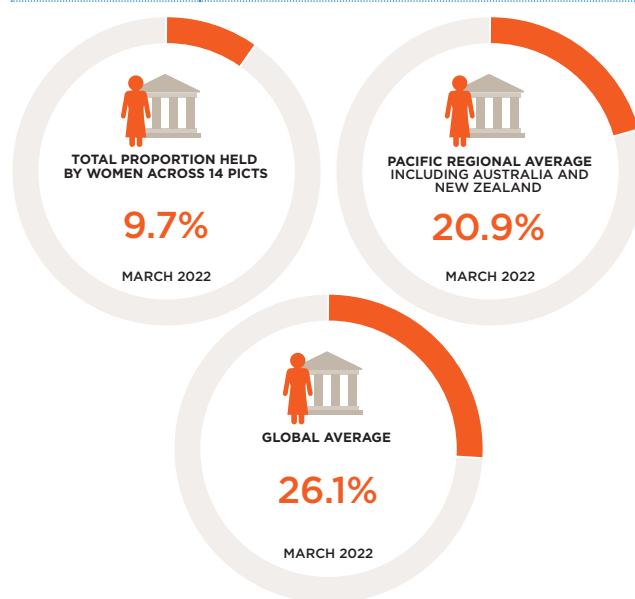
1 Information from individual country gender equality briefs

for example, the *Are Ariki* – a group of chiefs – make recommendations to the Legislative Assembly on matters concerning the welfare of the population. *Ariki* titles may be held by both men and women. In Samoa, [some villages prevent women from holding matai \(chief\) titles](#). This has implications for women’s participation in national politics as typically only *matai* can stand as parliamentary candidates.

Despite the low regional average representation of women in national legislature, there is a great deal of variation across Pacific Island countries. The proportion of women in the national legislature is highest in the [Cook Islands](#), where women hold 6 of the 24 (25.0%) parliamentary seats. Representation is also significantly above the Pacific Islands average in [Fiji](#) (19.6%) and [Tokelau](#) (18.2%). Female political representation [dropped from 25.0% to 15.0% in Niue following the May 2020 elections](#), when [three female candidates were elected](#) compared to the five female candidates elected in 2017. Such a significant drop in the proportion of women in legislature illustrates the precarious nature of female representation in the region, particularly in countries with small parliaments.

### Women in Legislature in PICTs (April 2022)

Cook Islands	25.0%
FSM	7.1%
Fiji	19.6%
Kiribati	6.7%
Nauru	10.5%
Niue	15.0%
Palau	6.9%
RMI	6.1%
Samoa	13%
Solomon Islands	8.0%
Tokelau	18.2%
Tonga	3.7%
Tuvalu	6.7%
Vanuatu	0.0%



National data source: UN Women Gender Equality Country Briefs

Regional and global data source: [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#)

In the Federated States of Micronesia, the [first woman was elected to the FSM Congress in a Special Election in November 2021](#), increasing the proportion of female representatives in the country’s national legislature from 0% to 7.1%. Vanuatu is the only one of the fourteen countries to have [0% female representation in national legislature](#), as of April 2022. There have been [five female members in Vanuatu’s 52-seat legislature since independence in 1980](#), and the parliament has been all-male since 2012.



Some small Pacific Island countries – for example Nauru and Tuvalu – do not have political parties, with parliamentary seats contested instead by independent candidates. A lack of political parties [has been identified as a potential barrier to increasing women's political representation](#). Political parties can provide opportunities for women to develop necessary skills as well as offer support for women to take on political leadership roles.

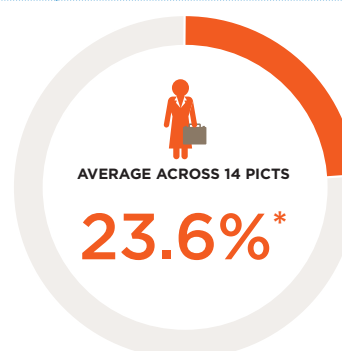
Data on women in local government in the region is sparse and in many cases is not regularly collected or published. In the Federated States of Micronesia, [women held 7.4% of state-level legislature and House of Senate seats in 2020](#), as well as 16.3% of state-level cabinet seats. A [regional analysis](#) from 2016 found the highest levels of representation of women in local government were in the Cook Islands (12%) and Samoa (11%). The lowest levels of representation of women in local government seats were found in Niue (2%) and Solomon Islands (2%).

In many countries, there is a lack of data on the level of female representation in the judiciary. There is a comparatively [high level of representation of women in Palau](#), where 36% of judges – including 44% of full-time judges – were women as of 2020. Conversely, in Kiribati there has never been a woman appointed to the judiciary. Women do, however, hold a significant proportion of law-related jobs in Kiribati, with [44% of law-related jobs held by women in 2015](#).

In examining the representation of women on boards in 14 PICTs, it is difficult to draw direct comparisons between in-country data due to the variations in statistical methodology. According to a [regional analysis published in 2021 by the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative](#) (PSDI), an estimated 23.6% of Directors on boards were women in 14 PICTs. The highest levels of female representation on boards were seen in Palau (38%), Samoa (33%), and the Cook Islands (32%). 12% of Board Chair positions and 20% of Deputy Chair positions were held by women in the countries analysed in this report. The PSDI report also found that, in the Pacific region, women were most highly represented as Directors on the boards of industry associations (35% female representation), followed by publicly listed companies (23% female representation) and state-owned enterprises (18% female representation).

### Female Directors on the Boards of PICTs Organisations (2021)

Cook Islands	32%
FSM	19%
Fiji	20%
Kiribati	22%
Nauru	12%
Niue	29%
Palau	38%
RMI	25%
Samoa	33%
Solomon Islands	11%
Tokelau	Data not available
Tonga	19%
Tuvalu	29%
Vanuatu	18%



\* Average calculated as the mean value across countries with available data

National data source: UN Women Gender Equality Country Briefs

Regional and global data source: [Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative](#)

Among the 14 PICTs, only Fiji and Tonga have their own militaries, while a number of countries have defence agreements with New Zealand or the United States of America. In Fiji, [22% of the armed forces were women in 2018](#). Data on women in the police forces of Pacific Island countries is not regularly published, although available data shows that women are significantly outnumbered by men. Women comprised [20% of the police force in Fiji in 2017](#), and [25% of frontline police officers in Cook Islands as of 2021](#).

In diplomatic posts, all of Kiribati's diplomatic missions overseas were headed by women in the most recent data from 2019, while data from Nauru suggests that the [majority of Nauruan serving missions consulates and overseas ambassadors are women](#). For Fiji, [30% of diplomatic posts were held by women in 2019](#).

## Education

Under Article 10 of CEDAW, State Parties should take all appropriate measures to ensure equality in education. As recognised by the United Nation's [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), the completion of free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education for both girls and boys is key to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Of the 14 PICTs analysed in this brief, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga and Tuvalu all offer free and compulsory education.<sup>2</sup> In Solomon Islands, [primary school education is fee-free but not compulsory](#). Vanuatu is the only country in the region where [education is neither free nor compulsory](#).

According to data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), the highest Net Enrolment Ratios (NERs) for girls in early childhood education in the 14 PICTs are found in [Kiribati](#) (93% in 2020) and the [Cook Islands](#) (89% in 2020). The early childhood NER is significantly higher for girls than boys in the Cook Islands, Kiribati, and [Palau](#). In the [Republic of the Marshall Islands](#) and [Niue](#), the early childhood NER is significantly higher for boys than for girls. Additional [data](#) from the Pacific Community (SPC) suggests that the NER for early childhood education is significantly higher for girls than boys in Tokelau (105% for boys, 86% for girls in 2016).

According to a 2017 [report](#) on PICTs by UNICEF, the average primary NER in Pacific Island countries is estimated to be 89.8% for both genders. According to the latest UIS data for girls' primary school education, the highest NERs are observed in the [Cook Islands](#) (100% in 2020), [Fiji](#) (98% in 2015), [Nauru](#) (97% in 2020), and

[Vanuatu](#) (95% in 2020). Although sex-disaggregated data is not available in all countries, data from [UIS.Stat](#) shows that the NERs for both genders combined are also high in Tokelau (98% in 2020), Kiribati (97% in 2020), and Samoa (100% in 2020). For all countries where sex-disaggregated data is available, primary education NERs are approximately equal between boys and girls or are higher among girls. The most significant gender differences are found in [Solomon Islands](#) (66% female NER and 61% male NER in 2019) and [Nauru](#) (97% female NER and 94% male NER in 2020).

According to the 2017 [UNICEF report](#) on the PICTs, the average NER for secondary education is higher for girls (69.7%) than for boys (62.3%). In the latest UNESCO data, the highest NERs for girls in secondary education are reported in [Tokelau](#) (100% in 2019), [Nauru](#) (95% in 2020), [Cook Islands](#) (95% in 2020), and [Samoa](#) (90% in 2016). Sex disaggregated data is not available in all PICTs. Low total NERs for girls and boys combined at the secondary level are reported in [SPC data](#) for Solomon Islands (40% in 2016) and Palau (45% in 2016). In sex-disaggregated data published by UNESCO, the lowest NER for girls in secondary education is reported in [Vanuatu](#), at 50% in 2020. In secondary education, the NER for girls is higher than boys in all PICTs that have sex-disaggregated data, except in [Tuvalu](#) where it is approximately equal. The gender gap is largest in [Tonga](#), where the NER was 82% for girls and 69% for boys in 2020.

Across both primary and secondary education, there are significant gaps between Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) and NERs, which is indicative of a high number of children outside of the official age range for their current education level.<sup>3</sup>

In all countries for which sex-disaggregated GER data is available for tertiary education, enrolment is higher among women and girls than among their male counterparts. According to UNESCO data, the highest GERs for tertiary education are reported in [Palau](#) (66% female GER and 44% male GER in 2013) and [Fiji](#) (64% female GER and 43% male GER in 2019). At a regional level, it is [difficult to assess the participation rates of youths and adults in technical, vocational, and tertiary education](#) as data is inconsistent, out-of-date, and often missing. This makes it difficult to analyse the progress of Pacific Island countries in improving

2 See the Table on Education Indicators for data and sources.

3 See the Table on Education Indicators.



access and educational outcomes in tertiary and vocational education, as well as to examine the extent of gender (in)equality in tertiary education.

Gendered stereotypes remain predominant in the selection of vocations and career choices, which in turn, [limit equal access to training and education across genders](#). In [Palau](#), in tertiary education, women are more likely to specialise in business, administration and law (34.0% of women and 15.7% of men); education (15.2% of women and 6.7% of men); and health and welfare (11.2% of women and 3.0% of men). Men are more likely to specialise in engineering, manufacturing and construction (2.5% of women and 35.6% of men). In 2015, 77% of students undertaking Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics majors in Palau were men. Similarly, in [Fiji](#) boys are more likely to study 'trade-centred' subjects such as automotive engineering, welding, and carpentry, whereas most female students are enrolled in support and hospitality-related courses such as catering and tailoring. A [regional Beijing +25 report](#) produced by the Pacific Community reported that there have been attempts by governments in Tuvalu and Fiji to extend equal opportunities for women and girls in 'non-traditional' courses. Since 2015, the Technical College of Fiji has more women than men enrolling in agriculture, and women have also enrolled in construction and engineering programmes.

There is growing evidence of the [gendered impacts of COVID-19 on the education of adolescent girls in the Pacific](#). Adolescent girls are less likely to have access to the internet and electronic devices (computers, tablets, smartphones) than their male counterparts. Plan International [reported](#) in 2021 that an estimated 32% of school-age children in East Asia and the Pacific (amounting to 183 million) have no access to the internet at home. This is linked to high poverty rates and limited telecommunications infrastructure within the Pacific, where electronic devices are not affordable or accessible to families, especially adolescent girls. Families identified cost as a barrier to purchasing data plans and electronic devices, according to a [2020 report](#) on Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands.

Adolescent girls have reported having less time to dedicate to learning and keeping up with social interactions as they take on a greater duty of care and domestic chores, compared to their male siblings. They also report more frequent experiences of gender-based violence during lockdowns, which heighten stress, anxiety, negatively affecting their mental health. Furthermore, adolescent pregnancy and child marriage can be reasons for girls dropping out of school in a number of countries, and in some countries, such as Vanuatu, forced and child marriage appears to have increased as a result of the pandemic.

## Women's Economic Empowerment



The right to work is described as an inalienable right in CEDAW, and State Parties to the Convention have a duty to ensure that women and men have equal employment opportunities, free choice of profession and employment, equal remuneration and access to social security benefits, and the right to protection of health and safety in working conditions.

Informal employment – which is [not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection, or entitlement to certain employment benefits and protections](#) – is common in PICTs. According to the [most recent national data](#) published by the Pacific Community (SPC), the highest levels of female informal employment in the non-agricultural sector are found in Palau (79%, 2014), Niue (78%, 2016), and Tonga (75%, 2018). The levels of informal employment in non-agriculture were higher among women than men in nine of the 14 PICTs. In the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, and Samoa, however, male informal employment rates were higher than female rates. Tokelau was not included in the analysis as no SPC data on informal employment is available for Tokelau within the last 10 years. The highest disparities between male and female informal non-agricultural employment were seen in Niue, Nauru, Tuvalu, and the Federated States of Micronesia. Updated data collection is required to adequately assess the current situation regarding informal employment in the region: in the Federated



States of Micronesia, Nauru, and Solomon Islands, the most recent data on informal employment was published in 2013. Using the latest data on informal employment from each country between 2013 and 2019, the average rate of informal employment in non-agriculture across the 13 PICTs (excluding Tokelau) is estimated to be 49% for women and 46% for men.

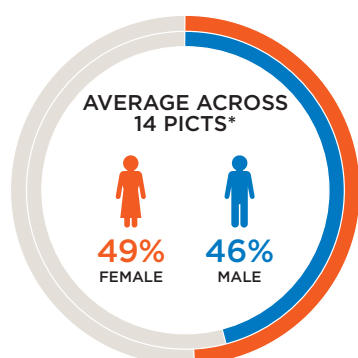
is higher than for their male counterparts in 10 of the 13 countries analysed. There is no available data for Tokelau. The gender disparity between male and female unemployment is greatest in the countries with higher levels of female unemployment, for example in Samoa (21.3% female, 10.6% male in 2018) and the Federated States of Micronesia (13.9% female, 5.4% male in 2014). For countries with higher levels of male unemployment, the greatest gender disparity is seen in Republic of the Marshall Islands (4.3% female, 7.3% male in 2019).

### Informal Employment in Non-agriculture in PICTs (latest available year)

	Female 	Male 
Cook Islands (2019)	30%	26%
FSM (2013)	53%	65%
Fiji (2016)	37%	34%
Kiribati (2019)	44%	38%
Nauru (2013)	58%	91%
Niue (2016)	78%	41%
Palau (2014)	79%	85%
RMI (2019)	28%	19%
Samoa (2017)	21%	22%
Solomon Islands (2013)	32%	31%
Tokelau	Data not available	
Tonga (2018)	75%	72%
Tuvalu (2016)	49%	35%
Vanuatu (2019)	55%	45%

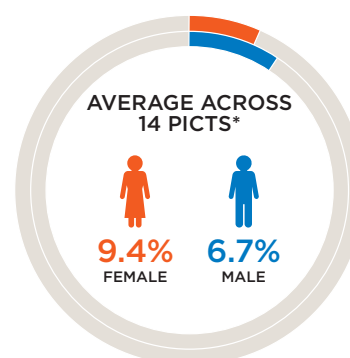
### National Unemployment Rate Among Population age 15+ in PICTs (latest available year)

	Female 	Male 
Cook Islands (2019)	0.9%	1.6%
FSM (2014)	13.9%	5.4%
Fiji (2020)	11.7%	5.1%
Kiribati (2020)	12.4%	10.4%
Nauru (2019)	19.0%	18.0%
Niue (2017)	0.3%	0.2%
Palau (2015)	1.5%	1.8%
RMI (2019)	4.3%	7.3%
Samoa (2018)	21.3%	10.6%
Solomon Islands (2021)	1.1%	1.0%
Tokelau	Data not available	
Tonga (2018)	3.6%	2.6%
Tuvalu (2017)	30.4%	27.2%
Vanuatu (2019)	9.4%	6.7%



\* Average calculated as the mean value across countries with available data  
Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)

National unemployment rates vary significantly across the region. According to the most recent national data, the highest national rate of unemployment is in Tuvalu at 30.4% for women and 27.2% for men aged 15 and over in 2017. The rate of unemployment among women



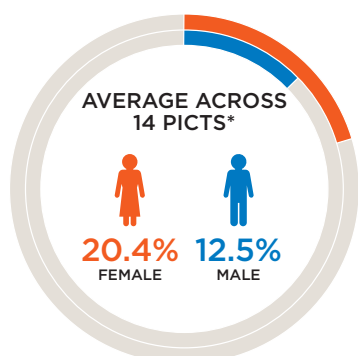
\* Average calculated as the mean value across countries with available data  
Source: [UN Women Gender Equality Briefs](#)

Unemployment rates are higher among youth populations aged 15 to 24, and a significant proportion of the youth population in the Pacific region is not in education, employment, or training (NEET). In the most recent national data, the highest female youth

unemployment rate and greatest disparity in youth unemployment is seen in Tuvalu, where 45.9% of female and 9.8% of male youth are unemployed in 2016. There are also significant gender disparities in youth unemployment rates seen in the Federated States of Micronesia (29.9% female, 10.4% male), Nauru (37.5% female, 20.9% male), Republic of the Marshall Islands (14.2% female, 30.4% male), and Samoa (30.0% female, 13.3% male). In the Cook Islands, Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, youth unemployment rates are higher among men than women.

### Youth Unemployment Rate Among Population age 15-24 in PICTs (latest available year)

	Female	Male
Cook Islands (2019)	1.6%	4.6%
FSM (2014)	29.9%	10.4%
Fiji (2016)	22.4%	11.9%
Kiribati (2019)	24.6%	20.9%
Nauru (2013)	37.5%	20.9%
Niue	Data not available	
Palau (2015)	4.4%	4.6%
RMI (2019)	14.2%	30.4%
Samoa (2017)	30.0%	13.3%
Solomon Islands (2013)	1.6%	1.1%
Tokelau	Data not available	
Tonga (2018)	13.0%	5.7%
Tuvalu (2016)	45.9%	9.8%
Vanuatu (2019)	20.1%	16.1%



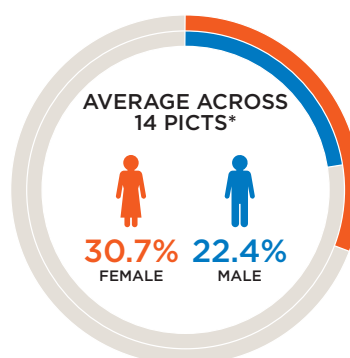
\* Average calculated as the mean value across countries with available data  
Source: UN Women Gender Equality Briefs

In all 13 PICTs countries with available national data, young women are more likely to be outside education, employment or training than young men. The highest female NEET rate is observed in Kiribati (48.9%) and greatest gender disparity in NEET rates is seen in Fiji,

where 29.6% of female and 10.8% of male youth are not in education employment or training in 2016. There are also significant gender disparities in NEET rates in the Federated States of Micronesia (29.1% female, 18.3% male), Nauru (44% female, 30% male), Republic of the Marshall Islands (45.2% female, 37.1% male), Samoa (41.5% female, 34.6% male) and Tuvalu (37.4% female, 21.7% male).

### Youth not in Education, Employment, or Training, Age 15-24 in PICTs (latest available year)

	Female	Male
Cook Islands (2019)	16.9%	8.6%
FSM (2014)	29.1%	18.3%
Fiji (2016)	29.6%	10.8%
Kiribati (2020)	48.9%	45.7%
Nauru (2019)	44.0%	30.0%
Niue (2016)	5.9%	0.0%
Palau (2015)	14.4%	11.1%
RMI (2019)	45.2%	37.1%
Samoa (2017)	41.5%	34.6%
Solomon Islands (2013)	8.7%	3.8%
Tokelau	Data not available	
Tonga (2018)	31.5%	29.0%
Tuvalu (2016)	37.4%	21.7%
Vanuatu (2019)	46.0%	40.2%



\* Average calculated as the mean value across countries with available data  
Source: UN Women Gender Equality Briefs

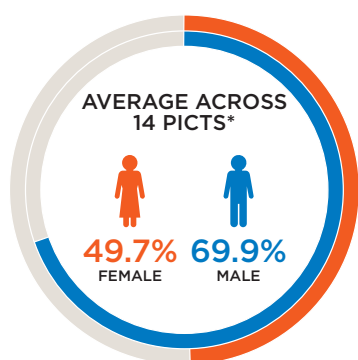
National labour force participation rates are difficult to compare due to the varying definitions used by governments in the region. Some countries, such as [Tokelau](#), may define those engaging in unpaid domestic work as within the labour force, while countries such as [Samoa](#) and [Tonga](#) do not count these individuals as economically active. Labour force participation rates across the region are, however, consistently higher for



men than for women. The main reasons cited for being outside the labour force include family and household responsibilities, and studies. In the [Cook Islands](#), 29% of women and 0% of men cited family and household responsibilities as the main reason they were outside the labour force in 2019. In the most recent [Palau's 2015 Census](#), 35% of women and 41% of men outside the labour force stated that they were full-time students.

### Labour Force Participation Rate Among Population Age 15+ in PICTs (latest available year)

	Female	Male
Cook Islands (2019)	63.3%	77.8%
FSM (2014)	46.2%	67.8%
Fiji (2020)	45.5%	82.6%
Kiribati (2020)	40.5%	77.8%
Nauru (2019)	52.0%	75.0%
Niue (2017)	60.6%	77.4%
Palau (2015)	74.7%	79.7%
RMI (2019)	27.9%	61.0%
Samoa (2017)	31.5%	55.0%
Solomon Islands (2013)	83.9%	87.9%
Tokelau (2016)	49.9%	70.0%
Tonga (2018)	38.4%	56.2%
Tuvalu (2017)	39.7%	58.5%
Vanuatu (2020)	42.1%	51.5%



\* Average calculated as the mean value across countries with available data  
Source: UN Women Gender Equality Briefs

According to a 2021 [analysis](#) of organisations in the Pacific region by the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, women held 13% of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) roles across 14 PICTs. The highest proportions of female CEOs were found in Kiribati (29%), Palau (29%), Tuvalu (29%), the Cook Islands (27%), and Samoa (25%). The lowest rates were found in Solomon Islands (7%),

Nauru (0%), and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (0%). No data was available for Tokelau. Female CEOs in the Pacific region were found to be most highly concentrated in the tourism sector. For organisation type, women were most likely to be CEOs in industry associations which support businesses and employers in particular sectors – including chambers of commerce as well as sector-specific organizations in sectors such as manufacturing, resources, and tourism – in comparison to publicly listed companies or state-owned enterprises.

Data from the [Pacific Community](#) shows similar comparative trends. The highest proportion of female managers is found in the Cook Islands, where women held 60% of managerial positions in 2019. The lowest rates of women in managerial positions are seen in the Federated States of Micronesia (20% in 2014) and Solomon Islands (26% in 2013). No data was available on women in managerial positions in Niue or Tokelau.

Protections in the workplace – including legislation and policies against sexual harassment and gender discrimination – are unevenly utilised throughout the region. The majority of the 14 countries examined in this brief – Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu – [do not have sexual harassment prohibitions within formal employment legislation](#). Some countries, such as Solomon Islands, Nauru and the Federated States of Micronesia, have protections for public sector and civil service employees that do not extend to the wider workforce. In the Cook Islands and Fiji, sexual harassment is explicitly prohibited across the public and private sectors in formal employment legislation. The [Cook Islands](#), [Fiji](#), [Kiribati](#), [the Republic of the Marshall Islands](#), and [Samoa](#) all have national legislation which prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of sex in both the public and the private sectors. [The Federated States of Micronesia](#), [Palau](#), and [Tokelau](#) have discrimination prohibitions that apply to the public sector. In Tonga, the [2020 Employment Relations Bill](#) prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, marital status, family status, or pregnancy, although this Act has not yet come into force as of April 2022.

Gender-based violence and harassment at work impact women's participation in employment and the quality of their work. While data is scarce, sexual harassment is the most widely reported form of violence and harassment in the workplace. Gender-based violence and harassment can occur anywhere work takes place, in all countries and sectors. Sectors that are more at risk of physical violence and harassment – such as [healthcare, hospitality, domestic work, education and social work](#) – are typically women-dominated sectors. Fiji is the [only country](#) among the 14 PICTs that has ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s [Violence and Harassment Convention](#). The Convention provided the first international definition of violence and harassment in the world of work and provides protection from violence and harassment in the workplace.

Among the 14 PICTs, [11 are members of the ILO](#): the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, and Niue are not members of the ILO, as of April 2022. Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau (through association with New Zealand), and Vanuatu have all ratified the [Equal Remuneration Convention](#) and the [Discrimination \(Employment and Occupation\) Convention](#). None of the Pacific Island countries analysed in this brief have ratified the [Maternity Protection Convention](#).

Fiji is the only country in the Pacific region in which [maternity and pregnancy are specified as prohibited grounds for discrimination](#). Fiji has the region's longest national maternity leave provisions, with women entitled to 98 days of paid leave. The ILO Maternity Protection Convention states that women should be entitled to a minimum of 14 weeks of paid maternity leave. Fiji is therefore the only country which meets international standards for the duration of maternity leave. The most common length of maternity leave provided in the 14 PICTs is 12 weeks, which is mandated at full pay in the [Federated States of Micronesia, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu](#), and at 25% pay in [Solomon Islands](#) and [Kiribati](#). In the [Cook Islands](#) and [Samoa](#), women are entitled to six weeks' paid maternity leave. This is paid at the national minimum wage rate for a 40-hour working week in the Cook Islands, and at two-thirds the individual's normal salary rate in Samoa. In the [public sector](#), women in Samoa may take up to 12 weeks' paid leave. In [Nauru, Niue,](#)

[Palau](#), the [Marshall Islands, Tokelau, and Tonga](#), there are processes regulating the provision of maternity leave in the public sector but not the private sector. Paternity leave provisions in the region are uncommon. Male spouses of a woman who gives birth are entitled to 10 days paternity leave in [Tuvalu](#), while men are entitled to five days paternity leave in [Samoa](#) and [Fiji](#) and two days in the [Cook Islands](#). Men in the public sector in [Nauru](#) are entitled to two weeks of paid paternity leave, and men in the public sector in [Tonga](#) and [Niue](#) are entitled to five days of paid paternity leave. Fiji's paternity leave provisions have been [reduced to two days during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). There is no paternity leave provisions in the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, or Vanuatu.

In addition to duration of leave, women may be impacted by the funding arrangements of national maternity provisions. Employer liability in maternity leave – in which it is the employer that is responsible for maternity leave payments – is common in the region and [may lead to discrimination from employers](#) who wish to avoid the associated costs of maternity leave.

[Childcare provisions and support](#) can be effective methods to improve the economic participation of women with children. In [Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu](#), breastfeeding mothers are entitled to two paid hours of nursing breaks per day. [Analysis](#) of employer-provided childcare support in Fiji found that the provision of childcare facilities improved the absorption and retention of female workers.

The [Waka Mere Commitment to Action](#) in Solomon Islands is an example of an initiative in the region that promotes the economic participation of women. As part of the Waka Mere initiative, 15 of the largest private companies in Solomon Islands have made commitments to promote women in leadership, build respectful and supportive workplaces, and increase opportunities for women to take up jobs traditionally held by men.

Social norms and gender stereotypes can affect women's economic empowerment. In the Asia-Pacific region, [women spend 4.1 times as long doing unpaid care work than men](#). For those within the labour force, social and cultural factors may impact the type of work that they do. In many instances, women in

the labour force are concentrated in particular sectors, for example education and health. In [Palau](#), for instance, men are more highly represented in professional roles within Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, with women holding just 31% of such roles in 2015. Data from [Tokelau](#) shows certain jobs are held predominantly or exclusively by women – such as caring and support occupations – while some other occupations are held by a majority or exclusivity of men such as construction, technology and trade.

Across the region, women have lower levels of access to financial services. In Fiji, for example, 57% of women and 69% of men [had an account at a financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider](#) in 2017. In Vanuatu in 2016, 25% of women and 37% of men had a bank account at a financial institution or mobile-money-service provider. Women's access to finance may be restricted by the uneven distribution of land ownership discussed in the *Women's Human Rights* section, in part because women are less likely to have the collateral required to secure formal loans. Further to this, in Asia and the Pacific region women are [less likely to possess the required documentation](#) needed to apply for loans.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has [exacerbated pre-existing economic vulnerabilities](#), and the high level of informal employment in Pacific Island countries has important implications for the economic empowerment of women during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Women in the Pacific region are [typically concentrated in lower paid, informal, and precarious work](#) where workers may not have the same access to formal support measures. Female market vendors and those working in the tourist handcraft and the fisheries industries have been particularly affected during the pandemic. Declines in sales and revenue have disproportionately impacted female-led businesses, with 69% of female-led and 32% of male-led business reporting a significant decline in sales and revenue, according to [surveys](#) conducted in 16 Pacific Islands countries by Pacific Trade Invest (PTI) throughout 2021. PTI's surveys found that, in late 2021, 27% of female and 51% of male

businesses in the region were fully operational.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had additional impacts on the economic empowerment of women through the increased burden of unpaid care work that is placed on women. As previously noted, it is women who are primarily responsible for unpaid care and domestic work, and so women are [disproportionately impacted by caring for out-of-school children and sick or unemployed relatives](#).

Existent barriers to women's economic decision-making and women's lack of control over household and community financial resources have [also been exacerbated by the pandemic](#), threatening women's economic livelihoods and increasing inequities between women and men. Since women are typically responsible for sourcing, preparing, and cooking food at home, women are [particularly affected by increasing food prices and decreasing food security](#).

## Health/Sexual and Reproductive Health

Article 12 of CEDAW emphasizes the need to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of healthcare and to ensure women's equal access to healthcare services, including those related to family planning. State Parties are required, under the Convention, to ensure that women can access appropriate services in connection to pregnancy, confinement, and the post-natal period, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation. Women and men have differing needs and outcomes across all areas of healthcare, including communicable and non-communicable diseases and sexual and reproductive healthcare.

As of 2019, [data from the Pacific Community](#) (SPC) shows that the highest mortality rates attributed to non-communicable diseases (cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory disease) in the region are observed in Kiribati (43.7% of female, 58.4% of male mortality) and the Federated States of Micronesia (39.9% of female, 52.1% of male mortality). There are, however, significant data gaps, with no recent sex-disaggregated data published on non-communicable disease mortality for the Cook Islands, Niue, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Tokelau or Tuvalu.



Risk factors for non-communicable diseases include excessive consumption of alcohol, tobacco use, physical inactivity, and poor nutrition. Alcohol consumption in the region is higher among men than women: according to [SPC data](#), the highest rates of annual consumption of pure alcohol per capita are seen in the Cook Islands (4.4 litres for women, 18.0 litres for men) and Niue (3.8 litres for women, 16.0 litres for men). [Tobacco use](#) is also more common among men than women in the Pacific region, with the exception of Nauru where the rates of current tobacco use were marginally higher among women (49.8%) and men (48.7%) in 2020. Betel nut, classified as a carcinogen by the World Health Organisation (WHO), is commonly chewed by women in [Palau](#), where 64% of women aged 25-64 chew betel nut daily, compared to 57% of men. Women in Palau are also more likely than men to add tobacco to betel nut.

According to [2016 World Bank data](#), Pacific Island countries have the highest rates of adult obesity globally: Nauru (60.7%), Cook Islands (55.3%), Palau (54.9%), Republic of the Marshall Islands (52.4%), Tuvalu (51.0%), Niue (49.3%), Tonga (45.9%), Kiribati (45.6%), Samoa (45.5%), and the Federated States of Micronesia (41.6%). The highest rate of deaths attributed to obesity was seen in Fiji, accounting for 27.1% of deaths in 2017. The rate of obesity is [higher among women than men](#) in all of the 14 PICTs, with the largest gender disparities seen in Samoa (55.0% of women, 39.9% of men), Tonga (54.5% of women, 41.4% of men), and the Federated States of Micronesia (51.5% of women, 40.1% of men).

There are additional country-specific risk factors that may affect the incidence of non-communicable diseases in Pacific Island countries, such as the impact of air pollutants on respiratory diseases. In [Fiji](#), women are more highly exposed to fumes from wood fires used for cooking and heating in the home: the average exposure time is 1 hr 45 minutes per day for women and 24 minutes per day for men. In [Nauru](#), phosphate dust pollution is associated with significant health risks, although the gendered nature of the impact is not known.

There is a lack of comprehensive regional data on the prevalence of mental health conditions in the Pacific.

Available data shows that the mental health of young girls is of particular concern in some Pacific Island countries. Among teenagers aged 13-17 in [Niue](#), 29.2% of girls and 10.0% of boys surveyed in 2019 stated that they had seriously considered suicide in the 12 months prior to the survey, and 14.1% of girls and 8.0% of boys had attempted suicide in the 12 months prior to the survey. Similar research conducted with middle-school children in [Palau](#) in 2017 found that 52.0% of girls and 24.1% of boys had seriously considered suicide, while 36.1% of girls and 19.8% of boys had attempted suicide in the 12 months prior to the survey. Many of the healthcare systems in Pacific Island countries do not have sufficient specialised mental health services.<sup>4</sup>

The [total fertility rate](#) in the region ranges from 2.2 births per woman in Palau (2018) to 4.4 births per woman in Solomon Islands (2015). In accordance with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), countries should aim to achieve an adolescent fertility rate of below 13 live births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 by 2030.

According to the latest national data, the highest adolescent fertility rates were found in Nauru (92.3 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 in 2017) and Solomon Islands (78.8 per 1,000 population in 2019). The lowest rate was 27 births per 1,000 population in Palau. None of the 14 countries have therefore yet achieved the SDGs target. According to SPC estimates, the average [adolescent fertility rate](#) across the analysed PICTs was 48 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19.

## Adolescent Fertility Rates in PICTs (latest available year)

Sustainable Development Goal target:  
reduce adolescent fertility rate to

**less than 13 live births per 1,000**

women aged 15-19 by 2030

Cook Islands (2018)	38 per 1,000
FSM (2003-2018)	44 per 1,000
Fiji (2021)	31 per 1,000
Kiribati (2019)	51 per 1,000
Nauru (2015-2017)	92.3 per 1,000
Niue (2017)	37 per 1,000
Palau (2016)	27 per 1,000
RMI (2018)	48 per 1,000
Samoa (2020)	55 per 1,000
Solomon Islands (2019)	78.8 per 1,000
Tokelau (2011)	30 per 1,000
Tonga (2019)	30 per 1,000
Tuvalu (2020)	40 per 1,000
Vanuatu (2020)	70 per 1,000

Source: UN Women Gender Equality Country Briefs

From the [latest data published by the SPC](#), an estimated 95.3% of births in the region are attended by a skilled health professional. The lowest rates were found in Samoa (82.5% in 2015), Solomon Islands (86.5% in 2015), Vanuatu (89.4% in 2013), Kiribati (92.0% in 2018), and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (92.4% in 2017). The latest SPC data from Nauru, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Niue, and Vanuatu was collected prior to 2015.

Target 3.2 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals aims to reduce infant mortality to below 25 deaths for every 1,000 live births by 2030. According to [SPC data](#) collected in 2019, infant mortality rates were highest in Kiribati (40.1 deaths per 1,000 live births), Republic of the Marshall Islands (26.4 deaths per 1,000 live births), and Nauru (25.7 deaths per 1,000 live births). All other analysed Pacific Island countries are below the target rate of 25 deaths per 1,000 births, with the lowest rates found in the Cook Islands (6.5 deaths per 1,000 live births) and Samoa (15.0 per 1,000 live births).

According to the most recent national data, the highest maternal mortality ratios in the region were seen in Solomon Islands (104 per 100,000 live births), Kiribati (92 per 100,000 live births) and the Marshall Islands (92 per 100,000 live births) in 2017. The Cook Islands, Nauru,

Niue, Palau, Tokelau and Tuvalu all recorded a maternal mortality ratio of 0. The most recent published data from many of these countries was collected between 2010 and 2017, and more up-to-date data is required to assess current prevalence and trends. Under the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all countries should aim to reduce the rate of maternal deaths to below 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030. Using UN-validated [adjusted maternal mortality ratio data](#), the estimated regional maternal mortality ratio for PICTs was 84 per 100,000 live births in 2015.

## Maternal Mortality Ratio in PICTs (latest available year)

Sustainable Development Goal target:  
reduce maternal mortality ratio to

**less than 70 per 100,000 live births**

by 2030

Cook Islands (2017)	0 per 100,000
FSM (2017)	88 per 100,000
Fiji (2017)	35.6 per 100,000
Kiribati (2017)	92 per 100,000
Nauru (2015-2017)	0 per 100,000
Niue (2016)	0 per 100,000
Palau (2016)	0 per 100,000
RMI (2017)	92 per 100,000
Samoa (2017)	43 per 100,000
Solomon Islands (2017)	104 per 100,000
Tokelau (2010)	0 per 100,000
Tonga (2019)	52 per 100,000
Tuvalu (2010)	0 per 100,000
Vanuatu (2017)	72 per 1,000

Source: UN Women Gender Equality Country Briefs

It should be noted that vital statistics such as infant and maternal mortality can be unstable in PICTs due to the low overall number of vital events that occur in small populations. According to a [2017 report by UNICEF](#), maternal death ratios are also prone to under-reporting and inconsistencies in methodology. Using unadjusted national mortality ratios, the estimated average regional maternal mortality ratio was 51 per 100,000 live births in 2016, below the SDG target of 70 per 100,000 live births.

There is a lack of regional data on the prevalence of anaemia in Pacific Island countries. According to country-specific [World Bank data](#), anaemia rates among women of reproductive age (age 15-49) in 2019 were highest in Solomon Islands (37.7%), Kiribati (32.6%) and Fiji (32.0%).

The lowest rate of anaemia among reproductive age women was found in the Federated States of Micronesia (25.0%). No data was available for the Cook Islands, Niue, or Tokelau.

Using the [most recent available data](#) the average contraceptive prevalence rate in the region was calculated to be 35% in 2016. The highest rates were seen in the Federated States of Micronesia, where 55% of women aged 15-49 reported using contraceptives, followed by Vanuatu (49%), the Marshall Islands (45%) and Fiji (44%). The lowest contraceptive prevalence rates were found in Palau (22%), Kiribati (22%), and Niue (23%). Multiple Cluster Indicator Surveys (MICS) conducted in Kiribati, Tonga, Tuvalu, Samoa and Fiji between 2018 and 2021 collected data on a number of maternal health indicators including demand for family planning and unmet family planning needs. For women aged 15-49 who were married or in a union, the percentage who reported having their family planning needs satisfied with modern methods was highest in [Kiribati](#) (53.6%), followed by [Fiji](#) (51.3%), [Tonga](#) (49.3%) and for [Tuvalu](#) (44.9%). The lowest rate was found in [Samoa](#), at 29.4%. Samoa had the highest rate of unmet need for family planning among the five MICS-analysed countries, with 38.9% of women aged 15-49 who were married or in a union reporting that they had unmet needs for spacing or for limiting births. The lowest rate of unmet need for family planning was reported in Kiribati, at 17.3%.

There are [significant data gaps](#) regarding the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections in the Pacific region. Overall, HIV prevalence is low, although the prevalence of high risk sexual behaviour is believed to be high. An [analysis of risky sexual behaviour among adolescents in Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, and Vanuatu](#) found that among those who had had sexual intercourse, 39.5% had not used a condom and 50.9% had not used birth control when they last had sexual intercourse. Overall, 77.8% of sexually active adolescents had engaged in risky sexual behaviour. Chlamydia prevalence in the region is high, with an [average prevalence of 19.5% among pregnant women](#). The highest rate of chlamydia infection among women receiving ante-natal care is found in Samoa (36%).

Many countries in the region report low levels of knowledge about HIV among the population. Among countries that have published MICS data since 2015, rates of comprehensive knowledge about HIV vary significantly. Knowledge is highest in [Kiribati](#), where 44.5% of women and 34.8% of men demonstrated comprehensive knowledge of HIV. Comprehensive knowledge of HIV was also higher among women than men in [Fiji](#) (29.9% of women, 26.1% of young men aged 15-24) and [Samoa](#) (9.0% of women, 6.3% of men). Men demonstrated higher rates of comprehensive knowledge about HIV than women in [Tuvalu](#) (23.8% of women, 28.5% of men) and [Tonga](#) (9.0% of women, 15.2% of men).

Healthcare-seeking behaviours are strongly connected to cultural attitudes and norms and vary across the Pacific region. The [Fiji Women's Rights Movement](#) (FWRM) reported in 2018 that 50% of women who are diagnosed with cancer in Fiji will not seek further medical treatment. Variations within countries have been also observed: as reported by the FWRM, native iTaukei women in Fiji are less likely to seek treatment and have a higher chance of dying from cancer than Indo-Fijian women. Healthcare is in many instances less accessible to women and men in rural areas, which may impact health outcomes of rural populations.<sup>5</sup>

Many national health systems in the Pacific use the health services in its neighbouring countries such as New Zealand and Australia for the provision of services that they are not able to offer domestically. This can cause a delay to treatments and in some cases can introduce additional financial barriers to patients. In [Fiji](#), the cost of receiving cancer treatment abroad may be covered by the government, but patients must pay for their own travel expenses. Further research is required to understand the gendered impacts of the utilisation of foreign health systems.

Women in the region, particularly women with disabilities, have experienced disadvantages in accessing health services during the pandemic. The [Pacific Disability Forum](#) estimate that across the Pacific Islands region there are around 775,000 women with disabilities. These women continue to face discrimination and increased barriers to communication during the pandemic because public health information is often not produced in local languages or accessible forms



such as in sign-language, easy-to-read formats, or braille. A lack of access to the internet and assistive devices has also aggravated information access inequities for women with disabilities. There is a significant data gap on women with disabilities, which need to be addressed in order to establish adequate social and legislative protections for them.

## Ending Violence against Women and Girls

Gender-based violence is a prevalent issue that directly threatens the safety of women and girls and [impedes the achievement of gender equality](#) through its wide-ranging impacts on women's human rights, health, education, and economic empowerment.

There is a lack of recent data on the prevalence of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the Pacific Island countries. Where national level studies on VAWG have previously been conducted, there is a need for more recent data, including in the [Cook Islands](#) (2013), the [Federated States of Micronesia](#) (2014), [Fiji](#) (2013), [Kiribati](#) (2008), [Nauru](#) (2013), [Palau](#) (2013), the [Republic of the Marshall Islands](#) (2012), [Samoa](#) (2006), [Solomon Islands](#) (2008), [Tonga](#) (2009), and [Vanuatu](#) (2009). There have been no national surveys on VAWG conducted in Niue, Tokelau, or Tuvalu. Multiple Cluster Indicator Surveys (MICS) provide more up-to-date data on some indicators of VAWG in [Fiji](#) (2021), [Kiribati](#) (2018-19), [Samoa](#) (2019-20), [Tonga](#) (2019), and [Tuvalu](#) (2019-20).

According to the latest available data, the highest rate of physical violence against women from intimate partners is found in Fiji: in 2013, 61% of ever-partnered women in Fiji reported experiencing physical intimate-partner violence in their lifetime. High rates are also seen in Kiribati (59%, 2019), Vanuatu (51%, 2009), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (48%, 2012), Nauru (47%, 2013), and Solomon Islands (46%, 2008). The highest rate of women currently experiencing physical partner violence – defined as the proportion of ever-partnered women who experienced physical violence from an intimate partner within the 12 months prior to the survey – was found in Kiribati, at 39% in 2019. The lowest rates of physical

violence were observed in Palau, where 23% of women in 2013 reported ever experiencing physical partner violence.

### Lifetime Prevalence of Physical Partner Violence Among Ever-partnered Women in PICTs (latest available year)

Cook Islands (2013)	30%
FSM (2014)	29%
Fiji (2013)	61%
Kiribati (2019)	59%
Nauru (2013)	47%
Niue	Data not available
Palau (2013)	23%
RMI (2012)	48%
Samoa (2019-2020)	30%
Solomon Islands (2008)	46%
Tokelau	Data not available
Tonga (2019)	21%
Tuvalu (2019-2020)	36%
Vanuatu (2009)	51%

Source: UN Women Gender Equality Briefs

The highest reported rate of sexual violence from intimate partners is found in Solomon Islands, where 54.7% of ever-partnered women stated in 2009 that they had experienced such violence, including 52.4% of ever-partnered women who reported experiencing forced sexual intercourse. The rate of intimate-partner sexual violence is also comparably high in Vanuatu: in 2009, 44% of ever-partnered women reported they had experienced sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime, with 33% reporting that they experienced such violence in the 12 months prior to the survey.

The prevalence of emotional violence – including being scared, intimidated, belittled, or humiliated by a husband or partner – is high throughout the region, and ranges from 19% in Tonga in 2019 to 68% in Vanuatu in 2009. The rate of economic abuse in intimate partner relationships is highest in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, where 27% of ever-partnered women reported in 2012 that a partner had taken their earnings or savings against their will or had refused to give them money for household needs.

High rates of controlling behaviours in intimate partner relationships have been observed across the Pacific Island countries. For example, in the Republic of the Marshall Islands in 2012, 79% of ever-partnered women reported having experienced at least one controlling behaviour

from a partner. Similarly high rates of controlling behaviour have also been reported by ever-partnered women in Kiribati (79%, 2019) and Samoa (78%, 2020). The most common form of controlling behaviour across all analysed countries was men insisting on knowing where their partners were at all times. In 2014, 33.6% of surveyed ever-partnered women in Nauru stated that they had experienced controlling behaviour from an intimate partner in which they had to ask their partner's permission to seek healthcare. In the Republic of the Marshall Islands in 2012, 48% of ever-partnered women reported that they had to ask their partner's permission to seek healthcare. Up-to-date data is required to assess the current impact of intimate partners' controlling behaviours on women's access to healthcare.

Non-partner physical violence was highest in Tonga, with 68% of surveyed women in the 2019 MICS reporting that they had experienced such violence since age 15. Non-partner violence is also high in Samoa (40.2%, 2020) and the Cook Islands (38.6%, 2014). Women are more likely to report experiencing physical violence from an intimate partner than from a non-partner in all countries in the region, except for Tonga, Samoa, and the Cook Islands. The perpetrators of non-partner physical violence are often family members: in Samoa, for example, 66.3% of those who reported experiencing non-partner physical partner violence reported that they had experienced such violence from their mother or step-mother, while 53.5% reported that they had experienced physical violence from their father or step-father.

The highest rates of non-partner sexual violence in the region are reported in Nauru, where 47% of 148 women surveyed in 2013 reported experiencing sexual violence from someone other than an intimate partner since age 15. Non-partner sexual violence was also high in Vanuatu, with 33% of women surveyed in 2009 stating that they had experienced such violence since age 15. The rate of sexual violence by non-partner is below that of sexual violence from intimate partners in all countries in the region except for Nauru, Palau, and Tuvalu.

Between 2010 and 2015, the regional average rate of child sexual abuse against young girls under age 15 was [estimated to be 16.9%](#), with the highest rates seen in Solomon Islands (37%), Vanuatu (30%), and Nauru (30%).<sup>6</sup>

Violence against women and girls is under-reported throughout the region. The highest

rate of non-disclosure is found in Solomon Islands, where 70% of surveyed women in 2008 stated that they had never told anyone about the violence they experienced. Women who had disclosed violence most commonly reported telling family and friends. In general, women tend not to seek help from formal authorities, with many stating that they did not seek help because they thought the violence was normal or was not serious. In the Republic of the Marshall Islands in 2012, 91% of women who experienced intimate partner violence reported that they did not seek help from authorities. Among those who did seek help, the primary reason was because they were badly injured (48%). In Vanuatu in 2009, women who sought help most commonly went to chiefs (24%) or church leaders (23%) rather than the police (10%).

A significant number of both women and men hold attitudes that justify violence against women and girls in many Pacific Island countries. When asked about situations in which a man has good reason to hit his wife, 85% of women in the Republic of Marshall Islands agreed with one or more justifications for violence in 2012. There were also high rates of agreement in Solomon Islands (73%, 2008) and Kiribati (70%, 2019). The most common situations in which violence was viewed as justified were 'if a man finds out his wife has been unfaithful' and 'if she neglects the children.' As seen in MICS reports for Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, and Tuvalu, attitudes that justify intimate partner violence are more common among women than among men.

Community acceptance and impunity for perpetrators are a [barrier to the elimination of violence against women and girls](#). For example, the National Human Rights Institute noted in 2015 that in Samoa, [concern for family reputation led to an underreporting of child sexual abuse](#). UNICEF have [reported](#) that in Niue the lack of reporting of incidents of sexual violence against children amounts to the community effectively condoning such violence.

Reluctance to openly discuss gender-based violence may contribute to a culture of impunity for perpetrators of violence but may also actively impede efforts to effectively understand and respond to violence within societies. For example, in the Nauru Family Health and Safety Study conducted in 2013, 58% of the women

<sup>6</sup> Regional average calculated from available data from the Cook Islands, Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu.

eligible to take part refused to be interviewed after news of the study spread in the community.

A number of countries in the region have developed referral protocols for responding to VAWG and/or child protection cases, with the aim of increasing survivors' access to services and promoting a more integrated response. Many countries, such as the Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, Tonga, Tuvalu, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, and Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu have also implemented so-called *no-drop policies*, whereby cases of domestic violence that are reported to the police must progress through the justice system regardless of whether the victim chooses to withdraw the case.<sup>7</sup> [No-drop policies](#) are designed to prevent victims from withdrawing a case due to reconciliation with the perpetrator, or in fear of the consequences they may face if they continue, as well as to discourage the use of reconciliation or community settlement resolutions to incidents of domestic violence.

While legislative progress has been made in the region in recent years, [barriers to implementation remain](#), and the effectiveness of family protection laws varies between countries. In the Cook Islands, the [Family Protection and Support Act 2017](#) defines domestic violence to include physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse as well as including provisions for protection orders and police safety orders for victims of violence. However, evidence suggests that more work may be required to effectively combat the rates of intimate partner violence in the country, and the majority of domestic violence incidents reported between January and June 2021 involved familial rather than intimate partner relationships. The most common action taken in response to reports of domestic violence was to issue a warning.<sup>8</sup> [Evidence from Palau](#) suggests that the reporting rates have increased in recent years, and, following the introduction of the Family Protection Act in 2012, victims of violence may feel more empowered to seek help. In Niue, a Family Law Bill [has been under discussion for a decade](#) and has yet to be passed. Legislation on physical and sexual violence in some Pacific Island countries requires revision to align with international standards: in the [Federated States of Micronesia](#), for example, there is no law against spousal rape. Five countries (Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru,

Republic of Marshall Islands, and Solomon Islands) also have child protection legislation outlining protective interventions for children experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

In addition to national legislation, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are [working throughout the Pacific region](#) to combat the impact of violence on the lives of women and girls. In Tonga, CSOs worked together with international donors to campaign for stopping violence against women to be included in the 2013 Family Protection Act. Elsewhere in the region, CSOs such as the Fiji National Youth Council have initiatives to challenge violent attitudes and behaviours among men. CSOs are also involved in providing services to survivors of violence in the region, such as the Samoa Victim Support Group, Solomon Island's Family Support Centre, and the Tonga Women and Children's Crisis Centre.

The services available to survivors of violence are subject to financial and logistical constraints and may be viewed to be limited in many instances. For example, [research in the region has noted](#) that support services are often concentrated in urban areas and may not be accessible to rural women. Furthermore, the support provided may be influenced by 'common sense' practices and traditional views rather than evidence-based methods.

Rapid assessments conducted in Pacific Island countries found that gender-based violence has [increased in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Rates of violence can be [impacted by factors such as](#) increased exposure to perpetrators during lockdowns and school closures, increased triggers for perpetrators during times of stress and uncertainty – which may in some cases lead to increased alcohol consumption – and a lack of access to formal and informal support systems.

Despite the gaps in the current data landscape, available data suggests that lives of women in the 14 Pacific Island countries analysed in this brief are significantly impacted by experiences of violence. Updated data is required in order to fully understand the current scope of violence against women and girls in the region.

7 Information from individual country gender equality briefs.

8 Cook Islands Police Service, Domestic Violence Statistics [Unpublished]

## Gender and Protection in Humanitarian Action

The Pacific Region has a [high risk of exposure to natural hazards and the effects of climate change](#). It is regularly affected by hazards ranging from cyclones, flooding, earthquakes and hurricanes to tsunamis and volcanic eruptions. Some of these are [expected to be further exacerbated by continued climate change](#) as average ocean and land temperatures increase and the seasonality and duration of rainfall changes. Moreover, higher ocean temperatures and melting polar ice caps will lead to sea levels rising, which can contribute to coastal erosion and saline intrusion, and impact the severity of storm surges. For certain low-lying atoll Island countries such as Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu, this threat is particularly imminent. These countries are at a high risk of being submerged by the sea level rises and face wide-scale destruction as large areas of their territory are only 1-3 metres above sea level.

According to the [2021 World Risk Index](#) on disaster risk, the global top three most at-risk countries from disasters are Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Tonga. Fiji (ranked 14<sup>th</sup>) and Kiribati (ranked 19<sup>th</sup>) were also classified as *very high* risk countries. The high levels of risk in Pacific Island countries are predominantly driven by high levels of exposure to hazards. Between 2011 and 2020, there were [91 major disasters recorded in the Pacific region](#), most commonly tropical cyclones (43%), floods (16%) and droughts (10%). In 2020, the total average annual losses due to disasters in the region was calculated to be US\$1.07 billion, equivalent to 4.11% of the regional GDP. Vanuatu, Tonga, and Palau are most at risk from economic loss due to disaster. Across the small island developing states in the Pacific, 73% of the population are exposed to seismic hazards, and 26% of the population are exposed to tropical cyclones. Women and gender minorities are disproportionately impacted by disasters, as evidenced by significant gender differences in disaster mortality rates between men and women, for instance.

Women in the Pacific are [likely to be disproportionately affected by disasters](#) through

impacts on shelter, food security, health and nutrition, and protection. Primary caregiving and the responsibility to ensure the household's food security typically fall on women. Women's workload in both areas is likely to increase during disasters. Furthermore, maternal, sexual, and reproductive health needs continue during emergencies, but they are often overlooked or de-prioritized.

Pacific Island countries' vulnerability to natural hazards means that they [face a complex set of issues](#) surrounding forced displacement, voluntary migration, and planned relocation. The rate of international migration within the Pacific region is notably high. In 2013, international migration was still economically motivated in nature, but it has been anticipated that over the next few decades migration will mostly be linked to natural hazards and environmental decline in the region.

Climate change presents an existential threat to the wellbeing, livelihood and security of PICTs, and its effects [disproportionately affect marginalised groups](#) such as women, girls, and persons with disabilities. In the Pacific region, sea levels are [rising four times faster](#) than the global average. In the [2021 Global Climate Risk Index](#), the highest ranking Pacific Island country in terms of direct economic losses and fatalities due to extreme weather events between 2000 and 2019 was Fiji (ranked 19<sup>th</sup>); followed by Vanuatu (ranked 37<sup>th</sup>). Observers have [raised concerns](#) that disaster relief and recovery initiatives often inadequately protect women, and that women's exclusion from national and local decision-making on climate change renders their needs invisible.

Women's [participation in humanitarian decision-making and leadership](#) is considered low across the Pacific Island countries, from household decision-making to national legislatures. Women are less likely to receive critical information to prepare for humanitarian disasters and are less likely to influence decisions in community decision-making bodies and consultations on disaster risk management and climate change adaptation.

Pacific Island countries have been working to increase women's representation in climate change and



humanitarian decision-making, preparedness and response. For example, the Cook Islands' [2011 National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#) recognises that men and women are impacted differently by climate change due to their different roles in the society. The Policy, therefore, advocated for gender-responsive climate strategies in order to build capacity and reduce vulnerability. More recently, the country's 2017 [Joint National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation](#) recognised that women and other marginalised groups are especially vulnerable to both the physical and socio-economic impacts of climate change. The Plan aims to strengthen the governance for climate change adaptation through increased participation of women in decision-making roles within the climate change and disaster risk management sector.

In Solomon Islands, the [National Climate Change Policy for 2012-2017](#) encouraged the participation of women in its implementation, promoting the inclusion of women in decision-making. Solomon Islands' [National Disaster Management Plan 2018](#) included provisions to involve women in preparedness and response arrangements at all levels to promote effective disaster management, including involvement in operational processes and decision-making.

Kiribati's efforts to improve community participation in environment matters include the Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Act of 2019, which mainstreamed the needs of women, children, and persons with disabilities. The [Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review](#) in Kiribati in 2020 regarded the Act as a successful example of a bottom-up approach to developing policies that promote gender equality. The Act was also commended for its integrated consideration of modern and traditional gender values and norms.

In 2017 the Tokelauan government established the [Integrated National Strategy for Enhancing the Resilience of Tokelau to Climate Change and Related Hazards](#), committing the country to low-carbon development policies and integrated risk reduction and disaster resilience arrangements. Its implementation plan for 2017-2022 considered the gendered impact of climate change and associated natural disasters and acknowledged that there had not been sufficient gender-differentiated, intergenerational, or socioeconomic

vulnerability assessments to demonstrate the impacts of climate change on men and women in Tokelau.

At the moment, it is important to consider disasters and gender in the context of COVID-19. In the [INFORM COVID-19 Risk Index](#), produced by the European Commission, the most vulnerable of the 14 PICTs analysed in this brief is Kiribati, which is classified as *highly vulnerable* and ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> in the global index. Solomon Islands (34<sup>th</sup>), RMI (44<sup>th</sup>), Vanuatu (45<sup>th</sup>), Tuvalu (52<sup>nd</sup>), FSM (56<sup>th</sup>), and Nauru (56<sup>th</sup>) are all also classified as *highly vulnerable* to potential health and humanitarian impacts of COVID-19 that could overwhelm current national response capacity.

According to a [UNDP and UN Women analysis of the global COVID-19 pandemic response](#) conducted in November 2021, among the 154 policy responses by Pacific Island countries and territories only 63 were assessed as 'gender-sensitive'. Among the 63 gender-sensitive policies, 50 aimed to address violence against women and girls during the pandemic; nine aimed to improve women's economic security; while four – three by the Cook Islands and one by Samoa – directly supported unpaid care. Eight PICTs have established COVID-19 national taskforces as of November 2021 – Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Palau, and Tonga. Fiji's two task national forces – the *COVID-19 Response Gender Working Group* and the *COVID-19 Vaccine Taskforce* – were both headed by woman, as were the Cook Islands' *National Health Emergency Taskforce* and Tonga's *COVID-19 Taskforce*.

## Appendix 1: 14 PICTs Background Information

	Capital	Population (2021, est.) <sup>9</sup>	GDP per capita (USD) <sup>10</sup>	Land Area (km <sup>2</sup> ) <sup>11</sup>	HDI (of 189 countries and territories in 2020) <sup>12</sup>	Women in Legislature (March 2022) <sup>13</sup>	Urban female population <sup>14</sup>	Female-headed households <sup>15</sup>
<b>Cook Islands</b>	Avarua	15,342	\$24,913 (2019)	240 km <sup>2</sup>	N/A	25.0%	72% (2019)	45% (2019)
<b>Federated States of Micronesia</b>	Palikir	105,754	\$3,565 (2020)	700 km <sup>2</sup>	136th	7.1%	22.5% (2010)	19.9% (2013)
<b>Fiji</b>	Suva	898,402	\$5,058 (2020)	18,270 km <sup>2</sup>	93rd	19.6%	56.7% (2020)	19% (2020)
<b>Kiribati</b>	Tarawa	120,740	\$1,654 (2020)	810 km <sup>2</sup>	134th	6.7%	60% (2020)	26.5% (2019)
<b>Nauru</b>	No official capital	11,832	\$10,580 (2020)	20 km <sup>2</sup>	N/A	10.5%	100% (2019)	34% (2012)
<b>Niue</b>	Alofi	1,549	\$18,757 (2018)	260 km <sup>2</sup>	N/A	15.0%	44% (2017)*	27.7% (2017)
<b>Palau</b>	Melekeok	17,957	\$14,244 (2020)	460 km <sup>2</sup>	50th	6.9%	81% (2020)*	30.7% (2015)
<b>Republic of the Marshall Islands</b>	Majuro (Majuru)	54,516	\$4,130 (2020)	180 km <sup>2</sup>	117th	6.1%	73.8% (2011)*	26% (2011)
<b>Samoa</b>	Apia	199,853	\$4,067 (2020)	2,830 km <sup>2</sup>	111th	13.0%	19.6% (2016)	20% (2016)
<b>Solomon Islands</b>	Honiara	728,041	\$2,251 (2020)	27,990 km <sup>2</sup>	151st	8.0%	24.7% (2020)	10.1% (2013)
<b>Tokelau</b>	No official capital	1,501	\$6,882 (2019)	10 km <sup>2</sup>	N/A	18.2%	0% (2015)	48.2% (2016)
<b>Tonga</b>	Nuku'alofa	99,532	\$4,625 (2020)	720 km <sup>2</sup>	104th	3.7%	23.2% (2016)	22.1% (2021)
<b>Tuvalu</b>	Funafuti	10,679	\$4,143 (2020)	30 km <sup>2</sup>	N/A	6.7%	59.0% (2017)	18% (2021)
<b>Vanuatu</b>	Port Vila	300,019	\$2,870 (2020)	12,190 km <sup>2</sup>	140th	0%	22.3% (2020)	17.5% (2016)

\*Where sex-disaggregated urban population data are not available, urban population figures refer to total population.

9 The Pacific Community (SPC), 2021 mid-year population estimate. For Samoa, Tuvalu, 2020 estimates from SPC ([here](#)); Vanuatu ([2020 Census](#)), ([here](#)). For Samoa, Tuvalu, 2020 estimates from SPC ([here](#)); Vanuatu ([2020 Census](#)).

10 SPC, latest data available ([here](#)). For FSM, Fiji, Kiribati, Palau, RMI, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu, see World Bank data ([here](#)). For Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, and Tuvalu, see SPC data ([here](#)).

11 SPC, latest data available ([here](#)).

12 HDI ([here](#)).

13 Pacific Women in Politics ([here](#)). For Niue, Government of Niue, 2020 ([here](#)). For Cook Islands, Parliament of the Cook Islands, 2021 ([here](#)).

14 UN Women Gender Equality Country Briefs

15 UN Women Gender Equality Country Briefs

## Appendix 2: International Human Rights Conventions ratification status by 14 PICTs (as of March 2022)

	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR)	Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED)	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW)	Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
<b>Cook Islands</b>	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	2006 (a)	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	1997 (a)	2009 (a)
<b>Federated States of Micronesia</b>	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	2004 (a)	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	1993 (a)	2011 (s) 2016 (r)
<b>Fiji</b>	2016 (s) 2016 (r)	2018 (a)	2019 (a)	1995 (a)	1973 (d)	2018 (a)	2019 (a)	1993 (s) 1993 (r)	2010 (s) 2017 (r)
<b>Kiribati</b>	2019 (a)	Not Signed	Not Signed	2004 (a)	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	1995 (a)	2013 (a)
<b>Nauru</b>	2001 (s) 2012 (r)	2001 (s)	Not Signed	2011 (a)	2001 (s)	Not Signed	Not Signed	1994 (a)	2012 (a)
<b>Niue</b>	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	1995 (a)	Not Signed
<b>Palau</b>	2011 (s)	2011 (s)	2011 (s)	2011 (s)	2011 (s)	2011 (s)	2011 (s)	1995 (a)	2011 (s) 2013 (r)
<b>Republic of the Marshall Islands</b>	2018 (a)	2018 (a)	Not Signed	2006 (a)	2019 (a)	2018 (a)	Not Signed	1993 (s) 1993 (r)	2015 (a)
<b>Samoa</b>	2019 (a)	2008 (a)	2007 (s) 2012 (r)	1992 (a)	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	1990 (s) 1994 (r)	2014 (s) 2016 (r)
<b>Solomon Islands</b>	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	2002 (a)	1982 (d)	1982 (d)	Not Signed	1995 (a)	2008 (s)
<b>Tokelau*</b>	1986 (s) 1989 (r)	1968 (s) 1978 (r)	Not Signed	1980 (s) 1985 (r)	1966 (s) 1972 (r)	1968 (s) 1978 (r)	Not Signed	Not Signed	2007 (s) 2008 (r)
<b>Tonga</b>	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	1972 (a)	Not Signed	Not Signed	1995 (a)	2007 (s)
<b>Tuvalu</b>	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	1999 (a)	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	1995 (a)	2013 (a)
<b>Vanuatu</b>	2011 (a)	2007 (s) 2008 (r)	2007 (s)	1995 (a)	Not Signed	Not Signed	Not Signed	1990 (s) 1993 (r)	2007 (s) 2008 (r)

All data sourced from [UN Treaty Body Database](#).

(a): accession  
(s): signed  
(d): succession  
(r): ratified

\* Tokelau is a non-self-governing dependent territory of New Zealand. Conventions ratified by New Zealand are in effect within Tokelau with the exception of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

## Appendix 3: International Labour Standards - ILO Conventions on equality of opportunity and treatment ratification and enforcement status by 14 PICTs (as of December 2021)

	ILO membership	Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)	Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)	Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)	Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)	Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)	Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)	Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)	Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)	Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)
<b>Cook Islands</b>	2015	Not ratified	Not ratified	Ratified (2015): in force	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Ratified (2018): in force	Not ratified	Not ratified
<b>Federated States of Micronesia</b>	Non-member									
<b>Fiji</b>	1974	Ratified (2002): in force	Ratified (2002): in force	Ratified (1974): in force	Ratified (2002): in force	Ratified (2003): in force	Not ratified	Ratified (2002): in force	Not ratified	Ratified (2020): in force
<b>Kiribati</b>	2000	Ratified (2000): in force	Ratified (2009): in force	Ratified (2000): in force	Ratified (2009): in force	Ratified (2009): in force	Not ratified	Ratified (2009): in force	Not ratified	Not ratified
<b>Nauru</b>	Non-member									
<b>Niue</b>	Non-member									
<b>Palau</b>	2012	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Ratified (2019): in force	Not ratified	Not ratified
<b>Republic of the Marshall Islands</b>	2007	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Ratified (2019): in force	Not ratified	Not ratified
<b>Samoa</b>	2005	Ratified (2008): in force	Ratified (2008): in force	Ratified (2008): in force	Ratified (2008): in force	Ratified (2008): in force	Not ratified	Ratified (2008): in force	Not ratified	Not ratified
<b>Solomon Islands</b>	1984	Ratified (2012): in force	Ratified (2012): in force	Ratified (2012): in force	Ratified (2012): in force	Ratified (2013): in force	Not ratified	Ratified (2012): in force	Not ratified	Not ratified
<b>Tokelau*</b>	1919	Not ratified	Ratified (1983): in force	Ratified (1968): in force	Ratified (1983): in force	Not ratified	Not ratified	Ratified (2001): in force	Not ratified	Not ratified
<b>Tonga</b>	2016	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Ratified (2020): in force	Not ratified	Not ratified
<b>Tuvalu</b>	2008	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Ratified (2019): in force	Not ratified	Not ratified
<b>Vanuatu</b>	2003	Ratified (2006): in force	Ratified (2006): in force	Ratified (2006): in force	Ratified (2006): in force	Ratified (2019): in force	Not ratified	Ratified (2006): in force	Not ratified	Not ratified

All data sourced from [International Labour Organization NORMLEX](#).

\* Tokelau is a non-self-governing dependent territory of New Zealand. All ILO Conventions ratified by New Zealand are in effect within Tokelau.



## Appendix 4: Net Enrolment Ratios for 14 PICTs<sup>16</sup>

Country	Education		Compulsory Education Age	Early Childhood Net Enrolment Ratio		Year	Primary Net Enrolment Rate		Year	Secondary Net Enrolment Ratio		Year
	Free	Compulsory		Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female	
Cook Islands	✓	✓	5-16 <sup>17</sup>	72%	89%	2020	100%	100%	2020 <sup>18</sup>	95%	95%	2020
Fiji	✓	✓	6-15 <sup>19</sup>	37%	36%	2019	99%	98%	2015	80%	89%	2012
FSM	✓	✓	Until 15 <sup>20</sup>	21%	22%	2020	81%	82%	2020	42%	53%	2020 <sup>21</sup>
Kiribati	✓	✓	6-15 <sup>22</sup>	85%	93%	2020	96%		2020	59%	77%	2014 <sup>23</sup>
RMI	✓	✓	5-13 <sup>24</sup>	55%	50%	2020	68%	67%	2020	52%	59%	2020
Nauru	✓	✓	5-16 <sup>25</sup>	31%	34%	2020	94%	97%	2020	91%	95%	2019
Niue	✓	✓	5-16 <sup>26</sup>	-	-	-	-				72%	2015 <sup>27</sup>
Palau	✓	✓	6-18 <sup>28</sup>	50%	61%	2020	86%		2020		45%	2016 <sup>29</sup>
Samoa	✓	✓	5-14 <sup>30</sup>	30%	31%	2019	94%		2018	82%	90%	2016
Solomon Islands	✓	✗	N/A	41%	43%	2019	78%	77%	2019 <sup>31</sup>		40%	2016 <sup>32</sup>
Tokelau	✓	✓	5-15 <sup>33</sup>	105%	86%	2016 <sup>34</sup>	98%		2020	98%	100%	2019
Tonga	✓	✓	4-18 <sup>35</sup>	28%	29%	2020	88%		2020	69%	82%	2020
Tuvalu	✓	✓	6-15 <sup>36</sup>	80%	72%	2019	74%	74%	2020	54%	54%	2020
Vanuatu	✗	✗	N/A	71%	69%	2020	96%	95%	2020	43%	50%	2020

16 For international comparison, all data are sourced from [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#) unless otherwise stated. National estimates may differ in some cases.

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28 United Nations Children's Fund, 2017, [Situation Analysis of Children in Palau](#).

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31 Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, 2019, [Net Enrolment Ratio \(NER\) 4 Years](#).

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33 United Nations Children's Fund, 2017, [Situation Analysis of Children in Tokelau](#).

34 SPC, 2016, [National Minimum Development Indicators for Education](#).

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36 Tuvalu Education Department, 2017, [2016 & 2017 Education Statistical Report](#).

## Appendix 5: Gross Enrolment Ratios for 14 PICTs<sup>37</sup>

Country	Early Childhood Gross Enrolment Ratio		Year	Primary Gross Enrolment Ratio		Year	Secondary Gross Enrolment Ratio		Year	Tertiary Gross Enrolment Ratio		Year
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female	
Cook Islands	75%	90%	2020	116%	114%	2020	99%	95%	2020	36%	43%	2012
Fiji	38%	38%	2019	119%	114%	2019	86%	94%	2012	43%	64%	2019
FSM	24%	24%	2020	90%	90%	2020	51%	62%	2020 <sup>38</sup>	-	-	-
Kiribati	85%	93%	2020	105%	111%	2020	66%	83%	2016 <sup>39</sup>	-	-	-
RMI	73%	63%	2020	76%	73%	2020	60%	66%	2020	24%	27%	2019
Nauru	31%	34%	2020	94%	97%	2020	95%	98%	2020	-	-	-
Niue	139%	86%	2020	138%	139%	2020	129%	130%	2020	-	-	-
Palau	68%	74%	2020	99%	106%	2020	157%	158%	2020	44%	66%	2013
Samoa	39%	42%	2019	119%	117%	2020	89%	98%	2016	20%	14%	2020
Solomon Islands	92%	94%	2019	105%	104%	2019	50%	47%	2019	-	-	-
Tokelau	100%	159%	2020	136%	136%	2020	138%	133%	2020	-	-	-
Tonga	46%	51%	2020	117%	112%	2020	81%	96%	2020	11%	27%	2020
Tuvalu	84%	74%	2020	85%	86%	2020	62%	63%	2020	-	--	-
Vanuatu	103%	102%	2020	123%	230%	2020	48%	55%	2020	-	--	-

<sup>37</sup> For international comparison, all data are sourced from [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#) unless otherwise stated. National estimates may differ in some cases.

<sup>38</sup> National Department of Education, 2020, [NDOE Education Indicator Report 2020](#).

<sup>39</sup> SPC, 2014, [National Minimum Development Indicators](#).

## Appendix 6. Major disasters and climate change risks in 14 PICTs

	Land Area	Maximum Height Above Sea Level	Total Average Annual Losses (US\$, 2019)	World Risk Index (2021, out of 181 countries)	Climate Risk Index – ‘X most affected country between 2000-2019 by extreme weather events’.	Number of Major Disasters, 2011-2020.	INFORM COVID-19 Risk Index (2020, out of 191 countries)
Cook Islands	237 km <sup>2</sup>	652 m	Unknown	Not included	Not included in index	Unknown	Not included
Federated States of Micronesia	701 km <sup>2</sup>	791 m	\$29.15 million	81	Not included in index	3	56 (High risk)
Fiji	18,333 km <sup>2</sup>	1,324 m	\$343.77 million	14	19	13	87 (Medium risk)
Kiribati	811 km <sup>2</sup>	81 m	\$7.46 million	19	131	3	23 (High risk)
Nauru	21 km <sup>2</sup>	71 m	Unknown	Not included	Unknown	Unknown	56 (High risk)
Niue	259 km <sup>2</sup>	68 m	Unknown	Not included	Unknown	Unknown	Not included
Palau	444 km <sup>2</sup>	242 m	\$25.99 million	Not included	Unknown	3	110 (Medium risk)
Republic of the Marshall Islands	181 km <sup>2</sup>	10 m	\$7.45 million	Not included	172	4	44 (High risk)
Samoa	2,934 km <sup>2</sup>	1,857 m	\$41.51 million	109	70	4	139 (Low risk)
Solomon Islands	28,230 km <sup>2</sup>	2,335 m	\$79 million	2	71	13	34 (High risk)
Tokelau	12 km <sup>2</sup>	5 m	Unknown	Not included	Unknown	Unknown	Not included
Tonga	749 km <sup>2</sup>	1,033 m	\$76.81 million	3	77	10	99 (Medium risk)
Tuvalu	26 km <sup>2</sup>	5 m	\$7.45 million	Not included	125	3	52 (High risk)
Vanuatu	12,281 km <sup>2</sup>	1,877 m	\$166.96 million	1	37	9	45 (High risk)

**Disclaimer:** Every effort has been made to include up-to-date and accurate information as of March 2022 in this Gender Equality Brief. The UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office Gender Equality Briefs will be updated on a regular basis.