

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



TONGA COUNTRY SUMMARY

Updated November 2020

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ABOUT PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

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

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

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

The programme operates to the end of 2022.





2020-2021 prevention initiatives supported by UN Women include:

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

- **‘Supporting the Women’s Affairs and Gender Equality Division (WAGED) Division with capacity strengthening through national convenings on best practice and evidence-informed interventions** and strategies to effectively mobilise communities to transform harmful attitudes, beliefs and norms regarding the acceptability of violence against women and girls. In addition, **supporting the development of Tonga’s National Action Plan (NAP) to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls** which will be a whole-of-government and whole-of-community, evidence-based, measurable, inclusive plan with an emphasis on stopping violence before it starts.
- **Shifting the Narrative: Changing Mind Sets and Attitudes’ by the Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC) Tonga:** This new project launched in 2020 is part of WCCC’s broader ongoing national programme that has been funded primarily by the Government of Australia’s Government aid programme. Under this new partnership with UN Women, through Pacific Partnership, the WCCC’s national programme is explicitly focusing on:
 - » **Empowering and building the skills of young girls and boys to prevent violence against women and girls** through respectful and equal relationships initiatives that address the harmful social norms and rigid gender stereotypes.
 - » **Engaging men in violence prevention through a male advocacy model** that aims to change social norms and harmful attitudes and behaviours that harm women and children in Tonga.
 - » **Trialling and testing innovative national media and behaviour change communication strategies and approaches** to engage everyone in the general population to prevent violence against women and girls through radio and television programmes; storytelling through social media and online platforms; public talanoa sessions; podcasts designed to spark public dialogue, whilst promoting key messages on gender equality and equal power relations.

- » **Lobbying and advocating key decision makers on the rights of women and children and practices and policies to address sexual harassment** through initiatives with the police, government and key line ministries, such as health, police, justice, and education.
- » **Promoting a comprehensive approach to prevention through a national focus on both prevention and response** whilst adhering to a women and children human rights framework in all strategies and activities.

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

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

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





Using a whole-of-community, nation and region approach to prevent VAWG through faith

- Pacific regional faith-based approach to end VAWG:** Partnering with the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) on the *‘Just and Safe Pacific Communities of Women and Men’* programme which aims to contribute to the attainment of safe, inclusive and violence free faith communities in the Pacific **and in Tonga**, 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, **including the Tonga National Council of Churches**. This includes a **regional mapping of faith-based responses to VAWG**, gender equality and child protection (**with Tonga as a focus country**); establishing systems for Tonga Member Churches to monitor and report on performance of their commitments to ending violence against women and girls; development and implementation of a Safe Church Policy (Zero Tolerance of VAWC in Church Communities) and Code of Conduct; and the development and roll out of a Pacific regional faith-based strategy to ending violence against women and girls.
- Supporting Tonga’s faith leaders to address violence against women and girls:** Supporting faith leaders advocacy initiatives to stop violence against women and girls with the **Tonga National Council of Churches** through the PCC regional One Voice Break the Silence Sunday multi-media campaign. This national campaign in Tonga features faith-based leaders of different denominations advocating for healthy families and communities and the prevention of violence against women and girls by delivering strong messages to faith communities on the necessity of education, attention and response to stop violence against women and girls.

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

- Community of Practice to promote knowledge sharing and coordination:** Linking Tongan 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 Tonga 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 Tonga** to ensure the highest quality programming; increased understanding of evidence-based approaches to prevention informed by Pacific and global evidence and practice; and the development of a sustainable cadre of experts on violence against women and girls prevention and response in Tonga and the Pacific region.

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

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

2020-2021 initiatives supported by UN Women include:

Supporting national coordination mechanisms

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





- Linking, where possible, Tongan partners within regional processes on gender-based violence counselling, including convenings to discuss technical implementation of the Family Protection Act requirements on counselling such as standards, accreditation and training procedures. This will be achieved by developing regional, standardised and inclusive training that is accredited, for counsellors working with survivors and perpetrators of violence.
- Providing technical support to service providers to **strengthen their capacities to respond to gender-based violence cases.**

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

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

Tongan non-state actors (NSAs), including civil society organisations and women's groups, also benefit from Pacific Partnership through **strategic engagement, capacity development for monitoring the implementation of national commitments on gender equality, and projects support through small grants.** The PIFS' NSA component of the Pacific Partnership programme works in close concert with the overall approaches supported by UN Women. In 2020, the NSA programme supported the **active engagement of the Civil Society Forum of Tonga, the Tonga Family Health Support, as well as representatives of women's CSOs and disability CSOs** 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.

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

ⁱⁱIbid.

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

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

BACKGROUND

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

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

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

