



IN BRIEF



GENDER EQUALITY BRIEF FOR TONGA

Women's Human Rights

Under Tonga's [1875 Constitution and subsequent Amendments](#), there is a general guarantee of equality which states that the laws of Tonga shall apply to all people regardless of class. The constitution does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics.

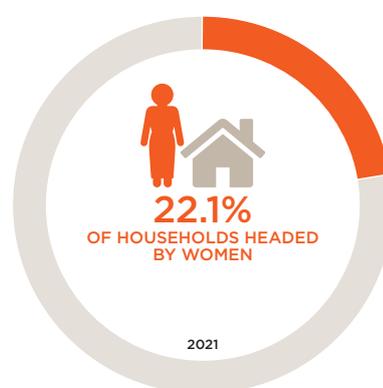
All land in Tonga [belongs to the monarch](#). Under the [Land Act 2016](#), Tongan men over the age of 16 can apply for a grant or lease of a rural tax allotment for farming purposes or a town allotment for residential purposes, and male heirs and their descendants are given precedence in inheritance law. Non-financial contributions and property accumulated during marriage [are not taken into account during divorce proceedings](#), with division of property therefore favouring men over women. The [2016 Land Act](#) states that widows are entitled to a life estate in any tax or town allotment of her deceased husband, although this is terminated if she re-marries or if there is proof in legal proceedings that she has 'committed fornication or adultery'. The barriers faced by women in property and land inheritance mean that [women with no income or assets may be forced to stay in households with violent family members and husbands](#). Whilst some women remain in violent relationships due to lack of income and assets, other women find themselves unable to leave due to the high risk of homelessness as a result of land laws conflicting with Police Safety Orders. Whilst a Police Safety Order may declare the male partner to stay away from the woman and home, under the Land Act 2016 Revised Edition the male partner is entitled to live freely and undisputed on his land. This results in women therefore having to leave the family home and seek shelter elsewhere or to remain in the violent relationship. With the increase in informal land leasing, women do not necessarily return to her own family land and home as this may no longer be in the possession of her family. Despite formal rules on land leasing, informal leasing is widespread. Previous [research](#) suggests that informal leasing is generally dependent on kinship arrangements because goodwill from male kin and their wives is often necessary for women to obtain leases.

Under the [Nationality Act](#), any person born to a Tongan

mother or father either in Tonga or abroad is deemed to be a Tongan citizen.

In 2021, [22.1% of households were headed by women](#). Seasonal-worker schemes and other forms of labour migration to nearby countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United States affect the number of households headed by women as [men move abroad and leave women to manage households alone](#).

Female-headed households in Tonga



Source: [Tonga Household Listing 2021](#)

In Tongan society, women have traditionally held a high social status within communities thanks to the ['Fahu' system](#) within families, which marks the eldest or another 'chosen' sister to hold a position of influence and respect within the family. The ['Fahu'](#) system grants the power of decision-making within families, and in some contexts it ranks sisters above brothers. Gender stereotypes about Tongan women remain pervasive with traditional customs and Christian values that have been interpreted as justifying paternalistic social hierarchy.

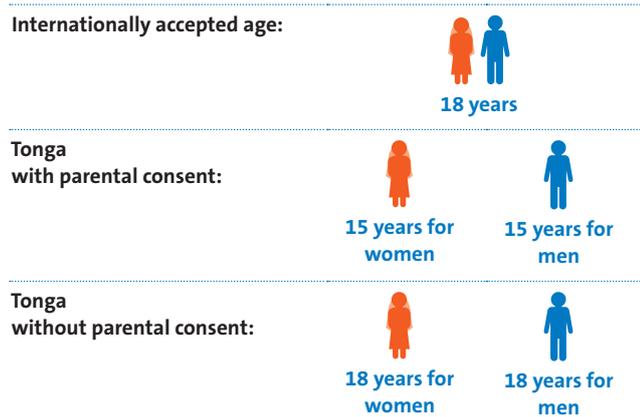
In Tonga, the [age of consent for girls is 15](#). There is [no minimum age of consent for boys](#). Under the [Criminal Offences Act 1988 and subsequent Amendments](#), rape is an offence that can only be committed by a man against a woman or girl.

Marital rape was [criminalised](#) in Tonga 1999. Gender-specific offences, such as 'enticing a woman to desert her husband', 'procuring the defilement of females' and 'abduction of women' are contained within the [Criminal Offences Act](#).

The legal age of marriage is 15 for both men and women, with [parental consent](#) required for all parties under the age of 18. In the [2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey](#)

(MICS), 0.4% of women aged 15-49 were married before the age of 15, while 3.4% of women and 1.8% of men aged 15-19 were currently married.

Legal Marriage Age in Tonga



Source: [Kingdom of Tonga Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act](#)

Consensual same-sex sexual activity is criminalised in Tonga under the [1988 Criminal Offences Act](#). Under the Act, punishment for the crime of ‘sodomy’ may include corporal punishment in addition to up to 10 years’ imprisonment. In practice, [the law has not been used to prosecute same-sex sexual conduct between consenting adults](#) in recent years. Same-sex marriage is [not legally recognised in Tonga](#), and there are no provisions in Tongan law to protect individuals from discrimination or violence on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics. In 2020, the U.S Department of State [reported](#) that there is an accepted subculture of transgender dress and behaviour in Tonga, and that transgender identities have been publicly highlighted by local organisations. Despite reported levels of acceptance, however, [hormone therapy treatment is not available for those who wish to medically transition](#). Previous [reports](#) suggest that some hormone treatment medication may be available over the counter in Tonga without counselling or health monitoring services available.

In the [2018 Tonga Disability Survey](#), a high proportion of people with disabilities, particularly women with

disabilities, reported they faced significant difficulties when travelling, shopping, going out in public places, or participating in elections.

Governance and Participation in Public Life

The legislative assembly is a [unicameral Parliament](#) appointed every four years in a first-past-the-post system. Prior to [constitutional reform](#) in 2010, only nine seats were popularly elected – for a maximum period of three years – whilst a further nine seats were reserved for members of the aristocracy who were appointed by the monarch with an indefinite tenure. Following election reform, there are now 17 People’s Representatives who are voted for by the general population and nine noble members who are elected to represent the 33 hereditary nobles of Tonga. In addition to this, the Prime Minister may appoint up to four Cabinet members who have not been elected to the legislative assembly. Women [cannot be appointed to any of the nine reserved noble seats](#), as the required aristocratic titles can only be inherited by men.

As of April 2022, there was [one female member of the 27-seat legislature](#), resulting in a 3.7% representation of women in legislature. In the most recent elections in November 2021, [12 of the 75 candidates \(16%\) were women](#). No women were elected. One non-elected member, a woman, was [appointed to the Cabinet](#) as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Tourism.

Female Representation in National Legislature in Tonga



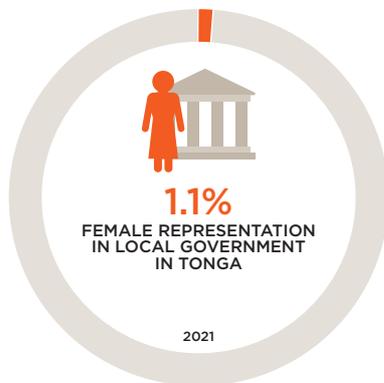
Source: [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#) April 2022 and March 2022

There has been little indication of national commitment towards adopting Temporary Special Measures (TSM) or providing incentives to improve women’s representation in Parliament. The Tongan Women’s Coalition, a non-governmental organisation, has [been advocating for a TSM Bill to reserve seats for women in Parliament and](#)

[made a submission to cabinet in 2017](#). As of April 2022, no decision on TSMs has been made.

[Local governance](#) in Tonga consists of district and town officers who are elected every three years. In the [2016 local elections](#), four of the 80 candidates (5.0%) in the district officers elections were female. 14 of the 357 candidates (3.9%) contesting the town officer seats were women. One woman was successfully elected as district officer in Eua Motu'a District and one woman was successfully elected as a town officer in Havelu, with women [therefore holding 1.1% of seats in local government](#). In addition to district and town officers, some villages have established councils to discuss priority issues and assist the district and town officers. The gender composition of these councils is not known. There are [community development committees with female chairs](#) in some villages. In other villages, women can only influence the women's committee and subcommittees such as women's agriculture committees.

Female Representation in Local Government in Tonga



Source: [Commonwealth Local Government Forum](#)

In a [2021 analysis](#) of women's representation on the boards of 19 organisations in Tonga, women were found to hold 19% of Director, 17% of Deputy Chair, and 10% of Board Chair positions. Women were more highly represented as Directors on the boards of private sector organisations (23%) than state-owned enterprises (18%).

According to the [Ministry of Justice](#), as of April 2022 all three of the judges on the Supreme Court of Tonga are men. In 2019, one of the five Magistrates Court judges was a woman, while all five judges on the Court of Appeal and all four judges of the Land Court were men. The gender composition of Tonga's police force is not known.

Women's full participation in leadership and governance

is [impacted by negative social and cultural attitudes](#) towards female participation in politics and decision-making. Traditionally, political and social issues are discussed during men's kava drinking clubs. Men then relay political discussions to their female relatives. Political candidates may attend kava circles during campaigns. Women therefore may be dissuaded from political discussion and debate due to a lack of access to the electorate.

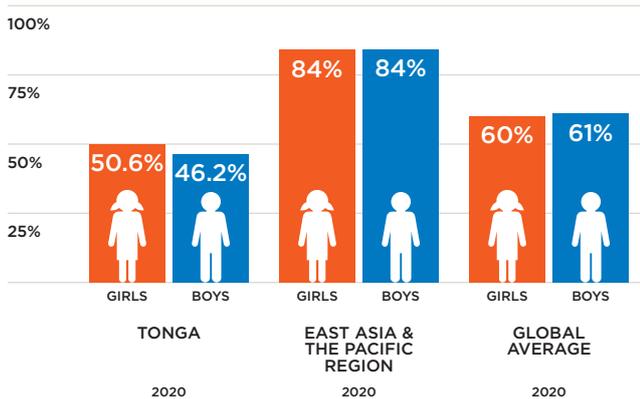
There has been [notable opposition against gender-related commitments](#), particularly towards the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In 2015, Tonga stated its intent to ratify the CEDAW but was faced with widespread opposition from religious leaders, congregations, some women's groups, and other community leaders. [Some groups expressed concern](#) that the international treaty might jeopardise existing legislation and disrupt social norms. Some women's groups, such as the Tonga Catholic Women's League, opposed CEDAW as it was believed that this would mean legalising same-sex relationships and abortion. The other critics tended to link CEDAW with a 'myth of female privilege' which remains pervasive within the country under the *Fahu* system.

Education

Under the [2013 Education Act](#), the compulsory school age was increased from ages 6-13 to ages 4-18. The Act stipulates inclusive education for children with special needs, and states that [all children under the age of 19 should have access to quality education](#) irrespective of gender, religion, socio-economic status, disability, or location. Male and female literacy rates are approximately the same in Tonga, with marginally higher literacy rates among women and girls than their male counterparts; in the [2011 Census](#), the [literacy rate](#) among female youth was 99.6% compared to male youth literacy rate of 99.2%. Adult women had a literacy rate of 99.4% compared to 99.2% for adult men.

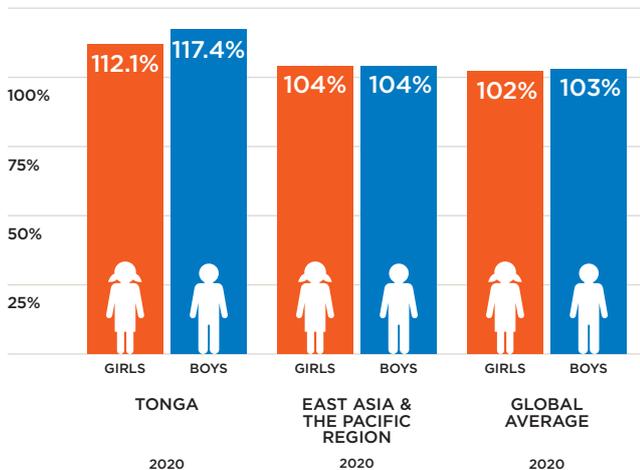
There has been a drive to recognise and implement [early childhood education programmes](#) – such as the Pacific Early Age Reading and Learning (PEARL) programme and nationwide reading campaigns – to ensure literacy at early ages. In 2019, girls were more likely than boys to attend early childhood education; according to the 2019 [Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey](#), 41.1% of girls and 30.2% of boys aged 36-59 months were attending early childhood education. Among children one year below the official primary education entry age, the net attendance ratio was 97.0% for girls and 96.4% for boys. In data published by the [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#) (UIS), the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for early childhood education was 50.6% for girls and 46.2% for boys in 2020.

Early Childhood Education Gross Enrolment Rates in Tonga



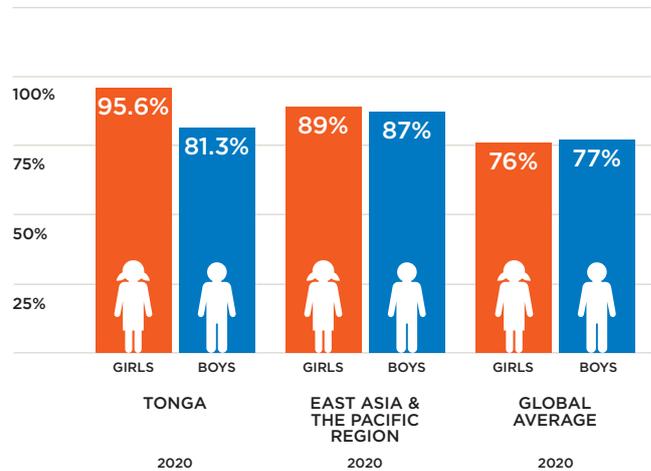
Source: [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#)

Primary Gross Enrolment Rates in Tonga



Source: [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#)

Secondary Gross Enrolment Rates in Tonga



Source: [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#)

School enrolment rates are higher for girls than boys. In the [2019 MICS](#), the adjusted net attendance ratio for primary education was 96.5% for girls and 96.4% for boys. The [effective transition rate](#) from primary to lower secondary general education in 2019 was 95.4% for girls and 93.4% for boys. The [GER](#) for primary education was 112.1% for girls and 117.4% for boys in 2020.

The [GER](#) for secondary education was 95.6% for girls and 81.3% for boys in 2020. According to data from the [2019 MICS](#), the net attendance ratio for lower secondary education was 93.0% for girls and 85.3% for boys. In lower secondary education, 1.7% of girls and 2.6% of boys were over the official age of their current grade, while 22.3% of girls and 22.9% of boys were under-age. The lower secondary completion rate was 93.2% for girls and 90.7% for boys. In 2019, girls aged 7-14 had a higher competency rate in literacy and numeracy than their male counterparts; 64.8% of girls and 61.3% of boys in this age range could demonstrate foundational reading skills, while 53.7% of girls and 51.3% of boys could demonstrate foundational numeracy skills.

In upper secondary, the [2019 MICS](#) recorded a Net Attendance Ratio of 73.6% for girls and 55.0% for boys. Approximately a third of children were out of school at upper secondary level, with significantly higher rates among boys (41.1%) than girls (23.6%). The upper secondary completion rate was 48.9% for girls and 38.9% for boys.

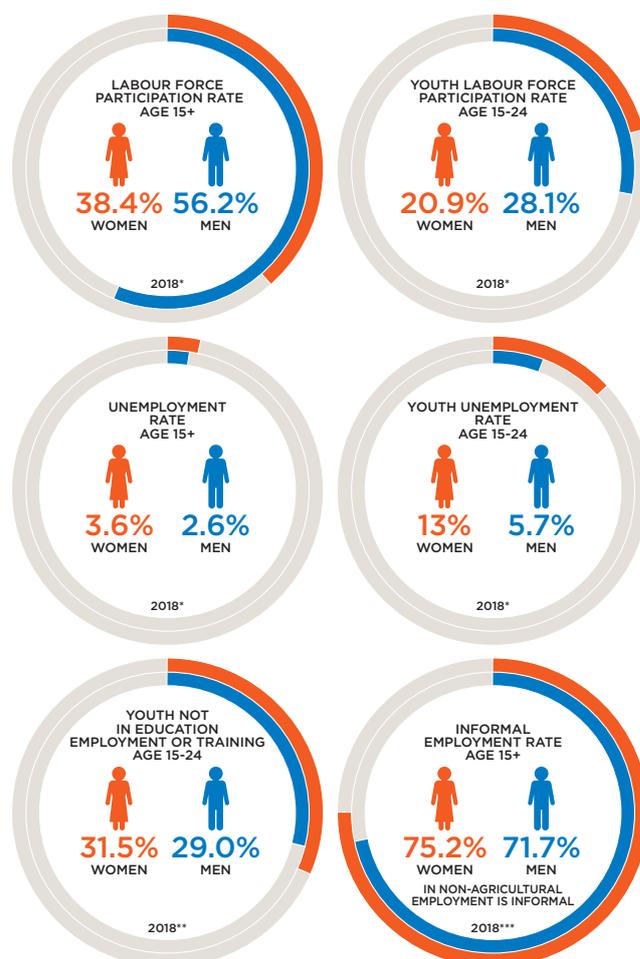
The GER for tertiary education was 26.7% for women and 10.8% for men in 2020. As reported by UNICEF in 2017, university degrees can be obtained from the University of the South Pacific Tonga campus as well as government technical institutes such as the Community Development Training Centre, Tonga Maritime Polytechnic Institute, Tonga Institute of Science and Technology and Tonga Institute of Higher Education. There is an increasing trend of women enrolling in these institutions, rising from 42% in 2005 to approximately 58% in 2013. Women were still underrepresented at the Tonga Maritime Polytechnic Institute and the Tonga Institute of Science and Technology as of 2013, where they constituted only 4.5% of admissions. This gender disparity may be shaped by gendered norms surrounding career pathways and capabilities. In the [2018 Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#), 8.4% of women and 7.0% of men over the age of 15 had tertiary education qualifications.

During the March 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, non-governmental organisation the Talitha Project reported that girls in Tonga struggled to balance schoolwork with additional domestic and care work. The [COVID-19 Tonga Accelerated Resilience Programme](#) from the Ministry of Education and Training supports the development of home-schooling guides and audio lessons for early childhood education, inclusive education, and primary schools for use in case of school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic or disasters. Under the programme, audio lessons were presented equally by male and female presenters, and scripts were checked for ‘inclusivity, positive messages, and culture appropriateness’.

In the [Joint Submission of the UN Country Team for Tonga’s Universal Periodic Review](#), it was noted that child marriage and teenage pregnancy have led in some instances to girls permanently leaving education, although statistics on this are not available. The Review further noted that higher education for young women does not translate into better employment outcomes due to gender barriers in labour markets, pervasive stereotypes regarding suitable occupations for men and women, and the expectation placed on women to engage in unpaid domestic and care work.

Women’s Economic Empowerment

Economic Empowerment Indicators in Tonga



* Source: [Tonga Statistics Department](#)

** Source: [World Bank](#)

*** Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)

In the [2018 Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#), the labour force participation rate was 38.4% for women and 56.2% for men. Among youth aged 15-24, the labour force participation rate was 20.9% for women and 28.1% for men. The unemployment rate was 3.6% for women and 2.6% for men. Among youth aged 15-24, the unemployment rate was 13.0% for women and 5.7% for men. [World Bank data](#) reports that, in 2018, 31.5% of female youth and 29.0% of male youth were not in education, employment, or training.

In the [2018 LFS](#), 75.6% of female employment and 79.7% of male employment was informal. By sector, informal employment was most prevalent in the agriculture, forestry and fishery sector, with 95.6% of male workers and 98.2% of female workers employed informally. The prevalence of informal employment was less significant in the industry sector (85.8% of male workers, 90.2% of female workers) and the services sector (64.1% of male workers, 64.1% of female workers). Employment within the informal sector accounted for 39.0% of female employment and 52.9% of male employment, which suggests a high number of women are employed in informal jobs within the formal sector. In non-agricultural employment in 2018, an estimated [75.2% of female employment and 71.7% of male employment was informal](#).

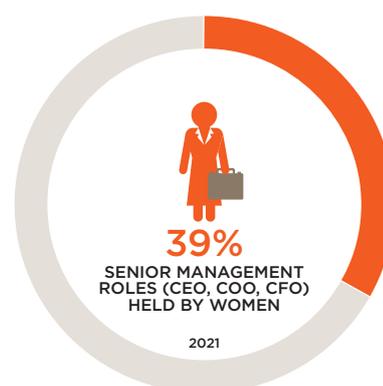
There are significant differences in the economic sectors of employment for men and women in Tonga. In the [2018 LFS](#), women were most commonly employed in the manufacturing sector (40.9% of female and 4.4% of male employment), the administrative and support services sector (11.1% of female employment and 7.3% of female employment) and the education sector (10.9% of female employment and 4.5% of male employment). Men were most commonly employed in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector (33.8% of male employment and 1.9% of female employment) and the construction sector (15.0% of male employment and 0.3% of female employment). In 2015, [70% of Ministry of Health employees were women](#), predominantly working as nurses. All midwives and advanced practice nurses were female in 2015, as well as 31.6% of specialised medical practitioners and almost 50% of General Practitioners. [Handcrafts](#) are an economic activity that helps generate income for many women. The production of traditional mats (*koloa*) primarily decorated bark cloth (*ngatu*) and woven pandanus mats (*kie*) is a significant industry.

While women's participation in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector was reportedly low in the 2018 LFS, women are known to play an active role in the agricultural workforce in Tonga. Handcrafts cut across both the agriculture and the manufacturing sectors as they require the production of raw materials for processing. In the 2016 Census, [25% of households produced handcrafted goods](#), with rates as high as 53% in some island groupings. In the [2015/16 Household](#)

[Income and Expenditure Survey](#), 7.9% of annual household employment income was estimated to come from handcrafts. In addition to handcrafts, agricultural activities such as weeding and maintenance of gardens and raising poultry are [traditionally viewed as a women's role](#). In the [2018 LFS](#), 55.5% of those engaged in own-use subsistence production were women.

In a [2021 analysis](#) of 19 public and private sector organisations in Tonga, 39% of senior management personnel – including Chief Executive Officers, Chief Financial Officers, and Chief Operating Officers – were women.

Women in Senior Management in Tonga



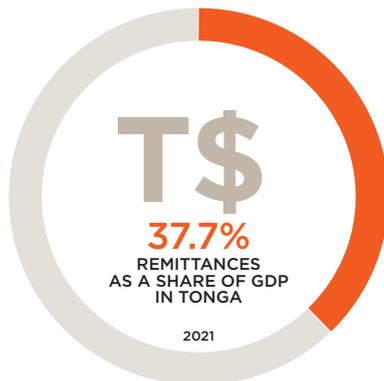
Source: [Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative](#)

From 2012, the simplification of company laws and business registration procedures across the Pacific through the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative [has been beneficial for female entrepreneurs](#). The introduction of electronic registries for companies has benefited people who live away from urban centres (and have little means to travel there) and has decreased the time needed for registration: in Tonga, the time has decreased from 5 days to 1.5 days. Company registrations have increased by 33% in Tonga (as of 2018). There is no data on company registrations disaggregated by the gender of the individual registering.

Women in the informal sector usually have no pension schemes and are reliant on savings or family support in their retirement years. Women who do have access to pensions [tend to contribute less to pension funds than their male counterparts](#). Factors such as unpaid caring responsibilities can interrupt women's careers or force them to seek part-time employment, therefore reducing their pension entitlement. In Tonga, early withdrawal from pension funds remains common among women.

[Remittances are a major source of income](#) in Tonga; in 2020, Tonga was the top recipient of international remittances when measured as a share of GDP.

Remittances as a Share of GDP in Tonga



Source: [International Organization for Migration](#)

Tonga has been a member state of the [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO) since 2016. Tonga ratified the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention in 2020. Tonga is not a signatory to any of the other seven fundamental conventions or to any ILO governance or technical conventions, including those pertaining to maternity leave or to violence and harassment in the workplace. In the public sector, employees are entitled to [12 weeks maternity leave](#) at full pay, or five days or paternity leave for fathers.

According to the [2020 Employment Relations Bill](#), a female employee who expects to give birth to a child is entitled to maternity leave from her employment for a period of 30 consecutive working days provided that the employee furnishes to her employer a certificate from a registered medical practitioner or registered nurse confirming the pregnancy and specifying the expected date of delivery of a child. The 2020 Employment Relations Bill also defines sexual harassment and spells out an employer's responsibilities should a complaint be filed.

Women's economic empowerment is impacted by their access to credit and financial services. The lack of land rights for women in Tonga may [prevent women from accessing financial services](#), as they do not have land to

use as collateral for bank loans. The Tonga Development Bank has introduced loan products with low interest rates and financial support services to support women's microenterprises. Previous entrepreneurial training programmes delivered by Tonga Skills and the Ministry of Labour and Commerce have included business and financial literacy training for women.

Health/Sexual and Reproductive Health

The [life expectancy at birth](#) in Tonga was 72.9 years for women and 69.0 years for men in 2019. There is a high prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) especially diabetes and cardiovascular disease, which pose significant challenges to the nation and its health system. According to [data published by the SPC](#), 20.2% of female mortality and 29.5% of male mortality was attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory disease in 2019. In the [2017 STEPS Survey](#) of adults aged 18-69, 95.1% of women and 89.6% of men were classified as overweight; 82.8% of women and 66.8% of men were classified as obese. Fruit and vegetable consumption was found to be low in the 2017 STEPS survey, with 97.2% of women and 97.7% of men reporting that they ate less than five servings of fruit and vegetables on an average day. Women spent an average of 25.7 minutes doing physical activity each day, compared to 64.3 minutes for men. 45.0% of women and 30.5% of men did not meet the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations on weekly physical activity.

Alcohol consumption and tobacco use were both higher among men than women in 2017: 14.5% of women and 37.8% of men reported smoking daily. 5.3% of women and 14.7% of men reported drinking alcohol in the 30 days prior to the 2017 STEPS Survey.

In the [2019 MICS](#), the total fertility rate was an average of 2.9 children per women. The adolescent fertility rate was 30 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 and was higher in rural (32 per 1,000) than urban (25 per 1,000) areas. The 2019 MICS estimated that 97.7% of births were attended by at least one skilled healthcare professional in 2019. According to the [SPC](#), in 2019 the infant mortality rate was 14.3 per 1,000 live births, and the under-5 mortality rate was 16.6 per 1,000 live births. The maternal mortality ratio was 52 per 100,000 live births in 2017.

Adolescent Fertility Rate in Tonga

Sustainable Development Goal target: reduce adolescent fertility rate to	Tonga:
less than 13 live births per 1,000	30 live births per 1,000
by 2030	2019

Source: [Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey](#)

Maternal Mortality Ratio in Tonga

Sustainable Development Goal target: reduce maternal mortality ratio to	Tonga:
less than 70 per 100,000 live births	52 per 100,000 live births
by 2030	2019

Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)

Under-5 Mortality Rate in Tonga

Sustainable Development Goal target: reduce under-5 mortality rate to	Tonga:
less than 25 per 1,000 live births	16.6 per 1,000 live births
by 2030	2019

Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)

Among married and in-union women in the [2019 MICS](#), 29.3% were using a method of contraception, with 25.2% using a modern method. Contraceptive use was higher among rural populations; 25.6% of rural women and 23.7% of urban women used a modern method of contraception. Women aged 35-39 were most likely to use contraception; 33.7% of women in this age group were using a modern method of contraception, compared to 19.6% of women aged 20-24. In a [2020 study into adolescent unplanned pregnancy in the Pacific](#), Tongan women were found to express reluctance for condom use as it is associated with casual sex and promiscuity. The most common methods of contraception in the 2019 MICS were female sterilization (8.9% of married and in-union

women aged 15-49) and implants (6.5%). Only 0.6% of women reported using male or female condoms. Among married and in-union women aged 15-49, 21.8% had unmet needs for family planning in 2019. In total, 22.5% of women aged 15-49 had unmet needs for family planning. Abortion is illegal in Tonga.

In the [2019 MICS](#), 14.7% of women aged 15-24 who had sex with a non-marital, non-cohabiting partner reported that a condom was used during last sexual intercourse. Knowledge about HIV was higher among young men than young women; 15.2% of men and 9.0% of women aged 15-24 could demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of HIV. Among 15-49 year olds, 10.8% of women reported having a sexually transmitted infection (STI) or symptoms of an STI in the previous 12 months.

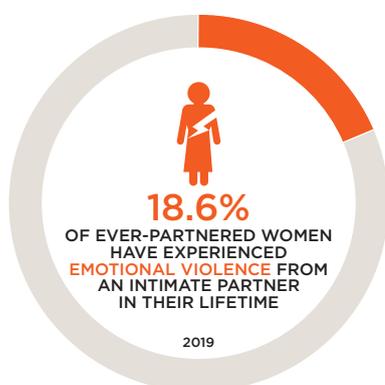
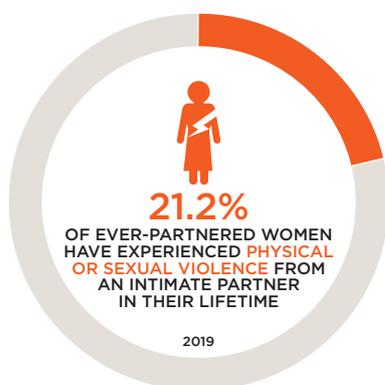
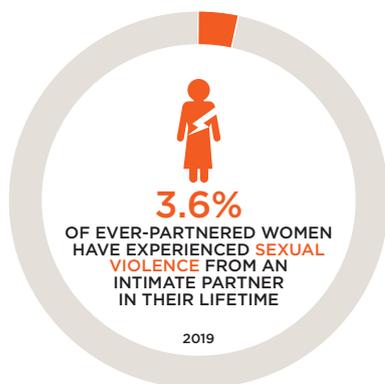
Many sources on sexual and reproductive health and adolescent pregnancy across the Pacific note that the [local culture regards sexuality as taboo](#). There is much cultural stigma and shame surrounding sex. This stigma prevents the communication of all topics connected to sex. This prevents adolescents and vulnerable groups such as women and disabled people from acquiring knowledge about sex and sexuality, as well as limiting access to services and knowledge of sexual and reproductive health.

Ending Violence against Women and Girls

Gender-based violence is a pervasive issue in Tonga. The most recent national survey on domestic violence was [conducted in 2009](#), and nationally representative data on gender-based violence was collected in the [2019 Tonga Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey](#).

Lifetime Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence in Tonga





Source: [2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey](#)

In the [2019 MICS](#), 19.1% of ever married women reported that they had experienced physical violence from a partner in their lifetime, with 12.5% reporting that they had experienced physical violence from a partner in the 12 months prior to the survey. Lifetime prevalence of sexual violence from an intimate partner was 3.3% among ever-married women in 2019, with 2.5% of ever-married women reporting that they had experienced this violence in the previous 12 months. 17.8% of ever-married women reported experiencing emotional violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime, and 14.9% reported experiencing emotional violence in the previous 12 months. Overall, 26.4% of ever-married

women had experienced emotional, physical, or sexual violence in their lifetime. In 2019, 59.5% of ever-married women reported experiencing at least one form of controlling behaviour from a partner in their lifetime, most commonly *insisting on knowing where she is at all times* (52.5%), *being jealous or angry if she talks to other men* (40.3%), *not allowing her to join any social functions* (24.5%), *frequently accusing her of being unfaithful* (23.8%), and *not permitting her to meet her female friends* (19.2%).

As reported in the 2019 MICS, the normalisation of violence as a form of punishment or discipline is a key factor which contributes to domestic violence. In 2019, 38.1% of women stated that they believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife in at least one situation: *if she neglects the children* (31.4%), *if she goes out without telling him* (21.8%), and *if she refuses sex with him* (8.3%).

Among all women aged 15-49 surveyed in the 2019 MICS, 15.2% reported that they had experienced physical violence from a non-partner since the age of 15. The most common perpetrators of non-partner physical violence were family members, including mothers and step-mothers (10.0%) and fathers and step-fathers (3.2%). The prevalence rate recorded in the 2019 MICS is significantly below the prevalence of non-partner physical violence recorded in [2009 National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Tonga](#), in which 68% of women reported that they had experienced physical violence from a non-partner in their lifetime. Among all surveyed women in 2019, 3.2% reported that they had experienced sexual violence from a non-partner since the age of 15, with a higher rate recorded in rural (3.6%) than urban (1.6%) areas. The most common perpetrator of non-partner sexual violence was 'employer/someone at work', accounting for 18.7% of perpetrators.

The [Family Protection Act 2013](#) (FPA) was enacted to tackle domestic violence in Tonga. It provides protection for all members of a family. In the [2016 revisions](#), the FPA legally defined what was classified as a 'domestic relationship' by extensively outlining various forms of relationships with the aim of providing more comprehensive protection for women and children. In 2019, the [Tonga Family Protection Counselling Framework](#) was developed to inform and guide the establishment

of the national registry known as the National Panel of Counsellors, which was launched later in the same year. Key achievements on domestic violence issues under the National Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Tonga Policy include the establishment of the Family Protection Legal Aid Centre in 2018 under the Ministry of Justice and Prisons; the renovated office for the Domestic Violence Unit with a safe space for children at the Police Station; and the 24/7 counselling helpline through the main service providers for victims of violence and the launch of the Tonga National Service Delivery Protocol for Multisectoral Response to Cases of Gender Based Violence.

In 2021 the Tonga National Service Delivery Protocol for Multisectoral Response to Cases of Gender-Based Violence (SDP) was launched with the objective to guide the coordination of multi-sectoral service delivery for survivors of gender-based violence. The Protocol is led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Womens Affairs and Gender Equality Division and was developed to coordinate and guide the national response of services to survivors of gender-based violence. The Protocol provides an agreed set of procedures and minimum standards to ensure a survivor-centred approach, continuity of care across the preparedness-emergency-recovery continuum and more positive outcomes for survivors, their families, and the communities of Tonga.

The Family Protection Legal Aid Centre, established following the introduction of the FPA, noted in 2018 that 20% of domestic violence cases reported to the Centre were not being reported to the police because of trust problems or fears of being shamed. According to [news media](#), between January and June 2020, only 18.4% of the 537 reported cases were successfully prosecuted.

Anecdotal evidence highlights that [sexual violence against women with disabilities is particularly prevalent](#). It has been suggested that women with disabilities are more likely to be homeless and be pushed into sex work, especially women with 'intellectual or mental health disabilities'. Tonga Women's Crisis Centre has developed a specific referral pathway for women and girls with disabilities to better meet the needs of individuals.

The [Tonga Leitis Association](#) – a non-governmental organisation focused on helping diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) communities – has [developed a referral pathway](#) aligned to the National SDP to better support the needs of those individuals who experience gender-based violence.

The [Women and Children Crisis Centre](#) was established in 2009 and provides free counselling, legal guidance, and support for survivors, as well as 24 hours of free accommodation to women and children in Mo'ui Fiefia Safe House. There are also preventive efforts to help curb gender-based violence, such as male advocacy training to end violence towards women and children, as well as to tackle discriminating attitudes. The UNDP-coordinated integrated service delivery platform called "[REACH](#)" connects government agencies and civil society organisations in order to deliver services to vulnerable communities in a timely and effective manner.

In line with global trends, there has been an increase in domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly over the initial months of the COVID-19 lockdown. In Tonga, the [Women and Children's Crisis Centre](#) (WCCC) recorded 54% increase in the number of cases coming in between February and April 2022. A [regional analysis of violence against women during COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific](#) found that rates of violence were impacted by factors such as increased exposure to perpetrators during lockdowns, increased triggers of violence for perpetrators during times of stress and uncertainty, and reduced access to support services.

Gender and Protection in Humanitarian Action

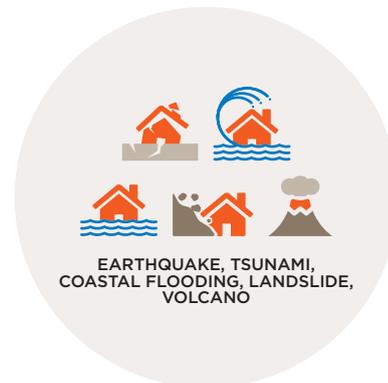
Tonga is ranked 3rd in the world in the [World Risk Index](#) for disaster risk. Tonga's exposure to disasters is classified as very high; susceptibility and lack of coping skills are classified as high; and vulnerability and lack of adaptive capacities in Tonga are classified as medium in terms of severity. The [most likely hazards in Tonga](#) are earthquakes (high likelihood) and tsunamis (high likelihood). There is a medium likelihood of coastal flooding, landslides, and volcanos. In Tonga, 84% of the population live within 1km of the coast. The maximum height above sea level is 1,033m.

Climate and Disaster Profile of Tonga

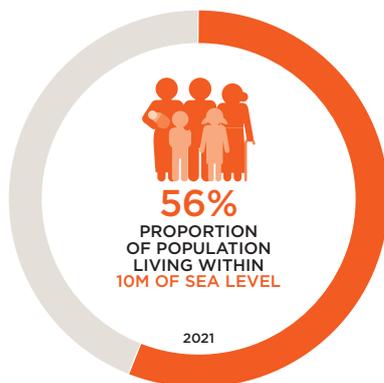


Source: [Australian Aid](#)

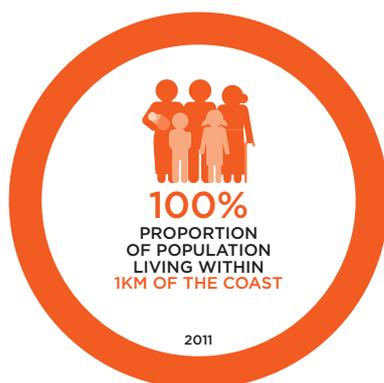
Main Climate-Related Hazards



Source: [Australian Aid](#)



Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)



Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)

In addition to being at high risk from disasters, [Tonga is also at risk from climate change](#). Tropical cyclones are predicted to become less frequent but more intense; extreme rainfall is projected to become more frequent and more intense; and temperatures and sea level are predicted to continue to rise. Tonga will further be impacted by ocean acidification and coral bleaching. Tonga was ranked the 130th most impacted by climate related extreme weather events in [the Global Climate Risk Index 2021](#).

Disasters in Tonga [disproportionately affect vulnerable groups](#) such as people of lower socio-economic classes, women, young people, and workers in the informal economy (especially in the agricultural sector). Data from CARE's 2018 [Tropical Cyclone Gita Kingdom of Tonga Rapid Gender Analysis](#) indicates that those risks increase further for "people living with disabilities; the elderly or widowed or those with chronic illnesses; young children; pregnant or breastfeeding women; female heads of households; single mothers, particularly those with a large number of dependents; and people diverse sexual orientations and gender identities".

Women's income in Tonga is dependent on natural resources and assets that are likely to be impacted by natural disasters. For example, mulberry and pandanus trees, which are farmed and used by women for agriculture and crafting, [are severely affected by tropical cyclones](#). Women are not able to divest from such livelihoods, as women have less opportunities than men

to access different careers due to social norms, domestic responsibilities and/or lack of necessary education.

Discrepancies in aid provision exist in Tonga. Female-headed households are [often overlooked in aid distribution](#) by town and district officers, who will only consider a household 'female-headed' if the woman leading is widowed. Single, abandoned, divorced, or separated women are not considered.

The overall representation of women in disaster preparedness and humanitarian decision-making is not known. Disaster preparedness committees, however, are [reportedly largely comprised of men](#), therefore women are excluded from decision-making processes during disasters. In the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Gita in February 2018, the Women's and Children's Crisis Centre interviewed women in evacuation centres. [Results](#) suggest that women wanted to be more prepared and felt that they had not been involved directly in decision-making; 14 out of 17 respondents expressed that they had no involvement in decision-making in the first 72 hours following Tropical Cyclone Gita and that they were simply following instructions on where to stay and what to do. Women were found to be excluded from decision-making processes and discussions, and decisions that affected them were being made without their consultation.

The risk of gender-based violence towards women and girls [increases in the event of a natural disaster](#). Following Tropical Cyclone Gita in 2018, women and girls in Tonga [reported feeling unsafe](#) because there was no electricity which restricted access to lighting and phones.

Women's lower levels of access to information systems/sources such as weather forecasts, flood warnings and water levels [leaves them increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters](#). Generally, across the Pacific Island countries women tend to have limited access to information, in part due to gendered social norms. Positioned as 'household heads', [men are more likely to have better access to information](#) and control who accesses information in their household. They may also incorrectly interpret relevant information.

The Safety and Protection Cluster chaired by the Ministry of Internal Affairs oversees gender and protection at a national level. The [National Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Policy](#) notes that the specific vulnerabilities of women are recognised in a number of programmes relating to natural disasters and climate change. An example is the work by the Safety and Protection Cluster and the Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC). The [Tonga Climate Change Policy](#) states that gender issues are to be considered in all planning and implementation processes in recognition of the unique issues women and men face.

COVID-19 outbreaks in the Pacific Island countries' have the potential to disproportionately affect women and girls in a number of ways, including adverse impacts to their education, food security and nutrition, health, livelihoods, and protection, according to a [CARE report](#) in 2020. COVID-19 risks increasing women's workloads and domestic caring responsibilities. Additionally, there is a risk of increased gender-based violence. This, [compounded by Tropical Cyclone Harold in early 2020](#) and the recent Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption and ensuing tsunami in early 2022, meant that Tongan women and girls were at high risk of living in vulnerable and abject conditions.

Appendix 1: Country Background

Capital	Nuku'alofa
Population	100,209 [51.3% female] (2021 Census)
GDP per capita (USD)	\$4,624.8 (2020)
Human Development Index	Ranked 104th out of 189 countries and territories (2020).
Type of Government	The Kingdom of Tonga is a hereditary constitutional monarchy . It has three branches of national government: the executive, legislature, and judiciary. There is also regional government divided along the island groups of Ha'apai, Tongatapu, Vava'u.
Women in Legislature	One out of 27 members of the Legislature is a woman (3.7%) as of March 2022.
Legal System	The Kingdom of Tonga is a hereditary constitutional monarchy with a common law legal system .
Ratified Human Rights Conventions	<p>Tonga has signed the following Human Rights Treaties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) (Accession 1972) • Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Accession 1995) • Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (Signed 2007, not ratified) <p>Tonga has not signed or ratified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) • Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED) • Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) • 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) • International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
Urban vs. Rural Women (%)	23.2% of women lived in urban areas in 2016.
Female-Headed Households (%)	22.1% of households were headed by women in 2021.
Women in the Workforce	<p>The Labour Force Participation Rate was 38.4% for women and 56.2% for men in the 2018 Labour Force Survey (LFS).</p> <p>In the 2018 LFS, 75.66% of female employment and 79.7% of male employment was informal. In non-agricultural employment in 2018, an estimated 75.2% of female employment and 71.7% of male employment was informal.</p> <p>Female employment by sector (2018 LFS):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40.9% manufacturing sector • 11.1% administrative and support services • 10.9% education sector
Women CEOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An estimated 39% of senior management personnel – including Chief Executive Officers, Chief Financial Officers, and Chief Operating Officers – were women in 2021. • Within the public sector, women held 43% of CEO and Deputy CEO positions in 2017. • Women held 59.2% of senior management roles in the 2016 Census.
Women on Boards	In 2021, an estimated 19% of Directors, 17% of Deputy Chairs and 10% of Board Chairs were women . Women were most highly represented as Directors in private sector organisations, where 23% of Directors were women.

Appendix 1: Country Background (continued)

The Kingdom of Tonga is made of around 170 islands, [of which 36 islands are inhabited](#). The islands are divided into four groups: Niua, Tongatapu, Ha'api and Vava'u. The capital Nuku'alofa [is located on the north coast of Tongatapu](#), and is situated approximately 890km south of Apia, Samoa, and 750km southeast of Suva, Fiji. The [total land area](#) of Tonga is 720km², and the Exclusive Economic Zone is 659,558km².

The population of Tonga was [100,209 in 2021, 51.3% of whom were female](#). In the [2016 Census](#), 23.2% of the population lived in the urban districts Kolofo'ou, Kolomotu'a, and Ma'ufanga which form the township of Nuku'alofa. The remaining 72.8% of the population live in rural areas. The average population density in Tonga was 155 people/km² in the 2016 Census, rising to 286 people/km² on the island of Tongatapu. The 2016 Census recorded 97% of the Tongan as Tonga ethnic origin, with 1% of part-Tongan ethnic origin and 1% of Chinese ethnic origin.

Appendix 2: Country Commitments on Gender

International Commitments

Gender Commitments	Status	Actions
The Beijing Platform for Action	Signed 1995 Tonga participated in the Beijing +25 year review process in 2020.	Tonga was noted for a number of achievements under the Beijing Platform for Action as part of the +25 review process in 2020. Notable achievements include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Family Protection Legal Aid Centre was established in 2018 and a new office for the Domestic Violence Unit was opened with a safe space for children. • Political candidacy training for women was carried out to encourage women to register as candidates in the 2016 local elections. • Gender components and indicators were incorporated into major disaster risk reduction and resilience building projects.
Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration	2012 A Regional Trend Assessment Report was published in 2016.	In the 2016 Regional Trend Assessment Report , the proportion of women in local government and in senior management was found to have increased since the Declaration was signed in 2012. A higher proportion of women were enrolled in the national retirement scheme. The number of both police incident reports on domestic violence and women accessing support services for victims of violence had increased. The number of seats held by women on state-owned boards reduced from 20% in 2012 to 15% in 2015, and there was no change in the number of seats held by women in Parliament during the same period.

Appendix 2: Country Commitments on Gender (continued)

National Commitments

Gender Commitments	Status	Actions
Family Protection Act	2013	The Family Protection Act was introduced to provide greater protection from domestic violence. The Act establishes Protection Orders to provide safety to persons who experience or fear domestic violence, defines the duties of the police in matters relating to domestic violence, and advocates for the health, safety, and well-being of survivors of domestic violence.
Tonga Strategic Development Framework (II) 2015-2025	2015	The Tonga Strategic Development Framework states that Tonga was not on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of promoting gender equality and empowering women. This is due in large part to the lack of progress made on the representation of women in politics. The Framework reports, however, that women are well represented at middle and upper management in government ministries and in the private sector, and that achievement in education is higher among girls than boys. Domestic violence is recognised as a barrier preventing the achievement of gender equality and female empowerment.
Universal Periodic Review (UPR)	Tonga's most recent cycle of UPR took place in 2018	<p>The Universal Periodic Review Third Cycle National Report notes the introduction of the Family Protection Act and the criminalization of marital rape under the Criminal Offences Act as positive steps towards eliminating violence against women in Tonga.</p> <p>The United Nations country team recommended in 2017 that Tonga introduce special measures to improve the low representation of women in legislation, as well as recommending that amendments are made to the Land Act to allow women to inherit land.</p>
National Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Tonga (WEGET) Policy and Strategic Plan of Action 2019-2025	2019	<p>The WEGET Policy intends to achieve gender equity by 2025. The Policy sets out a list of agreed priorities and guidelines for the government and civil society to build capacity for addressing gender issues. The Policy also defines a gender-sensitive approach to developing laws, policies and programmes to ensure the equal rights, opportunities and benefits of women and men. The Policy identifies five key gender equality issues in Tonga:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Weak enabling environment for gender mainstreaming; 2. Family and social issues; 3. Unequal access to economic opportunities and employment; 4. Unequal participation in decisions-making and political representation; 5. Unequal conditions to respond to natural disasters, environmental challenges, and climate change. <p>The Women's Affairs and Gender Equality Division (WAGED), which is part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) is the national women's machinery that plays the leading role in coordinating, monitoring, and providing advisory services on WEGET.</p>