



## TONGA

### *Data brief 1: Inequalities in birth and death registration*

## THE KILIKILI TEFUA PROJECT:

*Utilising birth and death data to identify gendered registration and health outcomes in Tonga*



## BACKGROUND

The Government of the Kingdom of Tonga is committed to ensuring that no one is left behind; however, anecdotal evidence suggests certain inequalities persist between girls and boys, and women and men. In response, between October 2024 and September 2025, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, and Tonga Statistics Department applied a gendered analysis of birth and death data to:

- highlight any inequalities in the civil registration status and health outcomes between girls and boys, and women and men,
- investigate the potential underlying causes behind these inequalities to judge if they were instances of inequity (inequalities that are unfair), and
- provide recommendations on changes to processes and policies to strengthen the collection, analysis and dissemination of data for gendered analyses.

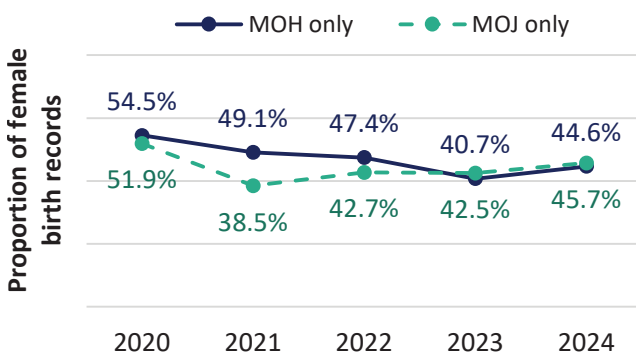
## KEY FINDINGS

### Female births are less likely to be registered than male births

Over 27,500 live births were recorded or registered during the 12-year period analysed (2013–2024). Of all recorded or registered live births, approximately 52% of the newborns were male, and this ranged from a peak of 54% in 2023, to a low of 50% in 2017. Importantly, data indicates that female births are slightly less likely to be registered than male births.

Of the births that were recorded by the Ministry of Health (MOH) but not registered by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) in 2020 for example, 55% of the newborns were female. Conversely, in 2021, of the births that were registered by the Ministry of Justice, but not recorded by the Ministry of Health, 61% of the newborns were male. While the situation does appear to be improving towards the end of the period, data from 2023 and 2024 are likely incomplete, and further analysis is needed.

**Figure 1.** Proportion of female birth records by source category, 2020–2024, Tonga



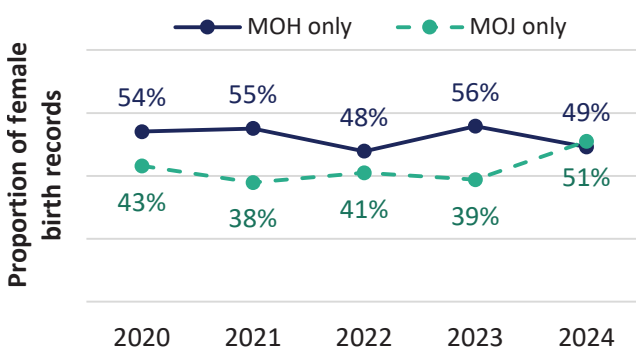
**Figure notes:** MOH = Ministry of Health; MOJ = Ministry of Justice

### Female deaths are less likely to be registered than male deaths

Over 8700 deaths were recorded or registered during the 12-year period analysed. Of all recorded or registered deaths, approximately 56% of the decedents were male, and this ranged from a peak of 60% in 2017, to a low of 53% in 2024.

As with births, data indicates that male deaths are slightly more likely to be registered than female deaths. In 2020, for example, of the deaths that were recorded by the Ministry of Health but not registered by the Ministry of Justice, 54% of the decedents were female. Conversely, in 2023, of the deaths that were registered by the Ministry of Justice, but not recorded by the Ministry of Health, 61% of the decedents were male.

**Figure 2.** Proportion of female death records by source category, 2020–2024, Tonga

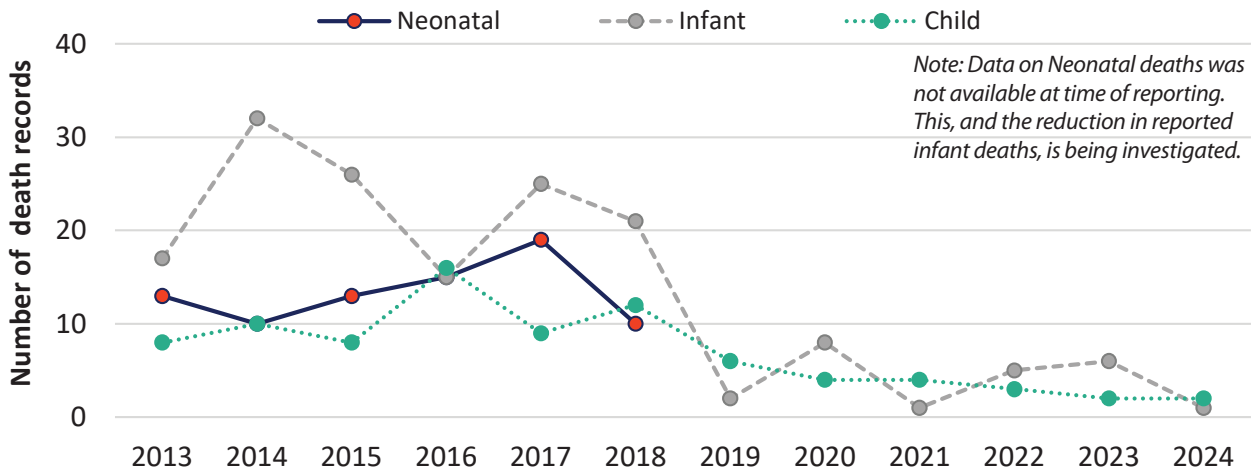


**Figure notes:** MOH = Ministry of Health; MOJ = Ministry of Justice

## Deaths among children are being missed

The number of child deaths recorded or registered decreased substantially between 2013 and 2024, from an average of 45 deaths per year, to less than 10 in the later part of the period. This apparent decrease should be further investigated to see if this is a “true” trend, or if this reflects under-reporting by the Ministry of Health and/or under-registration by the Ministry of Justice.

**Figure 3.** Number of child deaths by broad age group, 2013–2024, Tonga



**Figure notes:** Neonatal (deaths among neonates and newborns aged <28 days); Infant (deaths among infants aged 29 days – 11 months); Child (deaths among children aged 12–59 months); Total (all deaths among children aged 0–5 years). From 2019–2024, neonatal deaths have been included with infant deaths, as data were only provided by age at death in years.

## RECOMMENDED DATA ACTION POINTS

- Given the small sample size of this current analysis, findings related to lower birth and death registration for females should be investigated retrospectively (using previous years’ data) and regularly monitored moving forward.
- The reasons for the decrease in child deaths should be investigated by both the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Justice, as it is unlikely this reflects a “true” decrease in mortality, but rather that these deaths are not being reported by health authorities or registered by civil registration.

This project took place between October 2024 and September 2025, utilising financial and technical support provided by Vital Strategies through their Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative [Global Grants Program](#) (GGP). The GGP provides support to government partners, through a competitive process, to implement discrete projects that improve the systems that collect, analyse and use data for public health decision-making. Additional support was provided by the Pacific Community (SPC) and Pacific Health Information Support Hub (PHISH), Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

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