



Pacific
Community
Communauté
du Pacifique

Progress Towards Gender Equality in the Pacific

Beijing+30 Review Report (2019–2024)

JANUARY 2025



Progress Towards Gender Equality in the Pacific: Beijing +30 Review Report (2019–2024)



Suva, Fiji, 2025

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Original text: English

Pacific Community Cataloguing-in-publication data

Progress towards gender equality in the Pacific: Beijing +30 review report (2019-2024)

1. Women – Oceania.
2. Gender – Oceania.
3. Gender mainstreaming – Oceania.
4. Women – Social aspects – Oceania.

I. Title II. Pacific Community

305.40995

AACR2

ISBN: 978-982-00-1608-8

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AMAK	Aia Mwaea Ainen Kiribati (Kiribati national women’s umbrella organisation)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CINCW	Cook Islands National Council of Women
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [Australia]
ECCWP	Eliminating Cervical Cancer in the Western Pacific programme
ECE	early childhood education
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
FWCC	Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre
FWRM	Fiji Women’s Rights Movement
GBV	gender-based violence
GDP	gross domestic product
HDI	Human Development Index
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HPV	human papillomavirus
ICT	information and communication technology
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KFHA	Kiribati Family Health Association
KMBC	Kiribati Male Behavioural Change initiative
KWCSC	Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and others
MOU	memorandum of understanding
MWCSD	Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development [Samoa]
MWYCFA	Ministry of Women Youth Children and Family Affairs [Solomon Islands]
MWYSSA	Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports and Social Affairs [Kiribati]
NCDs	non-communicable diseases
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PacREF	Pacific Regional Education Framework [Pacific Islands Forum]
PALM	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme [Australia]
PICs	Pacific Island countries
PILNA	Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
PLGED	Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PPI	Pacific Policing Initiative
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands
RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
RSE	Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme [New Zealand]
SARV	sorcery accusation-related violence
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

SIPPA	Solomon Islands Planned Parenthood Association
SOP	standard operating procedure
SPC	Pacific Community
SPI	Social Protection Index [Asian Development Bank]
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
SVSG	Samoa Victim Support Group
TFGBV	technology-facilitated gender-based violence
TSM	temporary special measures
TuFHA	Tuvalu Family Health Association
TuLEP	Tuvalu Learning Project
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TWICT	Tonga Women in Information and Communications Technology
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WASDA	Nauru's Department of Women's and Social Development Affairs
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

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Acknowledgements

The Pacific Community (SPC) acknowledges the valuable contributions of its member countries, including Australia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu. The insights and data provided in their national reports formed the foundation for the analysis presented in the Pacific Islands Regional Beijing Platform for Action 30-Year Review.

SPC also extends its appreciation to the Human Rights and Social Development (HRSD) division at SPC, whose dedicated efforts in data collection and analysis have been instrumental in shaping this report, initially drafted from national reports by consultant Dr Petra Mahy.

Foreword

WE STAND AT A CRUCIAL JUNCTURE IN OUR JOURNEY TOWARDS ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY and empowering all women and girls, as we come together this year to reflect on progress made in the 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+30), and the dire need to further accelerate our efforts. Beijing+30 comes in the wake of last year's 30th anniversary of the Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights (PPA), which continues to be a guiding document or tool that Pacific Islands countries (PICs) use to plan actions and report progress against instruments such as the Beijing+30, Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, Convention on the Elimination on all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Pacific Platform for Action (PPA) together with the Triennial Conference of Pacific Women 2024, both of which have the Pacific Community (SPC) as their custodian, have played a fundamental role in supporting Pacific Islands countries (PICs) in their leadership of gender equality efforts and the production of this report. It is therefore my honour as SPC's Principal Strategic Lead – Pacific Women and Girls, to provide the foreword for this *Progress Towards Gender Equality in the Pacific: Beijing+30 Review Report (2019–2024)*. This report demonstrates the significant investment by the Pacific Islands region to gender equality, and the concerted effort as a region to collate evidence and information about our collective progress and challenges ahead.

What is clear from this progress report, is the immense knowledge, experience and commitment to gender equality that exists in the Pacific Islands region. Of course, measuring progress towards the Beijing+30 gender equality objectives in the Pacific is a complex task given the vast diversity of country contexts and sometimes limited availability of comparable data. I acknowledge and commend the considerable work and dedication of those working to progress, and also to measure, gender equality efforts across our Pacific Islands countries.

With that, I congratulate everyone who has worked so diligently and passionately, and has contributed in one way or another, towards the Beijing+30 and this regional progress report.

Mereseini Rakuita
Principal Strategic Lead – Pacific Women and Girls
Pacific Community (SPC)



Mereseini Rakuita

Executive summary

This review report surveys developments and data on gender equality in the Pacific for the period 2019–2024 against the ‘12 areas of concern’ for the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The review draws on the Beijing+30 national narrative reports for the Pacific, as well as additional data primarily provided by the Pacific Community’s Pacific Data Hub. Overall, the review indicates that gender equality is a well-recognised policy aim across most areas of government service delivery and non-government organisational programming in the Pacific region, but with considerable variation in progress and outcomes across the Pacific Island countries (PICs). Comparable time series data is still limited, meaning that tracking change across time is difficult. National narrative reports indicate a wide range of government, non-government and donor-funded programming across various issues that use a gender lens or have specific gender equality objectives, but tracking impacts of these programmes also remains challenging. The following paragraphs summarise findings in relation to the 12 areas of concern.

(A) Women and poverty

There is considerable variation in poverty rates across the Pacific, whether measured against international or national basic needs poverty lines, with strong urban-rural differences within countries. Data clearly show that gender plays a significant role in the experiences of poverty in the region. In general, measured against the international poverty line, women face slightly higher poverty rates than men in **Kiribati, Nauru, PNG, RMI, Solomon Islands, Samoa** and **Tuvalu**, while **FSM, Fiji** and **Tonga** show slightly higher male poverty rates. The details of household income and expenditure surveys (HIES) and multidimensional poverty assessments, where they exist, provide greater national specificity of various components of disadvantage affected by gender. Women, particularly those in rural areas and/or informal sectors, are disproportionately living in poverty, often due to unequal access to formal employment and social protection benefits. While social protection expenditures have been rising at modest rates, spending has generally continued to favour men over women due to their higher formal employment rates and the dominance of social insurance schemes. Some notable new developments in social protection include **Kiribati’s** introduction of an unemployment benefit (2020), **Fiji’s** Social Assistance Policy (2021), **Samoa’s** National Social Protection Policy Framework (2023) and **Tonga’s** National Social Protection Policy (2023).

(B) Education and training of women

Across the Pacific region, gender parity has been nearly achieved in enrolment in early childhood, primary and lower secondary education. Girls are also shown to be consistently outperforming boys in literacy and numeracy achievement at primary school level. However, gender inequality in enrolment does emerge in upper secondary school in some places with, for example, more girls enrolled in secondary school in **Tuvalu** and more boys in **PNG**. Also, in **Solomon Islands**, only 27% of females have completed secondary education compared to 30% of males. Gender disparity in tertiary education is also evident in some countries, with females outperforming males in some countries such as **Cook Islands, Fiji** and **Palau**, but are comparatively disadvantaged in others such as **Vanuatu, Samoa** and **Solomon Islands**. Policies on gender equality in education exist across the region, and some country programmes such as the **Tuvalu** Learning Project include gender-gap analyses to inform evidence-based interventions. Some second-chance education programmes such as **Fiji’s** Matua programme provide opportunities, especially to women, to return to education.

(C) Women and health

While progress is being made, significant challenges remain in improving women's health in the Pacific, particularly in maternal care, sexual and reproductive health information and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Maternal mortality rates vary significantly. **Fiji, Samoa, and Vanuatu** have higher rates, while **Palau** and the **Cook Islands** report low maternal deaths. **PNG** is a clear outlier with a comparatively low percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel. Breast and cervical cancers are the leading causes of cancer in Pacific women, with cervical cancer rates among the highest globally. Many countries lack effective cancer surveillance systems and face challenges in providing treatment. Breast cancer screening programmes are often limited by resources. Cervical cancer screening is expanding, with new methods such as HPV-based self-collection improving accessibility in countries like **PNG** and **Vanuatu**, and there is variable HPV vaccination coverage across the region. While the challenge of NCDs, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer, and their association with environmental and lifestyle factors, is well-recognised, the Beijing+30 reports provided limited information on targeted prevention programming for women and men.

(D) Violence against women

With some of the highest prevalence rates of violence against women and girls in the world, the Pacific region has instituted a range of legal and institutional responses. Domestic violence legislation (family protection Acts) have been passed in most jurisdictions, and these are supplemented by a range of standard operating procedures and MOUs between government agencies and between government and civil society. Implementation of these have been mixed across the region with common issues with resourcing and training as well as biases among police and other service providers. Actions to prevent violence against women commonly involve annual '16 Days of Activism' campaigns, attempts to shift entrenched social and religious norms and preventive programmes that work with men and boys. Responses to technology-facilitated gender-based violence are increasing but still limited, with some countries recently passing cybercrime or similar legislation. Programmes which address the intersectional vulnerabilities of marginalised groups of women and girls also appear to be limited, though there is some policy and toolkit recognition of women and girls with disabilities.

(E) Women and armed conflict

While some parts of the Pacific have and are experiencing armed conflict, the women, peace and security agenda has had limited application. The Pacific Islands Forum's Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012–2015) has expired and not been renewed. Most of the Beijing+30 national narrative reports had limited discussion of this issue. In 2017, the **Solomon Islands** government released a Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2017–2021 which is under review in 2024. The **Bougainville** Autonomous Region also has a new Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, Peace and Security Policy 2023–2027 launched in June 2024. Some local women-led peace-making initiatives have also been implemented in **PNG**. Observers, however, have noted that existing women, peace and security initiatives in the Pacific generally tend to merely 'add' women without fundamentally altering usual political processes.

(F) Women and the economy

Labour market data indicate that significantly higher numbers of women than men across the Pacific region are outside the labour force, often as a result of assumed caregiving duties for children, persons with a disability and the elderly. Women also tend to dominate informal and subsistence economies,

including in agriculture, handicraft production, smaller-scale fish processing and tourism roles. Such work is associated with precarity and low incomes with strong impacts seen during the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated shuttering of tourism industries in many countries. While data show that the rate of women giving birth who received maternity cash benefits was relatively high when compared to global levels, parental leave and other associated work rights are patchy and more often afforded to civil servants compared to those in the private or informal sectors. The Beijing+30 reports contained only a few examples of initiatives to otherwise relieve women's care burdens, but there are many examples of women's economic empowerment programmes ranging from financial inclusion initiatives, small loans, development of physical market infrastructure and various forms of entrepreneurship and skills training. Labour mobility programmes, especially to Australia and New Zealand, offer opportunities for employment of Pacific Islanders, but have tended to involve more men than women and have gendered impacts on families and communities at home.

(G) Women in power and decision-making

The Pacific region continues to have some of the lowest levels of female representation in legislatures and executive government in the world. While some countries in the reporting period have had some breakthroughs, such as the election of women representatives in **FSM** and **Vanuatu** where there had long been no women legislators, others have remained largely stable with low women's representation. The only introduction of quotas for women's representation at the national level has occurred in **Samoa** which was first activated in the 2021 general election. **Vanuatu** has continued to implement temporary special measures (TSM) at the municipal level, and a proposal for TSM at the provincial level in **Solomon Islands** has been developed. Common programming for increasing women's elected leadership includes practice parliaments and women in leadership networks. Comparative data on women judges and civil servants is not readily available but some of the Beijing+30 reports note upward trends including **Tuvalu's** judicial reform of 2021–2024 which, through the introduction of merit-based selection of judges, has significantly increased the number of women magistrates. Women's councils or fora, both standing and ad hoc, provide opportunities for women's leadership and play an important role in advancing women's interests in the Pacific. It is noted that women also wield power in traditional community settings in some parts of the region. In the private sector, there is considerable variation among PICs, with **Cook Islands, Kiribati, Samoa** and **Tuvalu** having higher proportions of women business leaders, while **Fiji, PNG** and **Vanuatu** have below average women's representation.

(H) Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

Gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment policies and action plans have been quite consistently created and updated across the Pacific region. There also appears to be increasing acknowledgement of gender equality objectives within other social policies. While all PICs have some form of women's empowerment machinery, actual resourcing of these ministries or divisions remains highly variable. These are often underfunded, particularly in the smaller PICs, and there is strong reliance on international donor partners to fund projects with gender equality aims. Other institutional mechanisms such as gender focal points appear to be relatively rare. In most PICs, gender-responsive budgeting is generally not being implemented, but some preparatory steps have recently been taken in **Fiji, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands** and **Tonga**.

Gender-disaggregated data collection is routinely occurring in major census and household income and expenditure surveys, although some countries acknowledge having low data collection capacity in general. Some countries such as **Solomon Islands** and **Tonga** have recently had Equality Insights Rapid surveys conducted showing multidimensional aspects of poverty and deprivation. These provide greater insights into the social needs of men and women at the individual level. **Fiji** also presented the findings of a major Country Gender Assessment in 2023. Common themes for where gaps exist in the data on gender equality include those in relation to care and domestic work and sex-disaggregated time use, and in relation to the impacts of climate change, resource use and the environment in general.

(I) Human rights of women

Between 2019 and 2024, key legal and policy developments for protections for women's rights in the Pacific Islands included the enactment of the *Gender Equality Act 2019* in **RMI**, which embodies commitments to recognise, protect, promote, and enforce the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all women and girls. Also, in 2022, **Tonga's** Legislative Assembly passed an amendment to the *Criminal Offences Act* to expand the definition of rape. In June 2020, **Fiji** was the second country in the world to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment in the workplace and has since put in place a National Policy on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace to help ensure accountability in cases of sexual harassment. In **Tonga**, a Public Service Sexual Harassment Policy was endorsed by Cabinet in 2022 to ensure that the Public Service Commission takes appropriate steps to protect public servants from workplace harassment, including by third parties. There has been limited new institutional support for human rights in general in the Pacific, with only **Samoa**, **Fiji** and **Tuvalu** having human rights institutions that conform to the Paris Principles. **Tuvalu's** Ombudsman, however, has not been operational since 2022.

(J) Women and the media

A few PICs reported initiatives to support women's participation in the media. In **Solomon Islands**, the Women in News Network was launched in 2023 to provide a safe space for female journalists to share challenges, build solidarity, and promote leadership. The **Palau** Media Council has been empowering women in media through mentorship and capacity-building initiatives. In **Kiribati**, efforts are underway to encourage girls to pursue careers in media and ICT. There are few, if any, policies or programmes aimed at preventing negative or biased portrayal of women in the media, although there are some youth programmes aimed at raising their awareness of the power of the media and issues of cyberbullying. There have been some efforts to highlight positive stories of women through use of media. For example, **Tonga's** 'Fefine To'a' or 'Woman of Strength' series of stories showcasing Tongan women's resilience published in English and Tongan, and disseminated across various media formats, and the **Solomon Islands'** 'Solomon Women' online newspaper reports on women's stories and activities from across the country.

(K) Women and the environment

Extractive industries like mining and logging are often male-dominated and exploitative in the Pacific and elsewhere, leaving women vulnerable. In **Solomon Islands**, a report on the logging industry found widespread exploitation of women, compounded by weak laws and limited justice. The government responded with awareness programmes and a new Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy for

Sustainable Mining (2023–2033). In **Papua New Guinea**, while there was early attention to women in mining, no recent initiatives have emerged.

National data collection on the gender impacts of climate change and the environment more generally, appears to be increasing. PICs are also increasingly incorporating gender and inclusion considerations into climate change and environmental policies. Many of the Beijing+30 national narrative reports contain examples of programming for climate and environmental mitigation and adaptation using a gender lens. These are often donor-funded such as several Asian Development Bank (ADB) projects in **Palau** and work by Save the Children, Water for Women and World Vision in **Vanuatu**. Various disaster response and preparedness programmes include attention to women and gender equality. The various local branches of the Red Cross Society are key players within this space, often working in collaboration with governments.

(L) The girl-child

The Beijing+30 narrative reports, with their focus on women, included only scant information on the situation and developments in relation to the girl-child, apart from information already included in relation to education and adolescent health. Some key country-level developments in girls' rights from 2019–2024 include **Fiji's** ratification of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on child sale, prostitution, and pornography. The **Solomon Islands** government reviewed and updated its National Children's Policy (NCP) (2023–2028). This policy aims to protect children from harm and ensure development opportunities. The government is also working on raising the legal minimum marriage age from 15 to 18. The **Tuvalu** Family Health Association promotes gender equality awareness programmes, aiming to educate communities on equal treatment and opportunities for both boys and girls.

Introduction: Gender (in)equality in the Pacific

The Pacific Islands countries (PICs) have all made commitments to achieving gender equality via the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and in fulfilling the reporting requirements for the 30th anniversary of the Declaration, most have produced national narrative reports and survey answers for the Beijing+30 reporting cycle (2019–2024).¹

In addition, almost all PICs have ratified the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (except **Palau**, which is a signatory only, and **Tonga**). All UN member states, including those in the Pacific, also adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) in 2015. This includes Goal 5 on Gender Equality. At the Pacific regional level, the Pacific Leaders Forum issued the 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) and the 2023 Revitalised Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. This commitment to gender equality and social inclusion is to be actioned as part of achieving the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*. Also, Pacific Ministers of Women endorsed the Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights (originally in 1994, and most recently for 2018–2030). The vital importance of gender equality and social inclusion more generally is, therefore, an acknowledged core factor in sustainable development and governance in the Pacific.

This review report aims to summarise progress towards the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action across PICs over the past five years (2019–2024). It discusses evidence and initiatives to address gender inequality in relation to the 12 areas of concern within the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, namely: (A) women and poverty; (B) education and training of women; (C) women and health; (D) violence against women; (E) women and armed conflict; (F) women and the economy; (G) women in power and decision-making; (H) institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; (I) human rights of women; (J) women and the media; (K) women and the environment; and (L) the girl-child.

This review report primarily covers the 12 UN member states of the Pacific Islands (i.e. **Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)**, **Fiji**, **Kiribati**, **Nauru**, **Palau**, **Papua New Guinea (PNG)**, **Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI)**, **Samoa**, **Solomon Islands**, **Tonga**, **Tuvalu** and **Vanuatu**), with the addition of **Cook Islands**, and occasional reference to other Pacific territories.

Measuring progress towards the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action gender equality objectives in the Pacific is a complex task given the vast diversity of country contexts and sometimes limited availability of comparable data. To report against the 12 areas of concern, this review report draws primarily on each country’s national Beijing+30 narrative report completed in 2024, where available, as well as various other relevant quantitative and qualitative data sources. It should be noted that the Beijing+30 country narrative reports have adhered to the Beijing+30 guideline documentation to varying degrees and levels of detail. Also due to their nature as self-reported national documents they tend to emphasise positive developments and programmes and do not

¹ At the time of writing, Papua New Guinea had not submitted a national narrative report.

consistently identify gaps or weaknesses in protection for women and girls or necessarily provide full evaluation of their programmes and initiatives.

As useful background context and supplementary detail for this review report, it should first be noted that there are other existing surveys of gender (in)equality across the Pacific Islands.

The UN Gender Inequality Index (one aspect of the Human Development Index (HDI)), as calculated in 2022, has partial data for the 12 UN member states in the Pacific (see **Table 1**). Most of the Pacific countries are placed in the ‘medium human development’ range within the broader Human Development Index (HDI). According to the Gender Inequality Index country rankings, Fiji holds the highest rank at 78, **Samoa** at 101, **Tonga** at 115, and **PNG** the lowest of the group at 151. There is also considerable variation between countries in relation to the component indicators: that is, maternal mortality, adolescent birth rate, share of seats in parliament, population with at least some secondary education and labour force participation rates. Standout statistics in this index include a maternal mortality rate of 192 per 100,000 live births in **PNG**, an adolescent birth rate of 71.1 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 in **Nauru**, and a very low female labour force participation rate in **Kiribati** (16.1%, compared to 73% of men).

In 2021, UN Women commissioned a series of *Gender Equality Briefs* for 14 Pacific Islands countries and territories, as well as a comparative analysis report on the Pacific region (UN Women 2022). These briefs tended to focus on women’s legal rights and presented data on key women’s rights indicators. Overall, the comparative report concluded that while there has been much progress towards gender equality, discrimination against women and gender inequality are the most pervasive and prevalent human rights violations in the Pacific (UN Women 2022). The report noted some remaining areas of legal gender discrimination in relation to land inheritance rights (especially in **Tonga**) and to minimum ages of sexual consent and marriage across some Pacific states. It was also noted that in **Kiribati**, rights to pass on citizenship to children and marriage partners are more restricted for women. There are also low workplace protections across the region, with only one country – **Fiji** – providing explicit protection against discrimination for pregnancy. The review report also noted overall low representation of women in national parliaments and high rates of violence against women and girls.

In 2020, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) conducted a six-year evaluation of its Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development programme, which is the leading aid programme in relation to women’s rights in the Pacific. This evaluation included an examination of a database of programme documents as well as interviews to ascertain women’s lived experiences. The evaluation noted that more development opportunities had been created for women and girls in the Pacific, including through specific programming aimed at reaching vulnerable populations including in rural and remote areas. However, many challenges remain. Trends in common across the region include the high incidence of violence against women, relatively low representation of women in formal leadership positions, and constrained opportunities for women’s economic development (Tabualevu et al. 2020: iii).

With substantial aid dependency across the region, it is also useful to consider where overall foreign funding is being directed. Collins (29 August 2024) analysed the Lowy Institute’s Pacific Aid Map (with data covering 2008–2021 primarily drawing from OECD and International Aid Transparency Data) and

found that women are underfunded in the Pacific. Aid funding where gender equality was the primary (also known as the ‘principal’) objective represented on average only 3% of the total aid funding disbursed across the period. This falls below the global average of 4%. Further, despite large spikes in investment benefitting women during the COVID-19 pandemic years from donors such as the ADB and Japan, Australia leads total Pacific aid spent on gender equality, including ‘principal’ gender equality projects exceeding the global average of 4%. A limitation of this aid funding data is that not all donors accurately report gender markers in their funding.

In relation to women’s legal rights in the workplace, the World Bank’s Women, Business and the Law Index provides longitudinal data combining eight sets of indicators for most Pacific UN member states (except Nauru and Tuvalu) (see **Table 2**). In the 2024 report, **Fiji** scored the highest on the overall index with a score of 82.5, while **Vanuatu** scored the lowest with 55.6. Two countries have increased their scores since 2019, namely **Fiji** (with increases to the sub-indexes on mobility and parenthood) and **RMI** (with increases to the scores for the sub-indexes on workplace, pay and entrepreneurship).

Finally, five years ago the Pacific Community published a Beijing+25 review report for the Pacific, which, like this one, drew on the Beijing+25 national narrative reports, and evaluated the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action’s 12 areas of concern (Pacific Community 2021). This was a quite large report that covered a wide set of issues. In particular, its authors noted a strong urban-rural divide whereby women and men in rural and remote areas were more likely to be affected by strict gender roles and divisions of labour. Women in rural areas were much less likely to be highly educated and/or employed, therefore, to be more vulnerable to poverty and have limited avenues to seek justice or support if subjected to violence or discrimination (Pacific Community 2021: 1). The report also noted that the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data is improving across the region, but gaps still make it difficult to follow any changes in gender equality.

Turning now to this reporting period (2019–2024), the PICs have endured the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions on international travel, a halt to tourism and related industries and the consequent severe economic impacts. Various natural disasters have also occurred: the eruption of the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha’apai volcano in Tonga in January 2022; several destructive tropical cyclone (typhoon) events including *Cyclone Harold* in April 2020 affecting Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu; droughts affecting Tuvalu, RMI and other areas; measles outbreaks; and a coconut rhinoceros beetle plague in Vanuatu. Climate change continues to affect and threaten weather patterns and sea-level rises and coastal erosion particularly for low-lying atolls. The high cost of imported food and other consumer goods is a common problem around the Pacific, and reliance on such food is solidly linked to the rise in NCDs. Environmental and economic disasters often more strongly impact women’s livelihoods and wellbeing. All of these, and other, factors interact with initiatives and programmes aimed at improving gender equality and the wellbeing of women and girls.

The remainder of this review report provides information and analysis against each of the 12 areas of concern for the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Table 1. Gender Inequality Index, Pacific Island countries, 2022

				SDG 3.1	SDG 3.7	SDG 5.5	SDG 4.4			
		Gender Inequality Index		Maternal mortality ratio	Adolescent birth rate	Share of seats in parliament	Population with at least some secondary education		Labour force participation rate	
		Value	Rank	(deaths per 100,000 live births)	(births per 1,000 women ages 15–19)	(% held by women)	(% ages 25 and older)		(% ages 15 and older)	
HDI rank	Country						Female	Male	Female	Male
		2022	2022	2020	2022	2022	2022	2022	2022	2022
71	Palau	..	..	..	42.1	6.9	96.9	97.3	59.8	73.6
98	Tonga	0.462	115	126	19.2	3.7	93.7	93.4	43.0	54.9
102	Marshall Islands	..	..	..	57.5	6.1	91.6	92.5	37.3	61.2
104	Fiji	0.332	78	38	26.1	19.6	66.1	61.3	37.3	77.7
116	Samoa	0.406	101	59	43.8	13.0	92.4	87.0	49.8	80.6
122	Nauru	..	..	..	71.1	10.5	..	..	56.8	73.6
132	Tuvalu	..	..	..	31.7	6.3	58.1	58.5	20.0	29.6
135	Micronesia (Federated States of)	..	..	74	35.7	7.1	..	..	45.0	66.0

137	Kiribati	..	..	76	39.6	6.7	..	..	16.1	73.0
140	Vanuatu	..	..	94	63.2	1.9	..	..	26.7	36.4
154	Papua New Guinea	0.604	151	192	54.3	1.7	26.3	37.5	46.0	48.0
156	Solomon Islands	..	..	122	59.4	8.0	..	..	82.9	86.0

Source: United Nations Development Programme, Gender Inequality Index, <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>.

Table 2. World Bank's Women, Business and the Law Index (2019 and 2024 reports), Pacific Islands countries

	WBL Index		Mobility		Workplace		Pay		Marriage		Parenthood		Entrepreneurship		Assets		Pension	
	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024
Fiji	74.4	82.5	75.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	50.0	50.0	100.0	100.0	20.0	60.0	75.0	75.0	100.0	100.0	75.0	75.0
Kiribati	76.3	76.3	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	20.0	20.0	75.0	75.0	40.0	40.0	75.0	75.0
Marshall Islands	56.3	65.6	100.0	100.0	25.0	50.0	75.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	75.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	75.0	75.0
Micronesia (Fed. States)	61.3	61.3	100.0	100.0	25.0	25.0	75.0	75.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	75.0	75.0	40.0	40.0	75.0	75.0
Palau	56.3	56.3	100.0	100.0	25.0	25.0	75.0	75.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	75.0	75.0	0.0	0.0	75.0	75.0
Papua New Guinea	60.0	60.0	75.0	75.0	50.0	50.0	25.0	25.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	75.0	75.0	80.0	80.0	75.0	75.0
Samoa	75.0	75.0	75.0	75.0	100.0	100.0	75.0	75.0	100.0	100.0	40.0	40.0	75.0	75.0	60.0	60.0	75.0	75.0
Solomon Islands	56.9	56.9	75.0	75.0	25.0	25.0	25.0	25.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	75.0	75.0	80.0	80.0	75.0	75.0
Tonga	58.8	58.8	100.0	100.0	25.0	25.0	75.0	75.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	75.0	75.0	20.0	20.0	75.0	75.0
Vanuatu	55.6	55.6	75.0	75.0	25.0	25.0	50.0	50.0	80.0	80.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	40.0	40.0	75.0	75.0

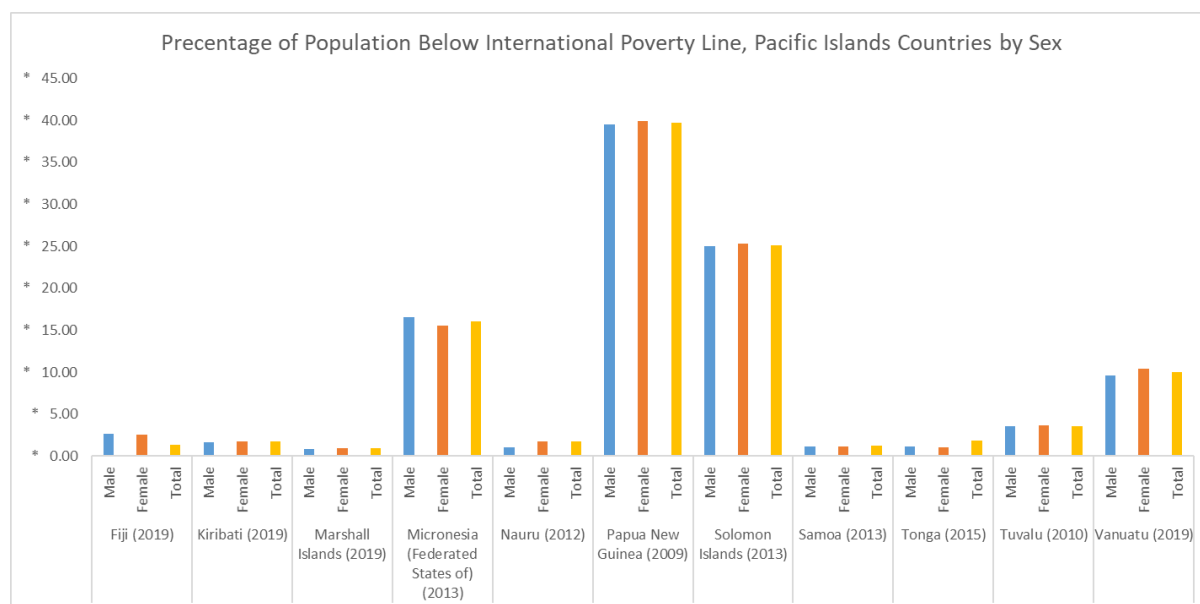
Source: World Bank Group, Women, Business and the Law (<https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl>, accessed 15 November 2024).

A. Women and poverty

A.1. Poverty rates and gender

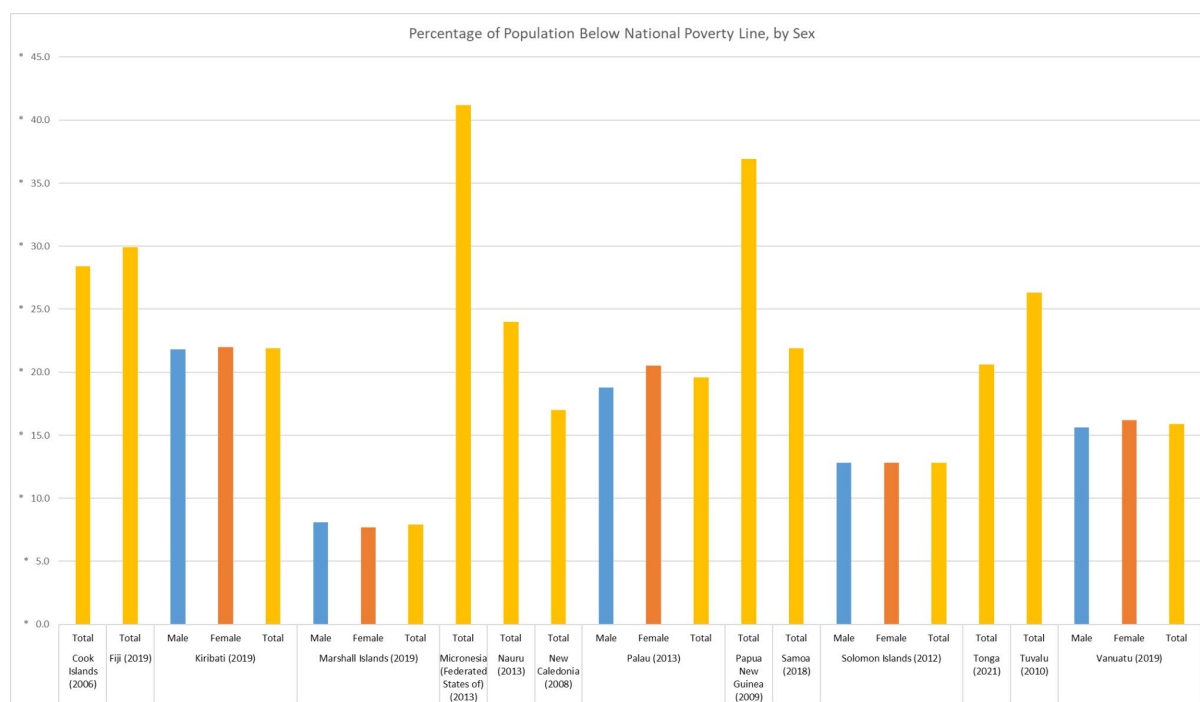
There is considerable variation across the Pacific region in relation to overall poverty levels. When measured using the international poverty line, the highest poverty levels are experienced in **PNG, Solomon Islands, FSM** and **Vanuatu (Graph 1)**. When measured as the percentage of the population living below the national poverty line, the highest rates are found in **FSM, PNG, Fiji** and the **Cook Islands (Graph 2)**. At the aggregate national level, poverty rates across the Pacific region measured below the international poverty line are generally fairly even for males and females, but with slightly higher rates of female poverty compared to male in **Kiribati, Nauru, PNG, RMI, Solomon Islands, Samoa** and **Tuvalu**, and with slightly higher rates of male poverty in **FSM, Fiji** and **Tonga**. There is less available sex-disaggregated data for poverty measured by the national poverty line, but again some gender differences are apparent, such as **Palau** (2013 data) where 20.5% of women and 18.8% of men were in poverty (**Graph 2**).

Graph 1. Percentage of population below International Poverty Line, Pacific Island countries, by sex



Source: Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Data Hub, various national survey sources.

Graph 2. Percentage of population below national poverty line, Pacific Islands countries by sex (where available).



Source: Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Data Hub, drawing on national household income and expenditure surveys (HIES)

Individual country survey data and analysis provides more detailed information on poverty and gender in some PICs, particularly where recent household income and expenditure surveys (HIES) or other multidimensional poverty surveys have been conducted.² There are commonly strong urban-rural differences within particular countries, and often but not always gender differences within poverty statistics.

Tonga's HIES survey of 2021 indicates that Tonga has virtually succeeded in eradicating extreme poverty, but 20.6% of the population was found to be below the 'cost of basic needs' poverty line (Tonga Statistics Department 2023: 36). The poverty rate is lower overall for people living in female-headed households (18.3% against 21.4% for those living in male-headed households), but it is generally higher for female-headed households in the outer islands (Tonga Statistics Department 2023: 42). Further, an Equality Insights Rapid multidimensional poverty assessment across 15 measures of deprivation conducted in 2022 found gender differences in some dimensions (Carroll et al. 2023). Women had higher safety deprivation than men, with 25% of women experiencing moderate deprivation and 14% severe deprivation, compared to 20% and 4% of men. Women also had higher levels of time use deprivation compared to men (Carroll et al. 2023: 51).

An Equality Insights Rapid study was also conducted in the **Solomon Islands** in 2022. This study found that women are likely to be more severely deprived than men in the following dimensions: clothing (32% of women compared to 19% of men), education (31% of women compared to 25% of men),

² Note that while Tuvalu conducted a HIES in 2022 (Menaouer 2024), poverty analysis is not yet available.

relationships (63% of women compared to 46% of men), safety (66% of women compared to 32% of men), sanitation (93% of women compared to 73% of men) and time use (46% of women compared to 39% of men) (Riveros-Morales et al. 2023).

The HIES survey conducted in **RMI** in 2019/2020 found that poverty was disproportionately rural, with the poverty rate in urban areas being only 2.5%, compared to 21.2% in rural areas. The rate of poverty is higher for people living in female-headed households than male-headed households, regardless of location. Approximately one-third of people in RMI live in female-headed households, and 9% of these households live in poverty compared to 7% in male-headed HHs (RMI Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office 2022: 13).

Fiji's official poverty rate based on its 2019–2020 HIES was estimated at 29.9%, which means that around 258,000 individuals were living below the national poverty line. There is some gender difference with 30.8% of males and 28.9% of females below the poverty line. Poverty rates are considerably higher among the indigenous iTaukei (36%) compared to Indo-Fijians (20%) and others (20%). There is also a clear predominance of poverty in rural areas compared to urban (Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2021: 9).

Based on the **Kiribati** 2019–20 HIES, the population living below the national cost-of-basic-needs poverty line was 21.9%. There are distinct geographic differences to poverty rates across the country, however the rate of poverty is similar for men and women and similar for people living in male-headed and female-headed households. Around one-third of people in Kiribati live in female-headed households. Of people living in female-headed households, 23% live in poverty compared to 21% of people in male-headed households, a difference which is not statistically significant (Kiribati National Statistics Office 2022: 6).

In **Vanuatu**, a National Sustainable Development Survey from 2019–2020 indicates that 15.9% of the population is living below the national basic-needs poverty line. There was a small difference between males and females, with 15.6% of the male population and 16.2% of the female population living in poverty. The proportion of the rural population living in poverty was 20.8% (Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2021: 29). This survey also collected data on subjective wellbeing; men and boys aged 15 years and over are happier on average than women and girls, although the difference is not statistically significant (Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2021: 37).

A.2. Social protection

Social protection can be defined as "a set of policies and programmes designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labour markets, diminishing people's exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against hazards and/or interruption and/or loss of income" (ADB 2022: 1). Formal social protection can be divided into three categories: (i) social insurance (e.g. contributory pension or insurance schemes); (ii) social assistance (e.g. government universal and targeted cash transfers or subsidies); and (iii) labour market programmes (e.g. programmes which facilitate employment such as skills and training and cash for work programmes).

Traditional forms of social protection supported by indigenous knowledge systems, kinship ties and gift exchange relationships are also highly important and not generally captured by indicators or analyses of formal systems (Jolly et al. 2015). However, a couple of the Beijing+30 narrative reports included reflections on the breakdown of these traditional systems due to demographic changes and the monetisation of the economy (e.g. Government of Kiribati 2024: 48; Republic of Palau 2024: 24). Personal remittances provided by relatives employed in urban areas or overseas are also a very important form of social security across the Pacific.

The Asian Development Bank's Social Protection Index (SPI) indicates that social protection coverage, on average, has generally remained weak in the Pacific region. However, expenditures on social protection have been rising at modest rates in the Pacific. Based on 2018 data, overall social protection expenditure ranged from 11.1% of per capita GDP in **Kiribati** and 10.3% in **RMI** to 1.5% in **Tonga** and 0.8% in **PNG**. On average across eight countries with comparable data—**Fiji, Nauru, Palau, PNG, RMI, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu**—the SPI steadily increased between 2009 and 2018, rising from 3.1% to 4.7% of per capita GDP. The steepest rise occurred between 2012 and 2015 (ADB 2022: xii, 47).

In terms of gender differences, the ADB's Social Protection Index shows that on average across the Pacific region social protection spending has continued to favour men compared to women, with social protection programmes spending 2.5% of GDP per capita on men and 2.2% on women. This difference has been steady across time, and reflects the fact that men are more likely to be in formal employment with higher rates of pay and therefore pay more to contributory pension and insurance schemes. At the individual country level, spending on social insurance for men outstripped that for women in **Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu**. Meanwhile, social protection spending was more favourable to women in **Nauru**, and rates were quite equal in **Palau, the Cook Islands and Samoa** (ADB 2022: xvi). While some social assistance programmes do aim to redress gender inequalities, particularly those suffered by poor households headed by women, the ADB data indicates that most social protection benefits still flowed to men because of the dominance of social insurance within overall social protection systems (ADB 2022: 36).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many PICs increased existing social protection benefits or introduced temporary new schemes. The pandemic particularly revealed the vulnerability of the large portions of the population in informal employment, with often a majority of women were engaged in the informal sector and when pushed into unemployment by the pandemic had no income insurance support.

Some highlights in recent developments in social protection and their benefits to women in some PICs, as reported in the Beijing+30 narrative reports, are detailed below:

Fiji has a relatively well-developed social protection system including schemes which provide regular benefits to elderly people, people living with disabilities, households with vulnerable children and households living in poverty. Women have been the primary recipients of several of these key assistance schemes (Government of Fiji 2023). During the COVID-19 response, the Fiji government implemented additional cash transfers, food rations, utilities subsidies, business credit guarantees, and waivers of government administrative fees (Gounder 2022). A new Social Protection Policy

adopted in 2021 commits Fiji to providing appropriate and gender-responsive social assistance over the life cycle (Government of Fiji 2023: 44-F).

Recent research has revealed that the **Cook Islands'** long-standing social welfare benefits system has contributed significantly to reducing poverty and inequality. The government provides universal schemes, such as the Child Benefit and Old Age Pension, along with means-tested support in the form of the Infirm Benefit, Destitute Allowance, Caregivers Allowance and the Power Subsidy. In fact, the Cook Islands invests one of the highest amounts in child benefits globally. It has been estimated that the 2016 poverty rate of 8.4% would stand at 19.6% if the Child Benefit, Old Age Pension and Power Subsidy were removed (Gorman et al. 2023; Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 37).

In July 2020, **Kiribati** introduced a new unemployment benefit known as the 'Support Fund for Unemployed' to cover all unemployed citizens aged 18–59. Also, in December 2020, the *Te Mwane ni Kara Act* created a Senior Citizens Allowance with a monthly allowance for I-Kiribati citizens aged 60 years and over. This SCA was recently increased to 100 AUD fortnightly. People with disabilities are eligible for the SFU and an additional Disability Support Allowance. These social benefits have enabled women to contribute to their family's livelihood, elevating recognition and better respect, self-sense of importance and independence (Government of Kiribati 2024: 17). Note that the ADB's Social Protection Index (2018) cited above does not yet include data on these new schemes.

Social protection in **Nauru** includes the Nauru Superannuation Scheme with mandatory employer contributions, and a separate Parliamentary Pension Fund. Women are likely to benefit less than men as there are fewer women in formal employment. Nauru also provides a range of cash transfer programmes including Birth Benefit, Death Benefit, Aged Benefit, Disability Benefit, School Feeding Programme, Education Assistance Trust Scheme, and 2020 Back to School Payment (Republic of Nauru 2024: 16–17). The new 'Nauru National Social Protection Strategy' (2022–2032) is based on principles of equality and recognises that women have higher rates of informal employment and care responsibilities and therefore require greater support (Republic of Nauru 2024: 17). This accords with the ADB's finding mentioned above that Nauru spends comparatively more on social protection for women.

In **Palau**, there is a well-established contributory social security system that is mandatory for all employees which provides for five types of benefits to eligible insured individuals or their qualified survivors: (i) retirement pension (old age, over age 60); (ii) permanent disability benefits; (iii) surviving spouse's insurance; (iv) surviving child's insurance; and (v) lump sum death benefits. The system is formally gender-neutral, however, rules on qualifying periods of contribution may disadvantage those who take time out of the workforce such as for maternity and childcare (Republic of Palau 2024: 22). Contributory public healthcare funds also provide local and, where necessary, international healthcare coverage. Small cash transfers are directed to persons with disabilities, parents through a child raising subsidy, social assistance payments to those in the informal market sector, tax refunds to low income earners, and utilities subsidies. As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Palauan citizens became temporarily eligible for either unemployment benefits under a United States scheme or local funding (Republic of Palau 2024: 22).

The **Tuvalu** Beijing+30 report notes there are no forms of financial support for the poor in the country, and that this lack of social protection continues to be an important challenge (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 12).

B. Education and training of women

Rates of female educational enrolment and attainment are quite variable across the Pacific, ranging from countries where female education is reported to outpace that of males (i.e. **Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu**), to countries where females continue to be disadvantaged (e.g. in some educational levels and areas in the **Solomon Islands** and **PNG**).

Examination of comparable education data across most Pacific countries shows that there is close to gender parity in enrolment ratios in early childhood, primary and lower secondary education, however, enrolment in upper secondary does show some clear gender inequality (Pacific Community 2021b). Two countries have a substantial gender gap, with more girls enrolled in secondary education in **Tuvalu** and more boys in **PNG** (Pacific Community 2021b: 13). Also, in the **Solomon Islands**, the number of females who have attained secondary education is lower (27%) compared to males (30%) (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 5).

Parts of the Pacific still have education access issues, where girls may be disadvantaged in comparison to their brothers when parents make education resourcing decisions (ABC Pacific, 7 November 2024). In the **Solomon Islands**, for example, primary barriers to education commonly encountered by girls include lack of funds to pay for school fees, discrimination, and gender inequality (Bobongie-Harris 2021). The urban-rural divide is a key determinant of education access, for example, in **PNG** it is estimated that almost 30% of children of primary school age were not attending school – especially in rural areas (Pacific Community 2021b: 8). Climate change and natural disasters also threaten all children’s access to education in the Pacific (Plan International 2023). However, there are also signs that previously negative social attitudes towards girls’ education in some regions may be changing (ABC Pacific, 7 November 2024).

B.1. Primary schooling

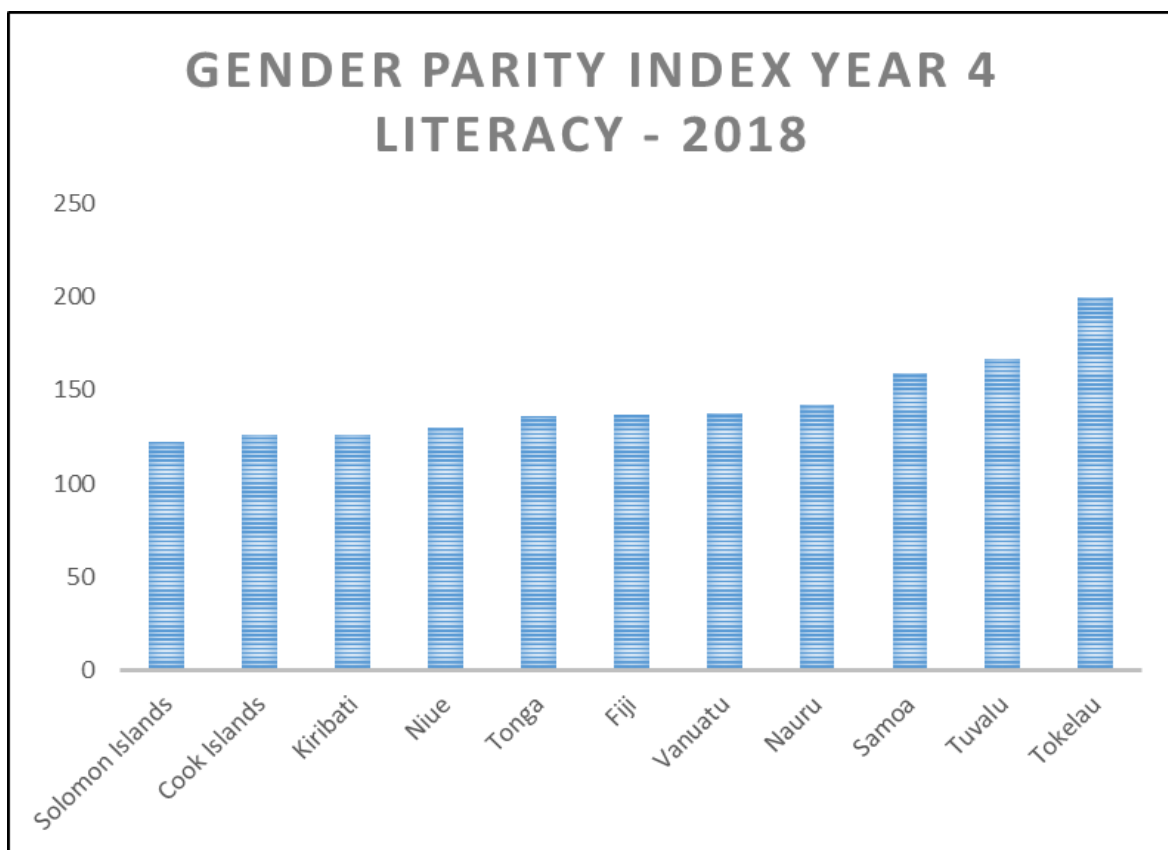
As noted above, and in the Beijing+30 reports, comparative statistics on enrolment and completion of primary school education generally shows gender parity across the Pacific region. In the **Solomon Islands**, for example, the gender gap in enrolment between males and females has been narrowing. There are now almost equal numbers of females and males who have completed primary education, 47% and 46%, respectively (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 5). In **Vanuatu**, the 2020 National Population and Housing Census showed that 59% of both males and females had completed primary school (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 12). **Cook Islands’** net enrolment rate at primary education level stands at 100% for both males and females (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 27). Similarly in **Fiji**, net enrolment in primary education is 100%, with the ratio of girls to boys being 0.93, indicating that nearly all girls of this age group are enrolled in primary school (Government of Fiji 2023: 3-A).

In terms of educational attainment at primary school level, the best comparative data is provided by the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA), with survey cycles last conducted in

2021,³ 2018 and 2015. This test and accompanying questionnaires about educational context provide a comparative measure of literacy and numeracy at years 4 and 6. In 2021, 40,000 students across 15 participating Pacific countries took the assessment. Student performance is measured against Pacific regional benchmarks and has gender-disaggregated data.

The PILNA shows that on average, year 4 girls outperform boys in reading and writing, and that this trend is evident across the 2015, 2018 and 2021 PILNA cycles. **Graph 3** shows 2018 data for 11 Pacific Island countries with girls consistently outperforming boys in literacy.

Graph 3. Gender Parity Index, Year 4 literacy, 11 Pacific Island countries, 2018

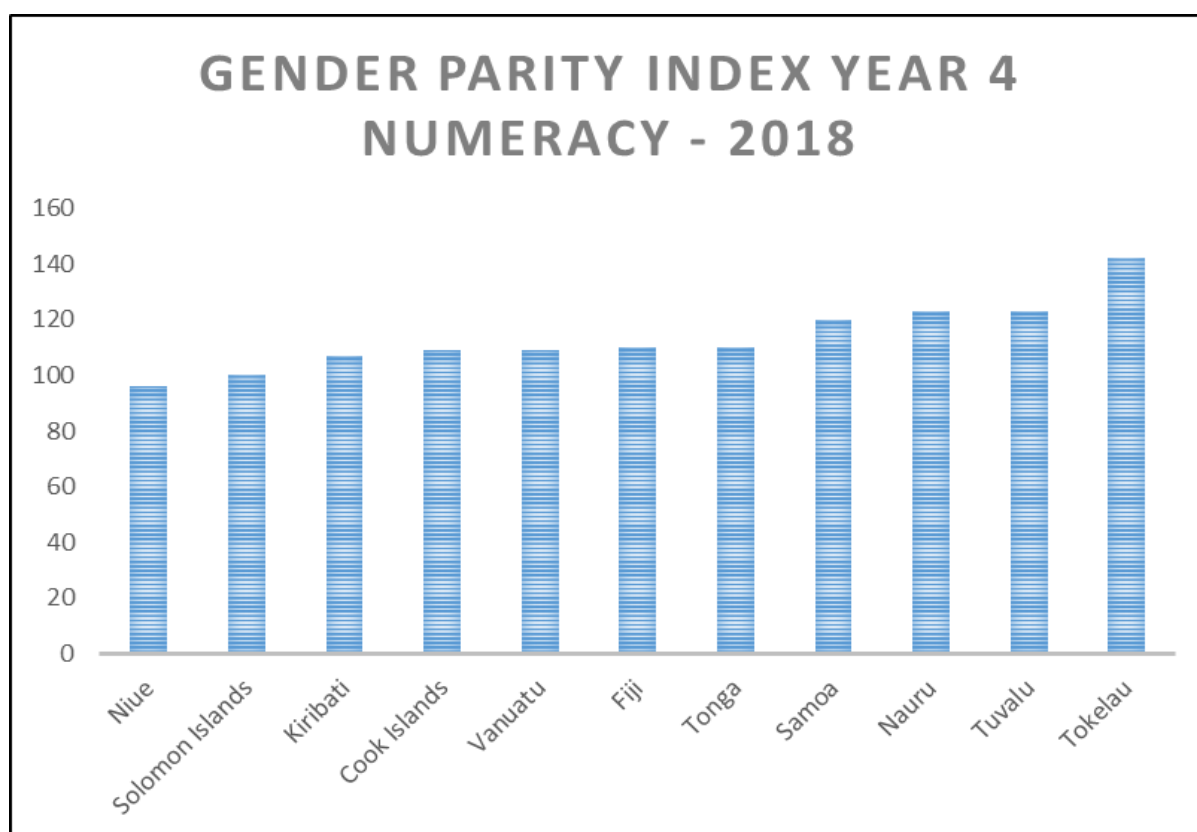


Source: Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Data Hub, Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) 2018.

The PILNA also shows that, on average, year 4 girls scored higher than boys in all numeracy areas, including the overall numeracy score. This was consistent across the 2015, 2018 and 2021 PILNA cycles. **Graph 4** shows year 4 girls outperforming boys in overall numeracy across 10 Pacific countries, with the exception of Niue, where girls performed slightly lower compared to boys on average.

³ Although some analysis of the 2021 PILNA findings are available (<https://pilna.eqap.spc.int/2021/regional>), unfortunately the publicly available data is not presented in a way that allows gender analysis of student performance across time.

Graph 4. Gender Parity Index year 4 numeracy, 10 Pacific Island countries, 2018



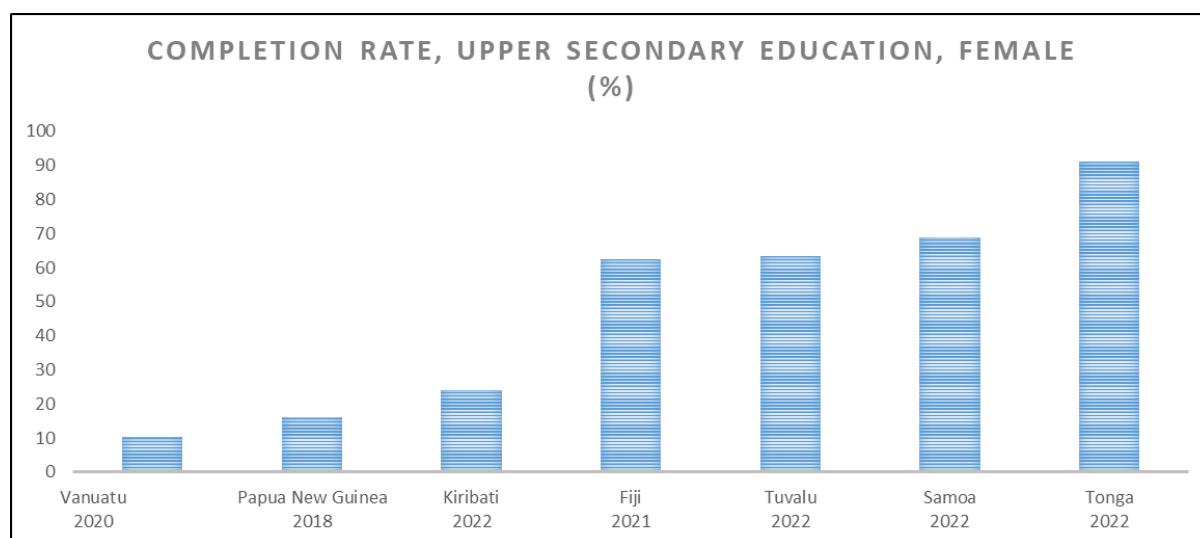
Source: Pacific Data Hub (Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) 2018)

B.2. Secondary schooling

As noted above, gender inequality becomes apparent at the upper secondary school level in some parts of the Pacific region. In some places, the statistics show more females completing secondary school. For example, in **Fiji** 97% of girls successfully complete secondary school, compared with 74% of boys (Government of Fiji 2024: 10). In **Vanuatu**, the 2020 National Population and Housing Census indicates that 34.3% of the population had completed secondary education (33.3% male and 35.3% female) (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 12). However, in the **Solomon Islands**, the number of females who attained secondary education was lower (27%) compared to males (30%) (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 5).

Data from the Pacific Data Hub (**Graph 5**), shows comparative rates of female completion of upper secondary school, ranging from 10.2% in **Vanuatu**, 16% in **Papua New Guinea** and up to 91% in **Tonga**.

Graph 5. Completion rate, upper secondary education, female (%), seven Pacific Island countries



Source: Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Data Hub, drawing from various national survey sources.

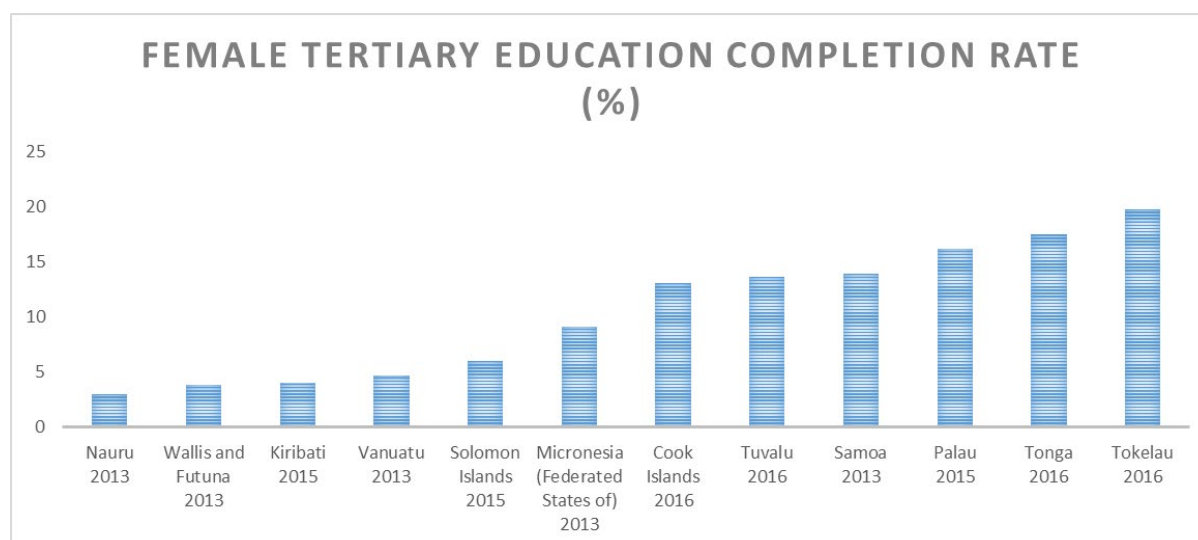
B.3. Tertiary education

Disparity between male and female rates of tertiary education attainment across the Pacific are also evident. For example, in **Vanuatu**, the 2020 National Population and Housing Census found that overall, 2.4% had completed tertiary education (2.9% male and 2% female) and 3.8% had completed vocational/professional education (4.4% male and 3.2% female) (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 12). In **Fiji**, young women account for 60–65% of tertiary students and over 50% of graduates (Government of Fiji 2024: 11). In **Samoa**, while females outnumber males in school attendance, males are more likely to attend tertiary education and achieve graduate and postgraduate certificates, master’s and PhDs (Samoa Bureau of Statistics and UNFPA 2020: 9). In **Cook Islands**, women are dominant in the bachelor’s degree category (58.9%) and in the postgraduate certificate and diploma category (59.3%). Further, more females than males received tertiary education scholarships in 2021 (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 28).

In **Solomon Islands**, only 4.9% of females had completed some tertiary education in 2019 compared with 10.7% of men. Solomon Islands men also dominate postsecondary technical and vocational education and training (TVET) constituting 73% of students enrolled at regional training centres and TVET institutions (Fitzgerald et al. 2024).

At a comparative regional level, the highest proportions of females with tertiary degrees are found in **Tokelau** (19.8%), **Tonga** (17.5%) and **Palau** (16.2%), and the lowest in **Nauru** (3%) and **Kiribati** (4%) (**Graph 6**). The lack of recent data, however, prevents analysis of contemporary trends in education attainment.

Graph 6. Female tertiary education completion rate (%), 12 Pacific Island countries and territories



Source: Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Data Hub, various national survey sources

The data on women’s enrolment and attainment at tertiary levels in STEM fields across the region appear scarce. In **Fiji**, it is noted that women attending Fiji’s universities outnumber men in programmes for environmental science and management, agriculture, fisheries and forestry (Government of Fiji 2024: 11).

B.4. Programming to improve female access to education

Education policies across the Pacific region tend to acknowledge principles of gender equality. At the regional level, the Pacific Islands Forum’s Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018–2030 is aligned with the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED). The PacREF supports fully inclusive learning opportunities. At the country level, free and compulsory education policies for all children ensure inclusivity. Most countries have both free and compulsory education with the exceptions of the **Solomon Islands** where it is free but not compulsory, and **Vanuatu** where education is neither free nor compulsory (UN Women 2022).

Fiji’s provision of universal, tuition-free access to early childhood education (ECE) ensures learning opportunities for all, regardless of gender or socioeconomic status (Government of Fiji 2024: 34). In **Tuvalu**, continuing education policies now address gender equality issues such as through selection of gender-balanced books, inclusivity and human rights training for teachers, and development of a programme specifically targeting gender-based bullying in schools (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 29). **Vanuatu’s** Reviewed Gender Equity in Education Policy 2018 focuses on increasing girls’ participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) through scholarships, access to non-traditional subjects, and career guidance (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 16).

Various programmes mentioned in the Beijing+30 narrative reports seek to incorporate gender considerations into quality education programming, including in non-traditional areas. For example, the **Tuvalu** Learning Project (TuLeP), is a five-year project that aims to strengthen early childhood education and improve literacy capacity and readiness for school. This project has included a gender gap analysis of enrolment and performance with the aim of informing evidence-based interventions

(Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 28). Also, local scholarships specifically for Pacific women are provided by some non-government associations such as the Women’s Federation for World Peace Australia and the Business and Professional Women’s Club of Port Moresby (ABC Pacific, 7 November 2024). Various international education scholarships, such as the Australia Awards, have gender equality policies. **Fiji** has a STEM Camp for Girls to encourage girls from underprivileged areas to pursue science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects (Government of Fiji 2024: 36).

Second-chance education programmes for people who missed earlier educational opportunities are being run in some places. **Fiji** established the Matua Programme in 2002 which provides a second chance for secondary education, including to girls and women who dropped out of secondary school due to pregnancy or other reasons. Between 2016 and 2021, enrolment in the Matua Programme increased by 80%, with women accounting for 63% of the students (Government of Fiji 2024: 10–11). Similarly, since 2018, the **Solomon Islands** National University has provided a second-chance programme for women who left education due to pregnancy (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 21).

Several vocational skills training programmes for women are noted in the Beijing+30 reports. In **Vanuatu**, such vocational training programmes, including in non-traditional industries, are supported through the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) and the National Gender Equality Policy 2020–2030 (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 11). The **Tonga** Women in ICT (TWICT) programme provides skills training on digital technologies. This occurs through a newly opened workspace cafe at Tonga National University, and through outreach to schools, particularly TVET institutions. **Kiribati’s** Ministry of Women, Youth, Sport, and Social Affairs (MWYSSA) coordinates informal training for women in income-generating activities and essential skills for developing and improving small businesses (Government of Kiribati 2024: 20). In **RMI**, an innovative training programme has provided women with skills in solar photovoltaic refrigeration systems (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 32). **Samoa’s** Ministry of Education and Culture has also taken measures to increase girls’ access to, and completion of, TVET and skills development programmes, including by strengthening TVET programmes in primary schools (Government of Samoa 2024: 12).

C. Women and health

C.1. Public health systems and COVID-19

Most Pacific Island countries struggle to maintain an adequate health workforce and healthcare facilities. However, the Beijing+30 narrative reports tend to provide only very general information about country health systems, and this review is not able to provide any in-depth assessment of these. Several countries report various efforts to assess and upgrade health service delivery during the reporting period. For example, the **Solomon Islands** has adopted Universal Health Coverage 2021–2031 as the guiding principle for health service delivery in the country. The Solomon Islands Ministry of Health and Medical Services is also undertaking a review of its *Health Services Act* to ensure equitable primary health care services, which is expected to be completed in 2024 (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 19). **Kiribati** also undertook a Health Facility and Readiness Service Assessment during 2019 in support of the 2030 Agenda of ‘leaving no-one behind’. This assessment will provide a baseline for strengthening integrated healthcare services (Government of Kiribati 2024: 27). In **Tuvalu**, there has been a focus on expanding access and enhancing the quality of medical

services, including an increase in the number of clinics on outer islands. Partnership with the Tuvalu Red Cross Society has greatly extended community health outreach efforts (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 26). **Samoa** also reports expansion of specific health services for women and girls, and gender-sensitive approaches to the treatment of chronic and NCDs (Government of Samoa 2024: 11). Through a five-year clean water initiative in **RMI**, over 8,000 water filters were distributed to households, churches, and schools throughout all 24 atolls. This ensured access to clean water for Marshallese families and will reduce illness caused by disease-borne drinking water (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 19).

The key public health crisis that loomed largest during the reporting period was the COVID-19 pandemic. Most Pacific Islands countries and territories instituted rapid international border closures and most remained free of the direct impacts during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Guam** and **French Polynesia** were the only territories with large-scale community transmission in 2020 (Bell et al. 2022: 1). However, in 2021, breaches in quarantine led to outbreaks and community transmission in **French Polynesia**, **Fiji**, **New Caledonia**, **PNG**, and **Wallis and Futuna** (Bell et al. 2022: 2). In **Fiji**, for example, as of early 2022, more than 62,000 Fijians had contracted COVID-19, including nearly 800 who died.

From mid-2021, all areas of the Pacific had received COVID-19 vaccines and undertook large-scale vaccination programmes, quickly reaching high population coverage. This was accompanied by various public education efforts. The pandemic caused interruption to general health services when facilities were overwhelmed and medical staff contracted the disease, when medical supplies were interrupted by lack of flights (Marazita 2021), but also due to the general population avoiding routine consultations. This often included disruption to family planning services. On the more positive side, the pandemic also resulted in some expansion of health system capabilities including in public health data collection, adult vaccination drives, and laboratory capacity across the region (Bell et al. 2022).

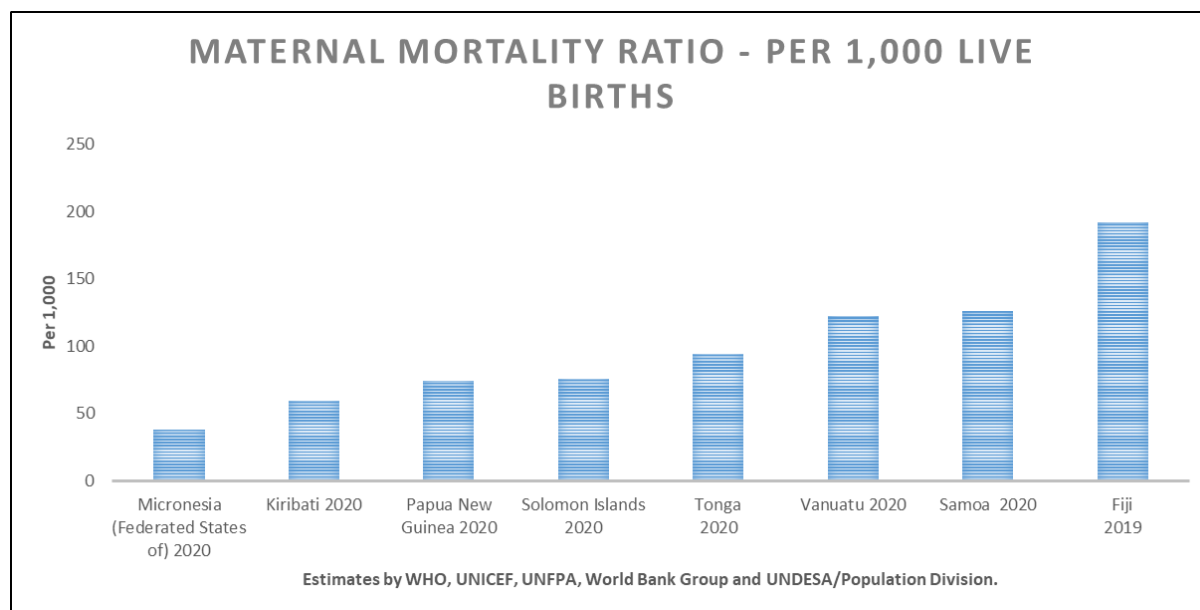
Across the PICs, there appears to be a wide variety of gendered health-seeking opportunities and behaviours. In **Fiji**, for example, despite health system progress, there remains systemic gender-based health inequities that adversely affect women and girls and their intersectional identities based on age, socioeconomic status, disability, cultural background, education, sexual orientation and where they live (Government of Fiji 2024: 29). Meanwhile, in **Palau**, it is men who are less likely than women to report having fair health and also less likely to participate in health practices, activities, and programmes and who generally have comparatively lower health literacy levels (Republic of Palau 2024: 25).

C.2. Maternal health

The data on maternal mortality across the Pacific region shows considerable variation, with the highest rates observed in Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu (**Graph 7**). The rates of maternal deaths in **Fiji** have been variable across time. In 2017, Fiji's maternal mortality rate (MMR) was 36 deaths per 100,000 live births, which was a significant drop from a rate of 51 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000. However, in 2019, the MMR rose to 96 deaths per 100,000 live births (Government of Fiji 2024: 29). At the other end of the scale, in **Palau** maternal deaths are rare with one maternal death in 2013, one

in 2019, and one in 2023 (Republic of Palau 2024: 25). Also, since 1995, **Cook Islands** has not recorded any maternal deaths (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 26).

Graph 7. Maternal mortality ratio per 1,000 live births, eight Pacific Island countries

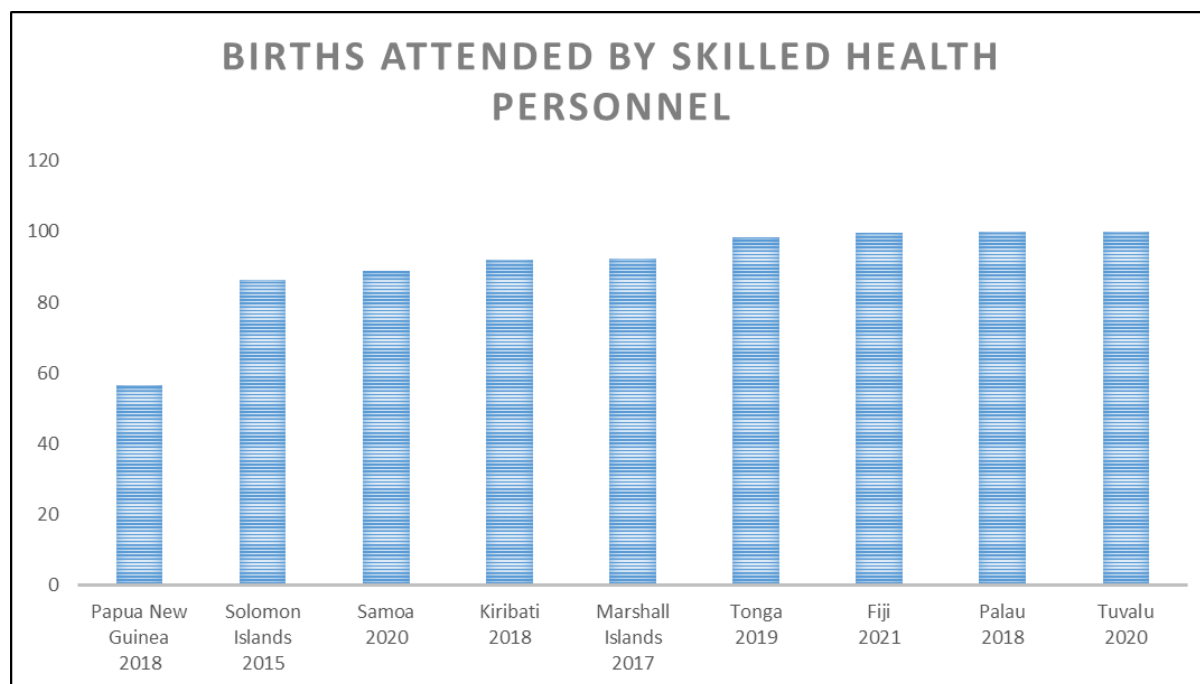


Source: Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Data Hub

The available data on births attended by skilled professionals is far more uniform across the region, with many countries reporting at or near 100% of births (**Graph 8**). In **Vanuatu**, for example, of women aged 15–49 who gave birth in the last two years, 89.2% had seen a skilled birth attendant at least once during their last pregnancy, 65% at least four times by any provider and 10.5% at least eight times by any provider (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 12). Not covered in **Graph 8**, is the **Cook Islands** which also reports that nearly all pregnant women receive antenatal care by medical professionals (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 26). In **Solomon Islands**, a key success of the National Health Strategic Plan (2016–2020) is that nine out of every 10 women giving birth are attended by a skilled birth attendant (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 19). In **Fiji**, nearly all pregnant women are seen by a skilled health professional at least once during their pregnancies and nearly 90% are seen at least four times. However, many women do not present for antenatal care until the second or third trimester, which is an underlying cause of maternal mortality in Fiji (Government of Fiji 2024: 13). The COVID-19 pandemic in **Fiji** was a difficult period for maternal health services, when due to the conversion of major hospitals to treat COVID-19, Fijian women delivered their babies aboard a medical ship staffed by midwives who had been recruited from retirement (Government of Fiji 2024: 33).

A clear outlier on this key women’s health issue, however, is **PNG**, where only approximately 56% of births have a skilled birth attendant. Studies indicate that women living in rural locations in PNG, and with low education, employment and wealth status are less likely to use a skilled birth attendant (Seidu et al. 2022). Despite recognising the importance of health facility births, fear of being scolded or shamed by health providers, as well as taboos about being seen by men while giving birth were further deterrents (Vallely et al. 2015). On the more positive side, since 2009, midwifery training quality has greatly improved and the number of practising midwives in PNG has almost tripled (Seidu et al. 2022: 70).

Graph 8. Births attended by skilled health personnel (%), nine Pacific Island countries



Source: Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Data Hub, various national sources

In terms of specific programming for maternal health, a key example is occurring in the **Solomon Islands** through a current project funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). This four-year project began in 2023 and is being managed by the World Health Organization (WHO) Representative Office. It aims to improve the health of mothers and newborns in five target provinces: Honiara, Guadalcanal, Western, Central and Malaita. KOICA has committed a total of USD 6 million to the project (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 19). In **Fiji**, the most recent initiative is the Maternal Perinatal Death Surveillance Response which has been developed with support from the UNFPA. This response strengthens collaboration between obstetrics and gynaecological teams with paediatricians. This programme aims to provide strong monitoring and evaluation of maternal deaths and contribute to policy and strategic changes required to further reduce maternal mortality in Fiji (Government of Fiji 2024: 33).

C.3. Sexual and reproductive health

Across the Pacific, a range of religious and customary norms, access to education and quality of policy frameworks and service delivery strongly affect women’s sexual and reproductive health. In **Solomon Islands**, for example, a review of policy and legislation on sexual and reproductive health found evidence of progress but also gaps in relation to having a standalone, up-to-date, sexual and reproductive health strategy and limited consideration of people with disabilities within policy frameworks (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 5).

Contraceptive use is comparatively low across the region, with only approximately half of all sexually active women who want to avoid pregnancy using a modern contraceptive method. For example, in **Vanuatu** 45.6% of women aged 15-49 currently married or in a union have their need for family

planning satisfied with modern contraception (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 12). In **Cook Islands**, contraceptive prevalence has increased from 17.6% in 2020 to 37.5% in 2023 (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 26). Low contraception use across the Pacific is attributed to such factors as limited access, partner disapproval, and stigma and feelings of shame especially among unmarried women (Wilson et al. 2023). There are also common misconceptions about the impact of contraception on fertility (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 25).

A 2021 survey of young people found that respondents in **Cook Islands** (85%), **Fiji** (75%), **Samoa** (85%) and **Tuvalu** (83%) were most likely to have received some form of sexuality education. Participants in **Kiribati** (33%) and **Solomon Islands** (50%) were least likely to have received or accessed sexuality education (IPPF and UNFPA 2021: 30). Lack of sexual and reproductive health education is linked to high rates of unplanned pregnancy among teenage girls. This issue was recognised in some Beijing+30 Pacific reports as being a key health and social problem, including in **Cook Islands**, **Fiji**, **Nauru**, **RMI**, and **Tonga**. In **Cook Islands**, for example, the adolescent birth rate stood at 10% (2020), 9.2% (2021), 3.5% (2022) and 9.8% (2023) (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 25). **Fiji** reported more than 5,000 teenage pregnancies over the past five years, of which 25% were individuals below the age of 15 years (Government of Fiji 2024: 61). In **RMI** report, it was recognised that while pregnancy was a choice, sometimes Marshallese girls were victims of coercion or assault (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 11). A qualitative study of unplanned pregnancy among young women and girls in **Tonga** conducted in 2019 found low knowledge about sexual and reproductive health and contraception. Further, once young women discovered that they were pregnant, fear of social consequences meant that they often did not seek medical attention until late in their pregnancy. The study recommended that culturally appropriate communication approaches (*talanoa*) be used to facilitate intergenerational discussion on sexual and reproductive health, with both older and younger women present (Linhart et al. 2020; Tu’i’onetoa et al. 2023; Government of Tonga 2024: 24).

The Beijing+30 narrative reports outline a range of government and non-government information collection and programming aimed at improving family planning education and services. This often occurs as partnerships between government and national family planning associations, and also often with international donor assistance, especially the UNFPA and Australian Aid. For example, the Government of **Fiji** has expanded access to family planning services, including contraceptives and reproductive health education for the population, family planning training for medical providers and evaluative checks on providers across the nation. Also, the Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services (FPBS) team has a specific individual who manages the supply chain management for family planning products (Government of Fiji 2024: 32). Pilot programmes have been run to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health services by people with disability. In 2022–2023, the Fiji’s Ministry of Health and Medical Services, with the support of UNFPA, also developed Youth Friendly Health Services Guidelines with a training package, ready to be rolled out to better assist young people to access medical assistance including contraceptives (Government of Fiji 2024: 32). **Cook Islands** has ensured that sexual and reproductive health education is taught in schools, and that information is also broadcast on local media (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 26).

Non-government family planning associations are key service providers in several countries. The **Kiribati** Healthy Families Project, implemented in partnership with the Kiribati Family Health Association (KFHA), has been expanding accessibility to sexual and reproductive health information,

skills, and services on South Tarawa and six outer islands targeting youth, people with disabilities and sex workers (Government of Kiribati 2024: 24). Similarly, a government partnership with the **Tuvalu** Family Health Association (TuFHA) provides essential sexual and reproductive health services and education, and support to all Tuvaluans, particularly young adults. Additional collaborations with organisations such as the Akanda Alliance (an LGBTQI+ association) and Fusi Alofa (a disability association) have extended these services to diverse and often marginalised populations (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 26). The **Solomon Islands** Planned Parenthood Association (SIPPA) provides mobile outreach clinics for rural areas and vulnerable populations. By 2020, SIPPA had served over 70,000 people across the country, primarily women and girls (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 19).

C.4. Menstrual health

Menstrual health is an issue of noted importance in some of the Beijing+30 Pacific reports. Menstrual health in the Pacific involves societal beliefs and attitudes, girls' knowledge and empowerment, access to appropriate menstrual hygiene products and access to WASH facilities, particularly in schools. These issues are variable for women across the Pacific. For example, in **Fiji**, it was reported that while most urban women have good access to information and to commercially available sanitary products, women in rural and remote areas, poorer women and those with disabilities may experience greater difficulties. In 2021, 94% of Fijian women aged 15–49 years reported having a private place at home to wash and change menstrual materials (Government of Fiji 2024: 31). Meanwhile, in **Tuvalu**, a survey of 328 participants conducted by TuFHA in February 2022 found that many young women and girls lacked knowledge about menstruation and menstrual health and that many were unprepared for menarche. Many schools and workplaces also lack adequate facilities for menstrual hygiene management, leading to use of makeshift methods. The survey concluded that there is an urgent need for comprehensive menstrual health education and improved facilities for women and girls (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 27).

Programmes aimed at addressing taboos and stigma around menstruation and promoting health knowledge among women and girls are occurring in some places. CARE in **Vanuatu**, in partnership with Mamma's Laef – a local enterprise producing reusable sanitary products – has distributed hundreds of menstrual hygiene management kits to girls and hygiene kits to boys in South Tanna. Accompanied by information sessions, this programme has positively impacted both girls and boys (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 34). Similarly, CARE in Vanuatu also implements the Laef Blo Mi, Vois Blo Mi programme which focuses on girls aged 12–19 in rural and remote areas of Tafea Province. Supported by the Australian Aid-funded Pacific Girl programme, it has provided life skills and respectful relationships education to approximately 800 girls, addressing menstruation and reproductive health. It also reaches male peers, teachers, health workers and families. In **Tuvalu**, the Tuvalu Red Cross and Tuvalu Family Health Association raise awareness about menstrual hygiene and health in schools across Funafuti in an attempt to eliminate stigma and misconceptions (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 27).

Other programmes aim to improve girls' access to sanitary products and WASH facilities in schools. **Fiji's** 2021–2022 budget allocated funds to provide sanitary pads at schools to prevent adolescent girls from missing school due to an inability to afford them. In partnership with UNICEF, Vanuatu's Ministry

of Education and Training (MoET) has developed a WASH in Schools monitoring module which includes indicators for the provision of menstrual health supplies, within the Vanuatu Education Management Information System (VEMIS). Local grassroots programmes can also be found. For example, a menstrual health programme for schoolgirls in Kwaio, **Solomon Islands**, provided girls with reusable menstrual pads and health education. The programme responded to feedback from participants by adapting the product designs to suit local needs and including access to laundry facilities and spaces (Esau et al. 2023).

Programming on menstrual health has also involved ad hoc distribution of ‘dignity kits’ during disasters, including typhoons, droughts and the COVID-19 pandemic. **Samoa’s** Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD), with assistance from UNFPA, distributed dignity kits to vulnerable women and girls during the COVID-19 lock-down and post-recovery periods. The project provided 1,350 customised dignity kits and 100 dignity kits for vulnerable families (Government of Samoa 2024: 14). In **RMI**, in 2020, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (with assistance from the Government of Australia, Majuro Atoll Local Government, Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs and Kwajalein Atoll Emergency Operation Center) distributed at least 600 hygiene kits to all households in vulnerable situations and to all persons with disabilities. These kits included reusable pads, toiletries and underwear (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 31–32). During the drought in **Tuvalu** in early 2023, 500 menstrual hygiene kits were distributed to women and girls in the drought-affected northern islands of the country. This included 68 kits specifically designed to meet the needs of women and girls with disabilities (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 43).

C.5. Female-specific cancer screening and prevention

Most Pacific Island countries and territories have insufficient cancer surveillance systems, and many are unable to provide cancer care to those affected. Patients may receive restricted treatment or are treated abroad where personal resources or insurance systems allow (Sarfati et al. 2019). The top two cancers affecting women in the Pacific are breast and cervical cancer, both in terms of incidence and mortality. Cervical cancer rates in the Pacific are among the highest in the world, with Pacific women up to 14 times more likely to die from cervical cancer than women in Australia. Thyroid, uterine, and oral cavity cancer are among the top five most common cancers, and lung and liver cancers are still prominent causes of death in Pacific women (GLOBOCAN 2022; Sarfati et al. 2019: e480). Cancer patients in the Pacific commonly present at very late stages and by the time the disease is diagnosed, it is often too late for treatment. The reasons for low screening and late presentation of women cancer patients include resources and facilities, trust in the health care system, culture and tradition, modesty, awareness, socioeconomic status, and geography (including location in remote islands) (Naidu et al. 2021).

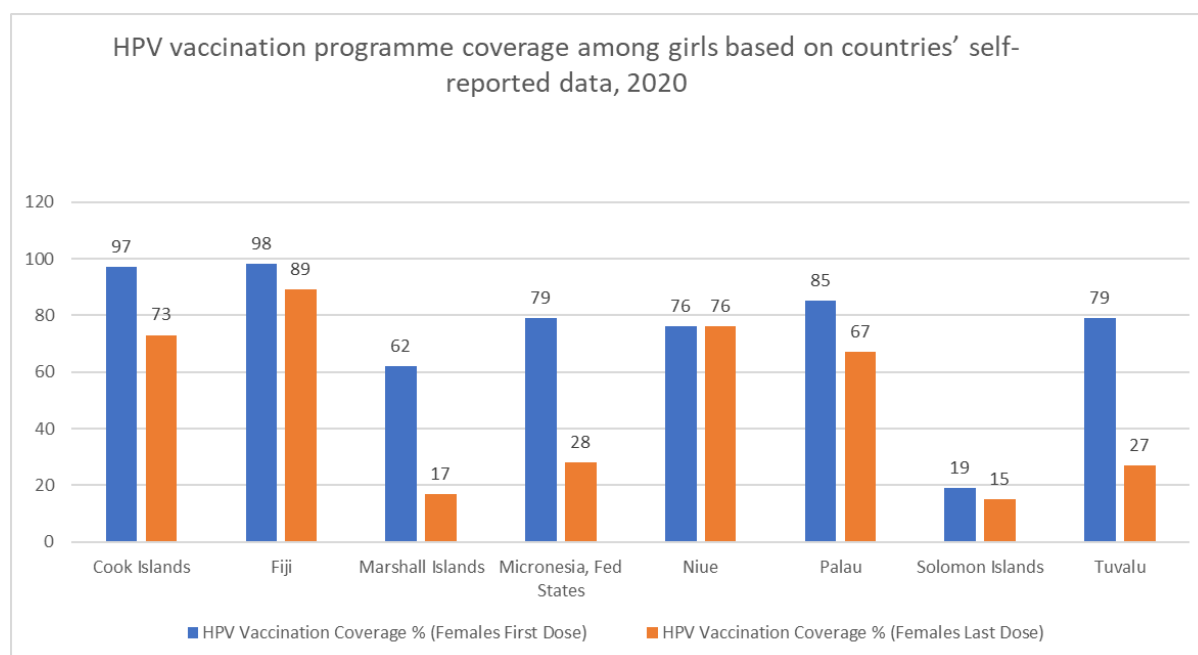
Various Beijing+30 country reports mention national breast cancer screening programmes, although obstacles have also been common. In **Cook Islands**, the last mammogram screening was conducted in 2022 with 809 women when the programme needed to be extended to cover the backlog from the COVID-19 pandemic period. The one mammogram machine in the country is nearing the end of its lifespan and is no longer able to operate at full capacity. As a result, breast cancer screenings were cancelled in 2023, and breast self-examinations were encouraged. A new mammogram machine is being procured (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 25-26). In **Fiji**, private clinics and hospitals offer

mammograms and ultrasound services, but many women are unable to afford them. Women are encouraged to carry out breast self-examinations and physical examinations are conducted at health centres (Government of Fiji 2024: 30). **RMI** has been attempting to increase mammogram screening and has had some success in bringing in new patients for screening, although shortage of staff, power outages and women not attending appointments have been challenges (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 29-30). **Palau** has recently procured a new mobile mammogram unit to better reach rural women (Republic of Palau 2024: 25).

Cervical cancer screening also occurs in many countries, with some such as **Cook Islands** recently piloting HPV-based self-collection methods to increase uptake where women were reluctant to undergo pap-smear tests (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 27). In **Papua New Guinea**, a Ministerial Task Force on Cervical Cancer has introduced integrated point-of-care HPV-DNA testing of self-collected vaginal specimens followed by same-day thermal ablation or gynaecological referral for women who test HPV positive. This has proved to be a much more effective and successful screening method than the system that was previously in place and gained WHO endorsement in 2021. Scale-up of this approach is beginning to be undertaken (WHO 2023: 27). **Vanuatu** has also recently been assisted by the Eliminating Cervical Cancer in the Western Pacific (ECCWP) programme formed by a partnership between the Vanuatu Ministry of Health, Vanuatu Family Health Association, Daffodil Centre, Kirby Institute UNSW Sydney, Australian Centre for Cervical Cancer Prevention, Family Planning Australia and the Minderoo Foundation. The ECCWP is expanding same-day screening, vaccination and treatment to women, including in rural and remote areas. More than 6,600 women have been screened for human papillomavirus (from October 2022–December 2023) and it is planned that a further 25,000 will be reached through the programme. This model has proven effective and has addressed cultural barriers by providing a quick and comfortable method of screening, while maintaining privacy and providing easy to follow instructions (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 32–33). In **FSM's Yap State**, self-collection of samples is being piloted (Government of FSM 2024: 7). Also, a Telepathology programme connects the **FSM** histopathology laboratory to a volunteer pathologist in Japan to assess pap smears for abnormalities and provide reports. High-powered resolution lenses are used to capture images of pap smears which then are transmitted to Japan for teliagnosis (Government of FSM 2024: 6).

Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programmes for the prevention of cervical cancer have variable coverage across the region, with the highest rates found in **Fiji** and **Cook Islands**, and the lowest in **Solomon Islands** (Graph 9). **Kiribati**, **Nauru**, **PNG**, **Samoa**, **Tonga**, and **Vanuatu** have yet to introduce the HPV vaccine into their national immunisation programme, and therefore data on HPV vaccination coverage for these countries are unavailable (WHO 2023: 16), although both **Nauru** and **Vanuatu** make some mention of HPV vaccination programmes in their Beijing+30 reports. HPV vaccination programmes were also interrupted to some extent by COVID-19 (Government of Fiji 2024: 31). Vaccination programmes are also being adapted in response to WHO recommendations regarding dosage and younger age of administration to match data on sexual activity (Government of Fiji 2024: 31).

Graph 9. HPV vaccination coverage (%) among girls based on countries' self-reported data, 2020, eight Pacific Island countries



Source: World Health Organisation (2023: 15)

C.6. Non-communicable diseases and gendered lifestyle risk factors

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and respiratory disease, which are strongly associated with lifestyle risk factors including poor diets, are of particular concern in the Pacific Island countries. Nearly three out of every four deaths are due to NCDs, and many of these deaths are considered premature. Pacific Island countries also constitute nine out of ten of the most obese nations in the world, and a diabetes prevalence of 40% in adults is common (Reeve et al. 2022: 2). The diets of Pacific Islanders have undergone significant transitions from being based entirely in local subsistence foods to being heavy in imported, processed foods high in sodium, fat and sugar (Reeve et al. 2022: 2). Other major NCD risk factors are tobacco use, harmful alcohol use and physical inactivity. While health policymakers and leaders are aware of these issues, part of the challenge is that the factors contributing to the rising rates of obesity are generally out of their direct control (WHO, 4 March 2024).

The challenge that NCDs pose to women's health is well-recognised in the Beijing+30 reports, and countries are collecting sex-disaggregated data on both incidence of NCDs and risk factors. In **Cook Islands**, for example, over 5,800 cases of NCDs were reported as of 2023 (52% females and 48% males), indicating a 5.4% increase from 5,500 in 2020 (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 25). In **Palau**, a recent health survey found that being overweight/obese affects 71.6% of males and 80.2% of females; cigarettes are smoked by 31.9% males and 8.3% females; betelnut chewing, with or without tobacco, is more prevalent among females (50.5%) compared to males (43.2%); and alcohol was consumed in the previous 30 days by 44.9% of males and 25.1% of females, with males significantly more likely to engage in binge drinking (Republic of Palau 2024: 25). Data from **Nauru** in 2023 indicate that 66% of females and 61% of males aged 18 and over were obese and 89% females and 88% males were

overweight. Among children and adolescents aged 5–19 years, 33% girls and 33% boys were obese, and 68.3% girls and 61.9% boys were overweight (Republic of Nauru 2024: 20).

The reports, however, only provided a small amount of information about efforts to combat these problems. For example, **Tonga’s** National Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (2021–2025) aims to consolidate Tonga’s efforts to prevent and reduce NCDs. This new strategy takes a systems-based approach to address NCDs which considers the underlying social, economic, cultural, political and environmental factors, alongside their interactions, consequences and systematic impacts on health outcomes for women, girls, men and boys (Government of Tonga 2024: 24).

D. Violence against women

D.1. Prevalence of violence against women

Some of the highest rates of violence against women, predominantly taking the form of intimate partner/domestic violence, in the world occur in the Pacific Islands, and this has been the priority for action across the Pacific, as discussed in all the national Beijing+30 narrative reports. As shown in **Table 3**, the national prevalence of women who have ever experienced physical or sexual violence ranges from 21.2% in Tonga to 58.3% in Papua New Guinea, 63.5% in the Solomon Islands and 64.1% in Fiji. This can be compared with the global lifetime average of 30% (WHO, 25 March 2024). It should be noted that this data is now somewhat dated in many of the PICs, with some currently taking initial steps to conduct new prevalence surveys (e.g. **Cook Islands, FSM, Palau** and **Vanuatu**).

Table 3. Proportion of women disclosing intimate partner violence, Pacific Island countries, per August 2023

Country	Year	Survey	Physical and or sexual violence	
			Lifetime %	Last 12 months %
Cook Islands	2012	aWHO	33	9.1
Fiji	2010	aWHO	64.1	23.7
Kiribati	2018	MICS-DHS	61	43.4
RMI	2012	aWHO	50.9	18.2
FSM	2014	aWHO	32.8	24.1
Nauru	2013	aWHO	48.1	22.1
Palau	2013	aWHO	25.2	8.4
PNG	2016		58.3	47.6
Samoa	2019	MICS-DHS	37.5	26.8
Solomon Islands	2008	aWHO	63.5	41.8
Tonga	2019	MICS-DHS	21.2	12.9
Tuvalu	2019	MICS ICS	37	26.8
Vanuatu	2009	aWHO	60	44

Source: UNFPA (2023).

Some of the Beijing+30 country narrative reports include administrative data from their service providers, thereby providing further and more recent insights into the incidence of intimate partner/domestic/family violence. Several countries experienced an increase in reported domestic violence cases during the COVID-19 pandemic (including **Cook Islands, Nauru, Palau, and Solomon Islands**). Data from **PNG** also indicates that there was a rise in stressors linked to violence such as financial pressures and higher consumption of alcohol and other substances during the COVID-19 stay-at-home order in March 2020 (IFC 2021: 20).

Pacific Islands countries have recognised this high incidence of violence against women as being a breach of human rights, but also as a drain on government revenues in terms of health costs, time lost from productive work; policing; social services provision; and court costs (e.g. Solomon Islands Government 2024: 4; IFC 2021; IFC 2019).

D.2. Responses to violence against women

Pacific Island governments have generally enacted quite similar domestic violence laws that uphold women's (and men's) right to safety, following advocacy by a variety of national women's organisations. These laws have followed a similar pattern, beginning with Vanuatu's *Family Protection Act* in 2008, similar legislation was passed in **Fiji** in 2009, **RMI** in 2011, **Palau** in 2012, then **Samoa, Tonga** and **PNG** in 2013, and in **Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu** and **Kosrae State (FSM)** in 2014, and **Nauru, Cook Islands** and **Pohnpei State (FSM)** in 2017 (Maravuakula 2022). **Tonga** released a revised edition of the *Family Protection Act* in 2020 (UNFPA and University of Melbourne 2022), and **PNG's Family Protection Act** was amended in 2022 to introduce an offence of "aggravated domestic violence" and to increase penalties (National Parliament of Papua New Guinea 2022: para. 61). **Chuuk** and **Yap States** in **FSM** have draft domestic violence laws (Government of FSM 2024: 4). The Acts tend to combine both criminalisation of domestic violence and enable the issuance of civil protective orders. Many have no-drop policies thereby precluding traditional reconciliation methods as a means of perpetrators avoiding formal legal proceedings.

Implementation of these family protection laws has been mixed. Some countries, such as **Solomon Islands** and **Kiribati**, report positive performance of their supporting institutional set-up. These programmes emphasise strong partnerships with civil society organisations to improve service coordination for victims of violence (Solomon Islands Government 2024:1,3; Government of Kiribati 2024: 35). Qualitative research of policing of domestic violence in **Vanuatu** found that women did view the police as being able to protect and defend them from violence and that police were considered trustworthy (Bull and George 2021). In **Nauru**, the renovation and refurbishment of a safe house for survivors of domestic violence was undertaken in 2020, and a helpline has also been created (Republic of Nauru 2024: 24).

However, other reports and independent research note a wider gap between law and practice. Various countries report that official service providers often hold prejudices against victims of violence or make judgements of women's behaviour which affects responses (Maravuakula and Mangubhai 2024: 216). For instance, in **Fiji**, two in three women survivors surveyed by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) reported that police told them to resolve their issue within the family or village or did not take their complaints seriously (FWRM 2017: 23). Despite a zero-tolerance policy, about 70% of Fiji police have been found to encourage traditional customary settlement of domestic violence

cases (Chand et al. 2024). In **Tuvalu**, police officers often have negative perceptions of victims, especially repeat victims or those who want to withdraw complaints (Amin et al. 2024: 29). The lack of women's land rights in **Tonga** can mean that following a complaint of domestic violence men will turn around and say 'get off my land' thereby dissuading women from accessing government services (Guttenbeil-Likiliki 2022).

The capacity of service providers to handle cases of violence can be severely limited by resourcing and training. For example, in **Tuvalu**, the domestic violence unit is managed by only one trained officer, hospitals and clinics do not have staff trained to handle GBV cases, and the Social Welfare Department has only one social worker available to provide psychosocial support (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 32).

The family protection laws are often supplemented by national policies on the elimination of violence, such as **FSM's** National Eliminating Violence Against Women Policy (2021–2025) and the **Solomon Islands'** National Policy to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls (2021–2027). There is ongoing work across various PICs on the institutional supports and inter-agency coordination required to implement the family and domestic violence protection Acts. Production of inter-agency MOUs, or MOUs between government and civil society organisations, and of internal agency Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), have been very important components of this. **Palau** has updated its inter-agency coordination MOU on several occasions since implementation of its *Family Protection Act* commenced in 2014. Most recently, in 2023, this involved reallocating the role of assisting petitioners with protection order applications away from the Judiciary to maintain court impartiality (Republic of Palau 2024: 34). Other work to write or update internal agency SOPs is also ongoing in Palau. In the **Cook Islands**, a key achievement in 2023 was the signing of an MOU between the Government and the Cook Islands Family and Welfare Association (CIFWA) to ensure CIFWA's services relating to protection of women at risk of gender-based and sexual violence. Further MOUs were also signed with the Punanga Tauturu Incorporated (Cook Islands Women Counselling Centre), and the Men's Counselling Centre Te Punaanga Ora'anga Matutu, strengthening the support available for women and men affected by domestic violence issues (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 19).

In 2021, **Samoa** launched an Inter-agency Essential Services Guide to guide a multi-sectoral response system to gender-based violence and child protection. In the same year, Samoa's Ministry of Health with support from the UNFPA developed the country's first Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Clinical Management of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Sexual Violence (SV) for all health facilities. Also since 2021, the Government of Samoa has been providing budget support to the Samoa Victim Support Group so it can continue to provide services to survivors of violence. In **Kiribati**, SOPs for the SAFENET system of victim support, police, social welfare, and the Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre, have been developed to guide work in responding to survivors' safety and protection. Plans are in place to translate the police SOP into Kiribati language, and continuous refresher training is provided to police officers on their responsibilities under the law and when interacting with survivors (Government of Kiribati 2024: 9). **Solomon Islands** launched the Solomon Islands Domestic Violence Counselling Guidelines in 2020. These guidelines establish a mechanism for registering and deregistering domestic violence counsellors in accordance with Section 54 of the *Family Protection Act*. **Fiji's** Service Delivery Protocol (SDP) is a binding agreement that establishes principles and guidelines to ensure that survivors of violence receive vital services and support in the aftermath of

incidents (Government of Fiji 2024: 38). **Vanuatu** developed Standard Operating Procedures for Managing Rape, Sexual Violence and GBV in 2022 (Vanuatu Government 2024: 15).

As time has passed, many Pacific governments have reviewed and updated the implementation of their respective domestic violence legislation. In **Solomon Islands**, the *Family Protection Act* of 2014 itself required that an independent review of the law be carried out, which was eventually completed in 2020. The review made a total of 43 recommendations relating to institutional implementation (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 22). Similarly, **Samoa's** Office of the Ombudsman (Samoa's national human rights institution) conducted an inquiry into family violence in 2017–2018, which resulted in recommendations for reframing national responses in relation to local cultural values *fa'asamoa*, faith and human rights principles across different levels of programming (Maravuakula and Mangubhai 2024). In **Cook Islands**, an audit of police files on domestic violence cases resulted in several being identified for escalation. And in 2023, a police officer on secondment from New Zealand assisted with police training and prosecution skills (Government of the Cook Islands 2024:42). **Tuvalu** established a GBV Task Force in 2023 to coordinate efforts among government institutions, civil society organisations, and law enforcement to provide comprehensive support to GBV survivors (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 14).

In **PNG**, a Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence was established in 2020. This Committee undertook a broad inquiry into gender-based violence during 2021–2022, tabling an initial and then final report to Parliament (National Parliament of Papua New Guinea 2022). The reports made a broad series of recommendations addressing government coordination, funding, coordination of data collection tools among agencies and service delivery. The review and report also encompassed sorcery accusation-related violence (SARV) and the need to continue funding services addressing this issue.

The family protection legislation also interact with broader criminal offences, anti-human trafficking legislation and family laws such as maintenance and child custody (Maravuakula and Mangubhai 2024:208). Such legislation is also sometimes reviewed. In **Cook Islands**, recent significant legislative changes were introduced through the *Crimes (Sexual Offences) Amendment Act 2023*, which will provide greater protection for female survivors of sexual violence (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 24). This Act changed the sexual offences provisions of the *Crimes Act 1969* by removing, amending, and adding offences, while also updating language and making necessary consequential amendments. There were three major changes to the offence of rape, including the criminalisation of rape within marriage (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 43). Similarly in **Tonga**, the Legislative Assembly passed an amendment to the *Criminal Offences Act* in 2022 to expand the definition of rape. Previously limited to rape cases involving a female and a male, the new definition encompasses various forms of rape such as anal and digital, ensuring more comprehensive protection for victims. **Palau** passed an *Anti-People Smuggling and Trafficking Act* in 2023 which greatly increased maximum and minimum penalties for trafficking offences and expanded immunity for victims of trafficking for non-violent offences they may have committed as a result of being trafficked.

D.3. Actions to prevent violence against women

The annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence campaign (running from 25 November–10 December each year) has become a key vehicle for awareness-raising around the

Pacific, including in **Cook Islands, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, RMI, Tuvalu** and **Vanuatu**. In the **Solomon Islands**, it was noted that the annual campaign directly reaches 300–500 people in each province, including the capital Honiara (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 28). In **Tuvalu**, the 16 Days of Activism campaign was first launched in 2020 and has helped to expand dialogue on intimate partner violence (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 11). **Samoa's** 16 Days of Activism activities have included use of the *talanoa* methodology to stimulate community-based dialogue on eliminating violence against women and a 'torch of peace' march (Government of Samoa 2024:16). Also in **Samoa**, since 2021, an additional year-round approach is taken by encouraging all public officials to wear black attire on Thursdays to show support for eliminating violence against women (Government of Samoa 2024: 16).

Fiji's National Action Plan – Violence Against Women and Girls (NAP-VAWG), which was launched in 2023, has an evidence-based approach to preventing VAWG before it starts. This emphasises a whole-of-population and inclusive approach to violence prevention (Government of Fiji 2024: 38).

Other programmes have attempted to shift entrenched social norms, particularly religious norms, that affect violence against women. For instance, in **Tuvalu**, some faith-based groups have been dismantling theological foundations and biblical interpretations that limit women's leadership and legitimise violence against women and children (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 34). Also, a Traditional Leaders' Forum convened in 2021 engaged traditional leaders in discussions about domestic violence and human rights, fostering community-level support for GBV prevention (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 14). In Polynesia generally, the Anglican Diocese of Polynesia and its House of Sarah programme has been working to reinterpret biblical passages that purport to place women in lower status compared to men (Maravarakula and Mangubhai 2024). In **Samoa**, a national inquiry into family violence conducted by the Office of the Ombudsman in 2017–2018 recommended reframing patriarchal values by drawing on *fa'asamoa* (Samoan culture), faith, and human rights principles. Considering this, church institutions have been encouraged to develop theology on family violence, and there have been efforts to develop a Samoan language around family violence (Maravarakula and Mangubhai 2024: 218). Also in **Samoa**, between 2020 and 2023, a performing arts awareness programme titled My Village, My Pride promoted positive social norms as a way of helping to eliminate violence against women (Government of Samoa 2024: 17). The **Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC)**, established in 1984, in addition to providing practical support to women and children, also undertakes translation work, that is, translating human rights in culturally and religiously appropriate ways (Amin et al. 2024: 28).

Preventive programmes that work with men and boys have been developing across the region. Transcend Oceania, a **Fiji**-based NGO, ran a three-year Oceania Men and Boys Engage (OMBE) project beginning in 2019. While intended to be regional, due to COVID-19 most of the work was centred in Fiji (Government of Fiji 2023: 52-C). The **Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC)** has a well-established Male Advocacy for Women's Human rights and Against Violence against Women programme that encourages men to reflect on their own attitudes and behaviours towards gender inequality and violence against women. The programme also works with small groups of influential men to train them to take leadership and advocacy roles. Since 2020, **Fiji** has adopted the Warwick Principles of best practices of working with men and boys (Government of Fiji 2023: 50-C; Government of Fiji 2024: 42). In **Cook Islands**, in 2022, a male counselling centre called Te POMS focuses on addressing domestic

problems affecting men and families was established. Similarly, the **Kiribati** Male Behavioural Change (KMBC) initiative works with men to address GBV and gender inequities at home. Between 2020 and 2023, the KMBC conducted refresher training for members and undertook an outreach programme for men across various islands, including collaborations with church and other groups (Government of Kiribati 2024:9). In **Solomon Islands**, the Ministry for Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA), in collaboration with the Anglican Church of Melanesia, held two GBV awareness and training sessions for a total of 55 male correctional services officers between 2021 and 2022. This training takes a ‘male advocacy’ approach through positive behavioural change (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 27). Also in **Solomon Islands**, in 2021, as part of the 16 Days of Activism campaign for that year, the MWYCFA and Dreamcast Theatre produced a film featuring 15 prominent Solomon Islander men explaining men’s roles in ending violence against women and girls.⁴

D.4. Responses to technology-facilitated gender-based violence

Reports of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) in the Pacific region are increasing, and some regional initiatives have begun to emerge. This included a regional Pacific Cyber Safety Symposium held in **Fiji** in October 2023, which produced a TFGBV Priorities Document and increased understanding of technology-facilitated gender-based violence among its 130 participants (Grant, 17 October 2023).

At the national level, responses to online sexual harassment, online stalking, and non-consensual sharing of intimate images are only in their infancy in the PICs. Most laws relating to domestic violence and civil protection orders in the Pacific do not cover domestic violence committed online (Dunn 2022). Also, police in the Pacific are often under-resourced, particularly when it comes to policing online behaviours (e.g. Republic of Palau 2024: 37; Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 38).

Some recent legislation, however, has begun to recognise the problem. In **Tonga**, the *Electronic Communication Abuse Offences Act* (2020) defines offences relevant to the use of technology to facilitate abuse of women. This Act will enable women to bring complaints for acts such as revenge pornography and harassment via text message, email and in other electronic forms. In August 2021, the **Pohnpei State** Legislature (**FSM**) passed *S.L No. 10L-57-21* to address violence against women and girls facilitated by technology. This law prohibits online harassment, online stalking and non-consensual sharing of images, audio clips, video clips or written description by telephone, the internet or other communication device. In October 2024, the **Palau** National Congress passed a Bill criminalising the unauthorised distribution of sensitive and intimate images, providing for both criminal penalties and civil liability for those who distribute such images without consent (*Island Times*, 25 October 2024). **Vanuatu’s** *Cyber Crime Act No. 22 of 2021* provides a legal framework for tackling cybercrime, including child pornography, cyberstalking and cyberbullying (Vanuatu Government 2024: 38). In 2021, **FSM’s Pohnpei State** Legislature enacted State Law no. 10L-57-21 which prohibits online harassment, online stalking and non-consensual sharing of images, audio and video clips or written descriptions (Government of FSM 2024: 16).

⁴ This film can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=065avuYdk1s>.

Some projects are also being developed in this area. Researchers from Deakin and Monash Universities are leading an action research project titled 'Understanding Technology-Facilitated Domestic Violence in the Pacific and Building Support Services for Victim-Survivors' (2023–2025) with funding from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This initiative aims to investigate the prevalence, nature, and impacts of technology-facilitated domestic violence in **Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu**. The goal of the project is to enhance support services for victim-survivors by improving frontline responses, national policies, law enforcement strategies, and engagement with technology companies. Some research has already been conducted, and the project is now in the training phase (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 27).

Some campaigns against domestic violence have included material on technology-facilitated violence, such as the 16 Days of Activism campaign in **Tuvalu** in 2023 where survey findings that young people were experiencing online violence were presented (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 34). Some countries are also running cyberbullying and online safety awareness-raising programmes with youth NGOs and school students (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 44). Otherwise, some general cyber safety awareness and digital literacy programmes are being conducted (e.g. Government of Samoa 2024: 18, Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 24).

D.5. Responses to violence against marginalised groups of women and girls

While there is some recognition of women and girls with disabilities and their intersectional vulnerability to GBV in the Beijing+30 national narrative reports, specific policy and programming appears limited at both regional and national levels. The Pacific Disability Forum (a regional NGO registered in **Fiji**) in collaboration with other disability rights and services organisations developed a Toolkit on Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls with Disabilities in Fiji (2014). The Pacific Disability Forum has since partnered with the Fiji Police Force, using the toolkit to train police, legal and justice officials (Government of Fiji 2023: 50-C). In **Samoa**, a 2020 needs assessment was conducted to understand barriers preventing women and young people with disabilities living in Samoa from fully realising their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and their rights to legal capacity and to be free of gender-based violence. The Government of **Samoa** has stated its commitment on this issue and noted the potential to overcome these identified barriers (Government of Samoa 2024: 19–20). The **Cook Islands** has included freedom from violence and abuse as a guiding principle in the Cook Islands Disability Inclusive Development Policy (DIDP) (2020–2025). The Cook Islands' Women's Counselling Centre (PTI) is in the process of collaborating with the National Disability Council, to review its services and ensure that these are accessible to, and inclusive of, women with disabilities (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 44).

Responses to violence against persons identifying as LGBTQI+ remains limited in the region and is largely not identified as a concern in the Beijing+30 reports. One exception is **Fiji**, where it is recognised that lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and gender non-conforming people may experience widespread institutional discrimination, and therefore generally rely on one another for support (Government of Fiji 2024: 40). Fijian organisations including DIVA for Equality, the Rainbow Pride Foundation, and the Haus of Khameleon advocate for policies and legislation that are responsive to the priorities and needs of people in LGBTQI+ communities. They also conduct research on GBV to support the development of evidence-based policies and capacity-building in their communities (Government of Fiji 2023: 50-C).

Special efforts to protect rural women or those living on remote islands seem limited across the region. The **Solomon Islands** has established and trained “authorised justices” (31 men in Malaita, and two women and 13 men in Guadalcanal Province) who can accept applications for interim protection orders in those communities, thus making justice processes more accessible (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 31).

There also appears to be little recognition of migrant women as a group that is vulnerable to violence in the Pacific, although they may be more readily identified within anti-human trafficking efforts. In **Palau**, for example, there are no special efforts to support migrant women, who are mostly from the Philippines and other parts of Asia, although they can access the same domestic violence services as Palauan citizens (Republic of Palau 2024: 38).

E. Women and armed conflict

While most of the Pacific Island countries are at peace, sporadic violence has occurred in particular locations, including in **Solomon Islands**, **PNG**, the autonomous region of **Bougainville**, **Fiji** and **New Caledonia**. Three Pacific countries have standing militaries – **Fiji**, **PNG** and **Tonga** – while the other states only have armed police forces. In **Fiji**, women currently comprise about 9% of military personnel and 27% of the Fiji Police Force (Government of Fiji 2024: 57). The United States has defence obligations under its Compacts of Free Association with **Palau**, **FSM** and **RMI** and a military presence in these countries, and their citizens can also serve in the US military. Beginning in 2024, the new Pacific Policing Initiative (PPI), championed and funded by Australia, will seek to bolster Pacific police forces through increased training and to establish a pool of police officers able to be deployed in response to particular country requirements such as major event management and times of crisis.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 has influenced peacebuilding efforts and the participation of women worldwide. In response, the Pacific Island Forum adopted a ‘Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security’ (2012–2015) which has expired and not so far been renewed. Most of the Beijing+30 national narrative reports have little discussion on the issue of Women, Peace and Security – therefore discussion in this section draws on these reports where possible but also on broader sets of literature to map developments in the reporting period (2019–2024). It is worth noting that both **RMI** and **Kiribati** responded to this question in their Beijing+30 narrative reports with examples of women as peacemakers within their traditional cultures (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 44; Government of Kiribati 2024: 47).

Violent inter-tribal conflict occurred in **Solomon Islands** in the early 2000s, especially on the central island of Guadalcanal. Many accounts identify the sectional capture of state security forces as a key factor contributing to the conflict (George 2020b: 104). An internationally supported peacebuilding intervention was conducted from 2003 until 2017 known as the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) led by Australia under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum and involving several partner countries across the Pacific. Initially this was a highly securitised response but transitioned into having a focus on democratic institution building. This included attempts to include women in conflict transition processes, for example through the Provincial Women’s Caucus (PWC) project established in 2018 in three provinces, and the recruitment of more women police and

corrections officers. However, observers have evaluated these programmes as ‘adding’ women rather than as truly disrupting broader conflict resolution processes (George and Soaki 2020: 582; George, 12 November 2018).

In 2017, the **Solomon Islands** government released a Women Peace and Security National Action Plan 2017–2021 which seeks to operationalise UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and its four pillars of participation, protection, prevention and recovery, and reconciliation of women in conflict, post-conflict, and peacebuilding contexts. The National Action Plan is under review in 2024 (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 39). The Women’s Development Division (WDD) of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children, and Family Affairs (MWYCFA), with funding support from UNWomen, has also been implementing peace and security activities including in relation to a Traditional Governance Bill, women’s empowerment and leadership training and advocacy and awareness-raising of the protection of women in girls in the context of extractive industries (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 39–40).

PNG also has a long history of conflict and unrest, including an intergroup conflict in February 2024 in the Highland Province of Enga that involved around 70 deaths, in July 2024 reported killings of at least 26 rural villagers in East Sepik Province with unconfirmed rapes of women and children (Forsyth and Dinnen 2024). Rioting also broke out in Port Moresby in January 2024 with at least 15 people killed. In general, women are excluded from tribal combat decisions but are often expected to take small children and key possessions and hide or seek safety with relatives. There are real risks of gender-based violence among populations displaced by tribal violence (ICRC 2022), and the Highlands Women Human Rights Defenders Movement and its networked organisations deal with gender-based violence cases, including those associated with tribal warfare, sorcery accusation-related and domestic violence daily. There have been women-led peace-making initiatives in PNG including the Kup Women for Peace initiative which has been active in the Kup region, a sub-district in the Simbu Province of Central Highlands in Papua New Guinea (Pacific Women 2021).

In the autonomous region of **Bougainville**, which experienced a secessionist war from the late 1980s to 2001, the beginning of the peace process has been widely attributed to women (Baker and O’Shannassy 2023: 441; George 2018: 479). Life in Bougainville for women, has however, continued to be characterised by insecurity, with women expressing feelings of vulnerability to violent assault in their everyday lives (George 2018: 483). Government efforts towards the women, peace and security agenda have included the release of a Gender Equality, Peace and Security Policy in 2016, however, there was little evidence that this policy attracted government or international development partner funding (George 2018: 484). More recently, a new Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, Peace, and Security Policy 2023–2027 was launched in June 2024.

In **Fiji**, which has experienced military coups since its independence in 1970, the Women, Peace and Security Fiji Coordinating Committee on 1325 (WPS Fiji), collaborated with the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA) to advocate for the inclusion of women on the National Security Council, and in 2007, the Minister of Women was appointed to that Council. FemLINKPacific, a regional women’s advocacy organisation, has promoted practical strategies to localise and implement the SCR 1325 through consultations organised by its Rural Women Leaders Community Media Network and relays findings to national policymakers (Government of Fiji 2023: 39-B). An

orientation and drafting workshop to develop a Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan was held in September 2022, facilitated by the US Indo-Pacific Command. However, the plan has not yet been completed.

Since May 2024, **New Caledonia** has experienced unrest. Recent regional Pacific peace delegations to New Caledonia have unfortunately had all-male compositions, and arguably women's perspectives have not been included within conflict mediation processes (George, 1 November 2024).

Seven **Kiribati** policewomen were involved in RAMSI. In 2022, five officers were deployed as part of the UN Peacekeeping Mission to Sudan, including two policewomen and three policemen and in 2023, the number of police officers increased to eight, with three policewomen participating. This shows a growing trend in women's participation in peacekeeping programmes (Government of Kiribati 2024: 46). **Fiji** also has a high involvement in peacekeeping operations around the world. A female Fijian Police Commissioner in the UN Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan, Ms Unaisi Vuniwaqa, was appointed as the Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security in 2021 (Government of Fiji 2024: 57).

In **RMI**, women continue to lead advocacy on the issue of the long-term health effects of US nuclear testing between 1946 and 1958. As discussed at the 15th Triennial Conference for Pacific Women held in RMI in July 2024, the nuclear fallout resulted in elevated cancer risks, with women being disproportionately affected (Rika, 25 July 2024).

F. Women and the economy

F.1. Women and the labour market

Across the Pacific region there are marked differences between men and women in labour force participation, with consistently significantly higher numbers of women than men categorised as being outside the labour force. For those PICs with comparable data, more than 70% of women are outside the labour force in **Kiribati**, **FSM**, **RMI** and **Solomon Islands**. Only **Palau** and **Cook Islands** have the proportion of women outside the labour force within the 40% range (**Table 4**). These statistics are, however, dynamic with, for example, **Fiji** experiencing a 10% increase in the overall labour force participation rate (LFPR) between 2015 and 2019 attributed primarily to an 18% increase in women's LFPR (Government of Fiji 2024: 19).

Relatedly, women tend to do most of the care work in the Pacific Island countries, spending more than three times as many hours on unpaid care work as men (Pacific Women Support Unit 2021: 4). For example, recent multidimensional survey data from **Solomon Islands** found that 89% of women assumed caregiving duties for children and young people under 15 years of age compared with 54% of men. Also, caregiving responsibilities for people with disability and the elderly were also assumed predominantly by women (77%) compared to 52% men (Riveros-Morales et al. 2023: 57). **Fijian** girls and women, over the course of their lives, spend two to three times the amount of time on unpaid domestic and care work, compared with boys and men (Government of Fiji 2024: 16). In **Nauru**, the main activity of 29% of women consists of the care of the household or family compared to just 7% of men (Republic of Nauru 2024: 11).

Table 4. Population by labour force and employment status and by sex, 11 Pacific Island countries

Labour and Employment Status	Male	Female	Total
Cook Islands (2015)			
All labour and employment statuses	100	100	100
Outside Labour Force	29.59	41.28	35.68
Unemployed	1.7	0.87	1.27
Employed	68.69	57.85	63.04
· Employees	58.66	50.51	54.4
· Employers	2.93	1.7	2.29
· Own-account workers	3.94	3.43	3.68
· Contributing family workers	1.43		0.81
· Workers not classifiable by status	1.7	1.97	1.84
Kiribati (2019)			
All labour and employment statuses	100	100	100
Outside Labour Force	56.86	71.31	64.19
Unemployed	3.69	2.49	3.08
Employed	39.45	26.2	32.73
· Employees	27.77	16.42	22.01
· Employers	0.55	0.69	0.63
· Own-account workers	5.87	6.45	6.16
· Contributing family workers	2.68	1.77	2.22
· Workers not classifiable by status	2.57	0.86	1.71
Marshall Islands (2019)			
All labour and employment statuses	100	100	100
Outside Labour Force	39.04	72.15	55.52
Unemployed	4.51	1.19	2.86
Employed	56.44	26.66	41.62

Labour and Employment Status	Male	Female	Total
· Employees	48.82	21.19	35.07
· Own-account workers	4.38	4.03	4.21
· Contributing family workers	1.71	0.46	1.09
· Workers not classifiable by status	1.11	0.58	0.85
Micronesia (Federated States of) (2013)			
All labour and employment statuses	100	100	100
Outside Labour Force	62.04	73.62	67.9
Unemployed	7.95	7.69	7.82
Employed	30	18.69	24.28
· Employees	25.65	15.78	20.66
· Employers	1.8	0.64	1.21
· Own-account workers	1.3	1.2	1.25
· Contributing family workers	0.93	0.53	0.73
· Workers not classifiable by status	0.32	0.53	0.43
Nauru (2012)			
All labour and employment statuses	100	100	100
Outside Labour Force	21.33	47.96	34.66
Unemployed	10.75	11.15	10.96
Employed	67.89	40.84	54.36
· Employees	64.65	37.63	51.14
· Employers	1.93	0.75	1.35
· Own-account workers	0.89	1.56	1.23
· Workers not classifiable by status		0.67	0.53
Palau (2015)			
All labour and employment statuses	100	100	100
Outside Labour Force	27.36	44.76	35.42

Labour and Employment Status	Male	Female	Total
Unemployed	0.61	0.28	0.46
Employed	72.03	54.96	64.12
· Employees	66.92	51.19	59.63
· Employers	1.67	1.03	1.38
· Own-account workers	2.5	1.77	2.16
· Contributing family workers	0.39	0.51	0.44
· Workers not classifiable by status	0.56	0.46	0.51
Samoa (2013)			
All labour and employment statuses	100	100	100
Outside Labour Force	44.37	69.78	56.78
Unemployed	0.82	0.87	0.84
Employed	54.8	29.35	42.38
· Employees	29.87	19.21	24.67
· Employers	1.63	0.6	1.13
· Own-account workers	5.16	3.52	4.36
· Contributing family workers	16.14	3.23	9.84
· Workers not classifiable by status	2	2.78	2.38
Solomon Islands (2012)			
All labour and employment statuses	100	100	100
Outside Labour Force	50.97	72.89	61.88
Unemployed	2.58	2.2	2.39
Employed	46.44	24.91	35.73
· Employees	22.18	10.1	16.17
· Employers	0.74	0.22	0.48
· Own-account workers	11.65	7.08	9.38
· Contributing family workers	10.67	6.42	8.55

Labour and Employment Status	Male	Female	Total
· Workers not classifiable by status	1.21	1.09	1.15
Tonga (2021)			
All labour and employment statuses	100	100	100
Outside Labour Force	47.75	62.44	55.64
Unemployed	2	1.41	1.69
Employed	50.25	36.14	42.67
· Employees	40.57	22.49	30.86
· Employers	1.47	0.79	1.1
· Own-account workers	6.01	10.68	8.52
· Contributing family workers	1.96	2.12	2.05
· Workers not classifiable by status	0.24		0.14
Tuvalu (2017)			
All labour and employment statuses	100	100	100
Outside Labour Force	46.59	64.86	55.57
Unemployed	12.59	8.7	10.68
Employed	40.82	26.44	33.75
· Employees	37.98	24.37	31.29
· Employers	1.16	0.5	0.84
· Own-account workers	0.81	1.04	0.92
· Contributing family workers	0.87	0.53	0.7
Vanuatu (2019)			
All labour and employment statuses	100	100	100
Outside Labour Force	45.82	53.74	49.76
Unemployed	3.65	4.33	3.99
Employed	50.52	41.93	46.25
· Employees	25.25	17.9	21.6

Labour and Employment Status	Male	Female	Total
· Employers	2.03	0.69	1.36
· Own-account workers	20.49	20.24	20.37
· Contributing family workers	0.85	0.77	0.81
· Workers not classifiable by status	1.89	2.34	2.11

Source: Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Data Hub.

Across the Pacific region there are only small formal economies, often dominated by the public sector, while informal and subsistence economies are relied on by many people, particularly women.

The size of the informal economies across the Pacific, and the scope of women’s participation, has not been precisely measured (ADB 2018: 25). However, paying attention to the existence of both formal and informal economies and their overlaps and intersections are key to understanding women’s economic livelihoods (Jolly et al. 2015: 2). Women are overrepresented within informal employment, which includes subsistence agriculture, handicraft production, smaller-scale fish processing, tourism roles etc, and such work is associated with precarity and low incomes (ILO Country Office for the Pacific Islands 2017: 6; Bocuzzi 2023: 10). Women are more likely to be own-account workers and contributing family members compared to men (**Table 4**), placing them in situations of vulnerability (Bocuzzi 2023: 10). For example, in **Cook Islands**, 25% of women are engaged in informal employment, such as home-based production work and crafts (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 15). In **Fiji**, most working women are in informal employment (Government of Fiji 2024: 16).

Occupational concentration by gender is also a characteristic of Pacific Island labour markets, with men more likely to dominate construction, technical roles and frontline police and defence roles, while women are more likely to be found in caring, clerical, health and education roles (Bocuzzi 2023: 8; ADB 2018: 8). Unemployment and underemployment affect many young Pacific Islanders, especially young women (ILO Country Office for the Pacific Islands 2017: xv).

Women’s occupational vulnerabilities became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when international travel restrictions effectively shut down the all-important tourism industries in several PICs for significant periods of time, including in Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. In **Cook Islands**, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic and the collapse of the tourism industry led to the economy contracting by 5.9% in 2020 and 29% in 2021 (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 6). In **Palau**, the tourism shutdown resulted in the country’s reclassification from high to middle income (Republic of Palau 2024: 19). In **Fiji**, about 115,000 people or one-third of the labour force were immediately affected by the closure of Fiji’s international borders (Government of Fiji 2024: 18). The tourism collapse across the region particularly impacted women in informal work or small enterprises associated with the tourism industry, including those producing handicraft souvenirs and providing catering services (Bocuzzi 2023: 12).

The COVID-19 pandemic also exposed the digital divide, impacting women. The Pacific region has the world’s lowest mobile internet penetration rate at 18% and noticeable technological divide among all genders. For instance, in PNG women are 10% less likely to own a mobile phone and 23% less like to

use mobile internet, this is indicative of the existing patterns of inequality in the region including systematic barriers, including access to legal documentation, access to credit and discriminatory gender norms (Fitzgerald and Moriarty 2023)

F.2. Women’s care responsibilities and support programmes

One of the key ways of lessening women’s primary care burden and enabling their participation in the labour force is through provision of paid parental leave rights, whether funded by employers or the government. This is particularly the case where traditional forms of childcare, including extended families, cannot be relied on such as through migration to urban areas (Collins 2022).

According to ILO data, the share of women giving birth who received maternity cash benefits in the Pacific Islands region was 72.3% in 2015 and 71.5% in 2023. This is comparatively high in relation to the world average of 29.6% for 2015 and 36.4% for 2023 (ILO 2024: 26). However, when considering the rights of both public service employees and private sector employees, there are still outstanding gaps in maternity and paternity leave legal protections (**Table 5**). Paid maternity leave is still much more likely to be provided in the public service, with variable lengths of time across the PICs, and it is a legal right in the private sector in only a few instances (PDSI 2024). Beyond this, no country in the Pacific provides maternity leave benefits to informal sector workers, including **Cook Islands** which excludes casual workers and workers without tax registration from its government-paid leave scheme. Short paternity leave rights exist in some countries but are still quite limited across the region.

Table 5. Maternity and paternity leave rights for citizens in Pacific Island countries (per 2024)

Country	Maternity leave for public service employees	Maternity leave for private sector employees	Any form of paternity leave
Cook Islands	12 weeks of maternity leave; 6 weeks at full pay or 12 weeks on half pay (<i>Cook Islands Government Public Sector Employee Handbook, Feb 2024</i>).	14 weeks of government-paid leave, excludes casual workers and workers without tax registration (<i>Cook Islands Government Funded Paid Maternity Leave Scheme</i>). ⁵	2 weeks of fully paid paternity leave for fathers in the private sector (<i>Cook Islands Government Funded Paid Maternity Leave Scheme</i>). 5 days paternity leave on full pay for public servants (<i>Cook Islands Government Public Sector Employee Handbook, Feb 2024</i>).

⁵ See: <https://www.intaff.gov.ck/government-funded-maternity-leave/>.

Fiji	Up to 84 consecutive days on full pay for first three births, half pay for subsequent births (<i>Fiji Public Service Commission, General Orders, 2011</i>).	Up to 98 consecutive days on full pay for first three births, for fourth and subsequent births half normal remuneration (<i>Employment Relations Act 2007, s. 101, Employment Relations (Budget Amendment Act) 2018</i>).	None. ⁶
Kiribati	Leave for 6 weeks prior to birth and 6 weeks after, at full pay, first two births only (<i>National Conditions of Service 2020, s. F35</i>).	Leave for 6 weeks prior to birth and 6 weeks after, at 25% pay (<i>Employment and Industrial Relation Code 2015, s. 95</i>).	None.
Nauru	12 weeks paid maternity leave (<i>Public Service Act 2016, s. 60</i>). For parliamentary services employees, up to 84 days consecutive leave at full pay for first four pregnancies and half pay for subsequent pregnancies (<i>Parliamentary Services Employment and Procedures Regulations 2021, art. 51</i>).	None.	For male public service employees, 2 weeks paid paternity leave (<i>Public Service Act 2016, s. 65</i>). For parliamentary services employees, 10 days paid paternity leave (<i>Parliamentary Services Employment and Procedures Regulations 2021, art. 56</i>).
Palau	1 month paid leave per calendar year (and unpaid leave of up to five additional months) for permanent public sector employees only (<i>33 PNC § 427; Public Service Regulations 1997, § 18.3(h)</i>). Some States such as Koror provide similar rights.	None.	None.
PNG ⁷	6 weeks leave prior to, and 6 weeks following, birth, with an additional 6 weeks if required for medical reasons. Only the period	6 weeks leave without pay (<i>Employment Act 1978, s. 100</i>).	None.

⁶ The FijiFirst government introduced 5 days of paid paternity leave in January 2019. During the COVID-19 pandemic this was reduced to 2 days (*Employment Relations Amendment Act (2020)*), reduced again to 1 day in 2021 (*Employment Relations (Budget Amendment) Act 2021*), and in March 2022 the provision was suspended entirely for ‘the COVID-19 period’ (*Employment Relations (Revised Budget Amendment) Act 2022*). It appears that paternity leave is yet to be revived since then.

⁷ The PNG Constitutional and Law Reform Commission (CLRC) initiated a review of the country’s maternity leave laws in July 2023.

	following the birth is paid (<i>Public Service Management Act 1995, Public Service General Orders</i>).		
Marshall Islands	20 workdays (first four deliveries only) (<i>Public Service Commission Regulation, s. 57</i>).	None.	None.
Micronesia (Federated States of) (FSM) and its constituent States	<p>FSM: 8 consecutive weeks paid leave per 12 month period for all national employees regardless of employment status (Act 22-61, amending Title 52, s. 145).</p> <p>Kosrae State: 30 days of paid maternity leave, then use of other leave entitlements up to 90 consecutive days for all female state employees regardless of employment status (Kosrae State Law No. 12-286, 2022).</p> <p>Pohnpei State: Maternity leave of no more than 240 hours (3 months) within a 12 month period. It can be taken during pregnancy and after delivery. A doctor's certification is required that the woman is pregnant. Applicable only to permanent state public sector employees (Pohnpei State Law no. 10L-85-22 (Title 9 PC 2-131), 2022).</p>	FSM, and all constituent States: none.	<p>FSM: none.</p> <p>Pohnpei State: 2 weeks paternity leave for male state public sector permanent employees. In the event the mother passes away, the father may access the full allocation of maternity leave (240 hours (3 months)) (State Law No. 10L-85-22, (Title 9 PC 2-131), 2022).</p>
Samoa	Up to 26 weeks leave, with full pay for the first 12 weeks, and may use paid annual or sick leave or without pay thereafter. Applies to all female employees, but temporary employees must have met six month qualifying threshold (<i>Public Service Act 2004, s. 9; Public Service Regulations 2008</i> ;	6 weeks leave, first 4 weeks with full pay OR six weeks leave on $\frac{2}{3}$ pay. Available to ordinary, part-time, shift and piece workers (<i>Labour and Employment Relations Act 2013, ss. 43-44</i>).	5 working days paid paternity leave for both private and public sector workers (<i>Labour and Employment Relations Act 2013, s. 46; Public Service Act, S9 Public Service Regulations 2008, R11; Determination 13E 2018</i>).

	<i>Determination 13D 2018).</i>		
Solomon Islands	Up to 12 weeks of leave, six weeks prior to, and six weeks after childbirth with full pay (<i>Solomon Islands Public Service General Orders</i>).	Up to 12 weeks of leave with 25% pay, with annual and sick leave at full pay available to take. Excludes casual workers (<i>Labour Act</i> , s. 42).	None.
Tonga	3 months (calendar days) paid leave (<i>Public Service Policy and Instructions per 1 Jan 2016</i>).	Leave of 30 consecutive working days, at least 15 to be taken after the birth. Specific payment conditions to be agreed in employment contract (<i>2020 Employment Relations Bill/Act</i> , s. 67(1), pending royal assent).	Paternity leave for public service employees of 5 working days to be taken immediately following birth of a child (<i>Public Service Policy and Instructions 2B.20, per 1 Jan 2016</i>).
Tuvalu	Max 60 days on full pay, further unpaid extensions possible with medical advice (<i>Tuvalu General Administrative Order 2016</i> , art. 9.3.2).	12 weeks maternity leave at full pay (<i>Labour and Employment Relations Act 2017</i> , s. 30)	10 days unpaid paternity leave for public service employees (<i>Tuvalu General Administrative Order 2016</i> , art. 9.3.1). 10 days paternity leave for private sector employees with full pay (<i>Labour and Employment Relations Act 2017</i> , s. 31).

Source: compiled by the author from primary sources.

Several key updates to maternity and paternity leave rights occurred during the 2019–2024 period as follows:

In **Cook Islands**, the Maternity Leave Fund, established in 2012, is the only social protection benefit for people of working age in the Cook Islands. Being government funded, this is a standout programme in the Pacific context (Gorman et al. 2023: 18). Originally for a six week period, in 2024, maternity leave was extended to 14 weeks of paid leave for mothers. At the same time, paternity leave was also increased from 2 days of paid and 3 days of unpaid leave to 2 weeks of fully paid leave for fathers (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 23).

The **FSM** Congress extended maternity leave for national employees from 6 to 8 weeks through Congressional Act 22-61 (14 December 2021). This provision is applicable for all FSM female national personnel irrespective of their employment status, including employees on probation. A law introduced in **Kosrae State** (Act no 12–286) in March 2022 allows for paid maternity leave of up to 90 days to be applied to all female state government employees, regardless of employment status or

contractual arrangements. The first 30 days are paid by the State, and the following is to come from accrued annual and sick leave. In 2022, a law was passed in **Pohnpei State** introducing maternity leave of 1.5 months, and paternity leave of two weeks for permanent state public employees. This law was enacted after almost a year of debate, with Pohnpei State now leading the way in **FSM** in relation to parental leave (*ABC Pacific Beat*, 6 August 2024).

In **Tonga**, in 2020, the *Employment Relations Act* was passed to ensure the fundamental rights and principles at work, however this Act is still pending royal assent. In addition to providing for maternity leave and equal pay for men and women who perform the same work, Section 68 of the Act prohibits the termination of female employees for reasons of pregnancy, childbirth and nursing a child.

Meanwhile in **Palau**, several attempts to introduce maternity leave in the private sector have failed to pass Congress in recent years. However, the state-owned public utilities company (PPUC), which is a major employer in the country, has nonetheless introduced parental leave for its employees with support from the Asian Development Bank (Republic of Palau 2024: 14).

Alongside maternity leave rights, provision of assistance with the care of children, elderly and persons with a disability, can also support women's economic opportunities. However, the Beijing+30 narrative reports for the Pacific contain only a few examples of such initiatives. The **Cook Islands** has a childcare subsidy programme that provides affordable childcare for children aged 0–3 years (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 23). In the urban areas of **Palau**, subsidised childcare centres are available which interact with the Head Start kindergarten programme. However, there are scarce services in more rural areas. In relation to elder care, a new Step Down long-term care unit and deployment of mobile community health workers are planned to take some of the burden of elder care. A new training programme at Palau Community College is also starting to produce trained carers (Republic of Palau 2024: 17). Plans are underway in **RMI** to establish a childcare training programme (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 23), and in **Nauru** there has been discussion and preparation work done to expand childcare services (Republic of Nauru 2024: 7). In **Tonga**, an Integrated Aged Care programme is being planned with assistance of donor funding. This will involve establishing community-based and climate-resilient aged-care centres, implementing aged-care services and programmes and supporting caregivers (Government of Tonga 2024: 15).

F.3. Women's economic empowerment programmes

While childcare and other care support programmes are apparently scarce across the Pacific region, the Beijing+30 narrative reports describe various examples of initiatives and projects aimed at women's economic empowerment. These tend to be particularly aimed at poorer women or those in agricultural and traditional handicraft sectors. Some of these are government-funded and initiated, while others are supported by donor partners, and some established by local civil society organisations.

Women's financial inclusion programmes are a popular approach. **Solomon Islands**, via the Central Bank of Solomon Islands (CBSI) National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2021–2025) (NFIS 3) and the National Women's Financial Inclusion Policy (2016–2023), aims to achieve gender parity in users of financial accounts. A review of an earlier strategy (NFIS 2) found generally greater access to financial services and that women held about 47% of active accounts. The NFIS 3 aims to continue to drive

efforts to achieve gender equality in the financial space, including by promoting e-financial products and services and access to credit for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 12). In addition, women's savings clubs are a key platform for rural and remote women to enhance their financial literacy, small business and life skills. There are approximately 800 clubs supported by the Central Bank of Solomon Islands and the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 6–7). A similar initiative is found in **Tuvalu** via the Nukufetau Women Trust Fund. Initiated in 2013, the Nukufetau Trust Fund involves women contributing \$50 annually to a trust account at the National Bank of Tuvalu for 10 years. In 2023, the fund matured, and each woman received 75% of their contributions back for personal use, including business ventures. With more than 500 women participating, the initiative has now been extended for an additional five years. In **Vanuatu**, the expansion of commercially available digital financial services – Vodafone MVatu and Digicel Mycash – are assisting people in rural and remote areas to send and receive money and pay bills. This is assisting both men and women with financial independence (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 27).

Small loans programmes, particularly offered by national development banks, are also common forms of economic empowerment assistance aimed at women (and youth). Such programmes are implemented by, for example, the **Fiji** Development Bank, Development Bank of **Kiribati**, National Development Bank of **Palau** and the Development Bank of **Tuvalu**. Some of these are targeted loans for particular sectors, such as ecotourism and climate-smart agriculture in **Tuvalu** (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 20), household energy efficiency in **Palau** (Republic of Palau 2024: 15), and rural support and product and handicraft loans in **Kiribati** (Government of Kiribati 2024: 13-16). In **Vanuatu**, low-interest loans are also being provided to 100 women for solar energy systems by the Vanuatu Women's Development Scheme (VANWODS) (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 25–26). Since 2017, the South Pacific Business Development (SPBD) programme has granted 24,000 micro-business loans to women in rural and peri-urban areas of Vanuatu (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 29).

The development of physical market infrastructure has been another approach to support women's economic empowerment in the Pacific region. In **Tuvalu**, the Tau Maketi market was established in March 2021. This provides a platform for vendors to sell their products – 93% of whom are women, with each vendor generating an average of \$1,225 per market day (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 14). The three public markets in **Samoa** have been supported by the Markets for Change (M4C) project in collaboration with the UNWomen and the Samoa Land Corporation. Through participatory processes, key issues have been identified to ensure the marketplaces are safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory while fostering gender equality and women's empowerment. This has included supplying cleaning equipment, installation of security cameras, solar powered lights and first aid kits, and instituting a recycling programme. At the Salelologa market, the lights have provided additional security to students attending the National University of Samoa (NUS) night school on the second floor, among whom 75% are women (Government of Samoa 2024: 6). In **Fiji**, market vendor associations have enabled market vendors, the majority of whom are Indo-Fijian women, to negotiate with market management and local authorities to improve facilities to make it safer for women who stay overnight in markets and to establish protocols for grievance redress (Government of Fiji 2024: 44).

Various forms of entrepreneurship and job skills training programmes are also found across the region. In **Samoa**, for example, programmes have been run through the UNESCAP Catalysing Women Entrepreneurship Project, by the Ministry of Commerce Industry and Labour, and more informally such as via the Samoa Women’s Associations of Growers (SWAG), which holds weekly dialogues on business practices and organic farming (Government of Samoa 2024: 9). A Small Business Incubator (SBI) scheme is also administered by the Ministry of Women Community and Social Development to support families to start businesses across the Upolu and Savaii islands (Government of Samoa 2024: 10). The Markets for Change (M4C) programme has also been assisting women market vendors in **Vanuatu** with training in leadership, financial and business literacy and food preservation and safety (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 29). Also in **Vanuatu**, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership (VSP) trains women in all six provinces in skills such as weaving, jewellery making, handicrafts, bee keeping, cattle farming, financial literacy and business development (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 22).

Other programmes provide support to women with new products or processes. In the **Solomon Islands**, a new initiative to improve the livelihoods of local women from four rural communities in the Western Province was launched in May 2024, by developing a new line of body lotion and soap made from sustainably harvested sea grapes. In **Kiribati**, between 2020 and 2023, the Ministry of Tourism, Commerce, Industry, and Cooperatives (MTCIC) developed two virgin coconut oil (VCO) facilities and has helped women to produce body oil, coconut coffee, and soap products (Government of Kiribati 2024: 13). The **Tuvalu** National Council of Women (TNCW) has continued building women’s capacity to produce and then market handicrafts. In **RMI**, a collaboration between Kora In An Kol Func (KIAKF), Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the KIO Club arranged a jewellery making, embroidery and entrepreneurship training programme was held for 15 young Marshallese women (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 25). In **Palau**, women’s livelihoods in organic agriculture have been supported through the Australian-funded Women Producers, Processors, and Women-Owned Businesses through Organic Value Chains (BPWP) Project’ (2018–2023), and by an ADB-funded project supporting women farmers to develop taro crops in upland areas and to create new value-added products such as taro chips and flour (Republic of Palau 2024: 6).

F.4. Labour migration and gender

Migration forms a key means of economic support for many Pacific Islanders, both for those who migrate and their family members who remain at home, and this process has various gender dimensions.

Migration commonly occurs through the direct entry and work access that some specific PICs have through agreements with New Zealand, Australia and the United States, which allows for permanent or long-term emigration. This includes the US Compacts of Free Association with Palau, FSM and RMI, New Zealand’s Pacific Access Category (PAC) and the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty. These emigration opportunities, and consequent loss of productive population, have been identified as key challenges for some countries, such as **RMI** 2024: 11) and **Palau** (Republic of Palau 2024: 55). Decision-making around emigration can be different for men and women. In **Palau**, for example, alongside other factors, the financial burdens that fall primarily on women from cultural obligations, particularly funerals, are thought to be one factor in prompting out-migration to the United States (Republic of Palau 2024: 55).

Labour mobility schemes also permit shorter-term employment for Pacific Islanders to New Zealand and Australia. New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme was launched in 2007 and allows employers in horticulture and viticulture to recruit overseas workers from eligible Pacific countries. In the 2021–2022 financial year, official data for the RSE scheme shows a total of 9423 people arriving in New Zealand (4983 from Vanuatu, 3334 from Samoa, 957 from Tonga, 148 from Solomon Islands and one from Fiji). Over the period 2007–2022, men accounted for almost 88% (32,120) of the total number of RSE workers recruited, compared to just over 12% (4,555) women (Bedford and Bedford 2023). Examination of gender differences by country reveals that over one-third of Kiribati and Tuvalu participants were women, while women comprised less than 10% of seasonal workers from Fiji and Samoa. There are both demand and supply side factors involved in these gender differences (Bedford and Bedford 2023).

Australia's labour migration programmes for Pacific Islanders have evolved through the Northern Australia Worker Pilot Programme, Seasonal Worker Programme, the Pacific Labour Scheme which began in 2018, and the current, more streamlined, Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme launched in 2022. Australia's programmes began with three countries – Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu – but have since expanded to include Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Timor-Leste and Tonga. The scheme now allows any low or semi-skilled labour in rural or regional Australia for up to four years. Workers may only travel alone with no rights to bring family, although a new initiative to allow accompanying family is being piloted in 2024.

In September 2024, there were 31,230 workers in Australia under the PALM scheme (6,070 from Fiji; 1,555 from Kiribati; 35 from Nauru; 2,005 from PNG; 2745 from Samoa, 4870 from Solomon Islands, 3,350 from Tonga; 300 from Tuvalu and 6,155 from Vanuatu) (Australian Government 2024). Specific sex-disaggregated data does not appear to be publicly available, however, it is reported that women constituted about 15% of the total during COVID-19, and that this has since risen to about 20% (Australia Awards 2022). The Australian government has also recognised the need for programming to support gender equality and other inclusion factors within the PALM scheme (Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2023).

These Pacific labour mobility schemes have a complex matrix of benefits and disadvantages (ILO 2019: 17). Positive outcomes include the ability to save money and send remittances, poverty alleviation, education and skills development, housing and small business investments, and financially supporting extended family members (Petrou et al. 2021: 302). For example, in **Tonga**, one of the largest labour supplying nations, earnings from Pacific labour mobility schemes contribute more to GDP than aid and trade combined (Petrou et al. 2021: 301). Further, **Tonga's** 2021 Census of Population and Housing identified that over 25% of Tongan households rely on remittances from labour mobility workers as their main source of income (Kingdom of Tonga 2023: 6). Examples of skills development associated with labour migration includes, in **Solomon Islands**, small cohorts of women obtaining aged-care qualifications through a cooperative training programme with Australia (Government of the Solomon Islands 2024: 14).

Downsides of these programmes also exist. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when labour migration programmes were suspended and many businesses in Australia and New Zealand were locked down,

many Pacific nationals were stranded abroad and/or experienced loss of employment and interruptions to remittances (Marazita 2021; Petrou et al. 2021: 316). Further, the transaction costs involved in transferring money home to the Pacific can be considerable (Collins 2023), and workers may struggle with the administration required to claim the superannuation in their accounts once they return home (Collins 3 May 2024). Women workers' sexual and reproductive health needs while abroad, including pregnancy or pregnancy termination services, may also be inadequately covered by health insurance (Kanan et al. 2024). There are also challenges around the inadequate legal protection and policy safeguards for female migrant workers exposing them to the risk of exploitation and abuse. This is particularly worse for undocumented migrant women who are not recognised nor protected by laws, policies and other formal processes (UESCAP 2024)

The programmes also have effects on domestic labour markets, householders and communities in the Pacific, including changing the social organisation of labour (ILO 2019: 18). Remaining family members, particularly women, may need to perform more and/or different forms of labour to compensate for absent relatives. Community labour practices can also be affected by the long-term absence of community members (Petrou and Withers 2023). Labour supply countries have begun to seek more control over migrant labour departures, such as via the **Tonga** Labour Mobility Policy (2021) (Bedford and Bedford 2023). The Tonga Labour Mobility Policy also seeks to increase the numbers of women participating in the labour mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand (Government of Tonga 2024: 9).

There is converse reliance on in-migration to fill labour shortages in some Pacific Island countries, that is, use of foreign workers in particular industries. This phenomenon has its own gender dimensions, often with male dominance, for example mining in **PNG**, several industries in **Fiji**, and in **Palau** and **Cook Islands**. For example, **Palau** has had a proportionally large male Bangladeshi population of migrant labourers, while the Filipino migrant population there is more gender-equal.

G. Women in power and decision-making

G.1. Women's formal political representation (executive and legislative)

Across this five-year period, only two women have been heads of government in Pacific Islands countries, namely President Hilda Heine of **RMI** (January 2016–January 2020 and January 2024–present) and Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata'afa of Samoa (May 2021–present). There have also been two women deputy heads of government, namely: Vice President of **Palau** J. Uduch Sengebau Senior (January 2021–January 2024), and Deputy Prime Minister of **Samoa** Fiame Naomi Mata'afa (March 2016–11 September 2020).

Women have held cabinet positions across most of the Pacific Island countries but have usually been in the minority (**Table 6**), grouping the region towards the bottom of the world rankings. Women in cabinet are often given 'soft' portfolios such as community development or women's affairs, health and education (Baker 2018a: 561). In **Samoa**, between 2021 and 2023, Honourable Mulipola Anarosa Ale-Molio'o was appointed as the first female Minister of Finance but has since taken over the Ministry of Women portfolio.

Table 6. Number and percentage of women cabinet members in Pacific Island countries (2019–2024, excluding 2022)

Country	2019	2020	2021	2023	2024
Fiji	3/13 (23.1%)	3/13 (23.1%)	3/13 (23.1%)	1/19 (5.3%)	1/19 (5.3%)
Kiribati	0/14 (0%)	0/13 (0%)	1/14 (7.1%)	1/14 (7.1%)	1/14 (7.1%)
Marshall Islands (RMI)	1/10 (10%)	1/10 (10%)	1/10 (10%)	1/9 (11.1%)	1/9 (11.1%)
Micronesia (FSM)	2/9 (22.2%)	2/9 (22.2%)	2/11 (18.2%)	2/8 (25%)	2/8 (25%)
Nauru	1/5 (20%)	1/7 (14.3%)	1/6 (16.7%)	0/7 (9%)	1/7 (14.3%)
Palau	2/8 (25%)	2/8 (25%)	2/9 (22.2%)	1/8 (12.5%)	1/8 (12.5%)
PNG	0/33 (0%)	0/32 (0%)	0/34 (0%)	0/31 (0%)	0/32 (0%)
Samoa	3/14 (21.4%)	2/12 (16.7%)	1/11 (9.1%)	4/13 (30.8%)	3/15 (20%)
Solomon Islands	1/23 (4.3%)	1/20 (5%)	2/19 (10.5%)	2/21 (9.5%)	2/21 (9.5%)
Tonga	1/12 (8.3%)	1/12 (8.3%)	1/17 (5.9%)	1/10 (10%)	1/10 (10%)
Tuvalu	1/8 (12.5%)	0/8 (0%)	0/8 (0%)	0/8 (0%)	0/8 (0%)
Vanuatu	0/12 (0%)	0/12 (0%)	0/12 (0%)	0/12 (0%)	0/12 (0%)

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNWomen. Data is for 1 January each year.

The Pacific region also has some of the lowest levels of female parliamentary representation in the world (Table 7). The highest female representation in Fiji in 2021 was 21.6% women representatives following an upward trajectory (Government of Fiji 2023: 12), but in the 2022 general election, which was the first election since the 2006 military coup, Fiji has since dropped below 10% women legislators (Baker and Meki 2023). The Cook Islands, which is not included in Table 7, reports that women’s representation in parliament stands at 29.1%, representing the highest proportion of women in parliament to date (Government of the Cook Islands 2024:7), and the highest proportion in the Pacific. The Cook Islands Women Parliamentarians Caucus, established in 2018, has been instrumental in pushing for gender-responsive legislation and policies (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 46).

Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu all had no women representatives for several years, although there are now two, three and one women representatives in those countries respectively. On 29 November 2021, Dr Perpetua S. Konman was elected as the first woman in the Congress of the **Federated States of Micronesia** (FSM). Until this election FSM was the only Pacific Islands country to have never had a woman representative in its national parliament. Dr Konman’s path to election included her status as a widow - her late husband had been a prominent congressman (Puas and Oliver 2022). The **Marshall Islands** has recently had a small increase in the number of women rising to four out of 33 seats (12.1%) in 2024. In 2022, **Vanuatu** saw the election of

the first female member of parliament in 14 years (making a total of six female MPs in the 44 years since Vanuatu's independence) (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 11).

Table 7. Women's representation in national parliaments in Pacific Island countries

Country	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Lower House/ Unicameral	Upper House	Lower House/ Unicameral	Upper House	Lower House/ Unicameral	Upper House	Lower House/ Unicameral	Upper House	Lower House/ Unicameral	Upper House	Lower House/ Unicameral	Upper House
Fiji	10/51 (19.6%)	-	10/51 (19.6%)	-	11/51 (21.6%)	-	10/51 (19.6%)	-	6/55 (10.9%)	-	5/55 (9.1%)	-
Kiribati	3/46 (6.5%)	-	3/46 (6.5%)	-	3/45 (6.7%)	-	3/45 (6.7%)	-	3/45 (6.7%)	-	3/45 (6.7%)	-
Marshall Islands (RMI)	3/33 (9.1%)	-	2/33 (6.1%)	-	2/33 (6.1%)	-	2/33 (6.1%)	-	2/33 (6.1%)	-	4/33 (12.1%)	-
Micronesia (FSM)	0/14 (0%)	-	0/14 (0%)	-	0/14 (0%)	-	1/14 (7.1%)	-	1/14 (7.1%)	-	2/13 (15.4%)	-
Nauru	2/19 (10.5%)	-	2/19 (10.5%)	-	2/19 (10.5%)	-	2/19 (10.5%)	-	2/19 (10.5%)	-	2/19 (10.5%)	-
Palau	2/16 (12.5%)	2/13 (15.4%)	2/16 (12.5%)	2/13 (15.4%)	1/16 (6.3%)	1/13 (7.7%)	1/16 (6.3%)	1/13 (7.7%)	1/16 (6.3%)	1/13 (7.7%)	1/16 (6.3%)	1/13 (7.7%)
PNG	0/106 (0%)	-	0/111 (0%)	-	0/111 (0%)	-	0/111 (0%)	-	2/115 (1.7%)	-	3/111 (2.7%)	-
Samoa	5/50 (10.0%)	-	5/50 (10.0%)	-	5/50 (10.0%)	-	4/51 (7.8%)	-	7/54 (13.0%)	-	7/54 (13.0%)	-

Solomon Islands	1/49 (2.0%)	-	4/49 (6.1%)	-	4/50 (8.0%)	-	4/50 (8.0%)	-	4/50 (8.0%)	-	4/50 (8.0%)	-
Tonga	2/27 (7.4%)	-	2/27 (7.4%)	-	2/27 (7.4%)	-	1/27 (3.7%)	-	2/28 (7.1%)	-	2/28 (7.1%)	-
Tuvalu	1/15 (6.7%)	-	1/16 (6.3%)	-	1/16 (6.3%)	-	1/16 (6.3%)	-	1/16 (6.3%)	-	1/16 (6.3%)	-
Vanuatu	0/52 (0%)	-	0/52 (0%)	-	0/52 (0%)	-	0/52 (0%)	-	1/52 (1.9%)	-	1/51 (2%)	-

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, per 1 January each year.

Some of the Beijing+30 country narrative reports also provide data on local-level political representation of women. In **Cook Islands**, in 2024, women’s representation among Island Government Councillors increased to 10 (18%). On the Outer Cook Island of Aitutaki, the 2024 election produced five of eight (62.5%) women councillors, which presents the highest percentage of women in leadership at Island Council level ever recorded in the Cook Islands (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 21–22). In **Palau**, there has recently been a slight upward trend in women legislators and executive office holders at the state level, although they are still very much in the minority (Republic of Palau 2024: 41). In **Tuvalu**, there are currently only seven women out of 48 members elected in local government (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 37). In **Vanuatu**, the Luganville Municipal Council has had the most gender-balanced representation in its history, including the first female candidate with a disability being elected (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 11).

Explanations for women’s continued low representation in politics across the region are provided by the Beijing+30 reports as well as relevant academic literature. Prevailing social norms and voter perceptions, among both men and women, about male leadership and women’s proper roles have a strong influence (Government of Tonga 2024: 30–31; Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 13; Solomon Islands Government 2024: 34). These norms often reflect both traditional gender hierarchies as well as colonial institutional lineages (Spark et al. 2021: 76) and concerns that change will result in loss of cultural identity (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 13). In some places, rules that a person must hold a traditional chiefly title, which are more often held by men, before being able to run for public office (e.g. *matai* in **Samoa**), or to automatically hold office (e.g. nobles in **Tonga** and chiefs in some states in **Palau**), also serve to exclude women from political leadership. Women candidates may also be disadvantaged by expectations that voters will be paid or given gifts as they often have lower personal financial resources (Taunsila and Palmieri 2022; Palmieri and Zetlin 2020). Those women who are successful leaders in the Pacific tend to eschew the label ‘feminist’, but often still pursue gender equality through framing issues as being about development for all (Spark et al. 2018). A study of the standout example of President Hilda Heine in **RMI** noted the need for women leaders to have good supporting staff, the benefits of disrupting the ‘boys club’ by relying on the rules of formal institutions, and the importance of building international networks of support among senior women (Cox et al. 2020). Female candidates also face the risk of gender-based violence, in Fiji women candidates across multiple elections have reported vicious online harassment, a recent study has highlighted the impact of violence on women’s participation in electoral processes in Fiji and PNG (Baker 2023)

G.2. Support for women elected leaders

One of the main attempts to increase women’s representation in politics in the Pacific has been through the introduction of various forms of gender quotas for legislatures, often referred to as temporary special measures (TSM). Quotas are controversial in general among both male politicians and women’s movement proponents, and movements to introduce them have had mixed outcomes in the PICs. Some movements, such as that in **Papua New Guinea** in the early 2010s, have failed, while there was more success in establishing three reserved seats for women in the autonomous region of **Bougainville** and a 10% gender quota for the national legislature in **Samoa**. Attempts to introduce reserved seats for women in **FSM** have not garnered enough support to pass (Puas and Oliver 2022). The introduction of quotas at the subnational level has often been far less controversial than at the

national level (Baker 2019: 10), with quotas established at the local level in **Vanuatu** and under proposal in the **Solomon Islands**.

In **Samoa**, the *Constitution Amendment Act 2013* introduced a 10% quota of women representatives into the Legislative Assembly, and this was activated following the national general elections in 2021. The system involves floating reserved seats for women. If no woman is elected during the elections, the quota is activated, and seats are added to the assembly. The gender quota was, however, the source of constitutional interpretation issues following the 2021 election and a deadlock in parliament. This deadlock had to be resolved by a Supreme Court ruling. As seen in **Table 7**, women representatives have held seven of the 54 seats, or 13% in the national assembly since 2023, which is the highest number of women MPs in Samoa's history.

Vanuatu's temporary special measures (TSM) have been in effect at the municipal level since 2013. By mandating a minimum representation of women in municipal councils, TSM has increased the number of women councillors from one to six (of 13 seats) in Luganville Municipal Council (LMC) and 5 (of 17 seats) in Port Vila Municipal Council, fostering a more inclusive governance structure (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 48).

In **Solomon Islands**, the *Political Parties Integrity Act 2014* (s. 48) requires political parties to 'reserve for women at least ten per cent of the total number of candidates it selects and endorses to contest an election'. However, the section also exempts a political party if they do not have sufficient women candidates to fulfil the requirement. Also, in December 2023, the Government Cabinet and Caucus endorsed an amendment to the *Provincial Government Act 1997* to enable Provincial Assemblies to adopt and implement temporary special measures to increase women's representation. That is, the amendment proposes to allow Provincial Assemblies to prescribe additional specific seats for women via Ordinance. This is the culmination of a long fought for campaign by the Women's Rights Action Movement (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 5), but voting on this amendment is still pending. To support these anticipated provincial quotas, in 2022, a Provincial Women's Candidate Training School and TSM training workshop were held to help prepare female candidates (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 33).

The Beijing+30 national narrative reports otherwise mention ad hoc women's practice parliaments and candidate training, often held with the support of UNDP (e.g. Government of Kiribati 2024: 21; Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 37). However, academic commentators have noted that there is rarely follow-up on these kinds of ad hoc programmes (Palmieri and Zetlin 2020: 4; Collins 2022), or they may even have a negative impact by leading to negative perceptions among voters that candidates are too feminist (Baker 2018).

In **Tonga**, the FI-E-FI-A'a Fafine Tonga (FFFT) network (formerly known as the Women in Leadership Coalition) was launched in October 2020. This network of member organisations aims to promote women's full participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in cultural, private and public life, and empowering women and girls more broadly (Government of Tonga 2024: 31). In the lead up to local government elections in May 2023, this FFFT network with the support of the Balance of Power programme ran a public media campaign and a series of candidates'

workshops to encourage women to run as candidates. Twenty-five women were nominated in these elections – more than ever before (Pacific Women Lead, 27 April 2024).

G.3. Women judges

In general, less attention is paid to the issue of women's representation as judges in the Pacific compared to representation in legislatures. Comparative data on this issue is not readily available, although a hand collected database from 2019 showed that women are under-represented on the superior courts of the Pacific (Dziedzic 2021). That study found that a total of 29 women had served as judges on the superior courts across nine Pacific states, more than half of whom were foreign nationals. Only in **Papua New Guinea** and **Samoa** was there an upward trend in the absolute number and proportion of women judges (Dziedzic 2021: 42). Hand counted data indicate that **Palau** currently has a strong proportion of women judges across its court system (Republic of Palau 2024: 39).

There have been a few developments of note in relation to support and promotion of women judges during the reporting period. In **Tuvalu**, the judicial reform of 2021–2024 introduced merit-based selection processes rather than relying on tradition. This has resulted in a significantly increased proportion of women magistrates. Previously, the recruitment process was managed by traditional local government bodies (*Falekaupule*), where decision-making was predominantly male-dominated. Before the reform, only 13% of magistrates were women, while afterwards women formed 38% and in 2023, they represented 53% (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 39). In 2022, **Tonga** appointed its first female Acting Supreme Court Judge, Justice 'Elisabeti Langi, as its first female permanent Supreme Court Judge (Government of Tonga 2024: 13). **Vanuatu** has also appointed one female Chief Magistrate in the past five years (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 23).

G.4. Women in public service and government boards

Comparable data on women in public service and other public positions such as government boards are scarce in the Pacific. However, it is generally noted that in several countries, such as in **Kiribati**, **Samoa**, **Nauru**, and **Solomon Islands**, the proportion of women in leadership positions in public services is far greater than it is in legislatures (Fraenkel 2009, cited in Baker 2019: 6) (see also discussion at G.1. above).

In **Palau**, women slightly outnumber men in the public service, including in senior leadership roles such as directors and chiefs (author's own data collection). In **RMI**, in the years from 2021 to 2023, even though the percentage of males in the public service is higher than female, more females occupied managerial and senior level positions (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 10, citing Public Services Commission Annual Report, 2021–2023).

In **Tuvalu**, there has been an increase in women's representation at the senior administrative level. Women now represent 58% of the Secretaries (the highest government level function), compared to 10% in 2018. Women also comprise 55% of the Deputy and Assistant Secretaries (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 35, 37).

In **Vanuatu**, there have been some notable appointments of women to senior public sector roles in the past five years include two Acting Secretary Generals (out of six), three Director Generals (out of

13), one Supreme Court judge, one female Chief Magistrate, one high commissioner and five directors (out of 43) (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 23). A Women in Leadership Programme, representing a partnership between the Ministry of Health, the Public Service Commission and several other supporters, aims to strengthen leadership and accountability in Vanuatu's health sector. Under the programme, since 2023, 29 female leaders and seven male change agents have graduated with a Certificate in Professional Development in Public Service Workplace Leadership (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 23).

G.5. Women's councils or fora

While women often have low representation in executive and legislative roles, it is clear from the Beijing+30 reports that non-government women's councils or fora, whether standing or ad hoc, provide opportunities for women's leadership and play an important role in advancing women's interests in the Pacific.

In **Palau**, the Mechesil Belau, a pan-Palau organisation of traditional women chief title holders from each State has held an annual conference for the past three decades. This annual conference has been used to advocate for women's concerns and it claims some success in having such concerns translated into legislative action. Among these reported successes is the *Family Protection Act* (2012) which criminalises domestic and family violence and enables the issuing of civil protective orders. Mechesil Belau also advocates for overall support for women's and men's traditional roles in food production and advocates for conservation laws, including customary laws, and for healthy diets (Republic of Palau 2024: 40).

In **RMI**, in 2022, a forum called Ainikien Kora Forum (Women's Voice) was held with nearly 200 women participants representing the 24 atolls of the Marshall Islands. The Ainikien Kora Forum brought together 150 nominated national gender equality stakeholders to present on regional gender equality commitments, current work and challenges pertaining to the priority areas and the crosscutting themes. This was held as a one-off event in the lead up to the 2024 Triennial Conference of Pacific Women hosted in RMI (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 39).

Two National Women's Summits were held in **Nauru** in 2019 and 2022. The first summit produced the Tomano Declaration which provided recommendations on improving health, education and training and eliminating violence against women and girls (Republic of Nauru 2024: 34).

In **FSM**, the government, in partnership with the FSM National Council of Women, coordinates the FSM National Women's Conference every two years. This Conference was last held on 27 November–1 December 2023 in Kosrae. This Conference provides insights into priority areas of concern for FSM women and is a critical platform for the national and states governments to engage and dialogue with women in all their diversity. The conferences often produce recommendations to the governments on ways to improve inclusion (Government of FSM 2024: 8).

Some PICs also have a peak women's non-governmental organisation which serves as a focal point for government programming and community consultations, and it may also directly run women's empowerment programmes. Examples of such organisations include the **Tuvalu** National Council for

Women, **Kiribati's** Aia M'aea Ainen Kiribati (AMAK), the **Cook Islands** National Council of Women (CINCW) and the National and State Women's Councils in **FSM**.

At the regional Pacific level, the women's movement has been quite influential in non-government spaces, although discourses and outcomes have not always reflected Western neo-liberal development objectives (Baker and O'Shanassy 2023). In 2016, the inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum was held with over 130 participants from 13 countries. The forum developed a Pacific Feminist Charter for Change, which defined its feminism within the frame of common Oceanic identity (Baker and O'Shanassy 2023).

G.6. Women's leadership in community realms

It should also not be forgotten that Pacific women often wield influence in community realms, including within church or other religious organisations, traditional power structures, civil society organisations (Spark et al. 2021: 73; PDSI 2024; Jackson et al. 2022: 4), and in sporting spaces (Kanemasu 2023).

Women's involvement in leadership in community spaces can depend, however, on traditional organisational structures. For example, in **Solomon Islands** traditional leadership often takes the form of male 'chiefs' who are the principal agents that interact with formal government. Women do not usually have a direct role in this, although they may indirectly influence their male relatives to voice their concerns (Cox et al. 2023: 32). Some **Fijian** communities emphasise communal cooperation and unity, as well as respect for the authority of hereditary chiefs, the majority of whom are men. This extends throughout traditional tribe (*yavusa*), clan (*mataqali*) and family (*tokatoka*) structures where men's authority takes precedence over women (Government of Fiji 2023: 8-B). However, in other parts of the Pacific, including those areas with matrilineal and matriarchal traditions, women's roles in the traditional realm may be stronger.

Chiefly systems have been subject to some innovation in relation to gender roles. For example, in the **Solomon Islands**, there have been experiments with establishing committees and men and women chiefs (Cox et al. 2023: 32). In December 2021, women representatives of Customary Land Holding Groups (CLHG) from Western, Malaita, and Guadalcanal Provinces received training in empowerment, leadership, and decision-making to build their efficacy within these groups (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 44). Also, during 2021, the drafting of the *Traditional Governance and Customs Facilitation Bill 2018* went through extensive consultations with 223 women leaders from all nine provinces of the Solomon Islands. Following this, a full gender assessment report on the draft Traditional Governance Bill, including recommendations for fostering women's equal participation in decision-making in traditional governance and recognition of women's rights under customary law and dispute resolution practices, was submitted to the Minister in charge of the Bill in October 2021 (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 37). However, the Bill does not appear to have yet progressed further.

G.7. Women in business managerial positions

The Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (PDSI), an initiative of the Asian Development Bank, has now published time series data on women's leadership in business in fourteen Pacific Islands

countries for the years 2021 and 2024 (PDSI 2021; PDSI 2024). This data found that women's representation in business leadership in the Pacific, i.e. as board directors and CEOs, has been increasing across time, rising from 21% in 2021 to 26% in 2024 (PDSI 2024: 2). These regional averages are higher than the global average of 23%. More specifically, women hold 12% of board chairs in the Pacific and 20% of CEO positions (PDSI 2024: 27). Notably, women are far better represented in business roles than they are as legislators (see Part G.1. above).

However, despite these general gains, almost one-quarter (24%) of all boards in the Pacific have no women directors, and a further 32% have fewer than 30% women directors. As with many other matters covered in this report, there is considerable variation among PICs, with **Cook Islands, Kiribati, Samoa** and **Tuvalu** having higher proportions of women business leaders, while **Fiji, PNG** and **Vanuatu** have below average women's representation (PDSI 2024: 2).

None of the Beijing+30 reports mentioned any specific programmatic support for encouraging women's leadership in private business or in state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

H.1. Gender equality and mainstreaming policies

Gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment policies and action plans continue to be created and updated across the Pacific region. There also seems to be an increasing trend of acknowledgement of gender equality objectives in other social policies particularly on youth and persons with a disability, and in climate change and disaster risk management. It is less certain, however, the extent to which such policies actually guide practice across the region, and the information provided in the Beijing+30 narrative reports is generally not very detailed. **Table 8** provides a summary of these policies.

Table 8. Summary of gender equality and gender mainstreaming policies as reported in the Beijing+30 reports, Pacific Island countries

Country	Main gender equality or mainstreaming policies	Status/notes (if provided)
Cook Islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Policy on Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment (2019–2024); - Social Assistance Policy (2024–2028). 	In practice, gender mainstreaming into government programmes, policies and budget remains a work in progress, as gender equality perspectives are not yet systematically integrated (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 20).
Fiji	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Gender Policy (2014); - Social Protection Policy (2021); - Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan (2025–2029); - Fiji Parliament's Standing Orders (2014) require that the six Standing Committees 'ensure that full consideration will be given to the principle of gender equality (Government of Fiji 2023: 13-B). 	Fiji's Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection (MWCS) is undertaking a Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development (ICD) programme. Phase 1 (2020–2021) involved collaboration across government ministries to build technical knowledge and institutional capacities and building partnerships. Phase 2 of the ICD is a five-year program (2025–2029) aimed at strengthening the entire government's capacity and institutional framework for gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting (GRPB) (Government of Fiji 2024: 8–9).
Kiribati	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy (2019–2022); - National Disability Policy; - Kiribati Development Plan (KDP) (2020–2023); - Kiribati National Disability Policy (2018); - Kiribati Joint Implementation Plan for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (2019–2028) is also gender-responsive. 	The Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy will soon be reviewed/updated (Government of Kiribati 2024: 57).
Marshall Islands (RMI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Gender Mainstreaming Policy (2015); - National Strategic Plan (2020–2030); - National Youth Policy (2021–2025); - National Climate Change and Health Policy and Revised Action Plan (NCCHP) (2022). 	
Micronesia (Federated States of) (FSM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FSM National Gender Policy (2018–2023); - FSM National Strategic Development Plan (2004–2023); - FSM National Disability Policy (2009–2016). 	Gender mainstreaming is a key priority to ensure that there are systematic approaches for sustainable development (Government of FSM 2024).
Nauru	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nauru Action Plan for National Gender Equality Policies (2025–2030); - National Gender Mainstreaming Policy; 	- There is awareness of the shortcomings of existing policies, and future policy frameworks will include gender and social inclusion considerations (Republic of Nauru 2024: 32).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Women’s Policy (2024–2034); - National Disability Strategy (to be established under the <i>Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities Act 2023</i>). - National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) (2019–2030). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An ‘Enabling Gender-responsive and Inclusive Climate Change, Disaster Risk and Pandemic Response Policy’ is being developed with anticipated endorsement in 2024 (Republic of Nauru 2024: 10).
Palau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Action Plan (2018–2023); - Palau National Development Plan 2023–2026. 	<p>There has been low implementation of the Gender Mainstreaming Policy at government level. Much of the impetus for gender mainstreaming has been occurring at the project level, largely driven by international donor requirements (Republic of Palau 2024: 7). A renewal process for the Gender Mainstreaming Policy is underway.</p>
Samoa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Policy for Gender Equality and the Rights of Women and Girls (2021–2031); - National Policy on Community Economic Development (2021–2030); - National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2021–2030). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Gender Equity, Disability and Social Inclusion Analysis (GEDSI) Policy across the public service is being developed (Government of Samoa 2024: 8). - The Public Service Commission is currently conducting a review of the public service. This will include identifying a baseline of crosscutting issues including the mainstreaming of gender in government processes (Government of Samoa 2024: 8). - The Samoa Umbrella for Non-Government Organisations (SUNGO), in partnership with the Spotlight Initiative CSO Capacity Assessment findings, developed a gender equality and gender mainstreaming toolkit in 2021 for civil society (Government of Samoa 2024: 23).
Solomon Islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender Equality and Women’s Development (GEWD) Policy 2016–2020; - Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR) Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategy 2024-2029; - Seven out of the ten Provinces have adopted gender and women-specific policies: Honiara City Council (HCC), Malaita, Western, Guadalcanal, Temotu, Choiseul, and Central. 	<p>A review is being conducted of the GEWD Policy.</p>
Tonga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality Tonga Policy (2019–2025); - 2020 Tonga Energy Road Map (TERM) review resulted in the new TERM Plus 2021–2035 Strategy, which now has a dedicated section on gender inclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A review of the National Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality Tonga Policy and Strategic Plan of Action (2019-2025) is underway, including stakeholder consultations. This is due for completion by the end of 2024 for endorsement and adoption in early 2025. Running parallel to this policy revision will be the roll out of gender mainstreaming workshops across government ministers and statutory bodies (Government of Tonga 2024: 17).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The National Committee on Gender and Development (NACGAD) have continued to meet regularly to monitor Tonga’s implementation of the national, regional and international gender equality commitments. - Local government leaders lack understanding of gender. - Public service lacks relevant implementation capacities (Government of Tonga 2024: 10).
Tuvalu	Te Paagatasi a Tuvalu - National Gender Equity Policy (May 2024).	The policy is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It includes specific actions and monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective implementation and accountability (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 14).
Vanuatu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Sustainable Development Plan 2016–2030; - National Gender Equality Policy 2020–2030; - National Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2018–2025; - Provincial Gender Equality Action Plans 2020–2024. 	The governance (coordination, implementation, monitoring and reporting) of the NGEP 2020-2030 has also been decentralised through the establishment of technical working groups and Provincial Gender Equality Action Teams. These measures have helped reach rural women and girls (Vanuatu Government 2024: 10).

Source: compiled by the author from Beijing+30 national narrative reports (excluding Papua New Guinea).

H.2. Women’s machinery

PICs all have some form of women’s machinery, whether part of a full ministry/department or as a ministry division. Nauru, for example, in October 2020 established a standalone Department of Women’s and Social Development Affairs (WASDA) after splitting it from the Ministry of Home Affairs (Republic of Nauru 2024: 5).

However, actual resourcing of the women’s machineries is highly variable. Some countries such as **Fiji** report regular, if fluctuating, budget allocations to their women’s machinery (Government of Fiji 2024: 52), while in others, particularly the smaller PICs, the women’s machinery is often left underfunded. In particular, **FSM, Nauru, Palau, RMI, and Tonga** all explicitly reported that their women’s machinery was understaffed and/or under-resourced, or not resourced at all, during the previous five years. For these countries, gender equality activities tend to be individually funded by international donor partners.

Other institutional mechanisms such as gender focal points appear to be relatively rare. The **Cook Islands** does have Women Development Officers placed under the respective Island Secretary in the outer islands. These Officers help agencies to coordinate gender equality initiatives (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 45). **Tonga** also has a National Committee on Gender and Development (NACGAD), which should meet regularly to monitor Tonga’s implementation of its national, regional and international gender equality commitments. However, natural disasters and competing priorities

of its members have impacted members' ability to attend regular meetings and impacted turnover of key staff at the national women's machinery which acts as the NACGAD's secretariat (Government of Tonga 2024: 10).

In **Vanuatu**, a decentralisation process of the gender equality machinery has been underway. This has included strengthening provincial and community-level governance such as developing Provincial Gender Equality Action Plans 2020–2024, establishing Provincial Gender Equality Action Teams and Provincial Gender and Protection Working Groups and strengthening community disaster and climate change committees (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 9).

H.3. Gender-responsive budgeting

In most PICs, gender-responsive budgeting is generally not being implemented, but some initial steps have recently been taken in some countries.

Fiji appears to have the most developed approaches to gender-responsive budgeting. Introduced in 2022, phase one of a Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development (ICD) programme has been implemented alongside Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting. The second phase is expected to begin in 2025. Fiji's Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection have been collaborating to ensure that budgetary allocations are analysed and address the specific needs and priorities of different genders (Government of Fiji 2024: 53).

In 2022, **Samoa**, through the support of the UNDP Spotlight Initiative, launched a *Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) Training Manual* for the public service. This manual requires inclusion of a gender perspective in all budget processes including decisions on resource allocation priorities. Samoa's Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSO) established a core GRB group and undertook training for selected public servants in 2023 (Government of Samoa 2024: 8).

In **Solomon Islands**, a gender-responsive budgeting initiative is underway as part of the Government of Solomon Islands reform programme to strengthen public financial management for fiscal resilience, including development and approval of new budget regulations under the *Public Financial Management Act* (2013). The initiative will involve piloting gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) in identified government ministries. The pilot is being led by the Ministry of Finance and Treasury (MoFT) and the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children and Family Affairs (MWYCF) with technical assistance by the ADB (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 10).

Towards gender-responsive budgeting in **Nauru**, a Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) assessment was completed in 2022 and endorsed by the PEFA secretariat and government of Nauru. There is strong support within the government to implement gender-responsive budgeting, including endorsement by cabinet (Republic of Nauru 2024: 6, 14). Further, the Nauru government has recently signed a grant agreement with the Asian Development Bank to assist it with strengthening gender-responsive fiscal sustainability (Republic of Nauru 2024: 15).

Tonga has not formally adopted gender-responsive budgeting. However, the Pacific Technical Assistance Centre conducted a Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) Public Expenditure and Financial Assessment (PEFA) for Tonga. The purpose of the assessment was to collect information on the extent

to which gender is mainstreamed within Tonga's Public Financial Management (PFM) system and to establish a baseline for future action (Government of Tonga 2024: 40). Similarly, in **Vanuatu**, analyses of gender-responsive budgeting are underway towards developing a guidance note to be piloted in specific ministries (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 62).

H.4. Collection of gender-disaggregated and gender-specific statistics

Major census and household and income expenditure surveys (HIES), and sometimes labour force surveys, conducted throughout PICs appear to be fully gender-disaggregated and provide valuable insights into major demographic developments. These surveys can, however, be irregular in some countries depending on resourcing. Some of the PICs acknowledge limited capacity for data collection in general in their Beijing+30 reports (e.g. **Kiribati, RMI, Nauru and Tuvalu**), with specialist surveys and analysis, including on GBV, often requiring donor funding. Voluntary national reviews (VNRs) on progress towards the SDGs have also been conducted in several PICs in recent years as follows: FSM, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands (2020); Marshall Islands (2021); Tuvalu (2022); Fiji (2023); and Palau, FSM, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu (2024). These reviews all include reporting on gender equality.

As noted in Part A.1. above, some countries such as **Solomon Islands** and **Tonga** have recently had Equality Insights Rapid surveys conducted showing multidimensional aspects of poverty and deprivation and providing greater insights into the social needs of men and women at the individual level. **Tonga** has also conducted a Gender and Environment Survey (GES) (2022) representing a comprehensive national household survey exploring the multidimensional relationships of women and men with the environment (Government of Tonga 2024: 37).

Fiji, through a recent major Fiji Country Gender Assessment (FGCA) process, has greatly expanded gender statistics for the country. Initiated in 2020, the final reports were presented in 2023. The FGCA is divided into eight thematic chapters and provides key and updated statistics, sex-disaggregated data and analysis along with policy recommendations to foster improvements in each of the identified thematic areas. The data collection process itself raised awareness across government agencies of the importance of gender statistics as a basis for effective policymaking and trialled coordination methods (Government of Fiji 2024: 7). There are still challenges ahead to expand this one-off collection of data to form longer-term processes such as the development of a centralised gender statistics data hub (Government of Fiji 2024: 73). Similarly, the **Samoa** Bureau of Statistics (SBS) developed a Samoa Gender Dynamics Monograph in 2020 which provides a breakdown of gender-focused and specific data such as number of women in parliament, head of executives, entities within sectoral ministry and sub-ministerial level (Government of Samoa 2024: 20). **Solomon Islands** highlighted the country's new system for the collection of administrative data on gender-based violence via its SAFENET services (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 52).

Common themes for where gaps exist in the data on gender equality include in relation to care and domestic work and sex-disaggregated time use, and in relation to the impacts of climate change, resource use and the environment in general (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 53; Republic of Palau 2024: 56). Notably, **Kiribati** has a planned Gender and Environment Survey underway to fill in the gaps in the gender and environment nexus to target the expected outcome such as identification of gender disparities that may reveal disparities in environmental experiences, access to resources,

decision-making power, and participation in environmental initiatives between different genders (Government of Kiribati 2024: 91).

I. Human rights of women

This section reports on changes to legal and institutional protection of human rights during the period 2019–2024. Other, broader, sources on women’s human rights in the Pacific include the individual and regional gender equality briefs produced by UN Women (UN Women 2022) and the World Bank’s ‘Women, Business and the Law’ index (see **Table 2**).

In terms of institutional support for human rights, currently only three PICs have established national human rights institutions which conform with the Paris Principles, namely **Samoa**, **Fiji** and **Tuvalu**. **Samoa’s** Office of the Ombudsman was upgraded in 2013 to add a special investigation unit and a human rights unit, thereby fulfilling requirements as a national human rights institution. It has ‘A’ accreditation status with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GAHNRI). **Fiji’s** Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission (FHRADC) was established in 1999 but withdrew its accreditation status following the 2006 coup. In 2021 and 2022, it was awarded ‘B’ accreditation status. The FHRADC has instituted legal proceedings and appeared as *amicus curiae* in court to uphold human rights principles, ensuring appropriate redress or remedies are afforded to the victims of human rights violations (Government of Fiji 2024: 54). **Tuvalu’s** Ombudsman was given expanded functions in 2017 thereby establishing it as a national human Rights institution. However, due to the resignation of the Chief Ombudsman in 2022, the institution has not been operational, with staff turnover also being a significant challenge. The Government acknowledges the necessity of fully establishing the Ombudsman and is progressively working towards this goal (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 39). Some other PICs have proposals for national human rights institutions under discussion including **Kiribati** and **Solomon Islands** (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 38).

There have been a few legal updates that increase protection of women’s human rights across the Pacific region within the reporting period. In **RMI**, the *Gender Equality Act 2019* embodies commitments to recognise, protect, promote, and enforce the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all women and girls, on an equal basis with men and boys, thereby promoting gender equality and non-discrimination (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 7). In **Tonga**, in 2022, the Legislative Assembly passed an amendment to the *Criminal Offences Act* to expand the definition of rape. Previously limited to rape cases involving a female and a male, the new definition encompasses various forms of rape such as anal and digital, ensuring more comprehensive protection for victims.

In June 2020, **Fiji** was the second country in the world to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment in the workplace and has since put in place a National Policy on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace to help ensure accountability in cases of sexual harassment (Government of Fiji 2024: 43). In **Tonga**, a Public Service Sexual Harassment Policy was endorsed by Cabinet in 2022 to ensure that the Public Service Commission (as the employer) takes appropriate steps to protect public servants from workplace harassment, including by third parties. The policy also aims to provide clear guidance to employees on sexual harassment in the workplace. This is the first legislative response specifically responding to the issue of sexual harassment in Tonga

(Government of Tonga 2024: 13). In the **Solomon Islands**, the *Public Service Bill 2022*, which is under debate, criminalises sexual harassment. Also, under the Solomon Islands Public Service Code of Conduct staff are expected to be "actively contributing to a harassment free workplace". A prevalence survey on sexual harassment conducted in 2021–2022 is leading to the development of a focused anti-harassment policy in the public service (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 11-12).

J. Women and the media

There is some institutional support for women's involvement in the media. In October 2023, the **Solomon Islands** Women in News Network was established to provide a safe space for female journalists and reporters to build solidarity, share challenges and encouragement, and promote leadership in the media (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 30–31). The **Palau** Media Council, a small association of journalists, reports that it has undertaken initiatives to empower women's participation in the media industry through mentorship and capacity-building activities (Republic of Palau 2024: 37). In **Kiribati**, there have been efforts to encourage girls to develop their skills and understanding of Information Communication & Technology (ICT) and thereby to consider participation in, or careers in, the media (Government of Kiribati 2024: 69).

The issue of portrayal of women and gender issues in the media is an area of action that is not very well-developed across the Pacific region. There are few, if any, policies or programmes aimed at preventing negative or biased portrayal of women in the media, although there are some youth programmes aimed at raising their awareness of the power of the media and issues of cyberbullying.

Rather, the emphasis seems to be on the use of the media to deliberately tell positive stories about women. For example, in **Tonga**, in August 2020, the Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC) launched the Fefine To'a or 'Woman of Strength' series and published stories in English and Tongan, showcasing Tongan women's resilience to encourage dialogue, shift perspectives on women and to normalise speaking up about gender-based violence. The Fefine To'a stories have been disseminated online via social media and email, in local newspapers and on WCCC's weekly radio programme and in 2021 reached 175,440 readers and viewers on social media alone (Government of Tonga 2024: 29). Similarly, in **Tuvalu**, over the past four years, the Gender Affairs Department has been proactive in organising roundtables in conjunction with International Women's Days and broadcasting these on radio and television. These media events showcase women exercising leadership and engaging in discussions on critical public affairs issues (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 35).

In **Solomon Islands**, the *Solomon Women* online newspaper⁸ launched in 2015, reports on women's stories and activities across a broad range of social areas such as business, education, health, sports, church, leadership, agriculture, environment, entertainment, fashion, politics, tourism, special needs, and youth (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 31). Also in **Solomon Islands**, in 2024, training was provided to media professionals on how to profile female national and provincial election candidates. The training focused on ensuring women's strong visibility and addressing gender biases in leadership positions (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 30). The **Palau** Media Council has integrated gender perspectives into media coverage of disaster risk reduction and climate resilience by highlighting the

⁸ Accessed at: <https://womensmedia.islesmedia.net/>.

gendered impacts of environmental challenges and amplifying the voices of women and vulnerable communities (Republic of Palau 2024: 37).

K. Women and the environment

K.1. Women and extractive industries

Throughout the world, extractive industries, such as mining and logging, tend to be male-dominated and often quite lawless spaces particularly in relatively remote resource frontiers, leading to particular repeated patterns of women's vulnerability (UN Women 2020). This pattern has also been observed in some areas of the Pacific.

For example, an IOM report (2023) on the logging industry in **Solomon Islands** found a high prevalence of exploitation of women and girls through encouraged or coerced sexual relationships with male loggers. The report found that the problem was exacerbated by gaps in protective laws and limited access to justice for victims of exploitation. The **Solomon Islands** government has recognised this problem. Between June and August 2021, the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Community Affairs (MWYCFA) collaborated with several partner ministries to raise awareness about relevant laws regarding various forms of violence against women and girls, such as those protecting against child, early, and forced marriage, in seven communities near mining and logging sites in Guadalcanal, Rennell Bellona, Malaita, and Western Provinces. The project resulted in recommendations for the protection and safeguarding of women and children in extractive industries. The Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification (MMERE) has since produced a Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy for Sustainable Mining in the Solomon Islands (2023–2033). This strategy aims to ensure that all stages of mining activity are carried out in a manner that promotes gender equality, inclusivity, and addresses the specific needs and concerns of women, marginalised groups, and local communities (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 43–44).

In **PNG**, while there was quite a lot of activity in the 2000s on women in mining, with several women in mining conferences held, and the development of the Women in Mining Action Plan 2007–2012 (Eftimie 2011), there does not appear to have been any subsequent renewal of the plan.

K.2. Women, the environment and climate change

The Pacific region is highly exposed to the impacts of climate change, with PICs combining high incidence of damaging environmental hazards with low capacity to manage the resulting risks (World Bank 2013: 4). Climate change and other environmental disasters have a direct impact on communities and individuals, with women and girls in all their diversity often experiencing particular vulnerabilities, including due to physical differences and care obligations or being exposed to violence in the aftermath of natural disasters. Taking account of gender differences may also be a factor in designing effective climate mitigation and adaptation strategies, with women often being custodians of particular environmental knowledge and/or significant contributors to food and water security, and to shaping society as a whole (Davila et al. 2024; McLeod et al. 2018). As Howard (2023a) notes, we need to be careful not to overemphasise women's vulnerability in relation to climate change and be sure to recognise agency, and also to be aware of likely failures caused by merely 'adding' women to male and Eurocentric institutions (Howard 2023b).

Based on the Beijing+30 country reports, some PICs are producing specific data on gender and the environment at the national level. For instance, **Tonga** launched a 'Gender and the Environment Survey' in 2024. In other cases, donor partners are producing relevant research; in the **Solomon Islands** the World Bank conducted primary research resulting in a report titled 'Local Insights into Social Resilience and Climate Change in Solomon Islands' (Cox et al. 2023). This report presents key findings to support the incorporation of social dimensions, including gender, into Solomon Islands efforts to address climate change and disaster risk management. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has also conducted a series of country gender assessments of the agriculture and rural sectors in various PICs, including in **Fiji** (2019), **PNG** (2019), **Samoa** (2019), **Solomon Islands** (2019), **Tonga** (2019), **Vanuatu** (2020) and **Palau** (2023). These reports include discussion of climate change and disaster risk management.

Academic researchers also contribute to the production of knowledge about gender and climate change (e.g. Cassinat et al. 2022, study in **Samoa**). In **Palau**, in 2020, the Ebiil Society, a non-government organisation, produced a study of gender and natural resources including detailing changing gender roles in relation to fishing, aquaculture, gleaning of invertebrates, medicinal plant collection and in agriculture (Singeo et al. 2020; Republic of Palau 2024: 48).

Specific programme-related studies have also been carried out. For example, in **Tuvalu**, in April 2023, CARE Australia and Live & Learn Environmental Education Tuvalu conducted an in-depth survey to assess the water and hygiene needs of populations affected by drought on the northern islands of Tuvalu, namely Nanumea, Nanumaga, and Niutao. This survey specifically integrated gender and inclusion perspectives (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 42). In 2023, the **Kiribati** Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Development (MFMRD) completed a gender analysis of the fisheries and aquaculture sector (Government of Kiribati 2024: 7).

Climate change and environmental policies appear to be increasingly incorporating gender and inclusion considerations. For example, the **Cook Islands** Climate Change Policy 2018–2028 is based on principles of equity and inclusiveness in terms of planning and implementation of environmental, climate change and disaster risk reduction activities (Government of the Cook Islands 2024: 48). Also, **Tuvalu's** National Climate Change Policy 2021–2030, known as *Te Vaka Fenua o Tuvalu*, explicitly incorporates gender equality and social inclusion as a guiding principle (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 42). **Fiji's** National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) 2018–2030 and the *2021 Climate Change Act* (CCA), and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2020–2024, all endorse the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment and recognise women as agents of change (Government of Fiji 2024: 62). **Kiribati's** Joint Implementation Plan for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (KJIP 2014–2023), integrates gender perspectives by improving gender indicators as well as including other activities that promote and strengthen gender responsiveness and inclusiveness (Government of Kiribati 2024: 7).

In relation to actual programming on climate and environmental mitigation and adaptation with a gender lens, the Beijing+30 reports provide several examples of usually donor-led projects. In **Palau**, the ADB, through the Disaster Resilient Clean Energy Financing Project (2020–present) (USD 4.9 m), is facilitating access of low income households and female borrowers to affordable disaster resilient clean energy financing in Palau (Republic of Palau 2024: 48). The ADB, as part of a COVID-19 recovery

package, has also been assisting groups of women farmers in **Palau** to develop taro crops in upland areas and to create new value-added products such as taro chips and flour. This programme has many simultaneous benefits for rural women's livelihood creation, climate change resilience, local food security and health (Republic of Palau 2024: 6).

In **Vanuatu**, Save the Children, the Ministry of Climate Change Adaptation and the Green Climate Fund (GCF) are implementing a six-year Vanuatu Community-based Climate Resilience Project (VCCRP). This project is supporting 282 communities with climate resilience in agriculture and fisheries and includes a comprehensive gender action plan prioritising women's leadership and participation (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 17). In another **Vanuatu** project, Water for Women and World Vision are working on upgrading climate-resilient WASH infrastructure in Sanma and Torba Provinces while ensuring gender equality and social inclusion in WASH planning and delivery (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 26).

A partnership between the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Pacific Community (SPC) has been implementing a four-year (2021–2024) Management of Coastal Aquifers (MCA) project in **RMI, Palau** and **Tuvalu**. The MCA project aims to improve the management of groundwater towards enhanced water security in the context of climate change. In **RMI**, the Gender Office conducted community engagement activities for the project including collecting information from men, women and young people (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2024: 47). Also in **Tuvalu**, the Tuvalu Coastal Adaptation Project (TCAP), supported by the Green Climate Fund and UNDP, aims to mitigate the impacts of coastal hazards and develop long-term adaptation strategies. The project integrates gender perspectives by ensuring that women are included in decision-making processes and benefit from enhanced resilience measures. The project includes a comprehensive gender strategy and plan of action identifying specific actions to implement across the project to support women's empowerment and gender equality (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 42).

K.3. Women and disaster responses and preparedness

The Beijing+30 narrative reports provide several examples of attention to women and gender equality within disaster response and preparedness programmes. The various local branches of the Red Cross Society are key players within this space, often working in collaboration with governments.

Tonga's response to the impact of the 2022 Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai undersea volcano eruption and subsequent tsunami included the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Women's Affairs and Gender Equality Division, with support from UNDP Pacific and UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office, mobilising the REACH 'A'u Tonu Ki Ai' programme. The REACH programme facilitates government and civil society organisation delivery of services. Due to COVID-19 restrictions on in-person scoping, a REACH call centre was established. Operational across five days, it responded to 220 calls from hotspot areas, among whom 60% were women. The REACH team then provided services to 1012 people in Tongatapu at four locations over two weeks. This included administrative support for lost documentation and basic survival needs. The programme staff were specifically trained in managing disclosures of GBV in this context (Government of Tonga 2024: 16–17).

Kiribati's Women Resilience to Disaster (WRD) Programme 2022–2025, supported by UN Women and coordinated by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sport, and Social Affairs (MWYSSA), is preparing

women and girls to withstand the impact of climate change and disaster. **Kiribati** also revised its South Tarawa Drought Management Plan (STDMP) during the 2023 drought crisis and now has more inclusion of gender in different phases of drought management. The MWYSSA now has a leadership role within this Plan. And Kiribati's Community-Based Fisheries Management (CMFM) integrates gender perspectives by including women in the planning and designing phases, such as moving away from traditional meeting practices (meeting in *maneaba* – traditional big meeting house where women are not invited) to ensure women fully and freely participate during meetings (Government of Kiribati 2024: 7).

In **Palau**, through a partnership between the government's National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) and the Palau Red Cross Society (PRCS), gender-responsive disaster plans for all 16 states have been developed. Men and women across all states have also been trained to ensure that they are ready to support their respective communities in any future time of need. Earlier, the government of Palau also took out a USD 15 million loan to run a Disaster Resilience Program (2018–2020), which supported gender actions on disaster resilience, inclusion of sex-disaggregated tracking of evacuees, and identification of their special needs in the Mass Rescue Operations Contingency Plan (Republic of Palau 2024: 49).

Tuvalu has also developed local council level (*Kaupules*) Island Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Plans. These Plans serve to enhance resilience and ensure that gender considerations are mainstreamed throughout the disaster management cycle. The Funafuti Plan identified the need for strengthening a GBV referral system to provide support and protection to women and girls affected by disasters (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 43). The Tuvalu Red Cross Society (TRCS) also plays a crucial role in disaster risk preparedness in Tuvalu and about 42% of its volunteers are women (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 43).

In **Fiji**, a cluster system has been implemented to coordinate emergency relief and the restoration of key systems and services following disasters. The Safety and Protection Cluster includes ensuring child protection and addressing the needs of women and girls who experience or are at risk of GBV, including LGBTQI+ communities (Government of Fiji 2024: 14). Another initiative in **Fiji** is the FemLINKpacific's Women's Weather Watch which provides critical information prior to and during disasters by broadcasting women's "on-the-ground knowledge". Through this service, women reported receiving faster and more specific information during Tropical Cyclone Winston (Government of Fiji 2024: 14). **Fiji's** Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, with United Nations support, launched a pilot programme in 2021 for a "climate risk parametric micro insurance product", targeting smallholder farmers, fishers and market vendors (Government of Fiji 2024: 21).

Similar to Fiji, in **Vanuatu** a Gender and Protection Cluster (GPC), is activated under the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) cluster system. The GPC is led by women at the national and provincial levels and ensures gender, disability, and social inclusion in disaster preparedness and response (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 17). CARE in Vanuatu has also assisted the Ministry of Justice and Community Services and the GPC to undertake gender analysis following tropical cyclones and COVID-19. This has led to programming that is more sensitive to women's increased workloads following a disaster (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 25). **Vanuatu's** responses to twin tropical cyclones Judy and Kevin in March 2023 included implementing 'women and girls friendly spaces' (WGFS) in

Tanna. Led by women, these spaces provided sexual and reproductive health and GBV referral services during the emergency period (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 18).

In relation to disaster preparation in **Vanuatu**, CARE in Vanuatu has assisted the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and the Department of Local Authorities to develop area council disaster plans that ensure the participation of women, people with disabilities, and other at-risk groups. Pilot initiatives in Tafea and Penama provinces aim to inform national guidelines for inclusive disaster planning (Government of Vanuatu 2024: 18). Also, similar to that of Fiji, a Women Wetem Weta (WWW) women's weather information service has been developed in **Vanuatu**. This service empowers women, including those with disabilities, to monitor weather, access meteorological information, and disseminate early warnings via SMS. That information is then used to support women's livelihoods and disaster preparedness. Recent research has indicated that the gender-focused early warning systems in both **Fiji** and **Vanuatu** prompt communities to take early actions which are more cost-effective than post-disaster responses (Australia Pacific Climate Partnership 2024).

L. The girl-child

The Beijing+30 narrative reports, with their focus on women, did not tend to include detailed information on the situation and developments in relation to the girl-child, apart from information included in relation to education (see Part B above) and adolescent health (see Part C above).

Almost all Pacific Island countries and territories have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (with the exception of **Tokelau**).

At the regional level, 'Pacific Girl' is a multi-country programme, funded by Australian Aid, to support adolescent girls in Pacific Island countries achieve their full potential. Since 2019, it has funded civil society organisations to implement activities in **FSM, Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga** and **Vanuatu** with a focus on building girls' life skills and knowledge of sexual and mental health.

The Beijing+30 narrative reports covered only a few country-level developments during the 2019–2024 reporting period with regards to girls' rights, including the following:

Fiji has ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (Government of Fiji 2024: 60–61). Two civil society organisations in Fiji – MSP, which runs the Child Helpline 1325, and the Reproductive Family Health Association of Fiji – have worked with young girls aged 12–14 years to help them understand their rights and to gain the skills to make independent decisions about their bodies, while also working with the girls' parents to support their daughters' decisions (Government of Fiji 2024: 42–43).

In **Solomon Islands**, the Children's Development (CDD) Division of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) commissioned a review of the country's first National Children's Policy (NCP) 2010–2015. This then served as the foundation for the current NCP 2023–2028, which was released in February 2024. The policy aims to ensure that all children in the Solomon Islands are safeguarded from physical harm, emotional stress and exploitation and are given development opportunities (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 42). The National Action Committee on Children is

also continuing work on a proposal to raise the legal minimum age of marriage from 15 to 18 years (Solomon Islands Government 2024: 24).

In **Tuvalu**, the Tuvalu Family Health Association (TuFHA) has implemented awareness initiatives focused on gender equality and gender equity. These programmes aim to educate the community about the importance of treating girls and boys equally and ensuring that both genders have the same opportunities and rights (Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department 2024: 41).

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**All people, of all genders and of all diversities,
enjoy their fundamental human rights,
are empowered, and benefit equally from
development outcomes in all areas of their lives.**

Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights (PPA)

Produced by the Pacific Community (SPC)

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ISBN 978-982-00-1608-8

