

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



FIJI COUNTRY SUMMARY

Updated November 2020

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

Violence against women and girls is recognised worldwide as a social, political, and public health problem as well as a fundamental violation of human rights. **In Fiji, 64 percent of women (almost two in three) aged 18-49 years who have ever been in an intimate relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence** by a husband or intimate partner in their lifetime – **almost double the global average.**¹

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

Pacific Partnership Priorities in Fiji

There are three key outcomes prioritised for Fiji under the programme:

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

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

Evidence indicates that prevention interventions are more effective if they: address social norms, attitudes and behaviour that perpetuate violence against women and girls; challenge dominant notions of masculinity linked to violent and controlling behaviours; involve all community members; and include long-term, systematic engagement across all levels of society in multiple settings.

Through Pacific Partnership, the UN Women Ending Violence Against Women and Girls programme is focusing on areas identified as powerful channels of influence in Fiji – such as faith and sports - and working across individual, community and societal levels.

ABOUT PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

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

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

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





2020-2021 prevention initiatives supported by UN Women include:

Using a whole-of-government and community approach to prevent violence against women and girls

- Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent VAWG:** Supporting the Government of Fiji's Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to develop a National Action Plan (NAP) to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (2021-2026), making Fiji the first Pacific Island Country, and one of the only two countries globally along with Australia, to have a whole-of-government and whole-of-community, evidence-based, measurable, inclusive plan with an emphasis on stopping violence before it starts. It will focus on preventing the most prevalent forms of violence against women and girls in Fiji- domestic violence/intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women and girls. The NAP is engaging 13 key sectors in the development process including the priority settings of education, youth and sports; faith-based institutions and groups; and traditional institutions and entities (such as the Ministry of I-Taukei Affairs). It will set out short, medium, and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and girls by challenging its underlying root causes, and influence social norms, promote community leadership and set a much stronger culture of equal and respectful relationships between women and men.

Using a whole-of-community, nation and region approach to prevention through faith and sports

- Community (faith):** Partnering with the **House of Sarah (HOS)** to adapt, develop and trial an innovative, Fiji-specific faith-based community programme to prevent violence against women and girls across three Anglican communities at Saint Mark's in Newtown (Nasinu), Saint Michael & All Angels in Matata (Lami) and Wailoku (Suva). HOS's *Preventing Violence in Fiji's Faith Settings (PVFFS)* project uses faith-based approaches and religious teachings to engage with church leaders and community members to encourage gender equality and stop violence against women and girls, which is often accepted as a social norm in Fijian society. This project is co-funded by the Fiji Women's Fund.
- National and regional (faith):** Supporting **faith leaders' advocacy initiatives** to prevent violence against women and girls with the House of Sarah, the Pacific Conference of Churches and key Fiji interfaith leaders, through the

national *One Voice Campaign*. One Voice is a national multi-media campaign aired during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign, where Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh leaders publicly speak out against violence against women and girls, in videos and documentaries that are aired at cinemas, on television, and circulated on social media. On International Women's Day in 2020, the campaign expanded to include Tonga. The House of Sarah together with the Pacific Conference of Churches worked with the Tongan Council of Churches to make this possible.

- Regional (faith):** Partnering with the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) on the *'Just and Safe Pacific Communities of Women and Men'* programme. This programme aims to contribute to the attainment of safe, inclusive and violence free faith communities in the Pacific, by preventing and responding to violence against women and girls, using strategic, collaborative and innovative approaches with religious leaders and faith communities across 18 Pacific Islands. The programme is advancing a faith-based approach tailored to Pacific faith culture and context to address violence against women and girls at regional and national levels through PCC's 31 Member Christian Churches and 9 council of Churches across the region. This includes a regional mapping of faith-based responses to violence against women and children, gender equality and child protection; establishment of systems for Member Churches to monitor and report on performance of their commitments to prevent violence against women and children; development and implementation of a Safe Church Policy (Zero Tolerance of Violence Against Women and Children in Church Communities) and Code of Conduct; and the development and roll out of a Pacific regional faith-based strategy to prevent violence against women and girls.
- Community (rugby):** Partnering with Oceania Rugby to design and implement the Get into Rugby PLUS programme to address violence against women and girls through sport as a tool to promote positive gender equitable norms, attitudes and behaviours. Building on World Rugby's Get Into Rugby development programme, it uses a safe playing environment and a **life skills component delivered by rugby coaches to support young people aged 10-14 years in 13 schools** in a process of critical thinking and reflection around issues of gender, power relationships and healthy, respectful relationships all built around the rugby values of integrity, solidarity, respect, discipline and passion. It is implemented in partnership with Fiji Rugby Union, with





the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, UN Women and ChildFund Australia providing technical assistance.

- **National and regional (rugby):** Oceania Rugby and UN Women are **advancing social norms campaigning through national sporting events**, with campaign messaging that is gender transformative, promoting equality, zero tolerance of violence, and women's safe and equal participation in sports. During one of the most important regional sport events- the Oceania Sevens Tournament in November 2019, 83 percent of spectators surveyed had seen or heard the campaign messages on the importance of equal participation of women and men in rugby; and 80 percent had seen or heard the term 'Equal Playing Field', which was the key gender-equality related message used in all the media promotions, as well as the hashtag used in social media promotions. Eighty percent believed that rugby is for all genders, while 89 percent said they would support a woman to play rugby. Spectator surveys like these are key to gauge how advocacy and behaviour change messages are tracking with target audiences and if adjustments needed to be made. Also part of the Oceania 7s Communications and Advocacy campaign were gender equality related media releases, social media posts (which included interviews and video footage of women players), signage, associated events and advocacy moments, development by Oceania Rugby, with support from UN Women. These all contributed to the high positive visibility of women in rugby at the tournament and promoted gender equality.

Strengthening evidence to prevent violence against women and girls in the Pacific

- **Rugby:** Undertaking research in partnership with Oceania Rugby to **understand the connections between gender inequality, violence against women and girls and sports participation in rugby and netball across two programme countries: Fiji and Samoa.** This research aims to contribute to the body of knowledge around how to make the field of sports, safe, fair, and accessible to women and girls across Pacific Island nations. It also aims to influence policy and practice of the sport sector to improve safe and equal access to sports; inform programme design to change social norms; and influence and convene organisations nationally and regionally to guide advocacy, social marketing and communication campaigns on preventing violence against women and girls and promoting gender equality.
- **Community of Practice to promote knowledge sharing and coordination:** Linking Fijian partners to a Pacific

regional Community of Practice to strengthen coordination and build a collaborative and supportive communities of practice across the region, in partnership with other key agencies and networks working in this space. This supports and encourages knowledge sharing of social norms and primary prevention programming, including 'what works' to end violence against women and girls in Fiji and the Pacific.

Capacity strengthening and technical support

- The **UN Women Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Technical Hub** provides wraparound technical support to national and regional partners in Fiji to ensure the highest quality programming; increased understanding of evidence-based approaches to prevention informed by Pacific and global evidence and practice; and the development of a sustainable cadre of experts on violence against women and girls prevention and response in Fiji and the Pacific region.

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

The programme advances international best practice, adapted to the Pacific context, to strengthen quality and access to essential services for survivors of gender-based violence. Under this area of work, UN Women provides technical support and funding to improve the overall governance and coordination of essential services (such as health, police and justice, social services) and technical and financial support to improve social services. This involves work with local front-line service providers to strengthen access to, and quality of social services for survivors, including but not limited to: strengthening disability inclusive services; adapting services to meet the needs of women and girls with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGISEC)ⁱⁱ; improving gender-based violence counselling and shelter responses; and supporting innovative models to increase access for women and girls in remote and hard to reach locations.

2020-2021 initiatives supported by UN Women include:

Supporting national coordination mechanisms and development of minimum standards

- Supporting Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA) **in its national coordination leadership role on ending violence against women and girls services** through:





- » **Technical advisory support to the National Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Task Force** to support overall coordination and governance of actions nationally.
- » **Progressing the National Services Delivery Protocol for Responding to Cases of Gender-Based Violence (SDP)** – this includes the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the SDP roll-out; the development of the second phase and targeted training for police, justice and health services.
- » Technical advisory support to **develop an administrative data system** to accompany the SDP, allowing for safe and ethical data collection from frontline service providers.
- » **Coordination and programming support to the National Gender-Based Violence Sub Cluster** to further strengthen national preparedness and response to **gender-based violence in emergencies**, specifically in relation to COVID-19.
- Partnering with the MWCPA to develop **Minimum Shelter Standards for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence** inclusive of COVID-19 adapted guidelines to ensure ethical and safety standards and procedures are in place.

Partnering with women's crisis centres and NGOs

- Partnering closely with the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre to strengthen best practices for gender-based violence response through the **development of counselling courses and broader strategic areas of work on ending violence against women and girls**.
- Supporting national SOGISEC organisation to provide improved access to services for the SOGISEC community.

- Partnering with Fiji Women's Rights Movement in supporting community-based organisations to ensure women in communities have a clearer understanding of justice sector pathways and services regarding family law and gender-based violence.

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

2020-21 initiatives targeting non-state actors supported by PIFS include:

Fijian non-state actors (NSAs), including civil society organisations and women's groups, also benefit from Pacific Partnership through **strategic engagement, capacity development for monitoring the implementation of national commitments on gender equality, and projects support through small grants**. The PIFS' NSA component of the Pacific Partnership programme works in close concert with the overall approaches supported by UN Women. In 2020, the NSA programme supported the **active engagement of women's CSOs** like the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, FEMLink, National Council of Women and Soqosoqo Vakamarama to engage in PIFS consultative mechanisms including the Annual Regional CSO Forum, 2020 Virtual Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting (FEMM), CROP Heads and NSA Executive Meetings. NSAs also participated in other activities including the Regional Non-State Actor Capacity Building Workshop, the development and validation of a **Policy Monitoring Toolkit on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, strategic planning toward a Leaders and Mentors Initiative for 'Gender Equality Agents for Change'** and providing technical input toward training modules for NSAs and governments on gender responsive budgeting.





BACKGROUND

In Fiji, the national prevalence study shows about two-thirds of women who have ever been in an intimate relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. When emotional violence is included, the rate rises to 74 percent. From the age of 15 years, 31 percent of women and girls were subject to physical or sexual assault by non-partners.ⁱⁱⁱ

The study also demonstrates that harmful ‘social norms’ – beliefs and actions accepted as normal in a society - justify and enable men’s power over women and allow violence to go virtually unchecked by community leaders, including faith leaders.

These social norms are based within deeply held beliefs that there are “justifiable reasons” for husbands to use physical violence to “discipline and control” their wives, for example. The traditional silence around violence against women and girls makes it difficult for women and girls to share concerns and seek support about the violence they experience, and for all community members to break this cycle. For example, shame and stigma often associated with domestic and sexual violence means that survivors often experience a sense of isolation and fear of retaliation. For those women and girls who do seek to escape abusive situations, or who seek post-sexual assault care, they often find quality essential services are limited or unavailable, with urban women having the most access, though at varied levels of care.

There is strong political will to address violence against women and girls in Fiji, with the Prime Minister; the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; and other Fijian leaders frequently condemning violence at the national and global stage. At the ministerial level, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA) is responsible for addressing gender inequality, the empowerment of women and the disadvantaged. It also has responsibility for the care and protection of children and addressing the needs of women and children within all spheres of Fijian society.

With its Women’s Action Plan (2010-2019), the MWCPA has committed to align its work and focus areas on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and several other regional and international action plans. In 2014, the Fijian Government launched the Fiji National Gender Policy, furthering its commitment to advance social and economic empowerment of women, including the elimination of violence against women and girls.

In January 2020, the MWCPA, in a joint press-conference with three key ministries, announced its plan to develop a National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls – a first for the Pacific, and only the second country in the world along with Australia. The MWCPA is also responsible for monitoring government initiatives, including drafting of new policies and procedures that will benefit survivors of gender-based violence and coordinates all efforts to end violence against women and girls through the MWCPA Ending Violence Against Women Task Force.

ⁱSomebody’s Life, Everybody’s Business: A survey exploring the prevalence, incidence and attitudes to intimate partner violence in Fiji. Conducted by the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre (FWCC), 2013

ⁱⁱSOGISEC is a term that has evolved from the more commonly known acronym LGBTQI+ which is for people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex. UN Women is now using this term to ensure we are using terms most preferred by the communities themselves.

ⁱⁱⁱSomebody’s Life, Everybody’s Business: A survey exploring the prevalence, incidence and attitudes to intimate partner violence in Fiji. Conducted by the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre (FWCC), 2013.

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

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

