



A glimpse inside a shelter in the Solomon Islands, offering a safe and supportive environment for survivors of violence. Shelters like this provide not only physical protection but also a space for recovery and healing. Photo: UN Women/Shazia Usman.

FROM FEAR TO FREEDOM

Strengthening Safe Shelters for Survivors of Violence Across the Pacific

The Pacific region has some of the highest rates of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the world. In countries like Fiji, PNG and Solomon Islands, over 60 percent of women report intimate partner violence, more than twice the global average.¹ In a region already burdened by climate shocks, displacement, and economic hardship, women escaping violence are left with few lifelines, as safe shelters remain dangerously underfunded.

In the Pacific, safe shelters are not just a place of immediate protection but also a symbol of solidarity, cultural strength and survivor-centred care. Women's crisis centres and community and faith-based organisations have led this work for decades, earning the trust of survivors and providing life-changing support. These safe spaces empower women to make informed decisions about their future, rebuild independence and begin healing from violence.

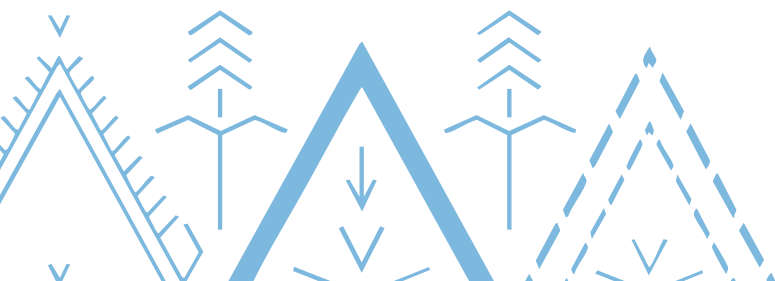
¹ UNFPA (2023). 2023 Asia-Pacific regional violence against women snapshot, KNOwVAWdata and UNFPA

KIRIBATI

Our Lady of Sacred Heart operates the only safe shelter in the country. The safe shelter is able to house 10 people at one time for short-term stays for up to one month. This services the entire population of 134,518, where 68 percent of women reported experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Pacific Community (2010) A Study on Violence Against Women and Children)

VANUATU

Vanuatu Women's Centre operates the only safe accommodation in Vanuatu. Two rooms are rented in a hotel for a short-term stay, generally up to a week. This services the entire population of 327,777, where one in two women have experienced physical violence from a partner in their lifetime (Vanuatu Women's Centre (2011) Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships)



The Reality of Safe Shelter in the Pacific

- The demand for safe shelter far exceeds the reach of existing services. In some countries, a single safe shelter carries the weight of serving an entire population.
- The safe shelters are chronically under-resourced, often struggling to secure even basic, multi-year funding. Staff and volunteers frequently put themselves at personal risk, filling the gaps left by systemic underinvestment.
- The Fiji National Shelter Guidelines on Responding to Cases of Gender Based Violence, the region's first national standards for safe shelter, represents a growing commitment to professionalisation without losing the heart of what has always made them effective, survivor-centred, women-led and grounded in Pacific realities.
- Safe shelters are increasingly called on to respond to complex cases, including sorcery-accusation related violence, technology-facilitated violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation, family violence, increasing challenges related to drug abuse and rising HIV rates.
- As one of the world's most disaster-prone regions, safe shelters struggle to meet spikes in demand linked to emergencies. Pacific women's leadership has long shown that disaster response is not gender-neutral with women leaders and networks mobilising before, during and after emergencies to ensure protection, recovery and resilience.
- The dearth of gender-responsive, affordable and accessible long-term housing for women and their children leave survivors with few options which support long-term recovery. Without the leadership of Pacific women, shelter and housing solutions often risk being disconnected and ineffective. With their leadership, they become powerful pathways to safety, healing and independence.



Source: Henrica A.F.M. Jansen. 2016. 'KNOWVAWdata Regional Snapshot: Women Who Experience Intimate Partner Violence, 2000-2016, UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Region.' Bangkok.

Pacific Women-Led Solutions for Shelter Justice

Safe shelters are lifesaving for women experiencing violence and their children. There is a need to holistically invest in advancing these services across the region - led by Pacific women, grounded in feminist principles, culture and acceptable to survivors. Efforts to advance safe shelter services must recognise and embed Pacific feminists' leadership for transformative pathways to safety, independence and justice.

- A regional assessment of safe shelter services and systems to inform priorities for sustainably advancing safe shelter support. This assessment must be led with Pacific women's voices and lived realities at the centre, ensuring priorities reflect the diverse cultural and geographical contexts of the region.
- Establishment and implementation of national safe shelter standards, with women's organisations at the helm. Standards must be resources not only as technical checklists but as tools that embed survivor-centered care, cultural accountability and feminist leadership across all services.
- Holistic support for a skilled, safe and more sustainable safe shelter workforce. This includes additional staff and paid volunteers, ongoing training, technical supervision and strong staff self-care initiatives. Women who hold the frontline need investment in their own wellbeing to sustain their courage and prevent vicarious trauma.
- Support for survivor-centred service delivery system. This means resourcing standard operating procedures, infrastructure and running costs. It also means ensuring every safe shelter can operate with dignity, safety and confidentiality - grounded in Pacific cultural strengths.
- Investment in disaster-resilient, women-led safe shelters. In the world's most disaster-prone region, emergency shelters must be designed with gender-based violence risk mitigation built in from the start, in formal coordination with women's crisis centres. Pacific feminist leadership is essential to ensuring disaster response is not gender-blind.
- A gender-responsive approach to social housing. Housing policies and programmes must be analysed and reshaped through a feminist lens, with long-term investment in social housing that is safe, accessible and integrated into gender based violence referral pathways.

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