



Cook Islands

2012 Gender Profile



SPC
Secretariat
of the Pacific
Community



COOK ISLANDS

2012 Gender Profile

Gender and Development Division, Ministry of Internal Affairs

<http://www.intaff.gov.ck>

Cook Islands Statistics Office, Ministry of Finance and Economic Management

<http://www.mfem.gov.ck>

Government of the Cook Islands

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

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Much of the policy and background information about the indicators used in this report has been taken from the United Nations annual publication 'The World's Women, Trends and Statistics' over various years.

Term used: *Pa Enua* is a Cook Islands Maori term that refers to outer island communities in the Southern and Northern island groups of the Cook Islands.

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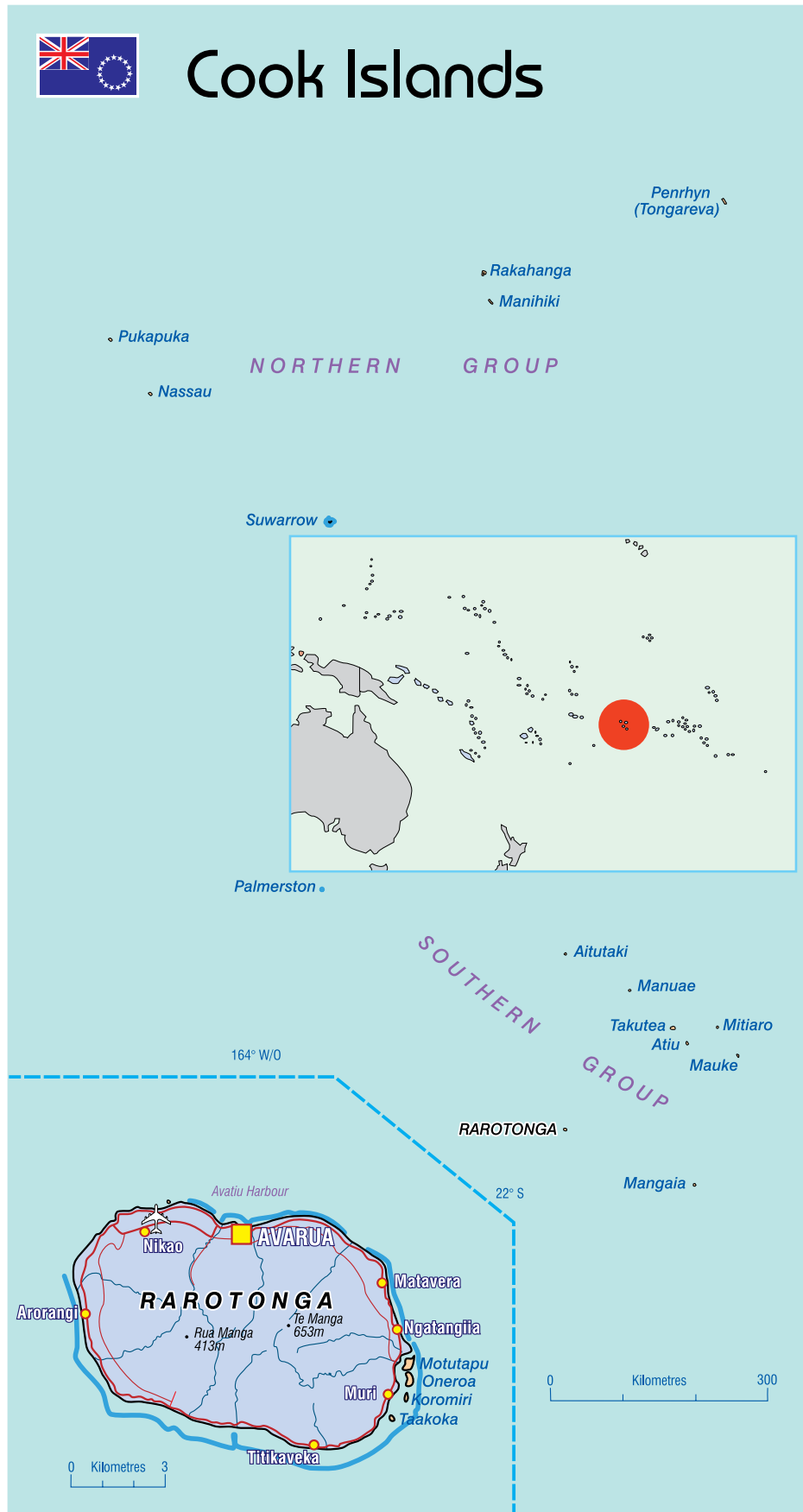


Figure 1: The Cook Islands

Source: SPC

Foreword

Message from the Minister of Finance and Economic Management

The first decade of the new millennium was challenging for the Cook Islands as a nation. The continued migration of families to the job markets of New Zealand and Australia after the government reform programme of the mid 1990s, and the movement of people from the *Pa Enua* to the main centre of Rarotonga, have changed the composition and location of our population and challenged the delivery of core services to remote islands and atolls. The global economic crisis of 2008 affected the mainstays of the economy — tourism, agriculture and financial services — but the economy remained resilient and recovered strongly. This was combined with the millions of dollars required for repairs after two severe tropical cyclones.

Our people have risen to the challenges. Forever resourceful and creative, drawing on our culture and tradition, the self-sufficiency and resilience of Cook Islanders is evident. Significant achievements have been made, particularly in education, health and the expansion of employment opportunities. The Cook Islands is on track to achieving all of its Millennium Development Goals by 2015 — one of the few Pacific Island countries to do so.

The government initiatives are guided by the *Te Kaveinga Nui*, our National Sustainable Development Plan, which sets the strategies and implementation framework for 2011–2015. *Te Kaveinga Nui* embodies the national vision for 2020 ‘to enjoy the highest quality of life consistent with the aspirations of our people, and in harmony with our culture and environment’. We will not achieve this vision without narrowing the gender gap and improving the status of women.

The gender gap is narrowing, with successes in health, education and employment. Progress has been made in addressing major issues of concern to society such as violence against women, and there has been an expansion in the coverage of the social welfare system. Women have driven much of this progress through their much broader, prominent roles in social and family life. Acknowledging and supporting these varied roles of women should figure prominently in reform agendas.

For each of the 10 areas covered in this report — population; households, families and housing; education; work and employment; public life and decision-making; legislation and governance; environment; poverty; information and communications; and violence against women — statistics were identified, compiled and analysed to bring to light differences in the status of girls and boys, women and men. Every effort was made to make the findings easy to interpret, with the extensive use of graphical presentation and non-technical language.

This report highlights the changes that Cook Islanders have experienced since the start of the millennium through an engendered analysis of statistics. The government recognises that more work is needed. In some areas the pace of change has slowed and in others work has stalled; and in still others we have no measures of change. However, the government is committed to making more progress to meet the specific needs of Cook Islands women and men. Many challenges remain, including providing a secure economic base for the country, dealing with environmental issues, and securing family safety. The policy implications highlighted in this report provide a thorough assessment of our progress in achieving gender equality in the Cook Islands with examples of positive outcomes and identifying the areas where more effort is needed.



Honourable Mark Brown
Minister of Finance and Economic Management



Message from the Minister of Internal Affairs

The availability and accessibility of good quality and timely gender statistics is integral to the policy design and evaluation process; the development of research agendas; and the decision-making processes of governments, organisations and communities. As gender policy and research agendas evolve, so too does the demand for statistical information.

The Cook Islands Gender Profile has been developed by stakeholders in the Cook Islands Government, and in non-government organisations. It is based on a shared understanding of the policy imperatives, and agreement on priority areas for policy development. It outlines the policy and regulatory actions required to accelerate progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women.

This profile used a range of statistical information, drawing heavily on the 2011 Census of Population and Housing, and statistical information on health, education, welfare, finance and local government. It provides a start for gender analysts to understand the causes and processes undermining gender equality. There are considerable data gaps, and work is ongoing to develop collection and compilation processes to produce statistical indicators that will allow for a fully informed gender analysis. This is a medium-term objective and joint initiative of both the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

This is the first profile of women and men and their status in our society that has been systematically collected, compiled, processed and analysed by the Cook Islands Government; this type of report will become a regular output of the national statistical system in the future as training and capacity building initiatives are implemented in the national statistical system and with non-governmental organisation implementing partners.

The Cook Islands Gender Profile 2012 is intended to contribute to the assessments being undertaken for the implementation of the Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. It addresses critical aspects of life: population, families, mortality, education, work, power and decision-making, violence against women, environment and poverty. It finds that progress in ensuring the equal status of women and men has been made in many areas, including school enrolment, health and economic participation. At the same time, it makes clear that much more needs to be done, in particular to close the gender gap in public life and to prevent the many forms of violence to which women are subjected.

We take pride in our strong cultural beliefs and traditions that ensure the status of women and enable their voices to be heard. But we have to do more. The cash-driven economy does not guarantee women the same rights and privileges as our traditional system, and the options for using customary protocols in the global economy are limited. It is my hope that this profile will be used to promote work to create an enabling socioeconomic environment that guarantees equal treatment of all women and men, and maintains the pristine quality of our unique but highly vulnerable physical environment. The gaps identified in the Cook Islands Gender Profile 2012 should be addressed to better support the development of policies to implement a basic human rights principle: gender equality.



Honourable Nandi Glassie
Minister of Internal Affairs



Acknowledgements

Message to the Report Contributors

This report was prepared by the Government of the Cook Islands and the Human Development Programme of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). I should like to thank the many people and organisations that provided help and support during the writing of this report.

This report reflects the dedication and professionalism of those working for sustainable development in the Cook Islands. The report reflects their efforts in providing policy and strategy information, as well as their analysis of progress made and the way forward towards achieving equal participation in, and realising the benefits from, sustainable development. This report relies heavily on the statistical information provided by the Cook Islands Statistics Office.

Thanks go to the government ministries and legislative bodies that provided a wide range of statistics for this report, as well as guidance in its final drafting. The Gender and Development Division within the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Cook Islands Government initiated this project, and this report reflects their knowledge, efforts and dedication.

We also thank the numerous technical experts and development partners in the Cook Islands who worked with SPC staff and provided valuable comments during the final stages of drafting. Without the constructive inputs of these individuals this report would not be as well rounded.

This report is all the richer for the many and varied contributions that participants made during the stakeholder consultation workshop, and we thank them for giving of their time and their expert advice.

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For more information visit <http://www.pacificwomen.org>.



Fabian McKinnon,
Deputy Director-General, Programmes, SPC

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Abbreviations

CITTI	Cook Islands Tertiary Training Institute
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CISO	Cook Islands Statistics Office
CPRD	Convention on the Rights of People Living with Disability
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ECE	early childhood education
FHSS	Family Health and Safety Study, Cook Islands
GADD	Gender and Development Division
GDP	gross domestic product
GER	gross enrolment ratio
GPI	gender parity index
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
ICT	information and communication technology
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NCD	non-communicable disease
NER	net enrolment ratio
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NZD	New Zealand dollar
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PSC	Public Service Commission of the Cook Islands
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
USP	University of the South Pacific
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

Purpose of this report

This report presents and analyses statistics on the status of the people of the Cook Islands. This report looks at statistical data and indicators, and research and reports about the Cook Islands, and analyses these in terms of social and economic differences between women and men. It provides the information required to develop and review policies that address the possible different impacts of policies or programmes and laws on women and men. This will then help ensure that the planned outcomes — as designed and implemented — are equal for all Cook Islanders. Sustainable social and economic growth and development is only possible if both women and men are fully involved and benefit equally.

This report does not contain all of the information required to fully assess the situation of the people of the Cook Islands. For example, it was not possible to obtain sex-disaggregated data about health, crime and justice when this report was drafted. Some information — for example, about access to and control over resources such as land and housing, or access to credit — is not readily available. These statistics will be compiled and reported on in the monitoring and evaluation framework for gender mainstreaming from 2015.

The report has been written for policy-makers and planners in the Cook Islands, to support policy review and development, and future monitoring and evaluation. The statistical data and indicators used are part of a broad framework of gender statistics being promoted in the Pacific Islands region by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). The Gender and Development Division in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, with help from the Cook Islands Statistics Office (CISO) in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, will continue to update the statistical indicators used in this report and make the information available to analysts and researchers.

This report explores gender issues under 10 topics, in keeping with the regional framework, with additional analysis of important issues to the Cook Islands (excluding health, and crime and justice). These topics have been chosen because of their relevance to current policy issues and the availability of statistical data. The themes are

1. Population
2. Households, families and housing
3. Education
4. Work and employment
5. Public life and decision-making
6. Legislation and governance
7. Environment
8. Poverty
9. Information and communications
10. Violence against women

What is gender?

Sex = male and female

Gender = masculine and feminine

Gender relates to the roles women and men, girls and boys, play in public and private life and where similarities and differences exist. It is not the same as sex (biological characteristics of women and men) and it is not the same as women. Gender is determined by the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in society and in public and private life. Gender is not about women only; it is about both men and women.

Information is presented under each topic, with an emphasis on describing key findings through clear text and graphs based on statistical data and indicators. The information is linked to current or possible government policies and priorities.

Every attempt has been made to ensure the information is not misleading, and is factually correct. Any conclusions are based on the data and stakeholders' expert knowledge. The publication avoids detailed technical explanations in an attempt to make it engaging and interesting for non-statisticians.

Many of the conclusions will be expected, but past presentations may not have been grounded in statistics, to enable evidence-based decision-making. It is hoped that the analysis is of value and stimulates further research and inquiry into the complex issues surrounding gender and the development or revision of gender-inclusive policies, programmes and plans. The policy implications were developed with input from a group of gender and subject matter experts.

Availability of gender statistics

The majority of Cook Islands government agencies are able to produce sex-disaggregated statistics on topics such as population, births and deaths, school enrolment, employment, hospital patients and parliamentary representation. Sex-disaggregated statistics are also becoming available in additional areas. For example, statistics on violence against women were released in 2014, and a chapter has been added to this report based on *Te Ata O Te Ngakau*, The Cook Islands Family Health and Safety Study, because of the importance of this issue in achieving gender equality.

Important developments within the Pacific Islands region and internationally have improved the concepts and definitions used for data collection and analysis. For example, the Statistics for Development Division at SPC worked with national statistics offices in the region to adopt a standard questionnaire for use in the census of population and housing. This has, for the first time, ensured consistency in definitions of employment and unemployment, as well as education, disability and fertility. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) began annual monitoring of progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and countries are providing regular updates to the regional MDG database maintained by PIFS. Finally, and of direct relevance to gender statistics and analysis, PIFS is developing a reporting framework to monitor progress towards achieving the 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration across the Pacific Islands region.

The collection of reliable statistical information is required by many donors when funding projects and programmes, and is now undertaken more widely by governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In addition, governments are working more closely with NGOs as implementing partners within a coordinated policy framework. In the Cook Islands, such partnerships exist in areas such as women's civic education, reproductive health, technical and vocational education, counselling services and training and non-communicable diseases. This has increased the coverage, accuracy and reliability of statistical information in these areas.

But challenges remain. Statistics are not available or are not detailed enough for a thorough gender analysis of topics such as international migration, household decision-making, access to and control of resources, hours in unpaid work in the home, access to and use of information and communication technologies, the informal sector, and informal employment. The same is true of data on occupations, wages, unemployment and underemployment, access to credit, and household poverty. In sum, while considerable progress has been made in expanding the range of statistical information available for gender analysis, there are still areas where information is very limited in the Cook Islands.

The Cook Islands

Cook Islands comprises 15 islands with an area of 240 square kilometres (km²), spread over 2.2 million km² of ocean. The Cook Islands consists of two main groups in the north and in the south. The Southern Group is made up of nine high islands that are mainly volcanic, although some are virtually atolls. The majority of the population lives in the Southern Group. The Northern Group comprises six true atolls. Rarotonga is the main and largest of the islands, and serves as the hub of the Cook Islands; it is the site of the main urban centre of Avarua. For statistical purposes, all of the island of Rarotonga is considered urban, while all other *Pa Enua* islands are rural.

The lack of physical resources and large distances combined with a small population results in high service delivery and high economic development costs. The economy is dominated by the services sector, which is based mainly on tourism and the offshore banking industry, with market-oriented agricultural production the main source of income on some islands.

Indigenous Cook Islanders make up most of the population, with a steadily increasing population of expatriates, largely composed of New Zealanders, Filipinos and people from other Pacific Island countries, notably Fiji. English and Cook Islands Maori are the official languages, with Cook Islands Maori the main language of communication. Culturally, the population is mostly homogenous, with the traditional patrilineal and chief or clan system still the main social structures, but with individual differences between islands. As in other Polynesian societies, women have status in relation to their roles as wives and mothers.

The Government of the Cook Islands is modelled after the British Westminster parliamentary system with a bi-cameral legislature composed of two houses: the House of Ariki (Chiefs) and the Parliament. The Prime Minister is elected by popular vote. In all other islands the Island Council is elected by popular vote.

The Cook Islands is an independent nation in free association with New Zealand for the functions of defence and foreign affairs, although for the latter the Cook Islands is largely independent. The free association means that all Cook Islanders are New Zealand citizens.

Population



Policy implications

The Cook Islands faces a number of challenges as it seeks to maintain a stable population and cope with the increasing proportion of older people. There are slightly more males in the Cook Islands than females, although there are more females than males aged 25–44 years, while in rural areas there are more women than men aged over 65 years.

The urban Rarotonga population is younger than the rural *Pa Enua* population, and the population in rural areas is declining.

There are more males living in the *Pa Enua* than females, who are more likely to live in Rarotonga than the *Pa Enua*.

1. Population

Statistical indicators

Indicator	2001		2006		2011	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Average annual rate of population change			0.2%	0.7%	-0.9%	0.0%
Rate of population change (rural)			-2.2%	-1.3%	-3.3%	-2.6%
Rate of population change (urban)			1.5%	1.7%	0.2%	1.1%
Sex ratio (males per 100 females)	106.7		104.3		100.1	
Sex ratio – urban	105.3		104.2		99.7	
Sex ratio – rural	109.2		104.4		101.0	
Proportion of the population, under age 15	18%	16%	16%	15%	15%	14%
Proportion of the population over age 65	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%	5%
Life expectancy at birth	76	69.4	73	71		
Births per year			161	143	139	123
Deaths per year					40	32

Source: CISO, 2012, Cook Islands Ministry of Health, 2014.

A young population with declining fertility

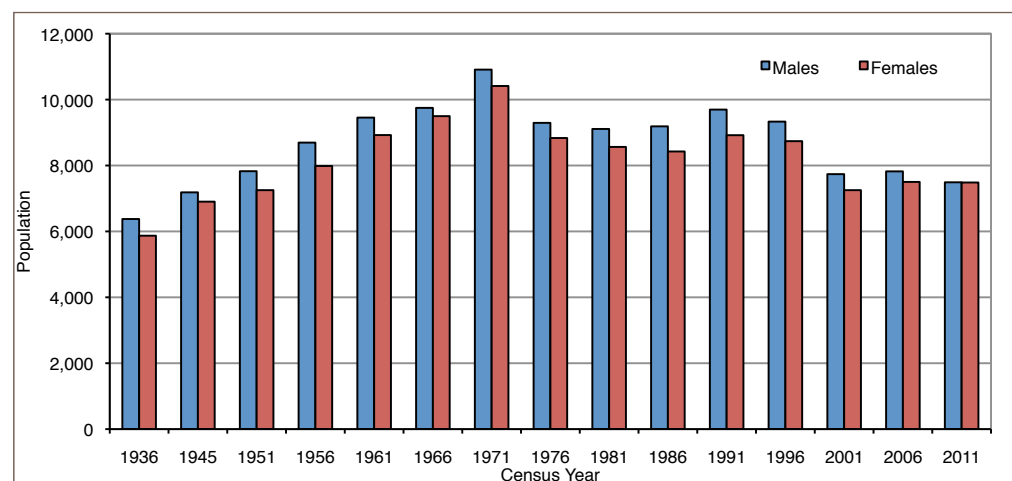


Figure 2: Cook Islands population, 1936–2011

Source: CISO, 2012.

Cook Islanders are New Zealand citizens and as such, are free to migrate to and live in New Zealand or Australia. Over the past 40 years the size and composition of the Cook Islands population has been shaped by emigration (people leaving the Cook Islands) and to some extent people moving from the *Pa Enua* to Rarotonga. These changes and trends in population growth (or decline) and distribution have affected living conditions across the Cook Islands. The population decline during 1971–1976 shows the outmigration of people after the international airport opened in 1974. The second major mass exodus occurred during 1996–2001, when government restructuring and economic reforms resulted in many families emigrating to New Zealand and Australia. In recent years the government has encouraged families to return through an incentive-based resettlement programme. The programme, in combination with an expanding range of economic opportunities in the Cook Islands, and an increasing migrant worker population, seems to have slowed the population loss.

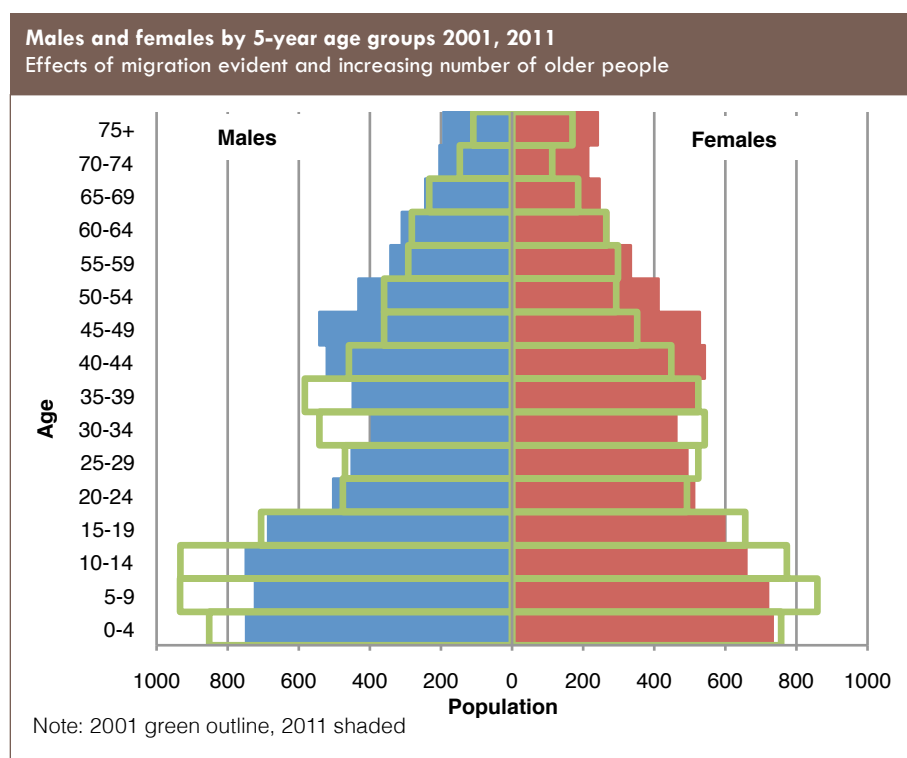


Figure 3: Cook Islands population, 2001 and 2011

Source: CISO, 2002, 2012.

The age and sex composition of the population shows the combined effects of declining fertility — there are fewer women in the Cook Islands having fewer children — and migration, especially for young women and men. In 2001, females aged less than 15 years made up 16% of the population, compared with 14% in 2011, while the proportion of young males aged less than 15 years decreased from 18% to 15% over the same 10-year period. The Cook Islands population is aging, 9% of the population was aged 65 years and over in 2011, compared with 3% in 2001; in 2011, women over 65 made up 5% of the population. These two factors mean the focus of caregiving is shifting from children to older people, although the proportion of the population aged less than 15 years remains significant. Internal migration is also having an impact, with more people choosing to live in Rarotonga than in the *Pa Enua*. The population of Rarotonga is 2.4 times larger than the *Pa Enua* for both women and men.

The population pyramid shows the number of people in five-year age groups by sex, and is used to provide a picture of the age and sex composition of populations. The 2011 pyramid for the Cook Islands has a narrowing in the base for the 0–14 year age group, showing the declining number of births, followed by a noticeable narrowing in the years through 30–39 for males showing the effects of out-migration. There are more men and women aged over 40 years in 2011 compared with 2001, with just over one-third (37%) of both males and females aged over 40. The population pyramid shows that the population growth rate has decreased since 2001. The pyramid indicates that there are fewer people in the 30–39 year age group in 2011 compared with 2001. This is most likely caused by the international migration of people aged 20–39 over the last 10 years.

In 2001, 62% of men and 63% of women lived in Rarotonga; by 2011, this had increased to 70% of both men and women. During this period, the population density in Rarotonga increased by 13%, while the number of people per km² in the *Pa Enua* decreased by 29%, from 33 people per km² to 26 people per km². This has implications for people who remain in the *Pa Enua*, particularly those who care for older people in remote island communities.

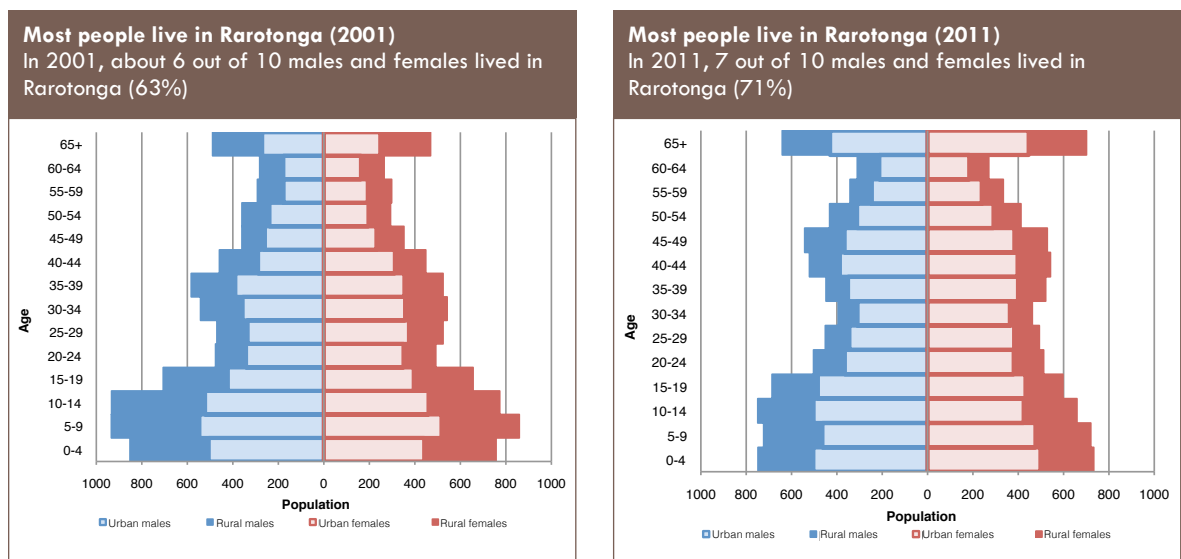


Figure 4: Cook Islands population, 2001 and 2011

Source: CISO 2002, 2012.

There have been more males than females in the Cook Islands since record keeping began in the late 19th Century, but the sex ratio has decreased over the past 10 years (2001–2011). In 2001 there were 107 males for every 100 females, but by 2011 the sex ratio was 100.4, meaning the number of men and women was almost identical. But there are differences in the 2011 sex ratios between different areas and for different age groups. There are more females than males aged 30–44, presumably because more males in this age group migrate than females. The sex ratios for the *Pa Enua* (Northern Group and Southern Group in Figure 5) show that women aged 30–44 and women aged 60 years and over outnumber men. For all other age groups men outnumber women (the sex ratio is less than 100).

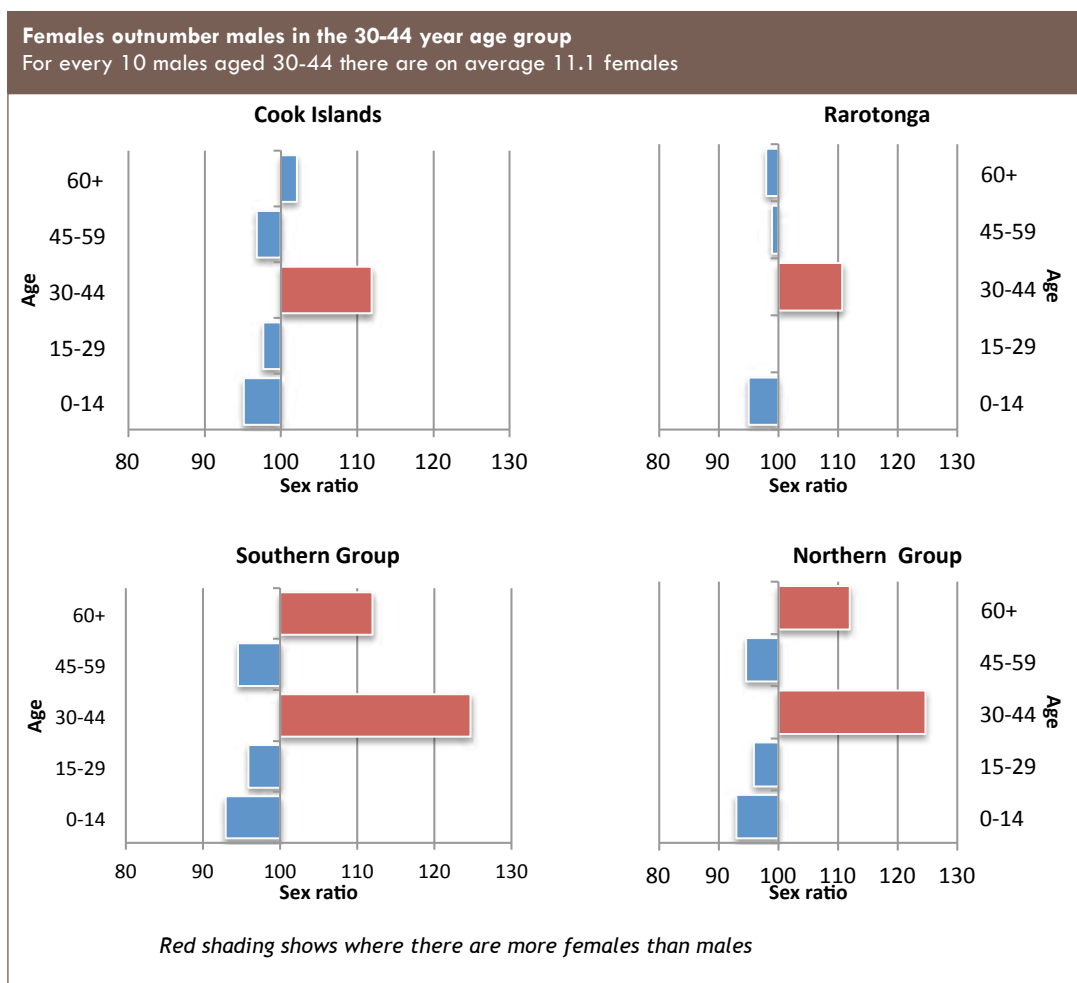


Figure 5: Sex ratio (number of females for every 100 males), Cook Islands, 2011

Source: CISO, 2012.

The population of the Cook Islands has been around 15,000 since 2001; population growth from natural increase or births is balanced by out-migration. A large proportion (29%) of the Cook Islands population is less than 15 years of age; the median age in 2011 was 30 years (29 for males and 30 for females).

The Ministry of Justice and Lands birth registration records show there were 259 births in the Cook Islands in 2012; the trend since 2006 shows a slight annual decrease. More boys are born than girls, with an average of 12 more boys born per year since 2006 than girls.

Since 2008, about 10% of all mothers were 15–19 years of age, and about 40% were under 25. A small number of births were reported each year to women older than 45 (0 in 2009, four in 2010, and one in 2012). Both young and older mothers face significant health risks for themselves, and often for their babies as well.

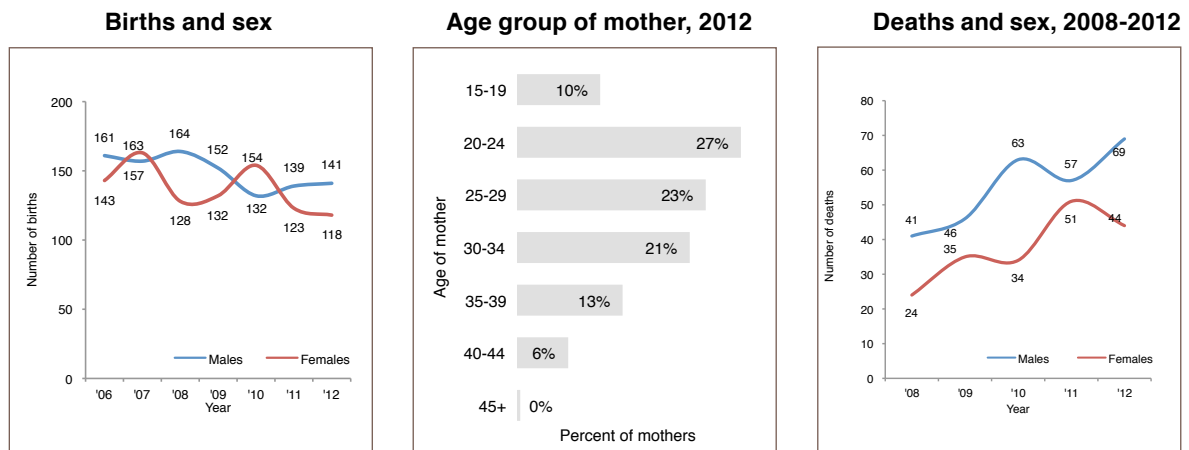


Figure 6: Sex, number of births and deaths per year, 2006–2012; and age group of mother, Cook Islands, 2012

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Health, 2014.

Life expectancy at birth is an estimation of the average number of years a newborn child can expect to live given the current levels of mortality in a country. It is an indicator that can provide a picture of the overall health status of a population, and enables the longevity of women and men to be investigated separately. In 1961, the life expectancy of a male at birth was 61 years, and the life expectancy of a female 63 years. Life expectancy for males increased to 68 years in 2001, 70 years for in 2006, and 74 years in 2011; the life expectancy of females increased to 74 years in 2001, 76 in 2006, and 78 in 2011.

Globally, women generally live longer than men as a result of biological advantages that begin at birth. However, societal, cultural and economic factors can affect the natural longevity advantage that females have over males — studies show that women’s exposure to risks associated with childbirth and disease can reduce this advantage. This does not seem to be the case in the Cook Islands although it is very difficult to tell because chronically ill Cook Islanders of all ages, including many elderly and high-risk pregnant women, migrate to New Zealand for long-term treatment; statistics are not available regarding their health outcomes.

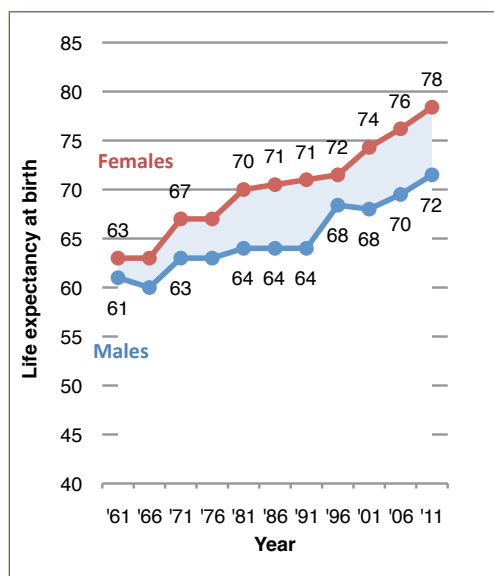


Figure 7: Cook Islands life expectancy at birth for males and females, 1961–2011

Source: CISO, 2014.

In 2012, 111 deaths¹ were reported in the health information system of the Cook Islands Ministry of Health, including 68 males (61%) and 43 females (39%); only one was less than 1 year old. On average, since 2008, 60% of deaths recorded in the Cook Islands were male and 40% were female (residents only). In 2012 non-communicable diseases (NCDs), in particular heart disease and hypertension, were the main causes of deaths for both sexes, while lung and prostate cancer were a significant cause of death for men.

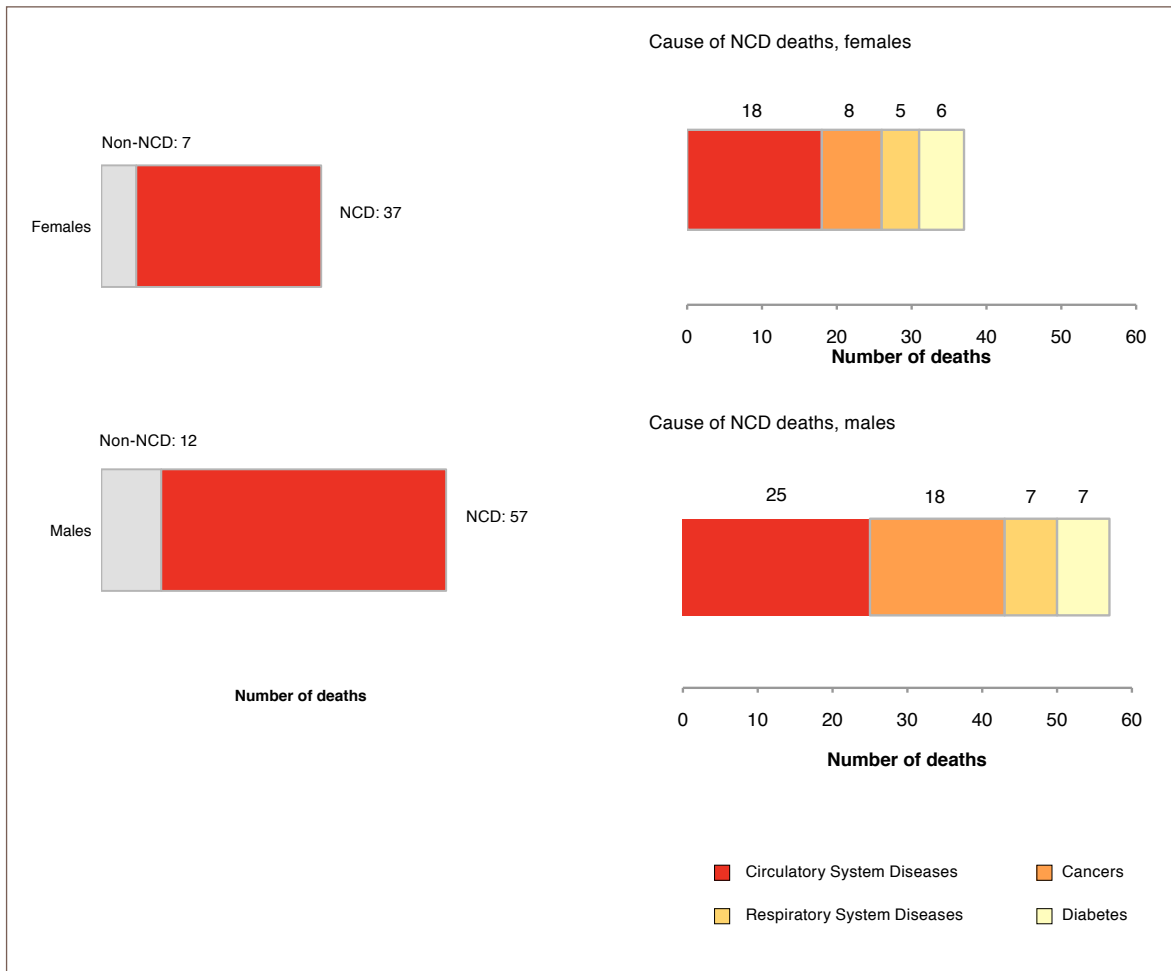


Figure 8: Causes of death for males and females in the Cook Islands, 2012

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Health, 2014.

1 Deaths of people resident in the Cook Islands only.

A net loss of population due to international migration

The movement of people from one place to another is as old as humankind itself. These movements are influenced by socioeconomic, political and demographic circumstances. The migration of people across borders is difficult to measure in real time, especially in the Cook Islands, where it is difficult to accurately collect statistics on the number of Cook Islanders that leave permanently. Consequently, the information on international migration is based on the census. In 2006, it was estimated that almost 100 people per year left the Cook Islands, mostly for post-secondary studies and work.

Table 1: Distribution of the Cook Islands resident population in 2011

Island/Region	Number of people aged under 14 years		Number of people aged 15–59 years		Number of people aged over 60 years	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Cook Islands	2,220	2,112	4,319	4,401	951	971
Urban	1,471	1,398	3,164	3,266	643	630
Rural	749	714	1,155	1,135	308	341
Southern Group	2,008	1,897	4,003	4,132	902	920
Rarotonga	1,471	1,398	3,164	3,266	643	630
Aitutaki	284	275	465	498	119	130
Mangaia	101	85	125	130	57	64
Atiu	74	78	114	118	40	44
Mauke	47	32	77	81	31	32
Mitiaro	31	29	58	39	12	20
Northern Group	212	215	316	269	49	51
Manihiki	43	28	82	63	10	12
Penrhyn	50	38	59	48	10	8
Rakahanga	6	12	26	22	6	5
Pukapuka	84	106	118	105	19	19
Nassau	18	17	17	18	1	2
Palmerston	11	14	14	13	3	5

Source: CISO, 2012.

Policy implications

The Cook Islands faces a major challenge resulting from the loss of population as a consequence of international migration, combined with declining rates of population growth because of decreasing fertility. This is a challenge for the delivery of basic social services such as health and education, as well as ensuring that everyone in the Cook Islands has the opportunity for a sustainable livelihood through economic activity and access to land and other productive resources. In an effort to prevent the birth rate from falling further, in 2012 the government increased the one-off 'new born' welfare payment to all mothers from NZD 300 to NZD 1,000². Anecdotal information suggests that *Pa Enua* women are benefitting from this payment.

The population structure presents real challenges if policies to limit out-migration are to be implemented. Young people migrate for various reasons — in search of education, sporting opportunities or work; and to join other family members — and must cope with a number of major life changes, which can include leaving school, leaving the parental home and living with other relatives, finding work or a reliable livelihood, managing new health risks, and taking part in the political system. The population data presented here are insufficient

² NZD = New Zealand dollar

to show how the life changes that youth experience differ for young women and men, but we will return to this theme in other chapters. Anecdotal information suggests that many parents who emigrate or live overseas place their children with Cook Islands relatives until the children's schooling is complete: school enrolment is not decreasing at the same rate as the population. This has implications for not only these children but their caregivers and parents. Older people migrate for medical care and to be with other family members. Recent changes in New Zealand now mean that Cook Islanders are eligible to receive a New Zealand pension in the Cook Islands. This could encourage older Cook Islanders to return home, as well as easing some financial pressure on those living in the Cook Islands, as they can now access New Zealand superannuation. Successive Cook Island governments have increased the pension for older people in the Cook Islands, and from 2015 those aged over 70 will be entitled to apply for a pension of NZD 640 per month.

The rate of urbanisation, or the growth of the population in Rarotonga, needs to be addressed through a range of policy initiatives to ensure there is adequate housing and basic services in Rarotonga, while creating opportunities and maintaining decent living conditions for families in the *Pa Enua*. In some *Pa Enua* islands the Island Council has introduced rotational work schemes to provide much needed cash income for families. There is limited evidence regarding internal migration and the reasons why people are moving to Rarotonga — anecdotally, people move because of educational opportunities for their children, mothers come to give birth and do not return, and young people want to experience the urban life style. But in terms of developing policy to assist these people, or provide opportunities for them in the *Pa Enua*, there has been no research to provide evidence about the causal 'push' and 'pull' factors required.

As the population ages, their needs — including those for health care for age-associated diseases, economic security, changing family structures and care systems, and mobility — must be catered to, so they can continue to actively contribute to their community and society. Services need to be provided for the health and welfare of elderly women and their care givers in the *Pa Enua*.

The Cook Islands Action Plan to Prevent and Control NCDs 2009–2014 contains six objectives to implement the community-based, comprehensive, integrated, multi-sectoral approach needed to reduce the incidence and impact of NCDs on individuals, families, communities and the country. It noted that the 2004 prevalence of hypertension was 30% in adults and almost one in four adults (24%) had diabetes, with low levels of fruit and vegetable consumption and low levels of physical exercise. The very high levels of overweight (89%) and obesity (61%) among participants were similar to those found through previous screening activities held in the Cook Islands. The Action Plan addresses three of four priority risk factors (alcohol use, food and nutrition (healthier eating), and physical activity), with the reduction of tobacco use included in a separate strategy (some tobacco-related activities are contained in the strategy). The range of interventions include legislative reform and enforcement, school curriculum changes and activities, community and NGO activities, media campaigns, clinical interventions, rehabilitation, and pharmaceutical supplies and protocols. A national NCD prevalence assessment (WHO STEPs survey, unpublished) was undertaken in 2013 to measure progress in implementing the action plan.

Households, families and housing



Policy implications

Most households headed by women consist of women living on their own, usually older widowed women or women with children.

2. Households, families and housing

Statistical indicators and information

Indicator	2001		2006		2011	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Household head (%)	76%	24%	73%	27%	74%	26%
Urban	75%	25%	73%	27%	74%	26%
Rural	79%	21%	78%	22%	74%	27%
Singulate mean age at marriage (years)	32.0	31.0	31.7	31.4		
Annual number of marriages	92	92	66	66	85	85
Proportion pop. aged 15-19 ever married (legal)	<1%*	1%*	1%	2%	<1%	<1%
Proportion pop. aged 15-19 ever married (consensually)			2%	3%	4%	5%
Proportion population aged 60+, widowed	15%	38%	16%	34%	12%	33%
Proportion population aged 45+ never married	12%	7%	4%	2%	12%	9%
Proportion pop. aged 15-59, separated/divorced	4%	4%	3%	3%	1%	2%
Population without sufficient living space (more than 2 people per room)			6%	6%	7%	7%
Households living in privately owned housing					71%	72%
Legal age for marriage	18	16	Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act, 1988. §. 428 (a). Custom marriages are exempt from the age requirements.			

*There was no separate category for de facto or consensual marriage in the 2001 census.

Source: CISO, 2002, 2007, 2012.

Women head one in four households

A household is defined as a group of people who usually live together and share resources such as food and shelter, or one person living alone in a housing unit.

The proportion of households headed by women is increasing worldwide, and much of the interest in household headship arises because of perceived differences between households headed by women and those headed by men. Household surveys such as the census collect information about the head of the household and how household members are related to this person (by marriage or kinship), or whether they are not related. The sex of the head of the household is used as a proxy to provide information about the differences between women and men because information on resource sharing among household members is not generally collected: we are not able to carry out detailed analysis of the socioeconomic status of household members based on the census information provided. This means that the category 'households headed by women' is used as a proxy for missing sex-disaggregated data, and the characteristics of these households are compared with those headed by men.

Women become heads of households because they have been widowed, abandoned, divorced, their husbands have migrated (either temporarily for work, or permanently), or because they are the oldest person in the household. Some women are heads of the household because their husbands suffer from a disability or chronic disease, including disability. Finally in some countries women are heads of their households because of

matrilineal customs and traditions. Demographic, cultural, and economic changes are transforming traditionally held views regarding household heads, and in particular the concept of women as heads of households.

In the Cook Islands 2011 Census of Population and Housing, the head of the household was the person who declared himself or herself in charge of the household. The census data show that most households are headed by men, but an increasing proportion are headed by women, especially in the *Pa Enua*.

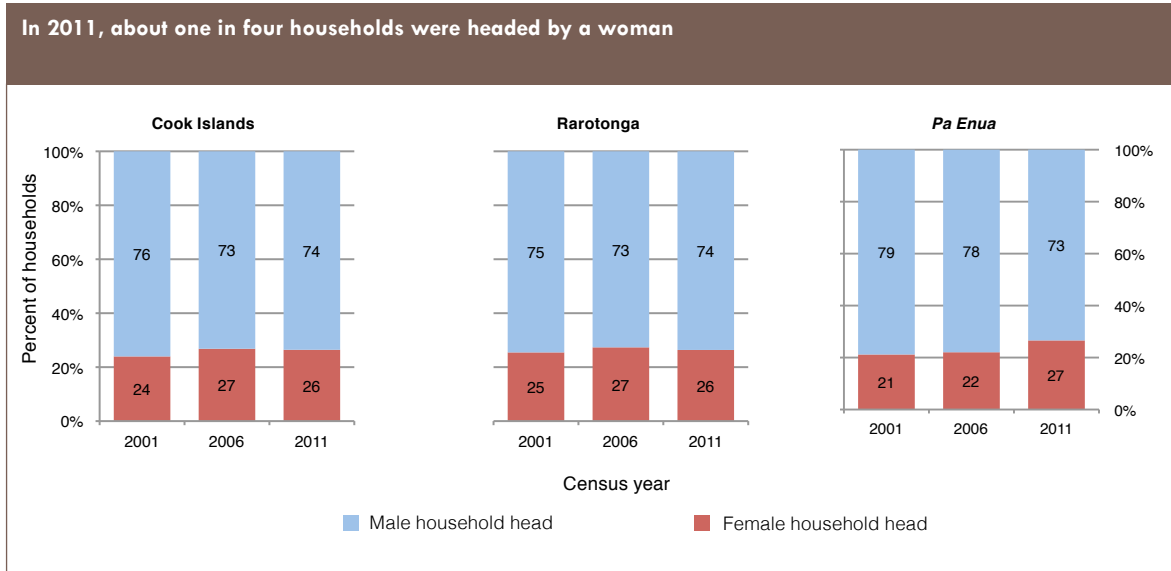


Figure 9: Sex of the head of the household, Cook Islands, 2001–2011

Source: CISO, 2002, 2007, 2012.

The 2006 census shows that throughout the Cook Islands, households headed by women were likely to be one-person households; in 2006 24% of households headed by women had just one person, which increased to 28% in 2011, with the increase taking place in Rarotonga. One-person households are considered vulnerable or at a social disadvantage associated with age. The risk of irregular or low income increases among young people, when unemployment is high, and jobs are typically casual, and in the late phase of working age, when unemployment increases. For elderly people living alone, the specifics of a country's welfare regime affects the degree of poverty. Many one-person households depend on social transfer payments, such as the old age or infirm pension. Research indicates that the combined disadvantages of low income – high dependence on public support, high unemployment and poor health – peak for people living alone and who are 40–55 years old.³

3 See Avramov 2002.

Table 2: Composition of households as a proportion of households headed by women and men, Cook Islands, 2006

Household composition	Cook Islands			Rarotonga			<i>Pa Enua</i>		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Couple	17	10	15	18	10	16	12	7	11
Couple + child(ren)	37	10	29	36	10	29	39	9	32
Couple + extended family	15	4	12	15	4	12	16	3	13
Couple + relative(s)	5	2	5	5	2	4	11	1	9
One person	15	24	17	15	23	17	12	26	15
Lone head + child(ren)	3	18	7	3	18	7	3	19	7
Lone head + extended family	4	19	8	4	19	8	3	26	8
Lone head + relative(s)	2	7	3	2	7	4	1	1	1
Non-related household	2	6	3	2	5	3	1	7	3
Unable to classify	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

The 2011 census household composition includes the separate *Pa Enua* island groups and shows that almost one-third of households headed by women in the Southern Group of islands comprise the female head of household and extended family members. There were a large number of these households in the Northern Group as well (26%), with an equal number of women living alone as heads of their own households. Throughout the *Pa Enua*, the most common type of household has a male as the household head, with a spouse and children.

Table 3: Composition of households as a proportion of households headed by women and men, Cook Islands, 2011

Household composition	Cook Islands			Rarotonga			Southern Group			Northern Group		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Couple	18	8	15	20	9	17	16	5	13	7	6	7
Couple + child(ren)	36	10	29	37	10	30	31	8	25	35	13	30
Couple + relative(s)	21	6	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	0
Couple + extended family	0	0	17	18	5	0	29	6	23	25	12	22
One person	15	28	19	15	29	19	15	27	18	17	24	19
Lone head + child(ren)	3	19	7	3	20	7	2	16	6	5	16	8
Lone head + relative(s)	4	22	3	2	5	7	1	5	2	4	4	4
Lone head + extended family	2	5	8	3	18	3	4	31	12	5	24	9
Non-related household	1	3	2	2	4	2	0	1	1	1	0	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

Almost all adults are married

Marriage – a social construct shared by all societies and people – is the act, ceremony or process that unites two people in a relationship that, in almost all cultures, is consensual and contractual, and is recognised as such by law. Marriage and union are in most cases a first step in establishing a family, which is often the essential unit in the composition and functioning of a society. Marriage and divorce are vital events that have important implications for the situation of women and men, for the organisation of society, and for population change. As key events in the formation and dissolution of families, marriage and divorce strongly influence many aspects of the lives of women and men, including their access to resources and opportunities and their living arrangements. In 2011, there were 85 marriages of residents, representing 2% of the population aged 15 and over legally married at the time of the census. Legal marriage is the predominant form of union: 22% of residents aged 15 and over in a union were living in a de facto relationship or consensual union compared with 78% living as legally married.

The Marriage Act, 2007 states that the minimum legal age for marriage for both males and females is 16, which the Committee on the Rights of the Child in the Fifty-ninth session in 2012 recommended be raised to 18 years and a bill to amend the Marriage Act will be presented to parliament in 2015. Census data make it possible to determine the proportion of the married population that is living in a consensual marriage (living together without being married legally or by custom). The proportion of young people aged 15–19 that is married or living in a union is very small, with 5% of females and 4% of males aged 15–19 reporting that they were married in 2011.

Women and men do not enter marriage at the same age. Throughout history, the average age at marriage for women has always been lower, sometimes considerably so, than the average age for men. This remains the case, although the average age of women at first marriage is now much higher, with young people worldwide marrying at older ages than their parents did. The average age at first marriage in the Cook Islands in 2006 (estimated from the census) is relatively high for the Pacific Islands region, with males marrying on average at 32, and females at 31: on average, men were one year older when they married than women.

The proportion of women aged 60 and over that is widowed is much higher than the proportion of widowed men. The proportion of men and women who are separated or divorced is about the same (2% in 2011). These two categories are of interest because these individuals are 'lone' heads of their households, and are responsible for providing for household members, or if elderly, reliant on family members who are living in the household or elsewhere for their care and support.

Marriage dissolution is not common

Under the law, a legally married couple is required to go through a two-year separation before filing for divorce through the court. In the Cook Islands, the legal requirements for divorce require fault-based provisions, but there is equal division of property after divorce. The law does not provide for 'no fault' divorce, and the fault-based criteria for divorce disadvantages women who are more likely to be in untenable situations and have difficulty establishing cruelty or adultery.

The Family Law Bill, to be tabled in parliament in 2015, will modernise and bring together the different pieces of legislation that currently govern family law. It will simplify marriage and de facto relationship dissolution and include a number of measures to prevent violence against women and domestic violence.

At the time of the 2011 census, 359 people declared themselves separated or legally divorced, just over 80% of whom lived in the urban area of Rarotonga. Women represented 55% of those who were separated and 54% of those who were divorced, and most lived in the urban area.

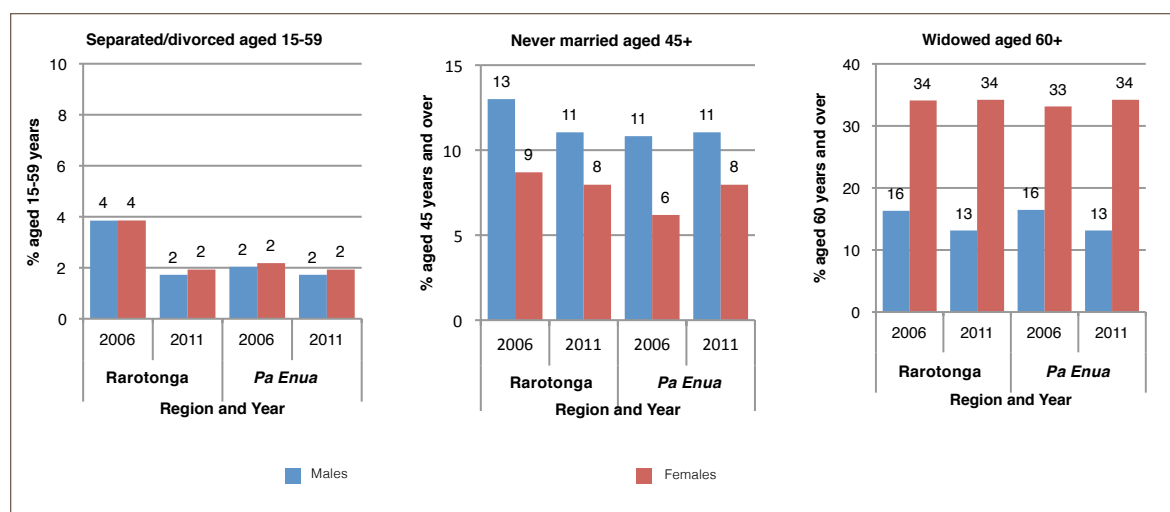


Figure 10: Proportion of women and men in selected marital status categories, Cook Islands, 2006 and 2011

Source: CISO, 2007, 2012.

Families

As spouses, parents and caregivers, women take on the primary responsibility for ensuring the proper functioning of families and providing everyday care and maintenance to household members. Preparing family meals, maintaining hygiene, caring for other family members and undertaking a myriad of other chores related to children consume much of the day for many women in the world. Men are becoming increasingly involved in the daily functioning of families, but it remains predominantly women's responsibility.

Table 4: Sex of household head, average number of people and composition of households, Cook Islands, 2006

Household composition	Cook Islands			Rarotonga			Pa Enua		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Couple	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Couple + child(ren)	4.5	4.0	4.5	4.5	4.0	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.5
Couple + relative(s)	3.8	4.1	3.8	3.8	4.1	3.8	3.8	3.0	3.8
Couple + extended family	6.6	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.8	6.7	6.3	5.0	6.3
One person	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Lone head + child(ren)	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.9	2.9	3.6	2.5	3.0
Lone head + relative(s)	3.2	3.7	3.5	3.3	3.8	3.5	3.0	2.0	2.8
Lone head + extended family	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.9	5.0	5.0
Non-related household	3.0	2.6	2.8	3.1	2.5	2.8	2.7	3.2	3.0
Unable to classify	3.6	2.3	3.2	2.7	2.3	2.5	5.3	0.0	5.3
Total	3.8	3.1	3.6	3.7	3.1	3.6	3.9	3.0	3.7

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

Table 5: Sex of household head, average number of people and composition of households, Cook Islands, 2011

Household composition	Cook Islands			Rarotonga			Southern Group			Northern Group		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Couple	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Couple + child(ren)	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.8	4.4	4.8
Couple + relative(s)	5.8	5.6	5.8	6.0	5.9	6.0	5.0	3.0	5.4	4.0	0.0	4.0
Couple + extended family	5.3	3.7	4.9	5.5	4.0	5.2	5.4	5.1	4.0	6.2	5.1	6.2
One person	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Lone head + child(ren)	2.9	2.7	2.7	3.0	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.8	2.8	2.8	3.0	2.8
Lone head + relative(s)	4.5	4.7	4.6	4.4	4.9	4.7	2.1	3.2	4.2	3.0	2.7	3.0
Lone head + extended family	2.8	3.1	2.9	2.8	3.1	3.0	4.1	4.3	2.9	6.0	4.8	6.0
Non-related household	2.8	2.4	2.6	2.6	2.4	2.5	3.5	2.3	2.8	4.7	0.0	4.7
Total	3.6	2.9	3.4	3.6	2.9	3.4	3.7	3.0	3.5	4.2	3.3	4.2

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

There is little difference in the average size of households, or the average number of people in each household based on the sex of the household head. In Rarotonga, households with a female head with no spouse or partner (one person) and children or other relatives, have slightly more people on average than similar households headed by men, but the difference is very small. This is also true in the Southern Group of the *Pa Enua*.

Housing

There is no public assistance housing programme in the Cook Islands; the government provides some housing for the relocation of families from the *Pa Enua* to Rarotonga, but this is not part of a public housing policy. The overall standard of housing is good, as measured by households that own their own home and do not live in crowded conditions. In 2011, 7% of males and females experienced overcrowding, an increase from 6% in 2006; overcrowding is more common in rural areas where housing has communal areas rather than separate rooms. Overcrowding is defined as having more than two people per habitable room in the house.

Another measure of the standard of housing is the proportion of households that have secure tenure on their house, meaning that the house is owned outright, or with a loan or mortgage. In 2011, just over 7 out of every 10 people lived in a house owned outright or with a mortgage or loan. There were no significant gender differences in dwelling tenure and sex of the household head, with 62% of households headed by women owned outright compared with 53% for households headed by men; this is most likely because these are older women who are heads of their household. Households headed by males were more likely to have a mortgage or loan for their dwelling (15% compared with 9% for households headed by women). Rates for secure tenure were higher in rural than urban areas, especially for households headed by women.

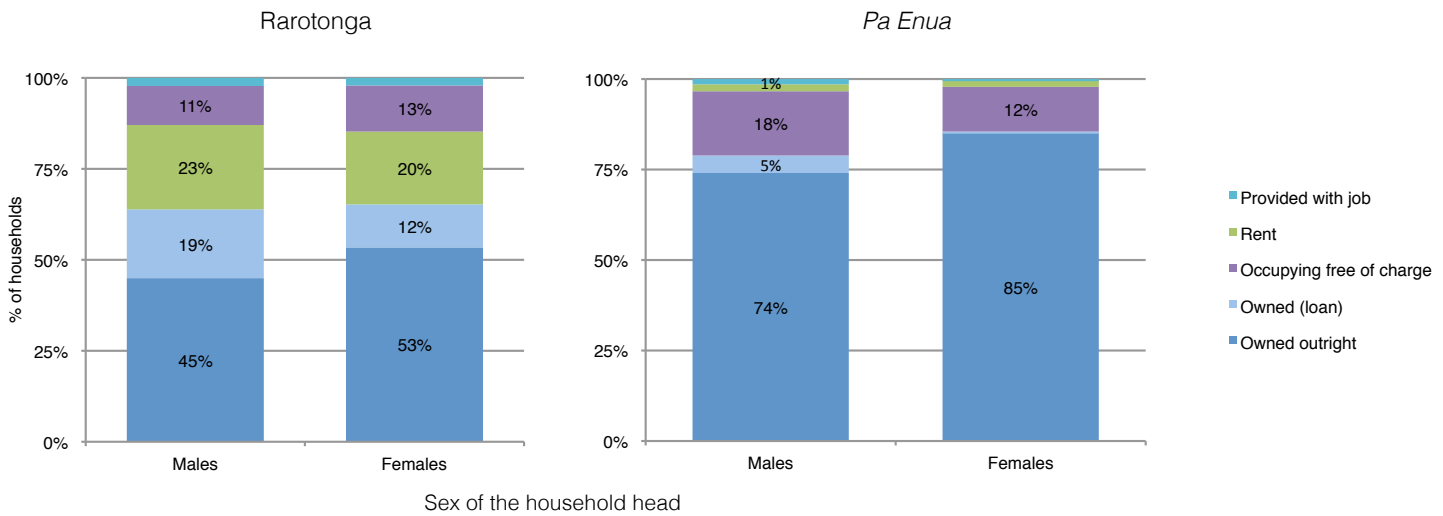


Figure 11: Tenure of dwellings and sex of household head, rural and urban areas, Cook Islands, 2011

Source: CISO, 2012.

Policy implications

Data on households and families can improve our understanding of the opportunities and resources available to women and men at different stages in life. Statistics on households are required for planning the supply, distribution and allocation of a wide variety of programmes, products and services, including such basic necessities as food and housing. When information such as the sex and age of the household head and the size of the household is available, household statistics can also be used to study gender differences in headship. A rise in households headed by women is a stated concern of the Platform for Action, because of the association between hardship and households maintained by women. However, to thoroughly analyse gender equality in households, more information is needed about household decision-making, and the different roles of all household members.

Households headed by women include one-person households, households of lone mothers with children, and households of couples with or without children where the woman rather than the man is reported as the household head. These may include de jure households headed by women, if women do not have a male partner, or de facto households headed by women, where the male partner is temporarily absent and may or may not contribute remittances to the household's welfare. Similarly, households headed by men may include one-person households, households of lone fathers with children, or households of couples with or without children.

The government provides housing support for the elderly through the provision of mobility aides as well as a subsidy for electricity. People living with a disability are eligible to apply for modifications to their housing to meet their needs. There is an increasing proportion of housing that is rented in Rarotonga, and government assistance is provided for specific groups such as the poor and outer island students. There is considerable demand for affordable rental accommodation in Rarotonga, including from private sector contract workers, and house rental prices are increasing.

Education



Policy implications

At senior secondary school girls, on average, record better achievements than boys, but boys have a wider range of local training opportunities than do girls. The Ministry of Education needs to increase the number of male teachers in early childhood and primary-level education. It is important that the same quality of education be provided in the *Pa Enua* as is available in Rarotonga.

3. Education

Statistical indicators and information

Indicator / Information	2011		2012		2013	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Gross enrolment ratio in early childhood education (ECE)					85	82
Net enrolment ratio in ECE education					81	76
ECE school student enrolment	265	252	240	242	265	248
Gross enrolment ratio in primary education					102	101
Net enrolment ratio in primary education					96	94
Primary school student enrolment	954	907	962	912	904	889
Gross enrolment ratio in junior secondary education					95	105
Net enrolment ratio in junior secondary education					81	88
Secondary school student enrolment	875	929	910	886	862	884
Gross enrolment ratio in senior secondary education					64	82
Net enrolment ratio in senior secondary education					51	60
Gender Parity Index in primary level enrolment (NER)					0.98	
Gender Parity Index in senior secondary level enrolment (NER)					1.20	
Teachers in ECE education	1	32	0	34	0	33
Teachers in primary education	14	103	17	94	11	95
Teachers in secondary education	56	74	43	76	55	73
Indicator / Information	2001		2006		2011	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Adult (15+) literacy rate					100%	100%
Illiterate population (15+)					0	0
Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds (self-reported)					100%	100%
School enrolment age (lowest age and no older than)	3–5 years of age Education Act 2012					
Minimum age of leaving school	16 years of age Education Act 2012					

* Literate in Cook Islands Maori and/or English.

Source: CISO, 2002, 2007, 2012, Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2013.

Access to basic education is good

In 2012 there were 29 co-educational schools on the 12 permanently populated islands. The government operates most schools. Five church and three private schools are in operation. A high proportion (over 90%) of children are in school until Year 11, or about 15 years of age. Close to 60% continue to Year 12 and over 30% to Year 13. Cook Islands primary and secondary education is based on the New Zealand system in its structure, content and compulsory attendance, although the curriculum is locally developed.⁴ It is difficult to assess the enrolment and drop-out rates in the Cook Islands because many students, especially at the senior secondary level, transfer to New Zealand schools or into post-secondary education in New Zealand. There is no statistical information about these students. Both Cook Islands Maori and English are used as languages of instruction.

⁴ The Evaluation of the Cook Islands Education Sector Partnership, 29/03/2012; from: http://www.education.gov.ck/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=558.

Post-secondary training courses available in the Cook Islands are mostly provided through the Cook Islands Tertiary Training Institute (CITTI), with faculties in Hospitality and Tourism, Nursing, and Trade and Technology. There is also a University of the South Pacific (USP) campus, and USP is implementing its plan to increase the number of centres in the *Pa Enua*.

The Cook Islands Education Master Plan 2008–2023 strategic direction for education is aligned with the Cook Islands second National Sustainable Development Plan 2011–2015 and regional and international commitments. It is an ambitious agenda to achieve literacy and numeracy targets in English and Cook Islands Maori while increasing efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of education services and infrastructure to all children, especially those in the *Pa Enua* at secondary level in distance learning schools.

Education imparts skills and competencies that are central to human development and enhanced quality of life, bringing wide-ranging benefits to both individuals and societies. Investing in the education of girls and women in particular produces exceptionally high social and economic returns. Educated women invest more in their children and contribute to the welfare of the next generation. They are more likely to participate in the labour force, allowing them to earn an income, know and claim their rights, and attain greater influence in the household and public life. Education is essential to empower women and close the gap between women and men with regard to socioeconomic opportunities; it can reduce inequalities based on gender and alter the historical legacy of disadvantage faced by women.

Education has long been recognised as a fundamental right, with far-reaching consequences for human development and societal progress. The right to education is proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and various international covenants. The importance of education for the advancement of women was highlighted in the Beijing Platform for Action, in which it was identified as one of 12 critical areas of concern and affirmed as central for gender equality and women's empowerment. The Platform for Action called for eliminating discrimination in education on the basis of gender at all levels, eradicating illiteracy among women and improving women's access to vocational training, science and technology and continuing education. With the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), efforts to eliminate gender disparities in education have been intensified, as this aim is essential to achieving the MDGs. Goal 3 calls for achieving gender parity in primary and secondary education, preferably by the target date of 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

Participation is difficult to measure

Net enrolment ratios (NERs) are lower for boys than girls; in 2013, the national primary school NER was 95% (96% boys, 94% girls), and the national junior secondary school NER was 85% (81% boys and 88% girls) with a net enrolment rate for boys at senior secondary of 51% compared with 60% for girls. Primary school enrolment, declined from 2,201 in 2005 to 1,793 in 2013; secondary enrolment declined from 1,899 in 2005 to 1,746 in 2013. the primary and secondary levels the general trend in enrolment of both boys and girls was a decrease until 2010, when it levelled off, followed by another decrease in 2013. It is difficult to assess enrolment trends or make future estimates because of the effect on enrolment of outward and inward migration of families to and from the Cook Islands. The Ministry of Education has found that school enrolment is declining at a lower rate than the overall population, implying that parents leaving the Cook Islands leave children in the Cook Islands with other family members.

In the Cook Islands the primary cycle of education includes Years 1–6, and secondary Years 7 to senior level 13 (this is the same as the New Zealand system). The majority of children (90% in 2011) enrolled in Year 1 have attended some form of ECE. There are no real gender differences at the primary level: in 2011 the gender parity index of the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) was 0.98, and of the NER 0.97, reflecting the slightly higher enrolment of boys than girls. Since 2005, the number of boys enrolled at primary level has decreased by 21%, with a 16% decrease in the enrolment of girls; at secondary level there was an 11% decrease for boys and 5% decrease for girls over the same period. The enrolment statistics (and the composition of the population) give no insight why the enrolment of boys has decreased more than that of girls.

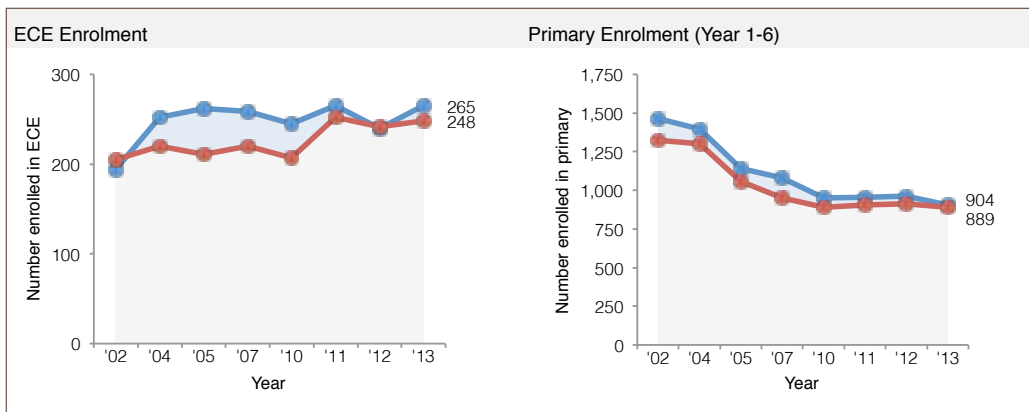


Figure 12: ECE and primary school enrolment of girls and boys, Cook Islands, 2002-2013

Note: The time series is not even.

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2013.

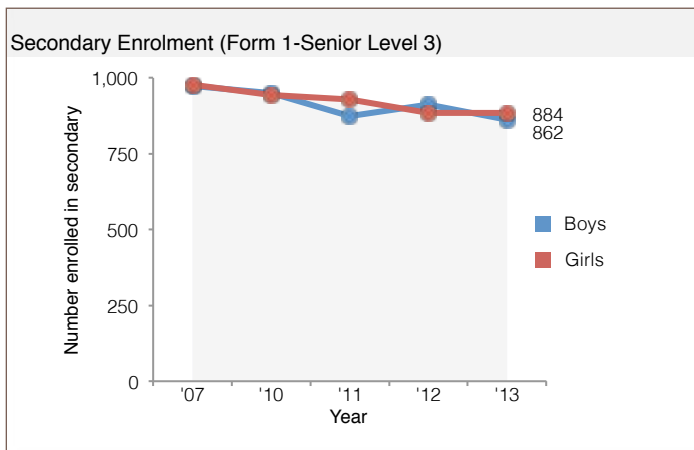


Figure 13: Secondary school enrolment of girls and boys, Cook Islands, 2007-2013

Note: The time series is not even.

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2013.

In 2005 there were some differences in enrolment for boys and girls by level, notably at the secondary school level. In 2013, these differences were not so apparent, with more girls enrolled at Senior Level 3 than boys. For each level of schooling there were slight variations in the number of boys and girls and the planning challenges are evident. For example, in 2013 there were 74 female Senior Level 3 students, most of whom would probably be among the 162 Year 5 students in 2005; similarly most of the 43 Senior Level 3 male students in 2013 would have been among the 183 boys in Year 5 in 2005. It is not clear why the number of male Senior Level 3 students in 2013 was smaller than the number of girls, despite the presence of more boys in the 2005 Year 5 class — it is not known if boys are more likely to leave school, they move overseas for higher education, or they pursue other training options in the Cooks Islands.

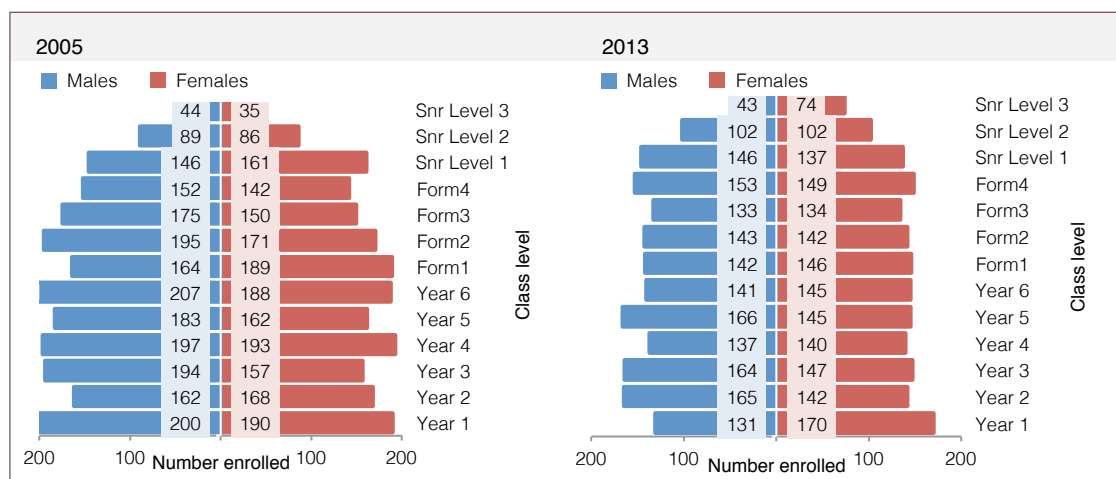


Figure 14: School enrolment of girls and boys, Cook Islands, 2005 and 2013

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2013.

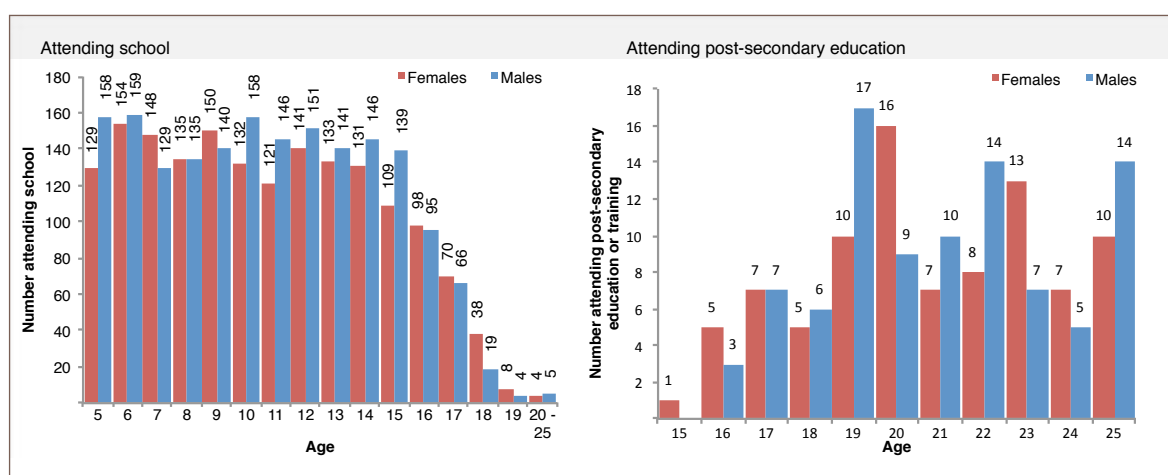


Figure 15: School and post-secondary school education and training attendance, males and females, Cook Islands, 2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

A slightly higher proportion (44%) of males aged 15–19 in rural areas were not attending school or post-secondary education and training, compared with 40% in urban areas. However, among females aged 15–19, 36% in rural areas were not attending school or post-secondary education and training, compared with 50% in urban areas: adolescent females living in Rarotonga are more likely to leave formal education than females in rural areas.

The enrolment information from the 2011 census supports the Ministry of Education analysis that boys are more likely to drop out of school than girls, although the timing of the census — in early November after the completion of the school year — resulted in a small proportion of both male and female students stating that they were not attending. However the statistics are clear: boys are more likely to not attend higher secondary school than girls. At secondary level the GER for boys was 86% compared with 91% for girls, resulting in a Gender Parity Index (GPI) in favour of girls of 1.07, with 884 males attending secondary compared with 804 females (the higher GER for females results from the higher number of males in the secondary school age group than females). When attendance in post-secondary education is factored into enrolment the statistics do not change — post-secondary enrolment is approximately the same for males and females.

Gender Parity Index (GPI)

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is commonly used to measure progress towards gender parity in education. For a given indicator, GPI is calculated as the ratio of the value for females to that for males. A GPI value equal to 1 indicates parity. In general, a value less than 1 indicates disparity in favour of men/boys, whereas a value greater than 1 indicates disparity in favour of women/girls. Gender parity is considered to have been attained when the GPI lies between 0.97 and 1.03.

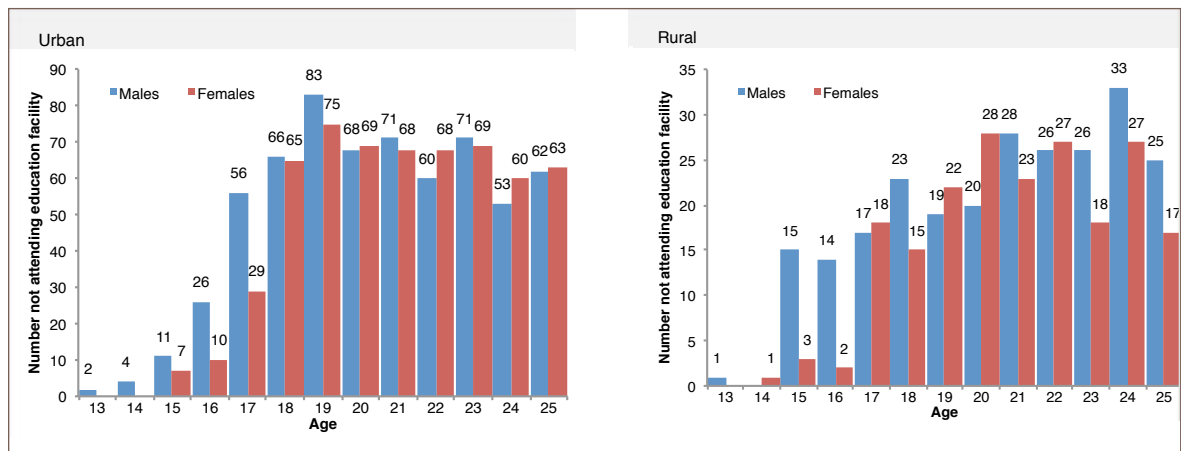


Figure 16: Males and females not attending school or post-secondary education and training, urban and rural, Cook Islands, 2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

Girls are achieving better results than boys

In 2011, boys were lagging behind girls in every aspect of literacy tested in Cook Islands schools. Childhood literacy testing in the Cook Islands starts with English and Maori reading; in 2011, the gender gap in Year 4 was 13% for English and 7% for Maori; assessments at Years 6 and 8 included listening as well as reading, and found consistent gaps, with a peak of 18% for reading in Year 8.

The gender gap decreases when students are assessed for literacy at National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level One. However, comparisons are more complicated because the criteria are broader than those used for assessment in the earlier years of schooling and students can be assessed over a

two-year or three-year period. It is difficult to analyse the NCEA results because of the relatively small number of Cook Islands students (no more than 300 are assessed at any level), and varying assessment conditions, given the scattered locations and differing school conditions. The Ministry of Education concluded that the scattered locations of schools, low number of students per level and the need for 'composite classes', low achievement in distance learning for higher levels of secondary school, and the qualifications and certification of teaching staff were more significant factors in learning outcomes than gender.

Participation in post-secondary education

There are multiple challenges in strengthening human resources in the Cook Islands that are related to the small population and the mobility enjoyed by Cook Islanders that enables them to pursue education, training and work in New Zealand and Australia; meanwhile, the local labour market requires a limited number (but wide range) of skills. In 2013, the Ministry of Education established the CITTI, which focuses on the needs of employers and supports training through the use of e-learning to better meet human resource needs. CITTI delivers skills across a wide range of areas customized to meet the needs of individual learners and employers. Three training schools come under the institute: the Cook Islands Trade Training Centre; the Hospitality Trade Training Centre; and Nursing. In addition, the University of the South Pacific (USP) and public and private sector employers provide post-secondary education and training opportunities that are internationally benchmarked.

Progress has been made in some sectors of the economy to match the human resource needs of employers with entrants to the labour market who are trained to a high standard, but demand continues in other areas. The broader Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) spectrum is constrained with respect to the resources and types of training available in the Cook Islands. Programmes for transition from school and TVET to employment have increased, with positive results in terms of employment of graduates, especially for males. Further challenges highlighted by the review of the education sector include a need to focus on transitions for the students who do not wish to travel to Rarotonga for training, but opt to stay on their home island.

The 2011 census indicates 181 males and females aged 15–25 were attending full- and part-time studies or training; 51% were males. Overall, 57% of males and females were attending part-time post-secondary education; with 59% of males attending part-time compared with 56% of females. This reflects, in part, the type of training undertaken; for example, some USP courses are offered on a part-time basis, or students enrol on a part-time basis because of cost or other activities. Part-time students were likely to be older (aged 22–25) than full-time students.

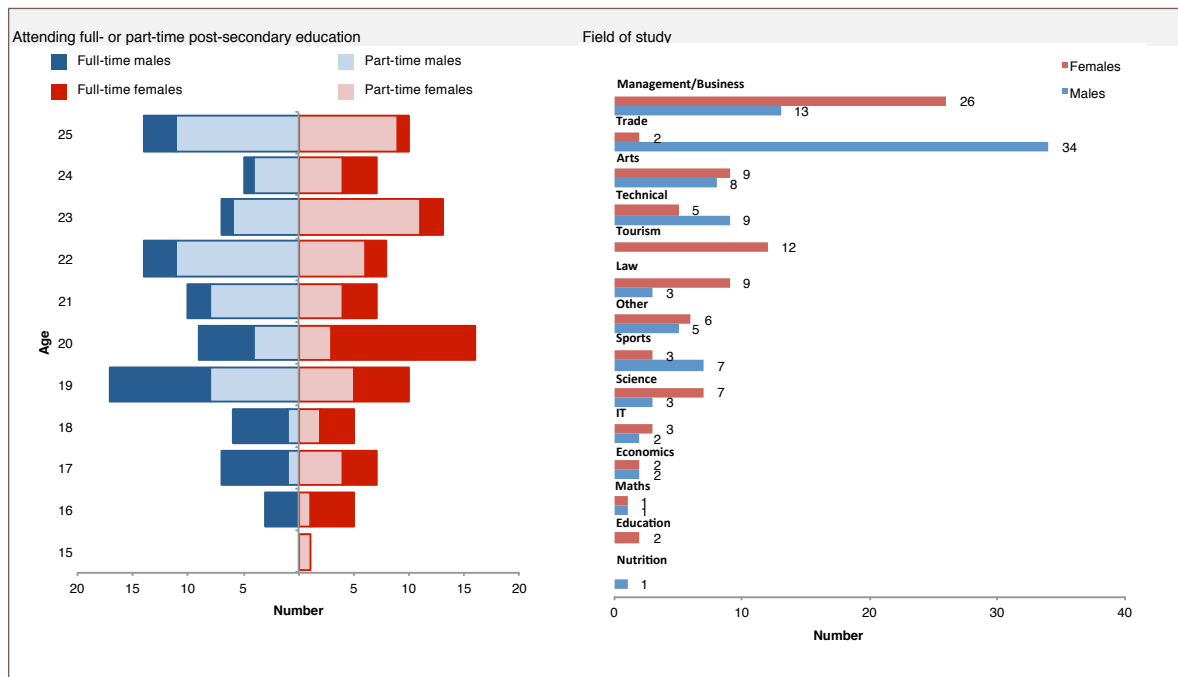


Figure 17: Post-secondary education and training of males and females aged 15–25, Cook Islands, 2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data

The Cook Islands follows the global trend in which women continue to dominate traditionally ‘feminine’ fields of study and are underrepresented in technical and trade-related fields (such as construction, mechanical and electrical). Women continue to dominate in fields linked to social reproduction — education, health and welfare, humanities and arts, social science, business and law. Women’s participation in construction and sports lags behind that of men, despite policies in the Cook Islands to encourage girls to enter technical and science-related ‘non-traditional’ areas of study. However, progress has been made in the area of science, where women aged 15–25 studying in the Cook Islands outnumbered men in 2011. All 12 students who were enrolled in tourism-related training in November 2011 were female.

The results of the 2011 census show that, for the population aged 15 and over, slightly more females had lower-level tertiary qualifications (a certificate, diploma or degree) than males, while males were more likely to have post-graduate tertiary qualifications than females. There were almost four males with a trade or business qualification for every female. About half (51%) of the adults with no qualification were female.

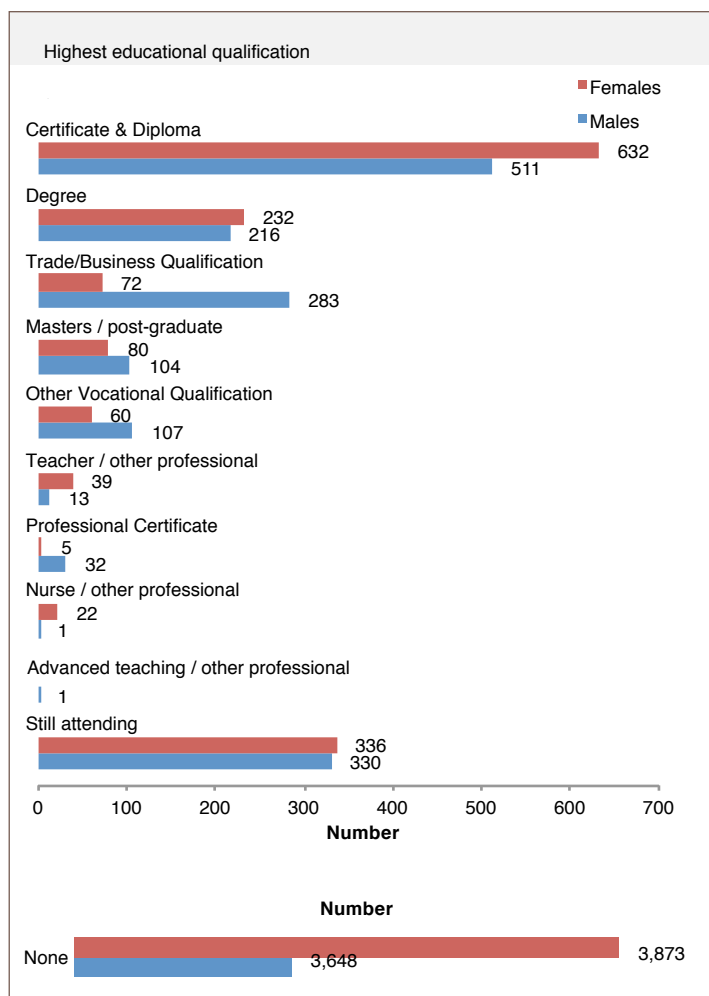


Figure 18: Males and females aged 15 and over and highest educational qualification, Cook Islands, 2011

Source: CISO, 2012.

Teaching staff

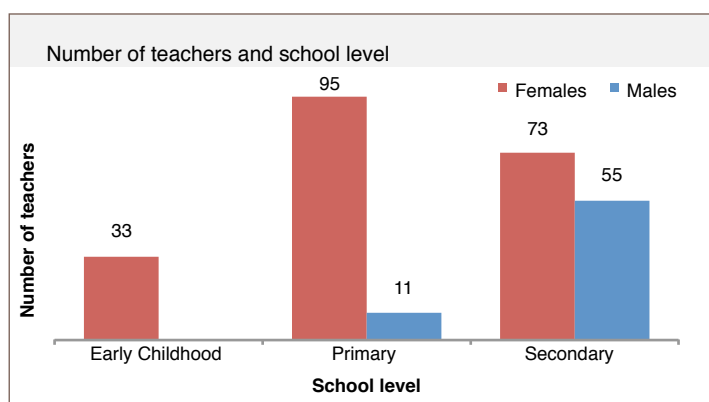


Figure 19: Sex of teaching staff and school level taught, Cook Islands, 2013

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2013.

Several factors impinge on the quality of education and the learning environment in the Cook Islands, including the lack of qualified teachers, limited availability of resources, composite classes (multiple grades for one teacher), insufficient instructional time, and students that are challenged by distance learning at the secondary level. Quality in education depends in large part on the quality of the teaching staff. Gender balance among the staff is critical for promoting gender parity and equal access to, and achievement in, education and for creating a supportive and non-discriminating learning environment for both women and men. There is evidence that gender balance among teaching staff is closely related to the improvement of gender parity in enrolment. As the proportion of female teachers increases from low levels, girls' enrolments rise relative to boys. Likewise as the proportion of male teachers increases from low levels, boys' progression through junior secondary to higher levels increases. The "feminization" of the teaching profession can serve as an empowering tool for young women to pursue their studies and for parents to choose to educate girls; or it can serve to segregate women in an occupation looking after young children, which is traditionally seen as a job for women.

There are a number of reasons for the low levels of male teachers at early childhood education and primary level, including the attraction of teaching as a career, remuneration packages that fail to meet expectations, limited advancement opportunities, limited opportunities for ongoing training, a perception that teaching is a less secure or attractive job than opportunities in other sectors, and even feeling intimidated about the prospect of being the only man in the staff room at break times. The Ministry of Education has a number of initiatives that may help to increase the number of male teachers at lower educational levels, including pay parity between primary and secondary-level teaching.

Policy implications

The policy focus in the education sector is to improve access to quality education to better meet the human resource needs of the economy and the interests of students. The main policies seek to ensure that educational opportunities — from early childhood level to senior secondary and TVET — are the same for boys and girls, regardless of whether they live on the main island of Rarotonga or a remote northern atoll. Girls perform better than boys at senior secondary levels, but are not as likely to enter the labour force after completing schooling; more research is required to determine whether this related to their 'work readiness', the availability and the desirability of jobs, or remuneration that doesn't meet expectations. Government and some private sector firms have work placement programmes for senior secondary school students.

The Ministry of Education is committed to extending the range of alternative learning programmes to increase retention, particularly of boys, with stronger links between junior secondary school and alternative learning pathways through TVET or senior secondary level. The Ministry of Education faces a considerable challenge in improving the teacher gender balance, particularly of its early childhood education and primary school teachers, and to a lesser extent at secondary level. Strategies to increase the number of male teachers at all levels of education can only be developed when the underlying reasons that teaching is not considered a desirable occupation for males are identified. It is imperative that the Ministry of Education has the financial and human resources required to continue to implement its very ambitious Cook Islands Education Master Plan and address the gaps in its policy framework that address the inclusive education of girls, including specific measures to improve the gender balance of the teaching staff, promote girls' access to TVET, and expand efforts to reduce the male drop-out rate. The Ministry has an inclusive education policy that adheres to international standards, under which all students with special needs are eligible for assistance, with the potential for refining the assessment of special needs children.

The Ministry of Education's key goals include improved numeracy and literacy outcomes for all learners. This requires balancing resources, to ensure teachers can provide the quality of instruction needed to achieve literacy and numeracy targets; providing classroom materials and resources; refurbishing schools, libraries, and laboratories; and ensuring the curriculum matches the human resource needs of the Cook Islands. The commitment to improving the quality of education has resulted in increases in in-service training and the certification and qualification of teachers, improved assessment tools with standard testing procedures throughout the Cook Islands, improved Cook Islands Maori literacy, a wider range of subjects offered to meet both the interests of students and skills and requirements of the workforce, increased access to higher levels of education for students in remote islands, increased use of online learning, provision of teacher aides for children with learning disabilities and more resources for career guidance and counselling. In terms of teaching staff, the Ministry of Education has introduced pay parity between primary and secondary school level teaching as part of a range of strategies to improve the gender balance in both levels of schooling.

Work and employment



Policy implications

The Cook Islands has one of the highest female labour force participation rates in the Pacific Islands region and women combine work for pay or profit with unpaid work in the home. A significant proportion of women work part time. Youth unemployment, while decreasing, is an issue given the use of contract migrant workers for technical, trade and tourism-related jobs. Women are outnumbered in jobs with status, power and authority and in traditionally male blue-collar occupations. The proportion of women working as senior officials and managers in higher-level occupations is increasing at a faster rate than is the proportion of men with such occupations, but men continue to outnumber women at this level.

4. Work and employment

Statistical indicators and information

Indicator	2001		2006		2011	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Labour force participation rate	76%	61%	76%	64%	77%	65%
Average annual rate of growth of the labour force			0%	1%	2%	1%
Female to male labour force participation		0.80		0.84		0.85
Unemployment rate	12%	15%	8%	9%	8%	8%
Youth unemployment rate (age 14–24)	21%	21%	18%	20%	16%	15%
Employment part-time (as a % of paid employees)	5%	9%	11%	15%	11%	16%
Ratio of average female income to male income*		0.7		0.8		0.8
Self employed, no employees (own account worker)	8%	4%	8%	5%	9%	5%
Self employed, employees	8%	6%	8%	6%	6%	4%
Paid employee, full time	79%	80%	75%	76%	65%	66%
Paid employee, part time	4%	8%	7%	11%	10%	15%
Unpaid family worker	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%
Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector		38%		42%		49%
Legislators, senior officials and managers	64%	36%	58%	42%	52%	48%
Professional and technical workers	49%	51%	45%	55%	46%	54%
Clerical	24%	76%	22%	78%	23%	77%
Service and sales	36%	64%	35%	65%	36%	64%
Elementary occupations	67%	33%	64%	36%	70%	30%
Information						
Minimum wage	NZD 6.00 per hour					
Length of maternity leave	Government workers 6 weeks paid maternity leave					

* Estimate based on gross annual income from census.

Source: CISO, 2002, 2007, 2012.

Women could be half of the workforce

Women constitute roughly half of the population of the world and thus potentially half of its work force. As a group they do as much (or more) work than men. However, the types of work they do — as well as the conditions under which they work, and their access to opportunities for advancement — differ from those of men. Women are often disadvantaged compared to men in access to employment opportunities and conditions of work; furthermore, many women forego or curtail employment because of family responsibilities. The removal of obstacles and inequalities that women face with respect to employment is a step towards realising women's potential in the economy and enhancing their contribution to economic and social development.

The Beijing Declaration affirms the commitment of nations to the inalienable rights of women and girls and their empowerment and equal participation in all spheres of life, including in the economic domain. The Beijing Platform for Action identifies the role of women in the economy as a critical area of concern, and calls attention to the need to promote and facilitate equal access by women to employment and resources, as well as the harmonisation of work and family responsibilities for women and men. Furthermore, the MDGs target the achievement of full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people, as part of Goal 1 (eradication of extreme poverty and hunger).

The statutory minimum wage in the Cook Islands is NZD 6.00 an hour, which was set in 2013; this is an increase from the NZD 5.00 per hour wage set in 2006, and NZD 4.00 in 2000. The 2006 increase was widely debated, with most lobby groups asking for NZD 7.00 as a minimum wage linked to the cost of living. The low minimum wage means that many families rely on the income of more than one family member to make ends meet.

Many families rely on the income from working mothers, but what rights do mothers have? It is important for the health and wellbeing of both the mother and baby that women have the right to take time off from their jobs (paid or unpaid) to deliver a baby, and be able to return to their job. The International Labour Organization established the Maternity Protection Convention in 1952, which is a global standard aimed at protecting working women before and after childbirth. It calls for a minimum 12-week leave, although a 14-week leave is recommended. The Cook Islands Public Service Commission (PSC) allows six weeks on full pay for maternity leave with provisions for extensions using annual leave or application for special leave without pay. Male government employees are entitled to three days paternity leave when their wife or partner gives birth, with provisions for extension if necessary.

The PSC grants employees full pay during the maternity leave period, which is commendable, and the 2011 personnel policy does not have a minimum employment service before employees receive this entitlement. There are no maternity or paternity leave provisions for part time employees.

Many private sector companies have paid maternity leave policies. The Employment Relations Act of 2012 introduced government-funded maternity leave payments for women employed in the private sector at a rate equivalent to the minimum wage for six weeks, with no minimum employment service before entitlement. In the 2012–2013 Budget Appropriation the government allocated NZD 49,000 to cover the maternity leave provision for private sector employees, with NZD 192,000 in the 2013-2014 budget. In addition, all women receive a NZD 1,000 'new born' allowance from the government. Government paid maternity leave is not granted to foreign workers, so maternity leave provisions for such women employed in the private sector are the responsibility of each employer.

Labour force participation of women and men

The proportion of women in the labour force gives an indication of the extent to which women have access to the labour market relative to men, with a value of 50%, indicating gender parity. Between 1996 and 2001 the number of men in the labour force declined, while since 2001 the number of women participating in the labour force has increased. The Cook Islands has almost achieved parity, with women making up 47% of the labour force in 2011.

Trends in women's labour force participation are mixed; in Rarotonga, around 70% of women and 80% of men have been in the labour force since 2001. The greatest change has occurred in the *Pa Enua*, where the proportion of women and men in the labour force has increased since 1996.

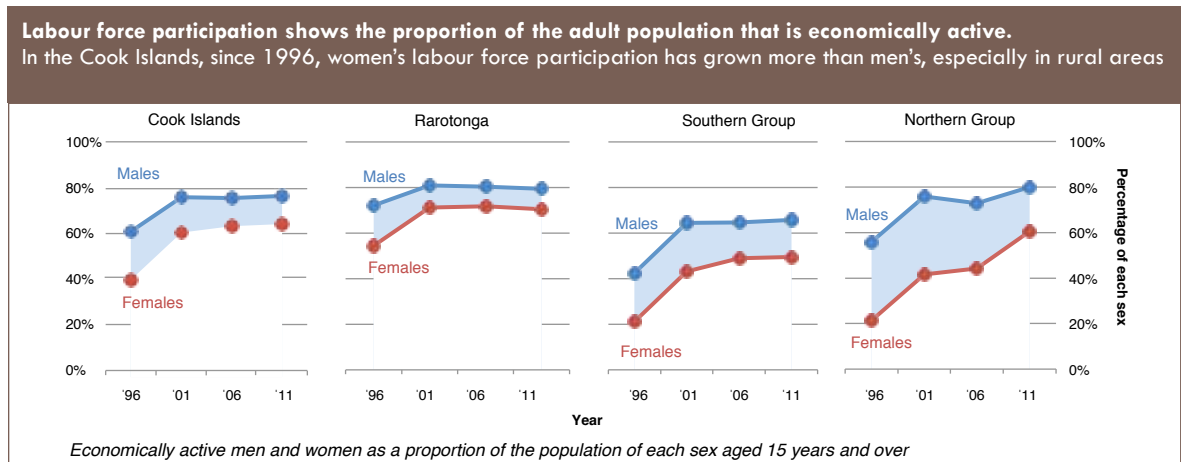


Figure 20: Labour force participation rates, Cook Islands, 1996–2011

Source: CISO, 2012.

Labour force participation has increased among women over age 35 and for men older than 50. Increased opportunities for secondary and higher education have no apparent affect on the age at which men and women enter the labour force. The changes over the last five years indicate that more women do not leave the labour force during the child bearing and rearing years, but remain in their job or career.

Four distinct patterns are apparent when examining labour force participation of women and men at various ages. For both women and men, the most common pattern is low participation at ages 15–19, sharply higher participation at ages 20–24, which peaks in the 25–29 age group for women, and 25–34 age group for men; high participation rates are maintained until about age 54, when participation begins to decline. For women, this pattern indicates that those who are in the labour force remain in it during their reproductive years. The rates also show an older labour force, which is more noticeable for women (ages 40–60) than men. The pattern described is typical for women and men in most countries.

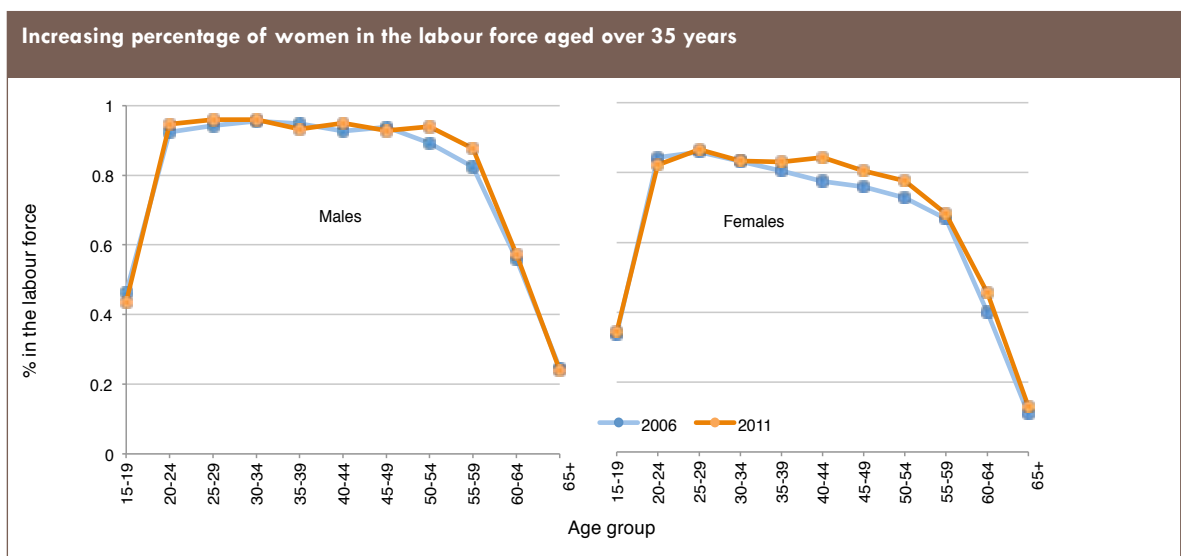


Figure 21: Labour force participation rates and age group, Cook Islands, 2006–2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

The economic activities of women and men

The importance of the service sector as a source of employment for both women and men continues to grow relative to the agricultural sector. This reflects the global transition of labour from agriculture to industry, and increasingly to services. In the Cook Islands women mostly work in the service sector. In 2001, 82% of female wage workers worked outside of agriculture, and by 2011, 95% of women were working outside agriculture.

In 2014, 6 out of 16 ministries were headed by women. One public authority out of seven in the Cook Islands – the Bank of the Cook Islands – was led by a woman.

Status in employment, or the type of work done by women and men

To understand the situation and position of women and men in the labour market, it is necessary to identify their status in employment. This entails classifying jobs on the basis of the type of explicit or implicit contract of employment an individual has with her or his employer or other persons. A worker's type of contract, or status in employment, often determines the level of security, protection and rights that a job has.

Wage employment is the most common form of employment, but own-account work (that is, being self employed and not having any employees) and contributing family work is increasing globally. The majority of employed women and men are engaged in wage and salaried work (81% of women and 75% of men worked as full- or part-time employees in 2011).

People working on their own account contribute income to the family when secure paid jobs are not available, generating employment not just for themselves but also for their family members, who are often not paid but work as 'contributing family workers'. Own-account employment allows more flexibility for women, who often have to combine family responsibilities with income-earning activities. However, unlike wage and salaried workers, own-account workers face high economic risks. The proportion of working women in the Cook Islands who are own-account workers has increased slightly over the past 10 years.

Women are equally likely as men to be contributing family workers, a group that represents just 1% of working women and 2% of working men. Women who are working as own-account workers or contributing family workers are often employed as shop assistants, kitchen hands, street vendors or domestic workers in the homes of others.

Occupational concentration

Women and men concentrate in different types of occupations, and the occupation groups in which they are employed vary widely by region. In the 2011 census the largest number of women reported that they were housekeepers and restaurant service workers, general managers, and shop salespeople, and college, tertiary (higher-level) teachers. The occupation with the largest number of male workers was transport labourers, followed by store managers.

Over the years, women have entered various occupations that were traditionally dominated by men. However, they are still outnumbered in jobs with status, power and authority, and in traditionally male blue-collar occupations. At the national level the proportion of women working as senior officials and managers in higher-level occupations has increased at a faster rate than it has for men, but men still outnumber women at this level. Shifts in women's occupations, or the type of jobs they do, are evident in the decreased number of women in the *Pa Enua* performing elementary occupations of cleaning and unskilled labour, while more women are working as shop assistants and sales people.

The number of rural men employed as skilled agricultural and fishery workers has declined as a result of poor commodity prices combined with poor market access and limited production in the pearl industry.

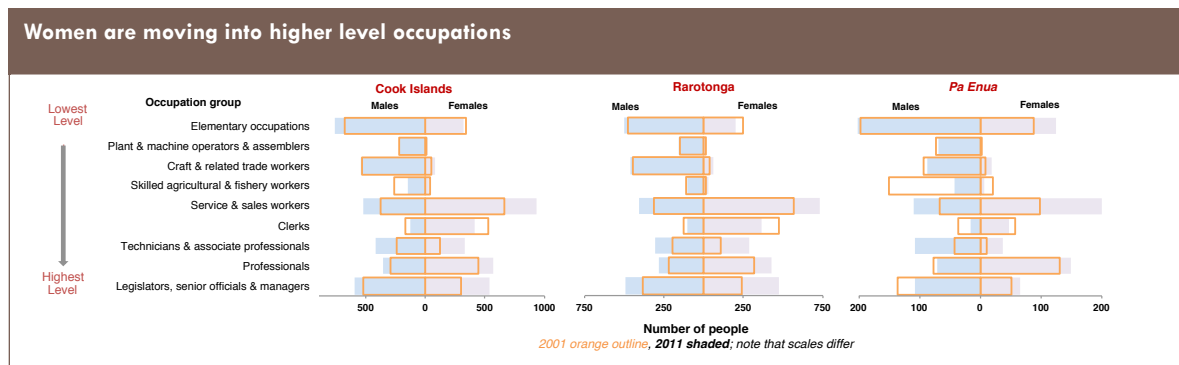


Figure 22: Number of working people aged 15 and over by occupation group, Cook Islands, 2001 and 2011

Source: CISO, 2002, 2012.

To more fully understand the depth of occupational concentration, it is important to analyse each of the occupation groups in more detail. Major groups encompass many occupations that are a mixture of male-dominated, female-dominated and neutral ones. For example, the group 'professionals' includes both heavily male-dominated occupations (such as architects, engineers and related professionals) and heavily female-dominated occupations (such as pre-primary, primary and secondary education teachers). The shift from the primary sector — agriculture and fishing — to the service sector is evident for males (and to a lesser extent females) living in rural areas. It has been observed that traditionally women find work in occupations with caring and nurturing functions or in jobs requiring household-related or low-level skills. Stereotypes, education and vocational training, the structure of the labour market and discrimination at entry and in work are among the causes often cited for gender segregation of occupations.

Part-time workers

The cost of part-time employment can be great. Part-time employment is associated with lower income — with a long-term impact on pensions — and does not carry the same social benefits as fulltime employment. Career advancement of part time workers, who are predominantly women, is often jeopardised because the image persists that they are not serious about their jobs and careers. The types of part-time jobs available and the conditions of work are also a concern. Thus, although part-time work may be a solution for women reconciling work with family responsibilities, it reinforces the male breadwinner model, relegating women to a secondary role in the labour market.

Women make up just over half (56%) of part-time workers in the Cook Islands. The census data from 2001 to 2011 indicates that the number of part-time workers is growing among both women and men, although a higher proportion of women work part time than men.

Unemployment

Unemployment is slightly higher among women than men in the *Pa Enua*, and unemployment is more common among youth, and especially for young women in the *Pa Enua*. For young people aged 15–24, just over one in every four women in the *Pa Enua* was unemployed in 2011; unemployment is an acute problem. Unemployment amongst young people in Rarotonga was not as high (7%) for young urban men and women. Young women and men make up about one-third of all unemployed men and women.

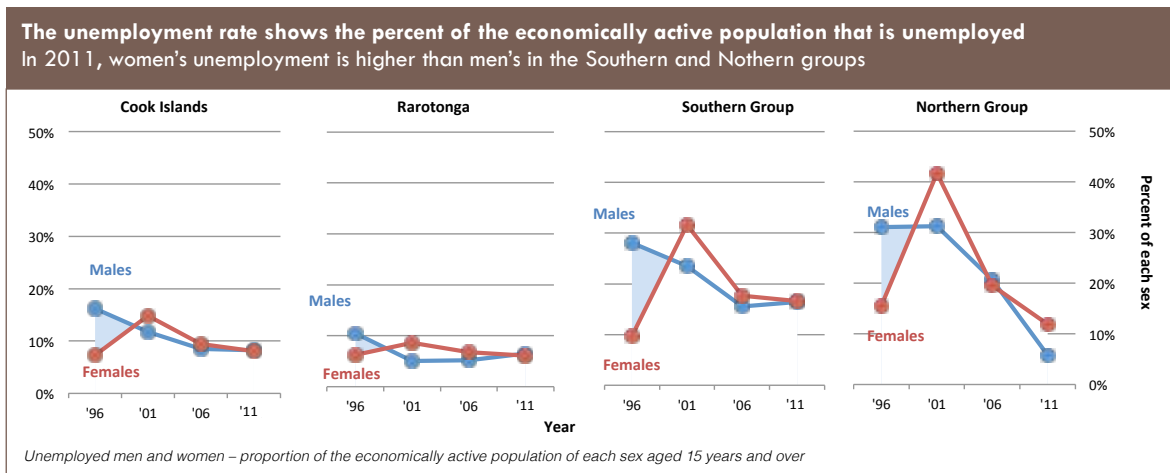


Figure 23: Unemployment rates and age group, Cook Islands, 1996–2011

Source: CISO, 2012.

Migrant workers

Despite an overall unemployment rate in 2011 of 15% for young women and 16% for men aged 15–24 there is a labour shortage in the Cook Islands. This is a result of migration of people for work, education, health care and other opportunities, primarily in New Zealand and Australia. The unemployed may lack the necessary skills to find employment, or other factors may prevent them from working (e.g. perceived poor pay from low-skilled jobs, unsuitable working hours, and other commitments such as roles as care givers in the home). A small proportion of the unemployed are not hired because of their criminal records.

The 2011 census collected information on contract workers. Contract workers were first recruited systematically around the mid-2000s to meet labour shortages in the tourism industry, and since then the scheme has broadened to include child care workers in private households, professional and technical occupations in health, education and aquaculture and the pearl industry. Contract workers are able to migrate with their families provided they meet the entry criteria.

At the time of the 2011 census 647 people declared themselves to be temporary contract workers, of which 47% were female. There were an additional 233 dependent family members of a contract worker. Most contract workers were Fijian nationals, followed by New Zealand and Philippine nationals. However, within the overall distribution some noticeable variations occurred, such as females making up 57% of the 137 contract workers from the Philippines. In terms of age distribution, 51% of contract workers were aged 25–39; 52% of male contract workers were in this age group, and 50% of females. The average age of contract workers was 38 for both males and females.

There are gender differences in the occupations of contract workers. Male contract workers are more likely to have a managerial or professional occupation than women, with almost half (47%) of male contract workers classified as senior officials, managers, professionals and technicians; the proportion (43%) of female contract workers in these occupations is slightly lower. The 16% of female contract workers in the senior officials and managers group are mostly managers working in the retail and tourism sector, whereas the 16% of male contract workers in this group are more likely to be managers outside of the tourism sector (finance, industry, construction, transportation etc). There were 110 female contract service and sales workers, which represented just over one-third (36%) of the type of work done by female contract workers. In comparison there were 56 males contracted as service and sales, workers representing 16% of the occupations of male contract workers.

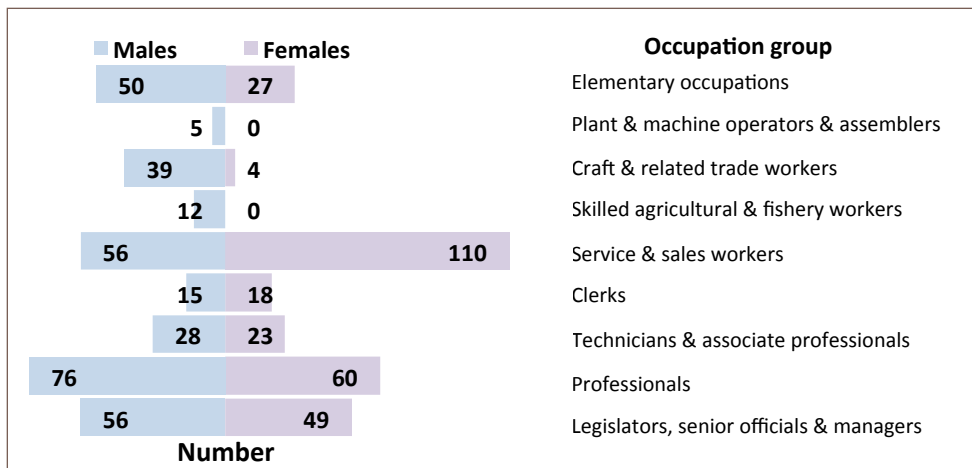


Figure 24: Occupation groups of contract workers, Cook Islands, 2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

The gender pay gap

The gender pay gap reflects inequalities that affect mainly women, notably horizontal and vertical concentration and, to some extent, segregation of the labour market; traditions and stereotypes that influence the choice of education, professions and career paths; and the difficulty of balancing work and private life that often leads to part-time work and career breaks for women.

A simple indicator is used to examine trends in gender pay gap — the ratio of the average earnings of women to those of men, expressed per 100. A ratio of 100 indicates that there is no gender pay gap: women are paid the same as men. A ratio below 100 indicates that women earn less than men and a ratio above 100 that they earn more than men — in other words, the closer the ratio is to 100, the smaller the gap. The gender pay gap here is a crude measure based on differences in average gross income from all sources for women and men aged 15 and over in the Cook Islands. This gap has narrowed from 71 in 2001 to 80 in 2011.

It should be noted that statistics of average wages from which the gender pay gap is derived cover only the 'formal' sector of the economy. They do not shed light on earnings from self-employment or informal sector activities. Also, a simple indicator based on statistics of average gross earnings without controlling for occupation, qualifications, job grade, other sources of income or hours actually worked has been cited as causing misleading comparisons. Nevertheless, this 'gross' measure reflects the realities of gender inequalities in the labour market, where higher proportions of women than men work part-time and are in the lower rungs of the occupation ladder.

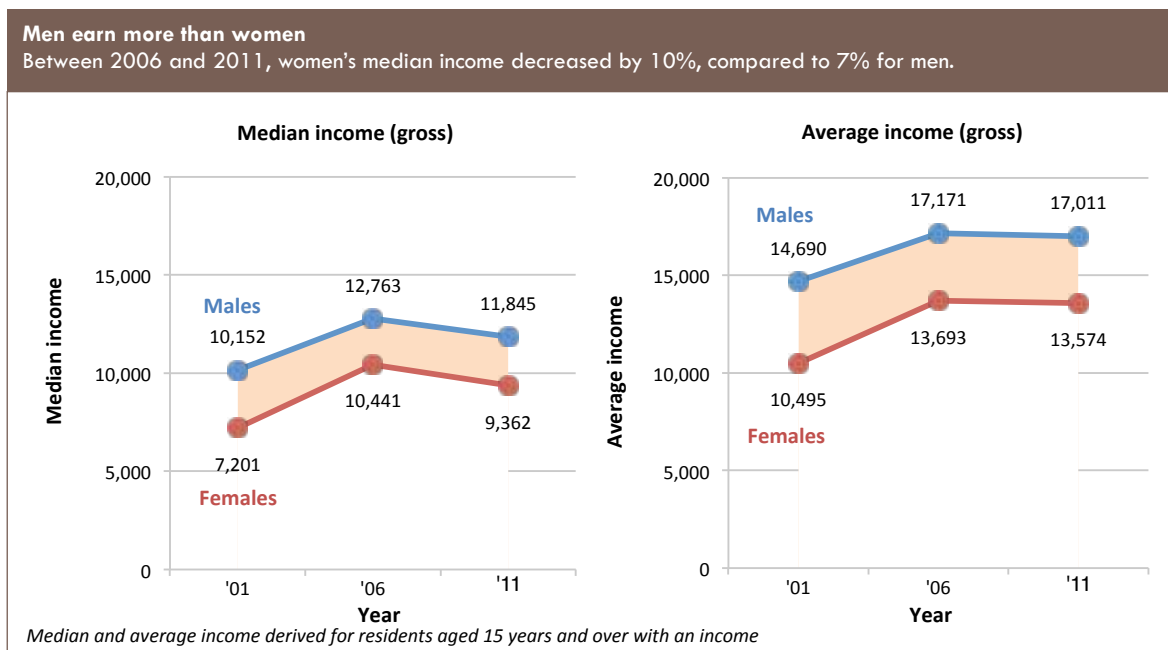


Figure 25: Median and average gross income of all people aged 15 and over, Cook Islands, 2001, 2006, 2011

Source: CISO unpublished data.

The minimum hourly wage in the Cook Islands is NZD 6.00 an hour (increased from NZD 5.00 in 2014), although in government there is no annual salary under NZD 15,000 which equates to approximately NZD 7.80 an hour. The 2011 census data for all people aged 15 and over shows an average gross income of NZD 13,574 for females and NZD 17,011 for males, with male gross average income increasing by 16% since 2001 compared to a 29% increase for women. The average for females is the result of adding together all the reported incomes of women (using the middle value of the income range in the census) and dividing by the total number of women. The average is distorted by high and low incomes so it is presented alongside the median income. The median income is the middle of the income of women when the incomes are sorted from lowest to highest. The median income for males was NZD 11,845 and for females it was NZD 9,362 in 2011. This was a 17% increase from 2001 for males and a 30% increase for females. For men there was a significant difference between the average and median gross income, which means that there were more males in the highest income bands than females.

This very crude analysis of the income data from the census point to a significant disparity in the incomes between women and men; because of the different nature of work done by women and men, with more women out of work, in part-time work or in full-time work with relatively lower earnings compared with males.

Work is one of women's many roles

Time use statistics show that in all regions of the world, women dedicate much more time to domestic work than men do. In general, women's increased participation in paid employment has not been accompanied by an increase in men's participation in unpaid domestic work (comprised mainly of housework and caring for dependent household members).

In spite of the changes that have occurred in women's participation in the labour market discussed above, women continue to bear most of the responsibilities for the home: housework, caring for children and other dependent household members, preparing meals and sewing. Those who carry the burden of work for the

home — mainly women — enter the labour market from a highly disadvantaged position, as the time they spend on domestic work restricts their access to full and productive employment and also leaves them with less time for education and training, leisure, self-care and social and political activities.

For mothers with young children or other dependents, decisions regarding working hours — or whether to work at all — often depend on the availability of affordable and reliable care. In the past, many workers were able to count on help from non-working relatives for childcare and other domestic tasks. Although such traditional family support still exists to a greater degree in the Cook Islands, it is becoming less available with urbanisation and the increased labour force participation of women.

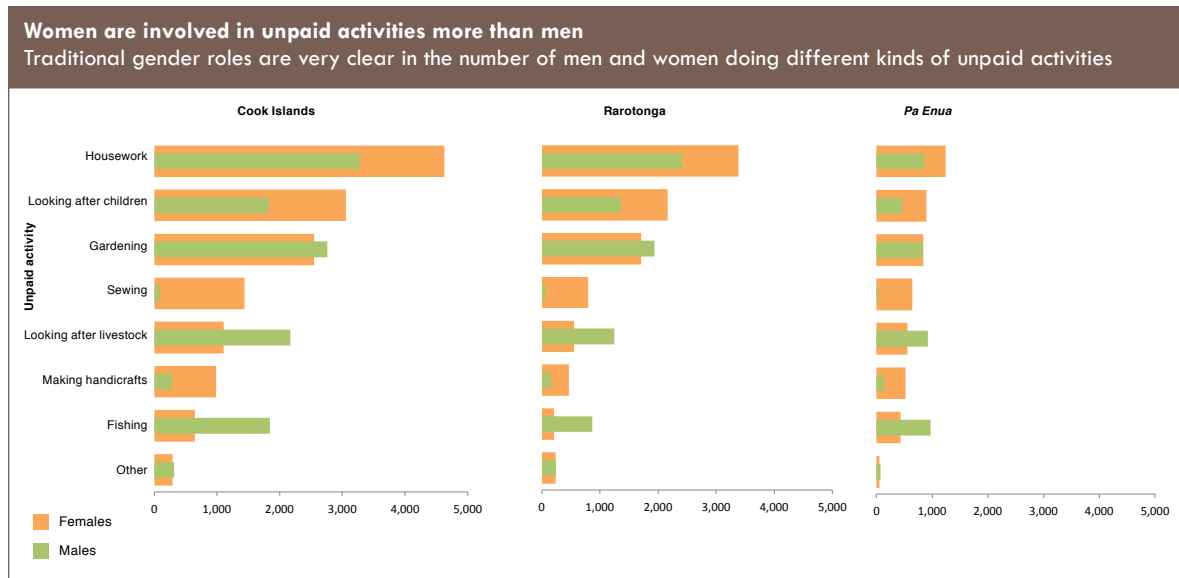


Figure 26: Activities done without pay in the last four weeks for all people aged 15 and over, Cook Islands, 2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

Policy implications

Maternity protection for employed women is an essential element in equality of opportunity, enabling women to successfully combine their productive and reproductive roles. Essentially, maternity protection has two aims: to preserve the health of (and the special relationship between) the mother and her newborn; and to provide a measure of job security. The latter aim includes access to jobs by women of childbearing age; maintenance of wages and benefits during maternity; and prevention of dismissal during pregnancy, maternity leave and for a period of time after returning to work.

The current international standard for the duration of maternity leave as provided for in the Maternity Protection Convention 2000 (No. 183)⁵ is 14 weeks. This is an increase from the standard of 12 weeks specified in the previous Convention.⁶ The Cook Islands has not adopted the new standard, but the introduction of paid maternity leave in the private sector in late 2012 is an excellent start.

The right to continue breastfeeding upon return to work is important for both the health of the mother and especially that of her child. At present, more than 90 countries provide legislation for nursing breaks of at least an hour a day. In most countries the duration is one hour in total, and the most frequent provision is until the child reaches the age of one year. There is no legislated provision for this in the Cook Islands.

⁵ Adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 2000. The Maternity Protection Recommendation 2000 (No. 191) that accompanies the Convention proposes 18 weeks of maternity leave.

⁶ Maternity Protection Convention (Revised) (No. 103), adopted in 1952.

Paternity leave is a short period of leave taken by a father around the time of the birth of his child. Although there is no international standard for this, paternity leave provisions are becoming more common around the world, perhaps an indication of the increased awareness of men's parenting roles and their need to reconcile work and family life. Paternity leave benefits, when available, vary considerably in duration and compensation. Compared with maternity leave, they are much shorter and more often unpaid. Paid leave provisions other than paternity leave may also be used by a father at the time of the birth of his child.

Another option to further help working parents care for children is parental leave, a relatively long-term leave offered mainly in countries in more developed regions that is available to either parent to enable them to care for an infant or young child over a period of time, usually following the maternity or paternity leave period. Because parental leave is available to either parent, it encourages the sharing of family responsibilities, recognising that both mothers and fathers are responsible for raising their children. However, women are usually the ones who take parental leave once maternity leave is exhausted, and men's take-up rates are very low. The public service leave regulations allow five days of paternity leave.

This chapter draws most of its conclusions based on the past 10 years of census data. It shows that women are increasingly active in the labour force in full- and part-time work. Two different groups of women are emerging: 1) well-trained, educated career women who are moving into highly skilled occupations, and 2) the majority of women, who work in relatively low-skilled jobs in the retail and tourism sector. Both groups must juggle work and family responsibilities. Women and men have extended their economic activity over the last 10 years, with fewer women and men retiring before age 65. The number of women and men in part-time work is increasing, as women and men find work to provide incomes and balance work and family life, although women still are the majority of part-time workers.

More research is required regarding the economic activities of women and men, particularly as part-time workers, including whether they have more than one part-time job, whether they work reduced hours because of other family care obligations, and what their relative earnings are. Young people and women in the *Pa Enua* are seeking employment opportunities and economic empowerment, and would prefer to stay on the outer islands and use local products for handicrafts or agricultural produce and associated 'value added' products. However, while demand is strong, both in Rarotonga and for export, a number of challenges must be addressed, including a lack of skills and resources, weak supply chains, the absence of quality standards, limited options for 'value added' processing, and high costs of transport (shipping). The Gender and Development Division (GADD) is carrying out a number of research projects about the many dimensions of women's economic empowerment, including access to credit, and business and financial literacy, with the aim of implementing a policy and projects for enterprise-based economic empowerment, notably for young women in the *Pa Enua*. There are a number of related initiatives, including project funding for women and youth in the *Pa Enua* for sustainable livelihoods projects (home gardens) funded by the Strengthening the Resilience of our Islands to Climate Change programme. Coordination mechanisms for these related activities need to be established.

The Cook Islands face challenges in providing employment opportunities for young people with senior secondary level education or a tertiary qualification. In recognition of the need for these young people to acquire professional experience and training, some government ministries have internship programmes, although there is no standard policy or programme across the whole of government.

Census data indicate that the gender wage gap has narrowed over the last 10 years. In 2014 the hourly minimum wage was increased from NZD 5.00 to NZD 6.00, based on recommendations from a Minimum Wage Review Panel, to help low-income earners who did not benefit from cuts to personal tax rates and increased the earnings of those on the minimum wage, many of whom live in the *Pa Enua*. The Public Service Commission has recently completed training for senior staff to enable 'job sizing' the entire public service; this will highlight gender differences in cases where women and men are doing the same type of work. Employees in the education and health sectors are predominantly female, and further analysis and research is needed regarding pay disparities between women and men who do the same work in these fields. The Ministry of Education has introduced pay parity between primary and secondary level teaching.

The Commissioner of Labour estimates that over 500 Filipina workers have employment contracts in the Cook Islands, mostly in the services sector (tourism and hospitality), with some professional and technical workers. There are concerns with the increasing number of foreign contract workers and the lack of resources allocated for ensuring compliance of employers with the Employment Relations Act (2012), as well as the relatively high costs of legal services if a contract worker has a grievance. The government has an obligation to ensure that contract workers are protected from exploitation.

Public life and decision-making



Policy implications

In 2014 four seats in the national parliament were won by women, and the Speaker was a woman. Women are more involved at the island government level in the *Pa Enua*, but the participation rate remains low.

5. Public Life and Decision-Making

Statistical indicators and information

Indicator / Information	2004		2006		2010		2014	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Parliamentary seats occupied	92%	8%	87%	13%	96%	4%	83%	17%
Seats held in national parliament	22	2	21	3	23	1	20	4
Election candidates (parliament level)					60	10	45	7
Share of decision-making positions in government -ministerial level			83% (5)	17% (1)	100% (6)	0%		
Women's share of decision-making positions in government -11 select committees				7% (2007)				
Share of decision-making positions in government –island government								17% (2013)
Information								
Right to vote					18 years of age for both men and women, universal			
Right to stand for election					18 years of age any registered elector			

Source: Cook Islands Electoral Office, unpublished data. Cook Islands Parliament website (www.parliament.gov.ck/).

Democracy relies on equal representation of women and men

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the right of every individual to take part in the government of her or his country. Equal access to power, decision-making and leadership at all levels is a necessary condition for the proper functioning of democracy. Ensuring the freedom of women to participate in politics, both as voters and as representatives, has been central to international, regional and national efforts aimed at more inclusive and democratic governance. These freedoms and rights are not limited to politics but extend to participation and leadership in public life, the private sector and civil society in general.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) commits states parties to CEDAW to act appropriately to ensure that women and men have equal rights in regards to voting, participation in the formulation of government policies, participation in NGOs and representation of their governments at the international level.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action states that the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status are essential for the achievement of transparent and accountable government that works for the benefit of both women and men. It recognises that women's empowerment and full participation on an equal basis with men in all spheres of life, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental to the achievement of equality, development and peace. In addition to setting out government commitments, the Platform for Action urges organisations from across society — including political parties, the private sector, trade unions, national, regional and subregional bodies, employers' organisations, research and academic institutions and NGOs⁷ — to take measures in support of women's participation at all levels of power and decision-making.⁸

7 United Nations 1995, section G, paragraphs 190–195.

8 United Nations 1995.

Women in public life

Public governance is one of the areas where inequality between men and women is highly visible. Limited participation by women in the structures of governance, where key policy decisions are made and resource allocations decided, often negatively impacts their political, economic and social opportunities.

Although women make up about half of the electorate and have attained the right to vote and hold office in almost all countries, they continue to be under-represented as members of national parliaments. The importance of women's political empowerment has been recognised within the framework of the MDGs, with one of the indicators for monitoring Goal 3 (promote gender equality and empower women) being the proportion of seats held by women in lower or single houses of national parliaments.

The Pacific Islands region has been noted in a number of international reports for its continued low share of female parliamentarians, with the average female participation in Pacific Island countries at 3% in 2010.⁹ This is also true in the Cook Islands, where there has been no improvement in the representation of women in the national parliament of the Cook Islands.

There were a record number of candidates in the 2010 general election, representation of women was low. The number of candidates decreased in 2014, with commentators attributing this to the snap election. The data on female and male electoral candidates for national parliamentary elections illustrate that the low proportion of female electoral candidates is directly correlated to the limited representation of women in parliament. In 2010, 10 women stood for national election, compared with 60 men (86% of the candidates were men). Men won 23 seats, meaning that 38% of men standing were elected; only one woman (10% of candidates) was elected. In 2014, 13% of the candidates were women, and women represent 8% of those elected.

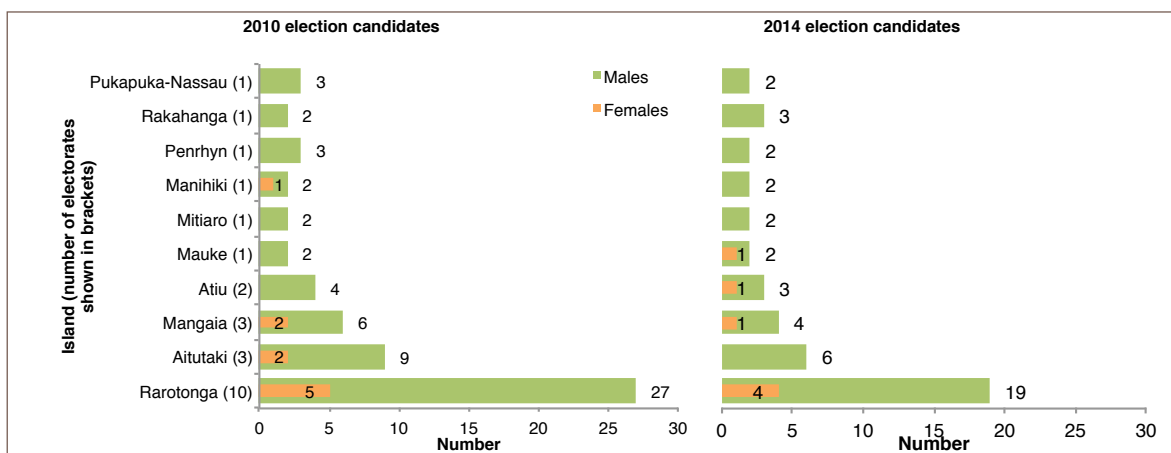


Figure 27: Number of candidates in each electorate, sex, national elections, Cook Islands, 2010 and 2014

Source: Cook Islands Electoral Office, unpublished data.

The current Speaker is a woman, who was appointed by the Prime Minister from outside of parliament. This could be seen as an astute political move to acknowledge the need for women and men to be involved in decision-making at the highest level in the Cook Islands, and recognising the traditional role of women in joint decision-making with men. Alternatively, it may be that no suitably qualified member of parliament from the government's side of the house was available, and an outside appointment was necessary.

9 For example, see *The World's Women*, 2010 pp. 112 and 113.

In general, women aspiring to careers in politics encounter difficulties, suggesting that the democratic principles of parity and equality continue to be hampered by structural and attitudinal barriers, including discrimination and gender stereotypes that disadvantage women in many regions of the world. The Cook Islands has two major political parties, the Cook Islands Party and the Democratic Party; two other parties contested the 2014 election (One Cook Islands Movement Incorporated and Titikaveka Oire Incorporated).

If there is to be any increase in the representation of women amongst the nation's leaders this must first be through increased representation as candidates endorsed by the two main political parties. The 2014 election was a snap election held seven months earlier than anticipated, resulting in a much shorter time period for activities and programmes to support women as candidates, as well as parallel education and information campaigns for women voters.

In the 2010 general election the Cook Islands Party fielded 24 candidates, one of whom was a woman. The Democratic Party fielded 23 candidates, 3 of whom were women. The *Te Kura O Te Au Party* had six candidates, three of whom were women. Of the independent candidates not aligned to any political party, 3 of the 16 candidates were women.

Women in island administrations

Local government in the Cook Islands outside of the main island of Rarotonga consists of island administrations elected by popular vote. Women are under-represented in decision-making at the local government level, with gender parity achieved only on the island of Palmerston, where six of the elected representatives on the island council were female. In Mitiaro, 12 of the 41 councillors were female (29%), the highest number of any island. In Mangaia, only four of the 48 councillors were female (8%).

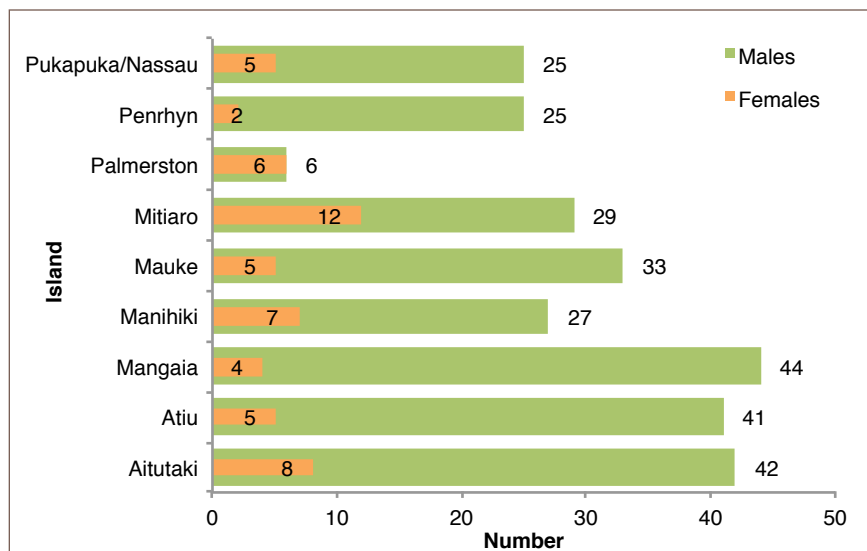


Figure 28: Island government employees, Cook Islands (as at 31 March 2013)

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, 2013.

Policy implications

In many countries, electoral gender quotas are considered to be an effective measure for improving gender balance in parliament. Generally, quotas for women require that women constitute a certain number or percentage of a body, such as a candidate list or a parliamentary assembly. Today, quota systems aim at ensuring that women constitute at least 30% or 40%, or even a true gender balance of 50%.

Many countries in the world implement gender quotas to offset obstacles that women have faced in the electoral process. At present, at least 90 countries apply an electoral gender quota of some kind for the lower or single chamber of their national parliaments. The introduction of gender quotas, however, is not without controversy. While quotas compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of the political seats, it has been argued that they contradict the principles of equal opportunity because women are given preference over men. It has also been observed that quotas are hard to apply in 'single winner' systems such as in the Cook Islands, where each party nominates a single candidate per district. Furthermore, the re-election of parliament members restricts the rate of member turnover at each election, which makes complying with gender quotas difficult. For example, analysis by the European Commission shows that around two thirds of members of parliament are re-elected at each election, leaving limited opportunities for new leaders and hence limited opportunities for progress towards gender balance.

The difficulty of combining family life, work and politics remain a severe obstacle to women seeking political office. Among the political challenges that women face, the prevalence of the 'masculine model' of political life and lack of party support feature prominently. In particular, the barriers to the political participation of women at the local level may be related to lack of community support, lack of family co-responsibility within households to release women from unpaid household work, limited recognition of and legitimacy allocated to their contribution within public power spheres, and the lack of economic resources to pursue a candidature.

In the Cook Islands, discussions have been ongoing with the two main political parties regarding how to increase women's participation in political life, but no resolutions or commitments have been made. There have been discussions about changing the electoral system from the current 'first past the post' model, but there is no consensus about reforms to electoral and political processes.

The National Council of Women is implementing a project to increase women's participation in local government (*Pa Enua* Island Councils). Training workshops have been conducted to increase women's participation in decision-making at the Island Council level, which is expected to increase representation of women when elections are held in 2015. It is hoped that once women become accustomed to being involved in local government and decision-making, more women will move into the national politics.

Legislation and governance



Policy implications

The Gender and Development Division receives less than 1% of the recurrent government budget and is not adequately resourced to implement the national gender equality policy. Implementing gender mainstreaming in government will require additional resources. The Cook Islands has made some progress towards implementing laws and policies to meet the obligations under CEDAW, but it has been slow.

6. Legislation and governance

Statistical indicators and information

Indicator	Information				
Year of ratification of CEDAW*	2006 (Accession); Optional Protocol 2007.				
CEDAW National action plan submitted to the United Nations	Initial Report to CEDAW Committee 2007. No national action plan developed.				
National body to monitor the implementation of law and policy to foster the advancement of women	The CEDAW Committee.				
Sexual harassment legislation	There is no specific sexual harassment legislation.				
Decriminalisation of solicitation (prostitution)	No. Crimes Act 1969, § 163 criminalises the sex worker.				
Government gender mainstreaming policy in place	No. Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment & Strategic Plan of Action (2011–2016) contains gender mainstreaming as an output.				
Indicator	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Proportion of government recurrent budget to Gender and Development Division	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Proportion of Ministry of Internal Affairs recurrent budget to Gender and Development Division	5%	6%	6%	6%	7%

* CEDAW = Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs. Budget information from Ministry of Finance and Economic Management Budget Appropriation (<http://www.mfem.gov.ck/treasury/budget-downloads>).

What is CEDAW?

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is an international treaty that is part of the United Nations human rights system. Sometimes referred to as the Women's Convention or the Women's Bill of Rights, it's a comprehensive international agreement that is intended to improve the status of women.

CEDAW promotes the equal attainment of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights by women. It also establishes rights for women in areas that were not previously subject to international standards. Moreover, it provides a universal definition of discrimination against women, so that those who would discriminate on the basis of sex can no longer claim that there is no clear definition of what this means.

CEDAW in the Cook Islands

In ratifying CEDAW, the Cook Islands committed to undertake all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

Currently there is no national governance mechanism to implement the human rights conventions the Cook Islands has ratified, but the government is considering various models involving a human rights commission or commissioner. One option that has reasonably strong backing is to make human rights the responsibility of the Office of the Ombudsman. However, the function of developing the measures and policies to progressively

implement CEDAW currently rests with GADD in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. GADD is responsible for coordinating legislative reform, establishing mechanisms, and mainstreaming the rights of women into sectoral strategies; recommending to Cabinet national strategic plans of action and other measures to implement CEDAW; ensuring that state reports for CEDAW are prepared in a timely manner and according to the relevant guidelines; and advocating for sufficient human and financial resources to carry out these functions.

A number of initiatives are underway as a result of the government's commitment to CEDAW, including domestic violence legislation, and a periodic report on the status of CEDAW implementation. Legislative compliance reviews have been undertaken for the Crimes Act 1969 and the Marriages Act, but the proposed revisions have stalled in parliamentary review committees.

Sexual harassment legislation

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination. Laws against sexual harassment are designed to protect women and men from unwanted sexual advances. Both men and women can be sexually harassed by someone of the same or opposite sex.

Globally, women are more likely than men to suffer from sexual harassment at their place of work, in education and training and in all aspects of life. Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexually determined behaviour, such as physical contact and advances, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, and sexual demands, whether by words or actions. Such actions can be humiliating for the recipient and are discriminatory when they create a hostile work environment.

The Employment Relations Act of 2012 contains provisions for sexual harassment and new protections around maternity leave, discrimination and termination.

Decriminalisation of solicitation (prostitution)

Decriminalisation of solicitation or prostitution is a step towards recognising the basic human rights of sex workers. Decriminalisation prevents the state from prosecuting adults for consensual, nonviolent sexual activity, whether or not money is exchanged. This is where laws already prohibit nonconsensual violent sex, as well as slavery, human trafficking, sex with a minor, rape, assault, extortion and robbery, as is the case in the Cook Islands. Decriminalisation is not a panacea for addressing the worst aspects of sex work, but is very important.

A unified international sex workers' rights movement, with thousands of members, has organised to demand the basic human rights of sex workers be recognised, and prostitution (a 'victimless crime') be decriminalised. This activism has resulted in the decriminalisation of prostitution in both Australia and New Zealand.

The Crimes Act, 1969 criminalises the act of soliciting and living off sex work, or operating brothels.

Gender mainstreaming

The concept of bringing gender issues into the mainstream of society was clearly established as a global strategy for promoting gender equality in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. It highlighted the necessity to ensure that gender equality is a primary goal in all areas of social and economic development. Mainstreaming is not about adding a 'woman's component' or even a 'gender equality component' into an existing activity. It goes beyond increasing women's participation, and means bringing the experience, knowledge and interests of women and men to bear on the development agenda.

There have been several successful initiatives to address women's issues and reduce gender inequalities in the last few decades in several sectors. However, gender equality is not systematically integrated in the policies and programmes of the central and local government. The gender stocktake conducted by the government in 2009–2010 reveals that gender issues are rarely discussed as development issues among government agencies, and gender equality is not mainstreamed across the sectors. With the exception of the Education and Health sectors, there is little production and use of sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis to guide policy-making, programme design and service delivery. There is no accountability system for mainstreaming gender at the institutional and individual levels. The technical capacity to conduct gender analysis and mainstream gender is generally low in all sectors. The coordination of initiatives for addressing women's human rights is weak and collaboration with the national women's machinery is very limited; financial and human resources for mainstreaming gender are largely insufficient.

Consequently, GADD is working to increase capacity for gender mainstreaming of government policy-makers, managers and professionals, and to increase its capacity to monitor, evaluate, coordinate and provide technical advice. GADD is working with development partners to assess how best to mainstream gender in government agencies in the Cook Islands. A cautious approach has been adopted, to ensure government agencies have the capacity to mainstream gender and develop gender-sensitive policies and analyses before introducing gender mainstreaming across government.

Resources for achieving gender equality

Gender equality cannot be achieved without adequately resourced and staffed mechanisms in government, with clear policy directions, and regular monitoring and evaluation of progress. In 1979 the Cook Islands Government established the Women's Desk (the Women in Development Division, since renamed GADD) within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but failed to provide adequate resources. The Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2011-2016 includes a strategic action plan with clear policy direction, prioritisation and commitment to allocate resources for gender equality, but with very limited financial resources and technical capacity. A National Steering Committee, with representatives from all government ministries and some agencies including the national council of women, has been established to provide advice and monitor implementation progress. There are several sectoral 'task forces' reporting to the National Steering Committee, based on the six key areas in the policy:

- Gender mainstreaming
- Leadership and governance
- Economic empowerment
- Climate change adaptation
- Health
- Violence against women

Donor partners are working with GADD to implement the policy. However, a lack of funding and a priority for developing capacity within GADD has slowed progress.

The government funding for gender equality, as shown by the recurrent budget allocation for GADD, was about 0.3% from 2010–2012. The government pays the salary of GADD staff, but provides very limited funding to cover operational costs. Within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, GADD receives about 7% of the recurrent budget. With this funding commitment it is unlikely that substantial progress will be made to implement policies to achieve gender equality, or undertake the substantial research required to identify and develop policies to address the underlying causes of inequality.

Policy implications

Ensuring that the legal and governance framework supports gender equality underpins all efforts to achieve gender equality. However, the for compliance with international treaties such as CEDAW, the Convention on the Rights of the legislative reforms required Child and the Convention on the Rights of People Living with Disability is overwhelming for small Pacific Island nations. Countries such as the Cook Islands need to set clear national priorities from among the many changes required, and work gradually towards these using a whole of government approach. The Cook Islands is planning to submit a combined periodic CEDAW report to the United Nations in 2015. In 2014 the Cook Islands drafted its first Common Core Document and this should make the human rights reporting process more streamlined, with treaty reports focusing on reporting progress against specific human rights treaty articles and the recommendations made by the United Nations (so called 'concluding comments').

Politicians, political parties, the judiciary, law enforcement officers and traditional leaders must be involved in this process, to avoid bills being dismissed because no action has been taken within the six months allowed for select committee review and public consultation processes. Delays can occur during the select committee review process, with legislation referred back to the submitting agency for clarification, revision or budgeting of the costs of implementation. Delays are also caused by Parliament not meeting as scheduled, or at all (as occurred prior to the 2010 general election). Potentially controversial legislation needs to be debated and discussed by the public well before it is presented to Parliament, to ensure both the public and parliamentarians are educated and informed.

Progress is being made to comply with human rights treaties, and the Crown Law office has a programme to implement legal reforms relating to progressive CEDAW compliance. The Crimes Act is currently being reviewed with development partner assistance, and the Family Law Bill should be tabled in parliament in mid-2015.

Regulations and policies regarding discrimination and sexual harassment are needed in both the public and private sectors. Sexual harassment and discrimination are mentioned in the Personnel Manual of the Public Service Commission, but only that incidents must be reported to the head of the ministry and with no specific definitions or alternative avenues for complaints. The Employment Relations Act (2012) contains provisions for sexual harassment and new protections regarding maternity leave, discrimination and termination; with some terms used not having precise and specific resulting in different interpretations of the provisions. In small countries such as the Cook Islands individuals often fulfil roles that fall outside their primary function: in the Cook Islands the former Ombudsman has made herself available to receive complaints from the general public about sexual harassment and discrimination.

Some employee induction programmes in the private sector include information about the business's sexual harassment policy and procedures that should be followed. Such an induction programme is absent in the public sector. In general, the level of awareness and knowledge about sexual harassment is low and public service employers apply the 'good employer' principle. Sexual harassment seems to be more prevalent in the private sector, although data are not available to support this. This highlights the need for a human rights institution that individuals can access at minimal cost to obtain the support and services they need. Barriers to pursuing a sexual harassment or discrimination complaint include the prohibitive cost of legal services, the requirement for mediation and arbitration, and general and lack of knowledge about policies and regulations.

Progress in mainstreaming gender in government has been slow. Obstacles include the capacity of GADD to undertake the needed policy review and implementation work with line ministries, the absence of formally established institutional arrangements, low support and understanding at the technical level in most ministries, and limited ownership by heads of ministries (with the exception of health and education), limited statistical information for gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation, and a heavy reliance on development partner funding for GADD operational activities. GADD will be working with the Public Service Commission as to ensure job descriptions for heads of ministries include requirements for gender mainstreaming activities under the gender policy and selection processes are gender balanced. As a parallel process GADD and the CISO are working with key stakeholders to develop a gender sensitive statistical indicator reporting framework with the assistance of development partners.

Environment



Policy implications

Data on changes in the work burdens of men and women as a consequence of natural hazards such as cyclones, droughts and floods, and data to assess the capability of women and men to protect local natural resources, are not available. There is little information on access to practical knowledge related to the environment. Sex-disaggregated data on participation in the management of local natural resources such as water or biodiversity are also lacking.

7. Environment

Statistical indicators and information

Indicator / Information	2006		2011	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Population access to improved sanitation	92%	93%	99%	100%
Urban			100%	100%
Rural			87%	87%
Population access to improved drinking water	79%	78%	76%	76%
Urban			63%	63%
Rural			99%	99%
Percentage of population relying on traditional fuels for energy use	8%	8%	1%	1%
Urban overcrowding*	4%	4%	6%	5%
Rural overcrowding*	10%	10%	9%	9%

* Measured using the United Nations Habitat definition as households with insufficient living space and more than two people per habitable room.

Source: CISO 2006 and 2011, unpublished data.

The statistical indicators are limited

Limited data availability has constrained the issues that could be examined in this chapter. More statistical information on links between gender and the environment is needed in several areas. For example, data on changes in the work burdens of men and women as a consequence of droughts, floods, or deforestation are not available, because there is no information about time use in the Cook Islands. Sex-disaggregated data on the effects of natural hazards on education, health, food and economic security are also not available.

Monitoring the impacts of climate change on the lives of women and men is particularly challenging. First, the gendered effects may not be easily detectable on a larger scale — a or region, country or even urban vs rural areas — where social statistics have traditionally focused, and monitoring may need to focus on smaller areas that are particularly prone to the impacts of climate change. Second, separating the effects of climate change on people's lives from other environmental and socioeconomic factors is difficult. Non-climate factors such as demographic pressure or over-exploitation of resources also increase the risk of environmental degradation and impact access to natural resources, and human health and survival. Finally, data to assess the ability of women and men to protect local natural resources are not available. There is little information on access to practical knowledge related to the environment, including modern agricultural information and techniques. Sex-disaggregated data on participation in management of local natural resources such as water or biodiversity are also lacking.

Overcrowding

The definition of overcrowding used here — those households with more than two people per room — has been chosen because this can be assessed using census data. Other measures are more sensitive to the physical condition of the housing unit or the sleeping arrangements. Census data show that overcrowding is not a major issue in the Cook Islands. In 2011, the average number of people per household was 3.5 in urban areas and 3.8 in rural areas. This compares with 3.6 people per urban household and 3.7 in rural households in 2006.

There was a slight increase in the population living in overcrowded housing in Rarotonga at the time of the 2011 census, from 4% of women and men in 2006 to 5% of women and men in 2011, while overcrowding in rural areas decreased from 10% to 9% for males and females of all ages. The higher incidence of overcrowding in rural areas results mainly from the style of housing, where the structure of the house itself is large but there are only few habitable rooms, typically a living room or some kind of shared area, and one bedroom for the owner of the house.

Access to improved water

The definition of improved drinking water used by the MDGs excludes bottled or water that is purchased from a vendor. By this definition, 37% of males and females in Rarotonga in 2011 lacked access to improved drinking water. Families buy drinking water because of concerns regarding the quality of the piped drinking water supply in Rarotonga. The government is investing to improve both the water delivery infrastructure and the quality of the piped water. However, when these improvements are fully implemented users will be assessed a fee to access water that is piped into their homes.

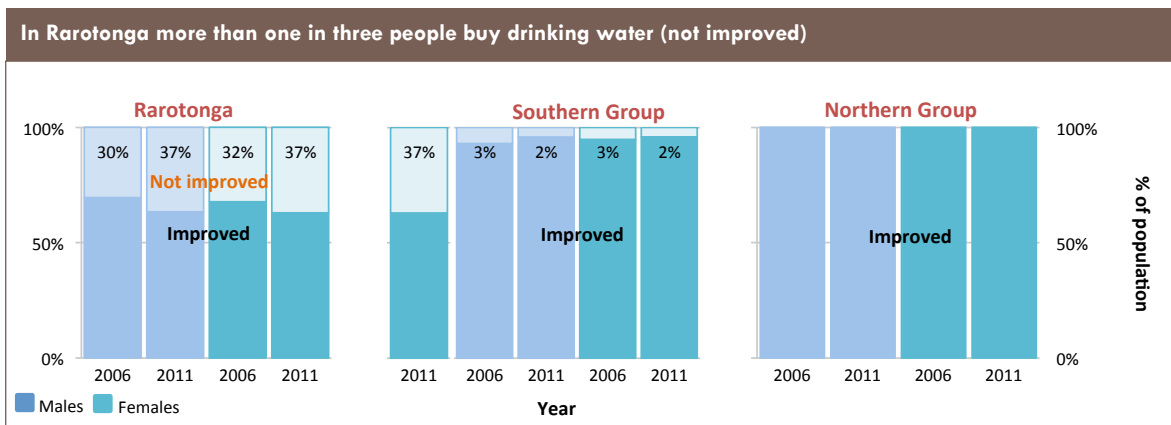


Figure 29: Population with access to improved drinking water, Cook Islands, 2006 and 2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

Access to improved sanitation

Progress is being made to increase access to improved sanitation; 15% of males and females in the Southern Group, and 6% of males and females in the Northern Group, lived in a house without a flush toilet in 2011.

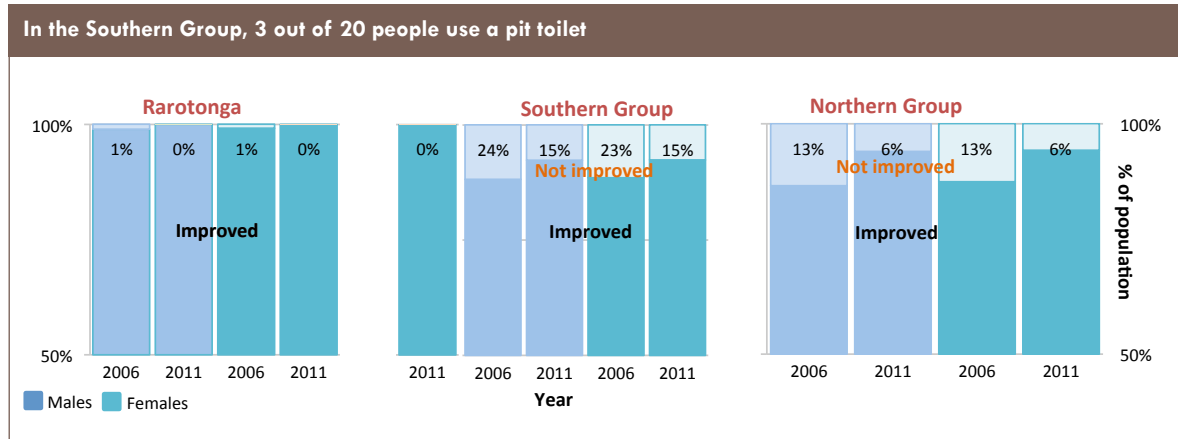


Figure 30: Population with access to improved sanitation, Cook Islands, 2006 and 2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

Use of solid fuels for cooking

In less-developed regions, a large proportion of households still use firewood for cooking and heating. This is not the case in the Cook Islands. In the last five years there has been a shift in the *Pa Enua*, especially the Northern Group, away from using wood as a cooking fuel to gas.



Figure 31: Population using only firewood for cooking, Cook Islands, 2006 and 2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

Policy implications

Involving women in environmental decision-making at all levels is a key step in ensuring that women's issues and gender perspectives on the environment are included in policy-making at levels (local, national and global). If the government is to achieve its goals of meeting energy needs from renewable energy, women must be fully involved in the implementation of such systems, and know how to maintain them. It

is not possible to directly monitor progress towards achievement of this goal. The 2011 census indicates there has been a shift in source of electricity, away from traditional grid systems and generators. In the Northern Group, 43% of women and 40% of men lived in households with some kind of renewable energy for electricity (solar or wind).

The Cook Islands Government has committed to obtaining 50% of the country's energy needs from renewable sources by 2015, and 100% by 2020. The Northern Group is the first priority area, to be followed by the Southern Group.

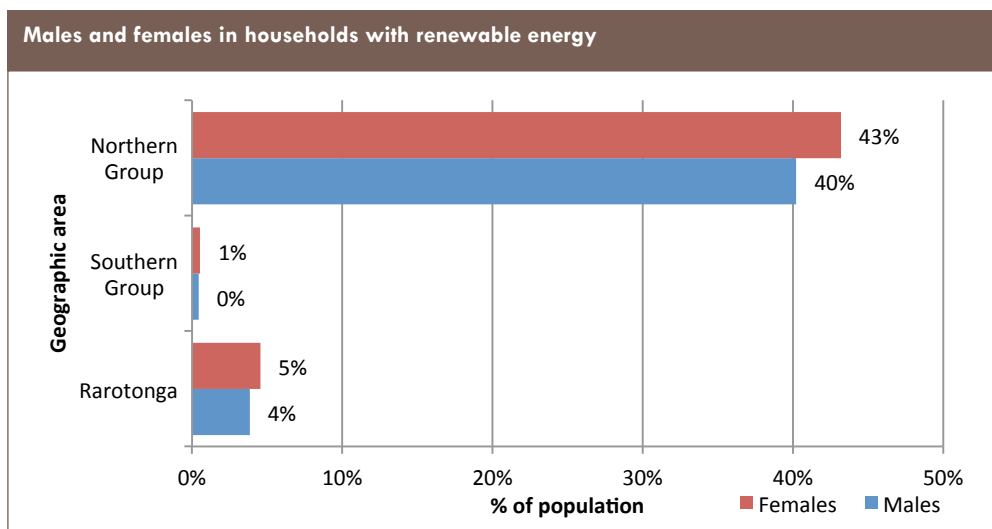


Figure 32: Population in households with renewable energy, Cook Islands, 2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

Women and the environment is one of 12 critical areas of concern for achieving gender equality identified by the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. The Platform for Action recognises that environmental conditions have a different impact on the lives of women and men due to existing gender inequality. In particular, the lack of access to clean water and energy, and environmental degradation and natural disasters disproportionately affect women in terms of unremunerated work, and impacts on health and wellbeing. Furthermore, the Platform for Action stresses that the role of women in sustainable development is hampered by unequal access to land, financial resources and agricultural information and technologies; unequal access to formal training in professional natural resources management; and limited involvement in policy formulation and decision-making in natural resources and environment management. These barriers are still in place 20 years after the Platform for Action was endorsed by governments.

There are also concerns that climate change may deepen environment-related gender inequality, particularly in small island developing states such as the Cook Islands. Increased temperatures; increasing risk of heat waves, droughts and floods; and increasing intensity and frequency of storms and tropical cyclones all result from climate change, and are expected to negatively impact agricultural livelihoods, the availability of food, and human health and survival. Women are considered among the most vulnerable groups, as they tend to be more dependent on the natural resources that are threatened by climate change, and have fewer assets to cope with the change.

Men and women have different roles in the family, community and work force, and have different personal interactions, priorities and strategies when it comes to environmental protection. Similarly, women and men are often differently affected by environmental degradation because the roles and work patterns of women and men (in both the workforce and the household) are likely to differ. Equal participation of men and women in environmental decision-making is a question of equal rights and responsibilities. Neither men nor women have a “natural predisposition” for environmental protection. But patterns regarding their roles in society may mean that strategies for promoting environmental protection need to target men and women differently. Policies that are better targeted (i.e. those that specifically take into consideration the needs, priorities and perspectives of different groups of men and women) will not only be more effective in ensuring positive outcomes, but will also result in more efficient use of resources in implementing these policies. Furthermore adopting a participatory approach to assessing environmental degradation, management and conservation helps build trust, credibility, and accountability, which in turn may elicit more commitment to environmental protection from the general population.

The Cook Islands has an extensive Disaster Risk Management network and associated activities for mitigating the impacts of climate change. However, gender roles are not specifically or systematically addressed in these programmes; village Disaster Risk Management committees focus on infrastructure and welfare, but do not yet provide facilities for women and with their young children, and people living with disability. An Internet geoportal is being developed for communities to access weather services and disaster-related information, but the limited number of households in the *Pa Enua* with Internet connectivity (because of high ongoing costs) limits the effectiveness of this initiative.

The donor-funded Strengthening the Resilience of our Islands to Climate Change programme has implemented a number of sustainable livelihood projects for women and youth in the *Pa Enua* based on the productive sector. While such initiatives take local knowledge and market demand into consideration, the process for appraising and awarding these project grants is not transparent, and coordination mechanisms are not established with other central government agencies. Climatic changes are being felt in the *Pa Enua*, particularly in the far north, where anecdotal evidence suggests that climate change is forcing people from their island homes, because of impacts on food security and access to fresh water.

The government has a scheme to provide free 6,000-litre water tanks to households, with the costs of water pumps and connections borne by the household. While this may suffice in Rarotonga and the Southern Group in the *Pa Enua*, in the drier north, larger community tanks or catchment systems are needed during prolonged droughts. Fortunately no adverse health effects have been reported to date linked to inadequate drinking water in the *Pa Enua*.

Poverty



Policy implications

Information about the income levels of households headed by women and men show substantial gender inequality between households; households headed by women are more likely to have lower incomes and be dependent on welfare (from the government benefit system, broader family and community social protections, or both). Women may not fully participate in decision-making on spending, and female and male household members do not always have equal access to household resources. Fewer women have cash income, and are less likely to own land or other property, than men.

8. Poverty

Statistical indicators and information

Indicator	2001	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012*
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) NZD '000 (real, 2006)	234,604	289,680	289,097	278,937	281,862	273,491	276,169	288,326
Per Capita GDP (nominal or current prices)	12,509	12,223	14,769	15,028	15,208	14,941	19,380	19,659
Per Capita GDP NZD (real, 2006)	10,251	12,223	13,767	12,622	12,472	11,540	14,768	14,939
Average annual growth rate real GDP	3.8%	-4.7%	12.6%	-8.3%	-1.2%	-7.5%	28.0%	1.2%
	2001		2006		2011			
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females		
Percent population without own income (by age group)								
15-24	40%	38%	39%	40%	37%	38%		
25-34	10%	6%	7%	5%	6%	10%		
35-44	10%	8%	7%	7%	6%	9%		
45-54	13%	16%	8%	14%	5%	12%		
55-64	9%	15%	9%	12%	7%	12%		
Percent population receiving benefits or pensions#								
15-24	2%	22%	2%	19%	2%	8%		
25-34	9%	63%	6%	52%	4%	16%		
35-44	9%	55%	6%	53%	4%	13%		
45-54	9%	35%	6%	30%	5%	13%		
55-64	56%	59%	42%	55%	41%	43%		
65 and over	97%	100%	95%	95%	94%	97%		

* Provisional estimates for 2012.

Changes to the census question in 2011 on source of income resulted in under-counting persons receiving benefits (child benefit included as other).

Source: CISO, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2013.

Relatively high gross domestic product but slow growth

Gross domestic product (GDP) is arguably the most important of all economic statistics as it attempts to capture the state of the economy in one number. GDP represents the total dollar value of all goods and services produced in a certain time period (one year in the Cook Islands). If GDP increases compared with the previous year, the economy is growing, while if GDP decreases, the economy is contracting. The Cook Islands economy is based on tourism, retail and wholesale trade, and fishing and agriculture; government spending also contributes significantly to GDP.

In 2011, the GDP of the Cook Islands was estimated to be NZD 276 million; if distributed equally to each person in the Cook Islands, this equalled NZD 12,789 per capita. In 2011, the Cook Islands Statistics Office estimated that real GDP grew by 1%, based on increased income from tourism, modest growth in exports, and expenditures for a number of large infrastructure projects. Much of the GDP growth has been concentrated in a small number of sectors; as a result, there has been rising unemployment and financial hardship on many islands of the *Pa Enua*. Through the harmonised aid programme Australia and New Zealand contributed NZD 18.1 million to the Cook Islands in the 2011–2012 financial year, with China contributing a further NZD 14 million: total aid from all partners contributed to about 12% of GDP.

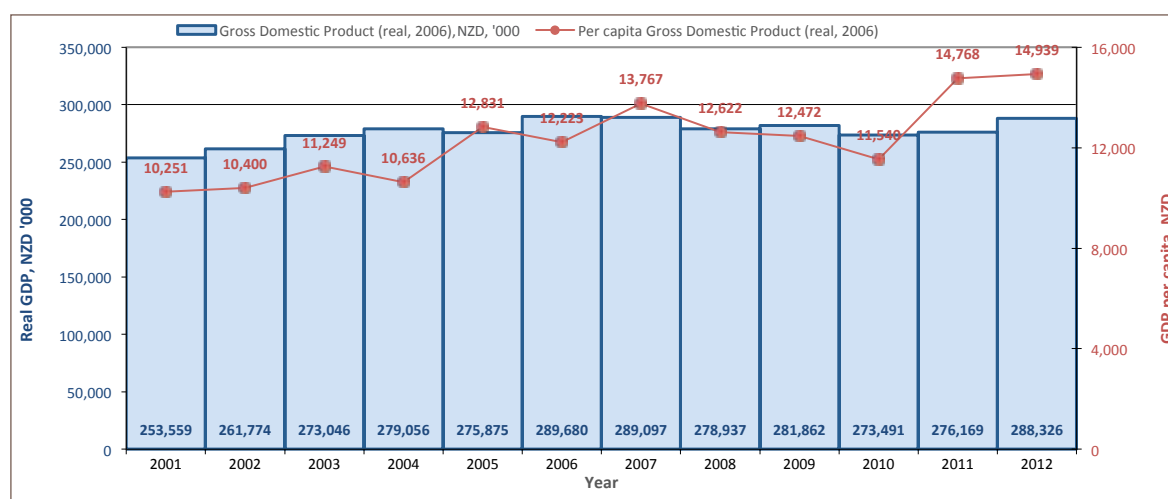


Figure 33: Cook Islands GDP (real, year 2006) and real GDP per capita, Cook Islands, 2001–2012

Note: 2012 data are provisional.

Source: CISO, 2013.

Growth in GDP does not necessarily result in everyone becoming wealthier. Supporters of 'trickle down' economics suggest that economically disadvantaged members of society will ultimately benefit from long-term economic growth with increased employment and business opportunities and higher wages and incomes. The labour force participation rate (Figure 20) from the 2006 and 2011 censuses did not increase significantly and averaged at 65% for women and 77% for men and the median (gross) income (Figure 25) over same period was about NZD 12,304 for men and NZD 9,900 for women with a decrease in the median (gross) incomes of women and men. This in relation to increasing GDP per capita implies that incomes are distributed unevenly with a large gap between the highest and lowest incomes.

Unequal distribution of wealth results in pockets of hardship

The MDG progress reports for 2005 and 2010 state that there is no extreme poverty in the Cook Islands; however, the data indicate that a large proportion of the rural population is heavily reliant on subsistence production of food and household supplies to meet their basic needs, while a segment of the urban population depends on social welfare benefits to meet basic needs. This is evident in the poverty indicators derived from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) of 2005–2006, the census data on the incomes of people aged 15 and over, and social welfare payment records.

Poverty lines were developed from the HIES for three regions: Rarotonga, Southern Group and Northern Group – based on expenditure reported for basic needs such as food, shelter, transport and communication. The poverty line for Rarotonga was NZD 117.95 per week, in the Southern Group it was NZD 74.91 and it was NZD 49.23 in the Northern Group. This variation in the poverty lines shows the lower price values of subsistence food production in the rural areas, notably the north; and the size and scope of the cash (or formal) economy in Rarotonga compared to the rural islands, where a much smaller range of goods and services is available than in Rarotonga.

Analysis of the data shows that poverty is not strongly linked to the sex of the head of the household in Rarotonga, and to a lesser extent in the Southern Group. In Rarotonga 18% of the households headed by women were below the poverty line, compared with 24% of the households headed by males.

In 2005-2006 households headed by women lived very close to the poverty line. In Rarotonga 27% of households were headed by women, but such households accounted for 32% of households in the lowest 20% of household expenditures in Rarotonga. Thus about three out of every 10 of the lowest-spending households in Rarotonga were headed by a woman, and one in four in the Southern Group.

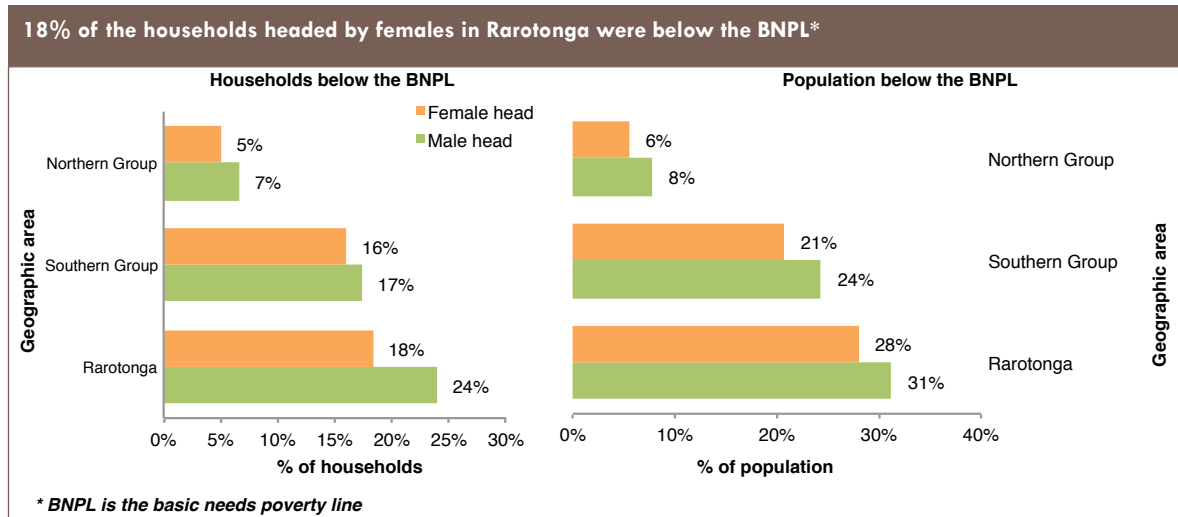


Figure 34: Households and population living below the basic needs poverty line (BNPL), Cook Islands, 2005-2006

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

A similar analysis based on household income estimates and sex of the household head from the 2011 Census shows that 28% of the households headed by women had household incomes in the lowest 20%, compared with 17% of households headed by males. While there are more households headed by men in the lowest income percentiles than households headed by women, a higher proportion of households headed by women are in this group.

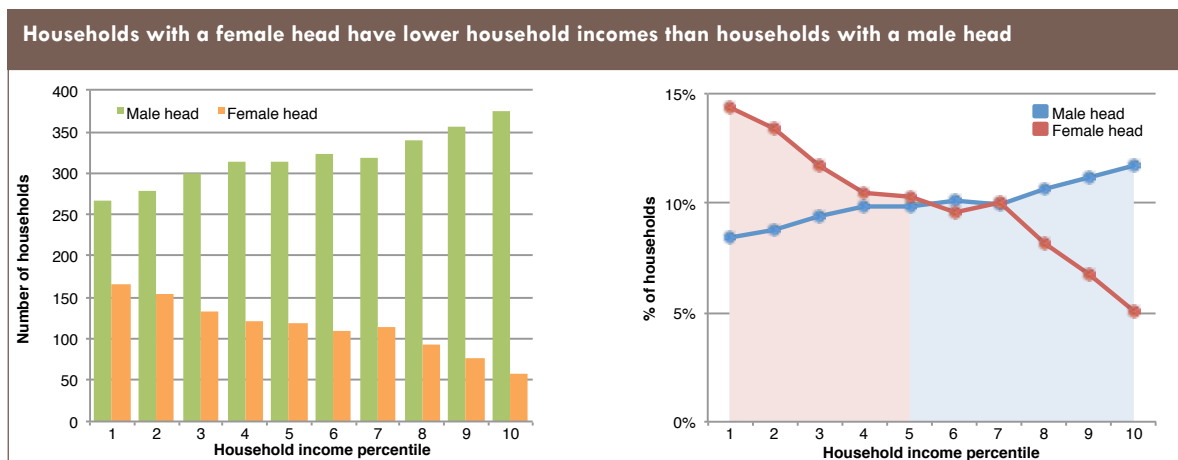


Figure 35: Sex of household head and household income percentile, number of households and percent of each sex, Cook Islands, 2011

Note: Income range mid-points used for population aged 15 and over.

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

People in households with low incomes, or incomes below the basic needs poverty line level, will not necessarily go hungry, although their diet is likely to be poor in nutrition. However, they probably struggle to meet their living expenses, particularly those that require cash payments (such as payments for electricity, water, transport, children's school fees, clothing, housing and medical costs). These families must constantly try to balance income and expenditures, resulting in frequent trade-offs. They would often (in some cases constantly) rely on family, friends and neighbours for assistance.

Welfare benefits are insufficient to support those without income

The Cook Islands is one of the few Pacific Island countries to have a social welfare benefit system. Programmes are in place to provide welfare benefits to those with low incomes, as well as the elderly and the destitute. All mothers receive a one-time 'new born' allowance of NZD 300; children aged under 12 receive a child benefit of NZD 30 per fortnight; while an old age pension of NZD 200 per fortnight is paid to those over 60. All beneficiaries receive a Christmas bonus. A destitute or infirm persons relief benefit of NZD 75 per fortnight is available for those who have no access to a livelihood, and the same amount is paid to eligible caregivers occupied in caring for a disabled or destitute beneficiary. Welfare recipients with total income of less than NZD 600 per month qualify for a subsidy payment for their electricity bill, and limited funds are available to welfare recipients who require extra help with their living conditions (for example, for essential home improvements and maintenance).

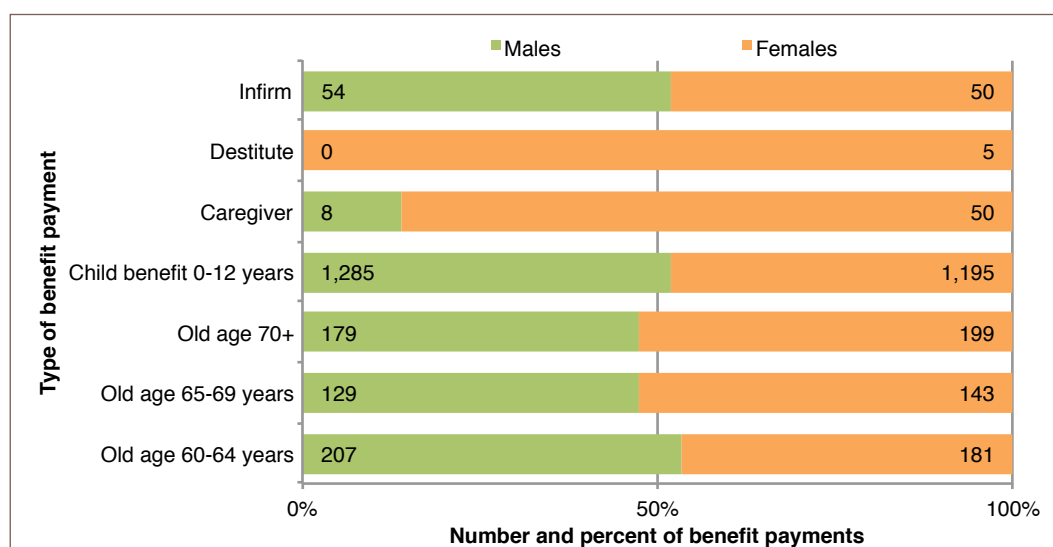


Figure 36: Rarotonga: Sex of benefit payment recipient, type of benefit and average number of recipients, Cook Islands, 2011

Note: Data was averaged over 24 payments for each benefit type to give approximate annual number.

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs, unpublished data.

Welfare payments made in Rarotonga in 2011 reflect the national pattern. Women were more likely than men to receive a pension for those aged 65 or older, as well as the caregivers allowance, and made up the majority of the small number of destitute beneficiaries (almost all are single mothers). In 2011 benefit payments in Rarotonga totalled just over NZD 7 million, which represents a significant portion of the government's recurrent budget.

No national definition of poverty

As is true for the majority of Pacific Island countries, the Cook Islands lacks a national poverty reduction strategy or specific policies to alleviate poverty. Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. The Beijing Platform for Action recognised that:

...poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life.¹⁰

Thus, while the economic dimension remains central, other factors such as a lack of opportunities, vulnerabilities and social exclusion are recognized as important in defining poverty. The use of a broad concept of poverty is considered essential for integrating gender into poverty reduction strategies, and for monitoring, from a gender perspective, progress towards achieving MDG 1 (eradicating extreme poverty and hunger).

Women's involvement in decision-making on spending

This analysis is limited to the survey data available. On average, households headed by women have lower incomes than those headed by men. It is not possible to analyse poverty in broader outcomes such as control over household resources as reflected by property ownership, cash income and participation in household decision-making on spending.

Policy implications

In summary, the information about the income levels of households headed by women and men presented in this chapter indicate that there is substantial gender inequality between households, and households headed by women are more likely to have lower incomes and be welfare dependent, from the government benefit system or broader family and community social protection or both. Women may not fully participate in decision-making on spending, and female and male members of the household do not always have equal access to household resources. Fewer women have cash incomes, and they own land or other property less often than men. This lower access to resources increases women's economic dependency on men and make them more vulnerable to various economic and environmental shocks.

The government maintains a welfare benefits system to make those offered in New Zealand and Australia less attractive to Cook Islanders, who are New Zealand citizens. There was a comprehensive review of the welfare system in 2010, and some adjustments were implemented after extensive national consultations, and demographic and economic analyses and forecasting that estimated the cost of the welfare system. Discussions were held regarding annual adjustment of benefits based on inflation (the cost of living); providing higher payments in the *Pa Enuā* because of higher costs; And the adequacy of benefit payments relative to their purpose. Much of the review focused on the old age pension, and analysis regarding caregivers or destitute benefits was limited. Recent increases in pensions paid to the elderly have increased the differences in amounts paid for different kinds of welfare payments.

10 United Nations, 1995 Chapter IV, section A, paragraph 47 (p.19).

It is important that the Cook Islands update its measures and incidence of poverty; the 2005-2006 HIES is the most recent source of data for poverty analysis. The income information collected in the 2011 Census indicates that the gap between the rich and poor is widening. Statistical household surveys that collect household income and expenditure information are expensive (on the order of NZD 500,000). The government has pledged it would meet 25% of the cost of such a survey, which ideally would include time use statistics to inform policy makers about the 'triple' burden on women and men: work in the formal sector, work in the informal sector and their unpaid work in the home. The data could be analysed in the context of the incidence of poverty and hardship and the many dimensions of poverty, including poverty of opportunity.

Government fiscal and macroeconomic policies are not analysed systematically from a gender perspective. For example, international research has demonstrated that goods and services taxes such as a value added tax (VAT) are regressive: the burden of these taxes is much higher on poorer households. The increase in the VAT from 12.5% to 15% in 2014 was justified on the basis that the government simultaneously raised the income tax exemption threshold, decreased the tax on secondary incomes and raised the threshold on business turnover for tax exemption. This tax model does not take into account people in the Cook Islands who do not work for pay or profit, as well as those who are dependent on the welfare system (apart from the elderly, although despite increasing pensions the government also increased the tax on pensions). Meanwhile, the price of imported items, food, household supplies and personal care items has increased.

The government has been exploring options to provide better services to those who are less well off. With development partner assistance welfare-based programmes implemented on Atiu, Aitutaki, Mangaia, Mauke and a village on Rarotonga to provide a mix of carer support and relief for older people and people living with disability and a weekly meal ends service. Funding assistance ends in 2014, but the Cook Islands government, through its Social Impact Fund, will provide continuing support in 2015 for Mangaia, Mauke and the Rarotonga village to provide rehabilitation services. Ongoing funding for food relief projects in Atiu and Aitutaki are being explored, including the possibility of private sector sponsorship of food packages in Aitutaki and, in the absence of private sector sponsors, a nominal fee payment in Atiu for this service. There is no national policy or strategy to provide universal access to such goods and services, and this should be addressed.

Information and communications



Policy implications

In the Northern Group of the Cook Islands the ability of women to benefit equally from the opportunities offered by information and communication technologies (ICTs), and to contribute fully to the knowledge-based economy, is limited. To overcome the further marginalisation of women it is imperative to expand their access to and use of ICTs.

9. Information and communications

Statistical indicators and information

Indicator / Information	2006		2011	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Telephone lines per 100 population*	79.8	82.2	78.4	79.5
Cellular phones per 100 population*	46.8	47.7	69.8	71.1
Personal computers in households per 100 population	30.2	31.0	52.2	52.8
Internet users per 100 population	22.5	23.9	43.2	44.0

* Based on census data population reporting to have access to telephone or cell phone at home or at work.

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

The knowledge divide

Use of the Internet and telephones are indicators of access to information and sharing of knowledge. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are pivotal for the development of knowledge societies. Advances in ICTs have affected how we create, transmit and process knowledge. The uneven distribution of access to and use of ICTs — which results in a 'digital divide' — has become a major barrier to development because of the risks it poses to economic and social marginalisation, and a widening knowledge divide. The digital divide occurs along multiple and often overlapping lines: education, poverty, gender, age, disability, ethnicity and region. There is a gender digital divide, and an associated knowledge gap between women and men. Unequal access to information sources, content and infrastructure can hamper the growth of knowledge societies. If unaddressed, it could further marginalise women and increase social disparities.

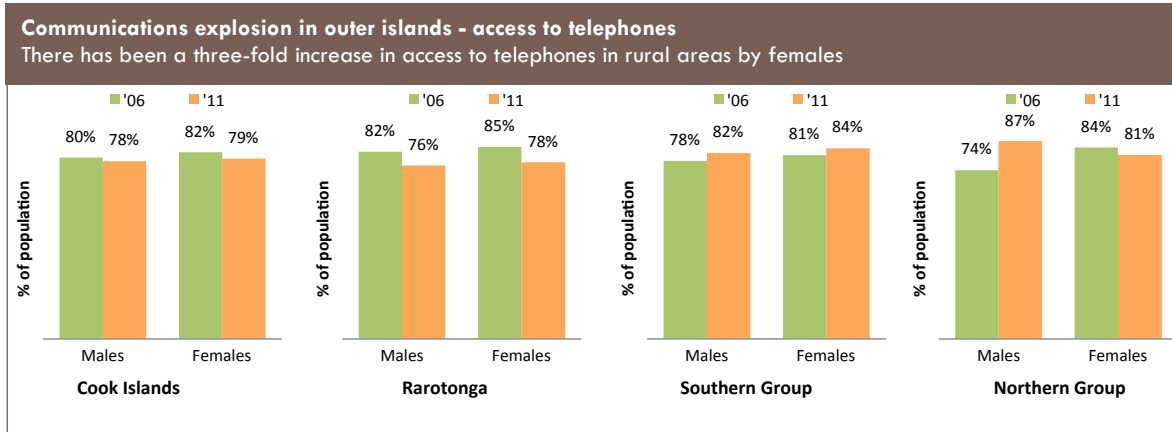
The Cook Islands has one daily newspaper — the Cook Islands News — which is published six days a week. Rarotonga has two weekly newspapers — the Herald and the Independent — that are owned by Elijah Communications, which also operates Cook Islands Television and Radio Cook Islands. None have regular features promoting gender equality.

The six radio stations in the Cook Islands have varying geographic coverage, operating hours and programming content. Radio Cook Islands operates on both AM and FM channels 18 hours per day on Fridays and Saturdays and 17 hours the rest of the week; its AM signal covers the entire country. Until 2010 Cook Islands Television provided the sole local free-to-air channel for Rarotonga and some of the islands in the Southern Group. In 2002 Telecom Cook Islands entered a commercial agreement with its counterpart organisation in French Polynesia for the digital transmission of three television channels (24-hour news, movies and cartoons) but this is not free-to-air. Some islands are able to receive television broadcasts from French Polynesia. In 2010 the second free-to-air channel, Vaka TV, began broadcasting on Rarotonga. Local television program content consists of news, talk-back, sports and other events such as dancing competitions. Most programs are from providers in New Zealand, Australia or other countries.

Access to communications

Communications access has greatly improved in the Cook Islands over the past five years, especially in the *Pa Enua*, although the census data indicates that progress is slow for women in the Northern Group compared with other parts of the Cook Islands. Cellular telephones are replacing landline telephones as the main means of communication in Rarotonga and the Southern Group, but not in the Northern Group. The most effective means of communication for all women in the Cook Islands is still a fixed-line telephone.

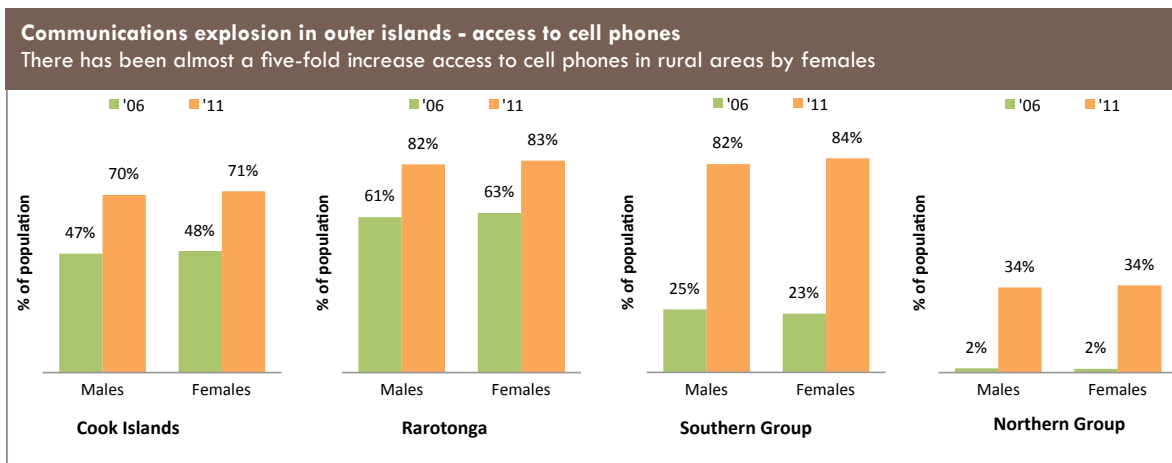
The 2011 census found that 79% of women lived in a house with a telephone or had a telephone at their place of work; 71% lived in a house with access to a cell phone or could use one at work; and 44% had access to the Internet at home, their work or by using Internet cafes.



Resident population living in private households where the household has access to telephone at home and/or at work.

Figure 37: People living in private households with access to telephones, Cook Islands, 2006 and 2011

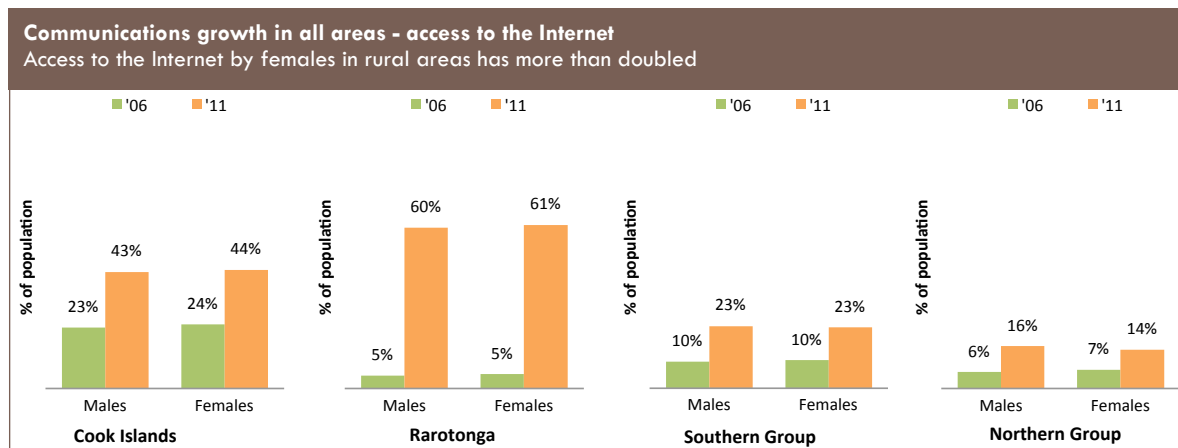
Source: CISO, unpublished data.



Resident population living in private households where the household has access to cell phone at home and/or at work.

Figure 38: People living in private households with access to a cell phone, Cook Islands, 2006 and 2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data.



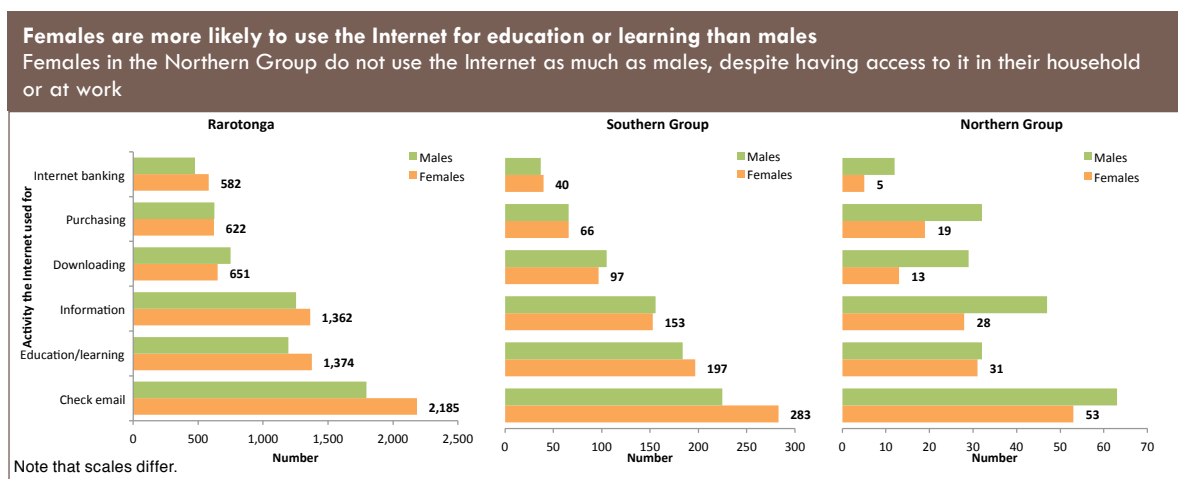
Resident population living in private households where the household has access to the Internet at home, and/or work, and/or at an Internet cafe.

Figure 39: People living in private households with access to the Internet, Cook Islands, 2006 and 2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

Use of the Internet

Although access to the Internet is not universal in the Cook Islands it is interesting to examine the different activities of those Cook Islanders who do have access. In the Northern Group very few women use the internet. In Rarotonga and the Southern Group more women use the Internet to check email for their own personal use than do men (this is the main means of communication and information sharing on the Internet). In Rarotonga and to a lesser extent the Southern Group, women are more likely to use the Internet for education or learning than men. In the Northern Group the proportion is about the same for males and females, and high school students in the Northern Group use the Internet for their school work. Men, on the other hand, are slightly more likely to use the Internet for downloading than women.



Resident population using the Internet.

Figure 40: People using the Internet, types of activities (non-work), Cook Islands, 2006 and 2011

Source: CISO, unpublished data.

Policy implications

Many women face barriers in accessing ICTs: they are more likely than men to lack basic literacy and computer skills, and in less-developed regions they may have to overcome gender-based cultural attitudes. Information centres or cybercafés may be located where women are not comfortable frequenting them, effectively restricting access by women to existing ICT facilities. Even when access is not an issue, the lack of Internet content that meets the information needs of women can lead to inequality in use. These issues limit the ability of women to benefit equally from the opportunities offered by ICTs and to contribute fully to the knowledge-based economy. To overcome the further marginalisation of women, it is imperative to expand their access to and use of ICTs. However, while expanding access is necessary, closing the gender digital gap requires adopting policies containing specific measures that target and address the gender dimensions of ICTs.

A range of government and non-government agencies use radio, television and social media broadcasts to educate the public and raise awareness about gender issues, and most recently, violence against women. The broadcasts are not part of a broader information and education campaign designed around the national gender equality policy, and tend to be specific to donor-funded projects. Some training and ongoing assistance has been provided to journalists to ensure that their reporting is gender sensitive, but this typically involves gender advocates (such as the National Council of Women) asking the media to retract statements or news items and present them in a gender-informative manner. This indicates that standards, protocols or an ongoing training programme are required.

Telecommunication access has improved significantly, but costs remain relatively high in terms of initial connection fees and ongoing charges. The telecommunications sector is undergoing change because New Zealand is seeking to sell its share in the national telecommunications provider; ideally the market would be deregulated to allow for competition in the sector, with the ultimate aim of improving service and lowering the cost to consumers.

Cook Islanders are active users of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to keep in touch with family throughout the country and overseas. There is great potential for the government to use social media to engage with people about social and economic policy and opinions. Gender equality advocates should develop information and communications strategies to engage target audiences through social media.

Violence against women



Policy implications

Violence against women is an extreme manifestation of gender inequality and the power differences that exist between men and women; the highest rates of violence against women occur in the Southern Group. The most widespread forms of violence against women are intimate partner violence and domestic violence in general. Support services are needed in the Southern Group, while the level of support in Rarotonga must at least be sustained and ideally increased.

10. Violence against women

Statistical indicators and information

Indicator	2013			
	Cook Islands	Rarotonga	Southern Group	Northern Group
Physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence against women prevalence, lifetime (%)	33%	30%	44%	24%
Physical intimate partner violence against women prevalence, lifetime (%)	30%	28%	40%	20%
Sexual intimate partner violence against women prevalence, lifetime (%)	13%	11%	22%	7%
Emotional intimate partner violence against women prevalence, lifetime (%)	27%	26%	31%	16%
Economic intimate partner violence against women prevalence, lifetime (%)	6%	7%	5%	2%
Physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence against women prevalence, last 12 months (%)	9%	9%	9%	11%
Physical and/or sexual violence by persons other than intimate partner since age 15 (%)	43%			
Physical violence by persons other than intimate partner since age 15 (%)	39%	36%	51%	29%
Sexual violence by persons other than intimate partner since age 15 (%)	7%	8%	5%	6%
Sexual violence by persons other than intimate partner before age 15 (%)	8%	9%	8%	2%

Source: Cook Islands National Council of Women, 2014.

Research, data and statistics on violence against women

Gender-based violence or violence against women (VAW) has been called 'the most pervasive yet least recognised human rights abuse in the world'¹¹. Globally, as many as one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or abused in some other way — most often by someone she knows, including her husband or another male family member. Globally one woman in four has been abused during pregnancy. This means that the family home cannot be considered a safe place for women and girls. VAW does not affect only the victims — it also has far-reaching impacts on family members and communities.

The Beijing Platform for Action called on all governments and development partners to promote research, collect data and compile statistics relating to the prevalence of different forms of violence against women (especially domestic violence) and to encourage research into their causes, nature, seriousness and consequences, as well as the effectiveness of measures implemented to prevent and redress violence against women.

Police and court statistics are a potential source of statistics on violence against women. The value of police statistics for measuring violence against women is currently limited as such violence is often not reported to the authorities, especially in cases of domestic violence. The Cook Islands has established a Domestic Violence Unit, and statistics on complaints received and investigations conducted are included in regular reporting.

11 United Nations, 2006.

The health sector can also serve as a source of statistics on various forms of violence, as are records kept by NGOs involved with the protection of abused and battered women. It should be noted, however, that statistics from these sources may not be fully reliable — information on the occurrence and consequences of violence is usually collected on a voluntary basis, because recording incidents and reporting on victims of violence is not mandatory for healthcare and other systems. It is not possible to separate injuries caused by domestic violence from all injuries treated through the health system.

This chapter highlights the key findings from The Cook Islands Family Health and Safety Study (FHSS) conducted in 2013, which used WHO methodology to conduct a nationally representative statistical survey on the prevalence, effects of and causal factors for gender-based violence. The study incorporated qualitative research into gender-based violence.

Women are exposed to violence throughout their lifetime

The proportion of women exposed to intimate partner physical and/or violence in their lifetime is 44% in the Southern Group, 22% in the Northern Group, and 30% in Rarotonga. The proportion that have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the preceding 12 months is lower, but about 10% of women throughout the Cook Islands report recent abuse.

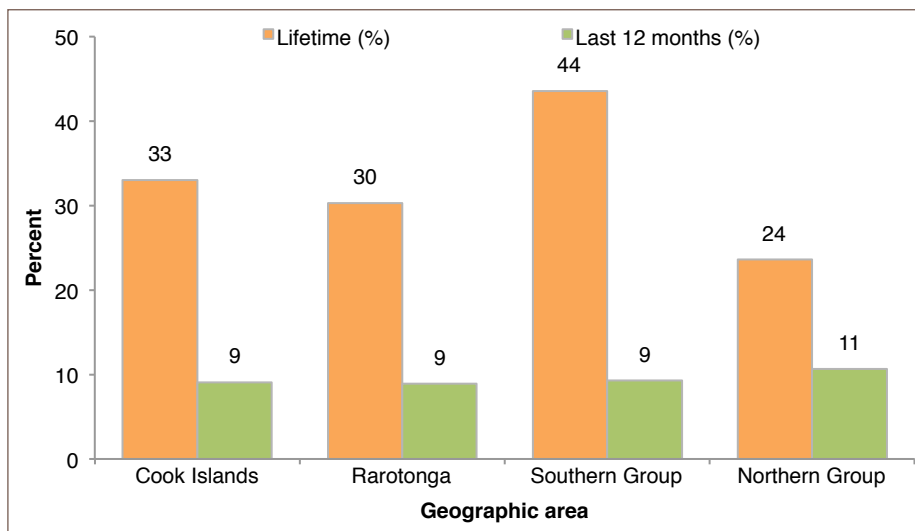


Figure 41: Prevalence of lifetime and current physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence among all ever-partnered women in the Cook Islands, 2013

Source: Cook Islands National Council of Women, 2014.

Intimate partner physical violence

Violence that women suffer from their intimate partners has very serious and often long-lasting consequences because it tends to be repetitive and accompanied by emotional (psychological) and sexual violence as well. The percentage of ever-partnered or ever-married women that suffered physical violence perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner at least once in their lifetime is 40% in the Southern Group, 20% in the Northern Group, and close to one-third (28%) in Rarotonga. The proportion of women subjected to physical violence by their intimate partners in the last 12 months was 7% nationally and the same across all regions.

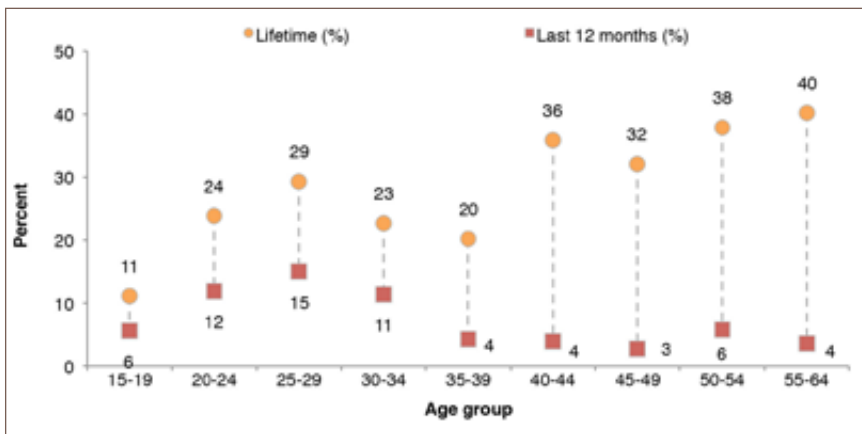


Figure 42: Prevalence of lifetime and current physical intimate partner violence by age group, Cook Islands, 2013

Source: Cook Islands National Council of Women, 2014.

As would be expected, older women have higher lifetime intimate partner physical violence prevalence rates than younger women, while women in their 20s are the most likely to have been the victims of recent physical abuse by their intimate partner, and have relatively high lifetime rates as well.

Severity and nature of physical violence

Women are subjected to both moderate and severe physical violence from their intimate partners, and this varies according to region. WHO defines severe physical violence as when a woman has been punched, kicked, dragged or beaten repeatedly, choked, burned, or hit with a weapon such as a piece of wood, iron bar, knife or axe; and defines moderate physical violence as slapping, pushing and shoving. In all regions, severe violence was experienced by many more women than those who experienced moderate physical violence; with women in the Southern Group almost three times as likely to have ever experienced severe violence as opposed to moderate physical violence.

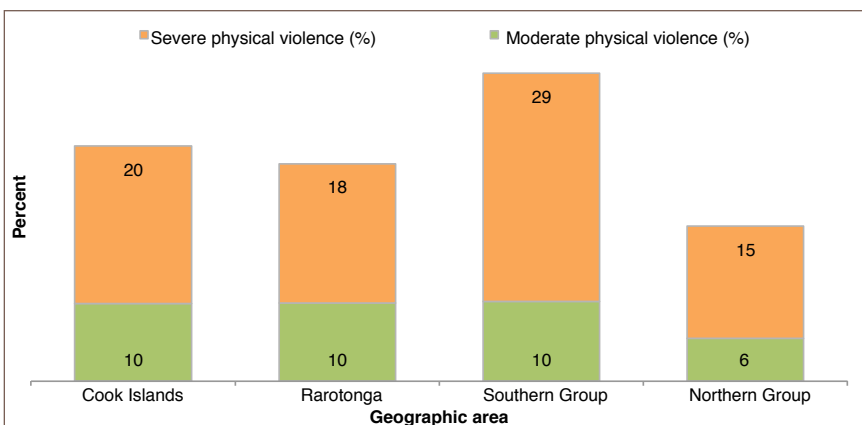


Figure 43: Severity of physical intimate partner violence among ever-partnered women, Cook Islands, 2013

Source: Cook Islands National Council of Women, 2014.

Given the severity of intimate partner physical violence, it is no surprise that nearly half (47%) of all female victims of intimate partner violence said they were injured as a result, with 22% needing health care; 16% reported that they lost consciousness.

Many women are sexually molested in their lifetimes

Although not as frequent as physical violence, sexual violence has consequences that almost always severely affects the victim for a prolonged period of time and often a lifetime. The term 'sexual violence', broadly interpreted, may include aggressive and abusive behaviours of different intensity and consequences, from unwanted touching to forced intercourse and rape.

The percentage of women experiencing sexual violence by their intimate partner at least once in their lifetime is over one-fifth (22%) in the Southern Group and 7% in the Northern Group; approximately one out of every ten (11%) of ever-partnered women in Rarotonga has experienced sexual violence in her lifetime.

Like physical violence, sexual violence experienced by women in intimate partnerships places a heavy toll on the victim and the partnership. In the Cook Islands, where there are strong traditional gender roles and attitudes toward marriage and family unification, it is difficult to leave a partner even if they are violent, and therefore many women endure ongoing abuse. The low proportion of adults who are separated or divorced (2%) supports this.

Women's attitudes towards wife-beating

Wife-beating is a clear expression of male dominance; it is both a cause and consequence of women's serious disadvantage and unequal position compared to men. The strength and weight of traditions in many countries results in many women finding it justifiable to be physically punished under certain circumstances, with the Cook Islands Family Health and Safety Study finding that suspected or confirmed infidelity is commonly agreed by women as the most acceptable reason for wife-beating.

It has to be stressed that not all women in the Cook Islands have the same attitudes towards physical intimate partner violence. Not is the rate of 'acceptance' high by regional comparison: in Vanuatu in 2011, 60% of women agreed with at least one of the 'justifications' given for a man to beat his wife. Age, level of education completed and wealth certainly play a crucial role in determining these 'entitlements to violence' granted to husbands.

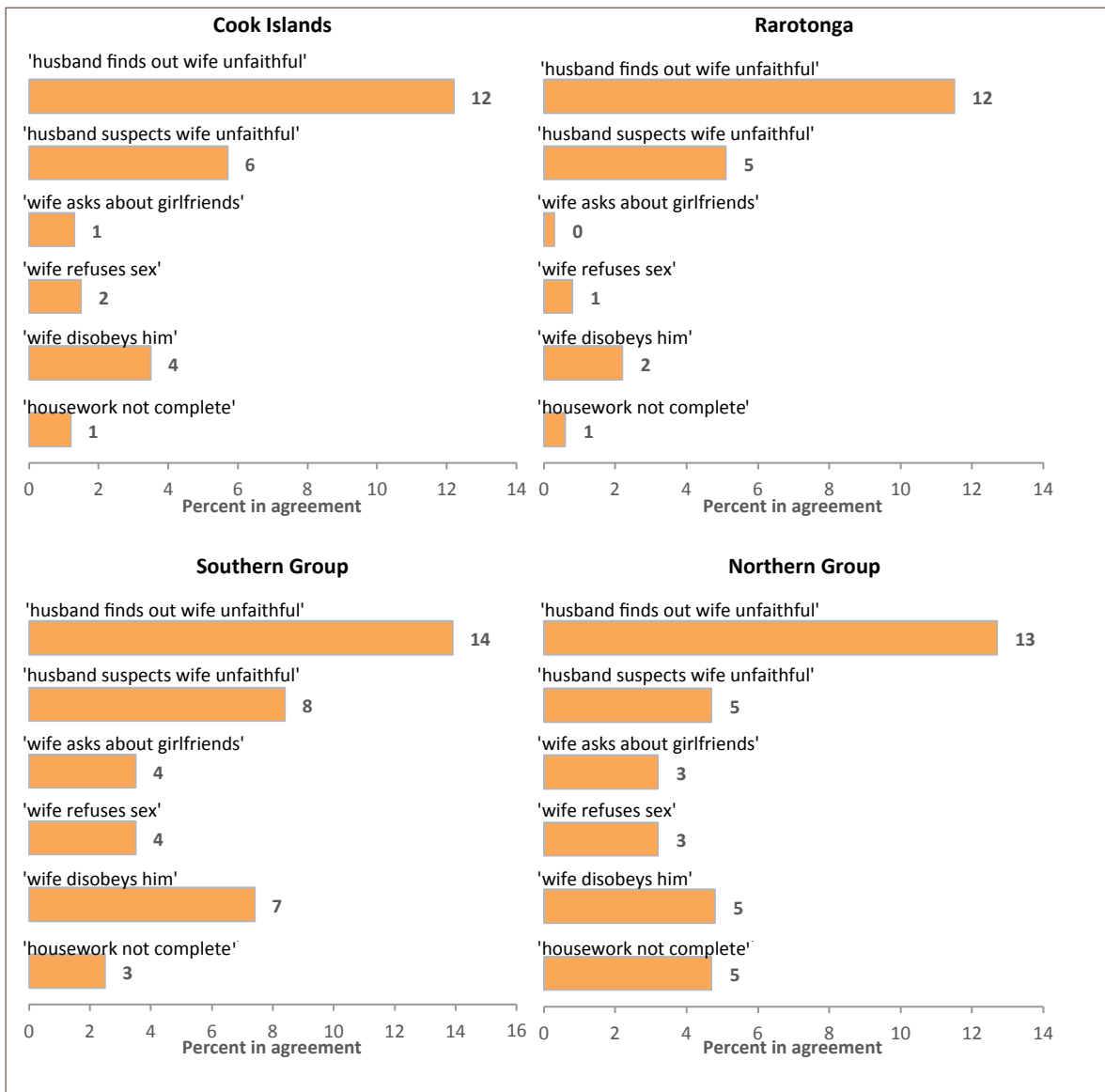


Figure 44: Attitudes towards physical intimate partner violence, percent of women in agreement with statements, Cook Islands, 2013

Source: Cook Islands National Council of Women, 2014.

Non-partner physical and sexual abuse

Perpetrators of physical and sexual violence who were not an intimate partner can be male or female. Nearly four out of ten women (39%) reported that people other than an intimate partner were physically violent towards them over their lifetime, and 8% of women had experienced such physical violence recently (in the last 12 months). These perpetrators of physical violence were commonly family members, mainly parents (15% fathers/stepfathers and 24% mothers/stepmothers) as well as other male and female family members.

Overall, findings suggest that this kind of physical violence is considered to be for child discipline and may not necessarily be because of gender. However it is difficult to fully assess this given that the study did not explore whether men experienced similar levels and types of physical violence as do women.

Policy implications

Violence against women is an extreme manifestation of gender inequality and the power differences that exist between men and women. The Cook Islands Family Health and Safety Study provides statistics on the prevalence of violence against women in terms of the magnitude, patterns, and forms of violence; attitudes towards violence; the impact of violence on women and families; and women's responses to domestic violence. The most widespread forms of violence against women are intimate partner violence and domestic violence generally.

Physical violence against women and girls perpetrated by men other than intimate partners is widespread, mostly by immediate family members, but not enough is known about whether this physical violence is a result of gender norms or because this is the prevalent form of discipline for both girls and boys by both males and females (although mothers or stepmothers are the most common perpetrators). Regardless, physical violence is not an acceptable form of discipline. This norm is changing: the 2012 Education Act bans any use of corporal punishment by staff towards students in educational institutions. In addition, the issue of corporal punishment in the home was included in 2012 consultations for the review of the Crimes Act; however, it is not clear whether this will be included in the revision as the draft for the Revised Crime Acts is not yet available.

Policy responses need to take into account a range of factors to address the unequal power relations between men and women, which constantly change in response to social, economic and political factors. Such interventions must address the practical needs of victims of violence (in all forms) in terms of access to and uptake of services, as well as strategies to enable women and men to challenge inequality and transform gender relations. These policies must be developed inclusively to address different kinds and level of resistance from individuals, groups and the larger community. It is very important that interventions involve men; for example, by promoting role models of respectful masculinity to help partnered men resist the 'peer pressure' to have a parallel relationship (a girlfriend), which was identified as a high risk factor for violence against women.

Policies that promote the ability of women to participate effectively in the wider process of development must respect their rights to education, training and skills, enable them to enjoy good health and access to the resources required for their own development, and enable them to voice their development needs. This could involve developing vocational skills, leadership training, training to gain access to economic and social resources, and training to enable women to use the legal and/or administrative system to challenge men and assert their rights. This can only be achieved by leaders, politicians, government, and women's and men's organisations working together.

The Cook Islands Family Health and Safety Study identifies a number of risk factors associated with the likelihood of physical and/or sexual violence, which can be used in targeting beneficiaries, including:

- **Current partnership status.** Women who were with a partner at the time of the interview were 2.5 times more likely to experience lifetime violence and almost 8 times more likely to experience current violence.
- **Nature of first sexual intercourse.** Women whose first sexual experience was forced were nearly 7 times more likely to experience lifetime violence and five times more likely to experience current violence.
- **Partner's parallel relationships with other women.** Women whose partners were engaged in parallel relationships with other women were 3.5 times more likely to experience lifetime partner violence and 2 times more likely to experience current partner violence.
- **Education level of the partner.** Women whose partners had higher education were 77% less likely to experience lifetime partner violence and 93% less likely to experience current partner violence.

Sexual violence against women has implications for their reproductive health, and health and human service professionals should be well trained in how to appropriately and sensitively screen their clients for such violence so that needed interventions can be implemented. Protocols and systems are required to make sure all agencies involved (Health, Police, counselling and support services) work together to provide services to survivors of sexual violence. Likewise the survivors and perpetrators of physical violence should have access to the required services, especially in the Southern Group, as well as Rarotonga and the Northern Group.

Working with men to change their attitudes and behaviour is an essential part of any solution to address violence against women. Strategies pursued by various agencies for men (Rota'iangā Men's Support Organisation, uniformed organisations, and church youth organisations) include programmes that encourage men to examine their assumptions about gender roles and masculinity, to promote change, and serve as positive, non-violent role models in their communities by teaching other men about gender roles, gender equality, and masculinity.

Since the Domestic Violence Unit was established in 2007, police procedures for dealing with domestic violence have been revised in line with external and internal review recommendations. Training and mentoring for officers dealing with domestic violence incidents has been ongoing and sensitive to victim experiences. The number of complaints reported to the Domestic Violence Unit is increasing as awareness in the community grows that domestic violence is a crime; although there is still a high level of under-reporting and secrecy around the issue, more victims are seeking assistance from the Police. An increasing proportion of relatives and neighbours are reporting domestic violence incidents to the Police, which may be the beginning of a shift from the perception that domestic violence is a strictly private, family matter. Advocacy, awareness and community outreach activities are resulting in more women receiving police assistance, with associated referral to counselling and other social services.

Enacting the required legislation, and mobilising the required resources and policies, relies on political will and highlights the critical role parliamentarians have in championing women's rights, health and development. The Cook Islands is a member of the Standing Committee of Male Parliamentarians on Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls (established in 2009). The committee supports evidence-based policy actions, mutual learning on policy and advocacy issues, reviews outcomes of the action plans, examines the usefulness of the efforts, and increases actions taken by parliamentarians for prevention of violence against women and girls.

The Family Law Bill 2014, currently being reviewed by a select committee, encompasses violence against women and most specifically, domestic violence; and includes sections to protect the human rights of women, children, victims and survivors. The Bill covers settlement of affairs for marriage and de facto relationship dissolution; duties and responsibilities of parents relating to the care, protection, welfare, best interests, and development of children; procedures for resolution of issues regarding family relations through negotiation and agreement; and the safety and protection of adults and children in domestic relationships. The Family Law Bill was drafted according to 'progressive realisation' principles and obligations of the Cook Islands as a signatory to CEDAW, Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Rights of People Living with Disability.

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