Pacific Community
Communauté du Pacifique

The status of Pacific education report 2024

A regional monitoring report focusing on SDG 4 mid-term review

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www.spc.int | spc@spc.int

Cover photo: Year 3 students in Samoa participating in a phonics lesson as part of the Samoa Synthetics Systematic Phonics programme.

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Abbreviations

% pt.	percentage points
ANER	adjusted net enrolment rate
CI	Cook Islands
CPEM	Conference of Pacific Education Ministers
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
ECE	early childhood education
EMIS	education management information system
EQAP	Educational Quality and Assessment Programme
ER	enrolment rate
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
GDP	gross domestic product
GIR	gross intake ratio
GPI	gender parity index
GPIA	adjusted gender parity index
ICT	information and communications technology
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LPIA	adjusted location parity index
PacREF	Pacific Regional Education Framework
PICs	Pacific Island countries
PILNA	Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PQTR	pupil-qualified teacher ratio
PTTR	pupil-trained teacher ratio
RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
SDG	sustainable development goal
SI	Solomon Islands
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SPC	Pacific Community
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
vs.	versus
WPIA	adjusted wealth parity index

Figures

Acknowledgements

The status of Pacific education 2024: A regional monitoring report focusing on SDG 4 mid-term report provides an overview of the educational progress that has been made by Pacific Island countries (PICs). The information contained in this report has been gathered through the hard work and dedicated efforts of many individuals and organisations. This report would not have been possible without the support of the individuals and organisations who are recognised below.

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Thank you all for your valuable contributions to the *Status of Pacific education report 2024*.

Dr Michelle Belisle
Director
Educational Quality and Assessment Programme
Pacific Community

Foreword

Official statistics play a vital role in the creation of strong and resilient democratic societies, as policy decisions rely on factual data rather than personal stories or opinions. In the field of education, high-quality data form the basis for effective education policies and planning. However, in the Pacific region, access to such data is often limited, which negatively affects the development and evaluation of education sector policies and plans. The Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) has taken on the task of enhancing the quality, accessibility, and use of statistical information for education policy planning and management. SPC anticipates the use of its Data Governance framework in Education Data and Statistics policies not only at its Divisional level but also as a reference for Pacific Island countries (PICs).

To ensure better quality data, EQAP has focused on upgrading and improving education management information systems (EMIS), which are essential for generating reliable education statistics. A key approach is to assist PICs in establishing and maintaining EMIS by helping to coordinate and develop national EMIS policies, assessing data quality and offering technical support to improve national education databases. There is a plan towards using the Pacific Schools Information Management System (PacSIMS) to support the work in this area.

To enhance data availability and usage, EQAP has collaborated with UNESCO's UIS to guarantee access to internationally comparable education data from PICs in order to facilitate regional monitoring and policy discussions. The goal of this partnership is for PICs to regularly publish high-quality education data that decision-makers at all levels can use effectively. It is crucial that accurate information regarding the education status in the Pacific region is widely shared to foster public trust in education statistics. This report aims to promote greater confidence in the use of official education data and statistics for informing education policy and decision-making at national, regional, and international levels.

Dr Stuart Minchin
Director-General
Pacific Community

A young girl in Palau taking notes during class.

1. Introduction

This report is the third comprehensive report of a planned series of reports on the status of Pacific education to be produced biennially by the Pacific Community's Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) as part of their monitoring of the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018–2030. The series is primarily designed to provide the Pacific region's education ministers, their senior executives, and the region's development partners with regular overviews of progress as it relates to education in the region, alongside emerging issues and challenges that are common to most, if not all, PICs.

1.1 Evolution of education development in the Pacific region

The evolution of education development in the Pacific region is a multifaceted process that is influenced by diverse cultural, historical and socio-economic factors. PICs, with their rich cultural heritage and unique geographical challenges, have seen significant transformations in their educational systems over the years.

Over the past 30 years, education in the Pacific region has evolved significantly, which has been driven by the need to expand access, improve quality and address the region's unique challenges. The 1990s focused on increasing access to education, particularly in rural areas, while the 2000s shifted towards enhancing the quality and relevance of education to better align with labour market demands. The 2010s saw a rise in innovation and inclusivity, with the adoption of digital tools and a focus on making education accessible to all, regardless of gender, disability, or socio-economic background. The 2020s have been marked by the need for resilience and sustainability, especially in response to global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. Throughout these decades, regional collaboration and the integration of local knowledge have been key in shaping a more inclusive and adaptive education system in the Pacific region.

Thereby, the evolution of education in the Pacific region has been characterised by a shift from expanding access to improving quality and relevance, embracing innovation and building resilience. As the region continues to face new challenges, education remains a cornerstone for sustainable development, cultural preservation and the empowerment of Pacific communities.

1.2 Rationale and relevance of the mid-term review

The year 2023 represented the "midway mark" for implementing the commitments to fulfilling the collective *Education 2030 Agenda*.

It is evident that PICs have made significant progress since 2016 in strengthening resilience and enhancing capacities of national systems in order to serve all learners with a lens for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The mid-term review will help countries to:

1. ensure monitoring, follow-up and review of all targets as a key strategic approach to achieving SDG 4;
2. identify progress and gaps, summarise lessons learned, highlight good practices, clarify priorities and strategies going forward, and shaping the future of education;
3. strengthen national capacities for the monitoring and evaluation of education; and
4. accelerate the overall implementation of the *SDG 4 – Education 2030 Agenda*.

1.3 General processes and approaches of mid-term review

1. The mid-term review analyses each of the country's context, challenges and opportunities, and provides policy recommendations that call for actions to enhance the progress monitoring of the 10 SDG 4 targets through data and benchmarks, and to enhance efforts to achieve them by 2030.

2. Considering post-COVID-19 recovery, the mid-term review will not only assess the progress that has been made towards SDG 4, but will also serve as a solid foundation for learning recovery and the transformation of education and its systems.

Year 9 students of Sacred Heart College, Fiji, engaged in classroom learning.

2. Regionalisation of SDG 4 and Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF)

2.1 Priorities of education in the Pacific region – PacREF agenda and focus

The PacREF serves as a strategic outline for advancing educational priorities for the Pacific region. The PacREF agenda has been established to guide educational development across PICs and is focused on creating a coherent and collaborative approach to addressing the region's unique educational challenges. The framework is designed to support the vision of "quality education for all" in the Pacific region, and it is structured around key priorities that aim to enhance the overall education system. The priorities for education are further elaborated and aligned in the PacREF agenda.

The PacREF agenda is a comprehensive and strategic approach to education development that reflects the Pacific region's commitment to improving educational outcomes for all its citizens. By focusing on quality, access, lifelong learning, system strengthening, resilience and regional cooperation, PacREF aims to build an education system that is inclusive, sustainable and capable of meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century.

2.2 Adaptation and integration of SDG 4 in PacREF

The SDG 4 targets and relevant *Education 2030 Agenda* indicators are mapped to the PacREF monitoring framework. The mapping enables the reporting of SDG 4 global and thematic indicators for regional and international reporting purposes and to reduce the response burden placed on small PICs by data requests from regional and international agencies. However, only official data approved by PICs will be used in regional and international databases and publications.

PacREF and SDG links

Area 1 Quality and Relevance
1.1 Relevant curriculum
1.2 Broad-based learning
1.3 Responsive learning
1.4 Quality learning environment

	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.8	4.c
1.1	4.1	4.2	4.3 4.3.1	4.4.1	4.5.1				
1.2				4.4			4.7 4.7.1		
1.3	4.1						4.7 4.7.1		
1.4	4.1						4.7	4.8	

Area 2 Learning Pathways
2.1 Enabling policy environment
2.2 Inclusive participation
2.3 School readiness
2.4 Learning pathways

	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.8	4.c
2.1	4.1	4.2	4.3						
2.2	4.1	4.2			4.5				
2.3		4.2							
2.4		4.2	4.3 4.3.1	4.4 4.4.1					

Area 3 Student Outcomes and Well-being
3.1 Literacy and numeracy
3.2 Improve system-side outcomes
3.2 Social skills

	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.8	4.c
3.1	4.1 4.1.1				4.5	4.6 4.6.1			
3.2		4.2 4.2.1	4.3	4.4	4.5				
3.3							4.7 4.7.1		

Area 4 Teaching Profession
4.1 Qualified, certified, competent teachers
4.2 Professional development and support of teachers
4.3 Professional and social status of teachers

	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.8	4.c
4.1									4.c 4.c.1
4.2									4.c 4.c.1
4.3									4.c 4.c.1

Sustainable Development Goal 4

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

4.1 Universal primary and secondary education
4.2 Early childhood development and universal pre-primary education
4.3 Equal access to technical/vocational and higher education
4.4 Relevant skills for decent work
4.5 Gender equality and inclusion
4.6 Universal youth literacy
4.7 Education for sustainable development and global citizenship
4.a Effective learning environments
4.b Scholarships
4.c Teachers and educators

2.3 Monitoring of SDG 4 and PacREF

Common indicators allow for the monitoring of SDG 4 and PacREF at the same time. There are PacREF key performance indicators (KPIs) below that are also SDG 4 indicators.

1. Quality and relevance

1.1. Percentage of primary and secondary schools meeting national minimum service standards
1.2. Percentage of primary schools with vernacular instruction in first three years
1.3. Percentage of primary and secondary schools with access to drinking water and basic sanitation
1.4. Percentage of primary and secondary schools with access to computers for pedagogical use
1.5. * Out-of-school rate for primary, lower and upper secondary education
1.6. Percentage of children over-age for grade in primary and lower secondary education

2. Learning pathways

2.1. * Participation rate of youth and adults in formal/non-formal education/training in last 12 months
2.2. Gross/net enrolment rates (GER/NER) in early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education
2.3. * Participation rate in early childhood education (ECE) the year before primary education
2.4. Transition rates between primary, secondary and tertiary education
2.5. Retention rates for primary and secondary education
2.6. * Youth participation rate in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes

3. Student outcomes

3.1. Educational attainment rate for secondary, TVET and tertiary education
3.2. Percentage of pre-school children who are school-ready
3.3. * Percentage of primary students achieving proficiency in literacy
3.4. * Percentage of primary students achieving proficiency in (mathematics) numeracy
3.5. * Gross intake ratio to the last grade (GIRLY) for primary and lower/upper secondary education
3.6. * Completion rate for primary and lower/upper secondary education

4. Teaching profession

4.1. Percentage of teachers meeting professional standards in primary and secondary education
4.2. * Percentage of trained teachers in primary and secondary education
4.3. Percentage of qualified teachers in primary and secondary education
4.4. Student–teacher ratio by education level for qualified and trained teachers in primary and secondary education
4.5. Percentage of teachers having annual professional development in primary and secondary education

*Note: * = Priority indicators*

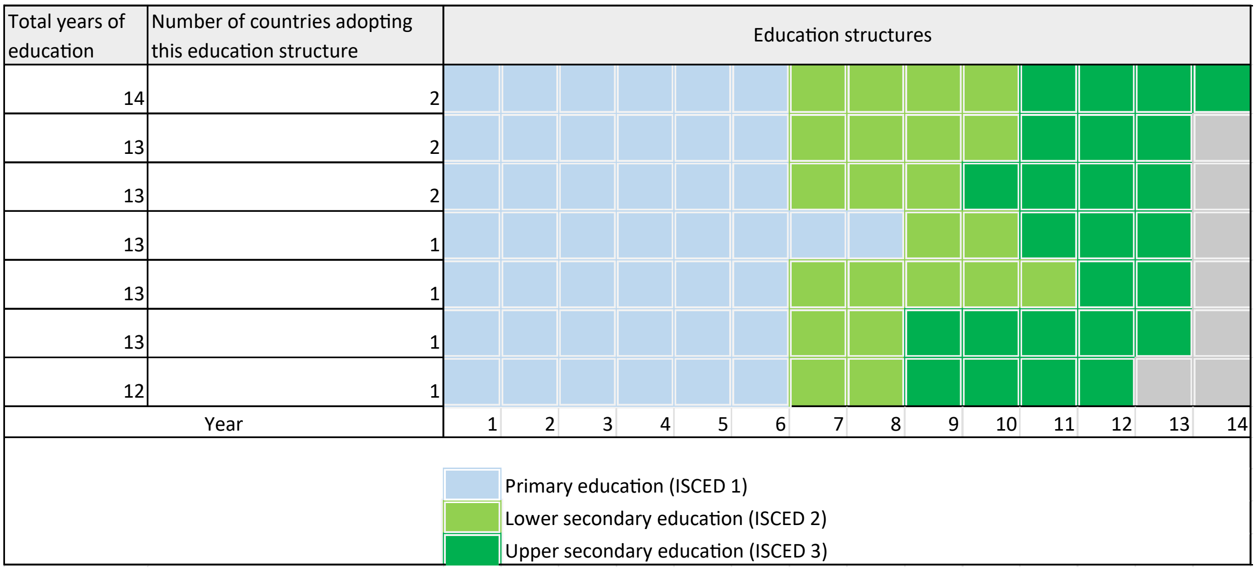
3. Progress assessment of SDG 4 in the Pacific region

3.1 Education structure and provision in the Pacific region under the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) framework

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is the reference classification for organising education programmes and related qualifications by education levels and fields. The basic concepts and definitions of ISCED are intended to be internationally valid and comprehensive of the full range of education systems.[1] The ISCED mappings are essential tools for organising information on national education systems, their programmes and related qualifications in order to ensure the comparability of national education information, as well as supporting the interpretation for regional and international statistical purposes.

Out of 15 countries in the Pacific region (excluding Australia and New Zealand), 10 have submitted the required information for ISCED 2011 so far, which is the latest round of major ISCED mappings. As shown in figure 1, there are significant commonalities shown when comparing the education structures and provisions within the Pacific region under the ISCED framework; six out of the 10 countries that submitted information chose to allocate six years to primary education, and seven years to secondary level, making it the most common education structure in the Pacific region.

Figure 1: Education structures in the Pacific region, categorised under ISCED.



Source: UNESCO, International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).

[1] https://uis.unesco.org/en/files/isced-2011-operational-manual-guidelines-classifying-national-education-programmes-and-related/.

All countries in the Pacific region (based on available data) allocate no fewer than 12 years for basic education, which highlights the high recognition of its importance throughout the region. Upon closer examination of basic education structures, which are typically divided into primary and secondary levels, it becomes apparent that primary education in nearly all countries in the Pacific region is designed to be completed in six years, which aligns with global norms. However, secondary education in the Pacific region tends to extend over a longer period of time compared with other countries, and often spans seven to eight years.

The prolonged secondary-level education in the Pacific region can be attributed to several factors, including geographical challenges, cultural and linguistic diversity, and the transitional role it plays in societies. Many PICs comprise remote islands with limited infrastructure, which poses challenges for school access. Consequently, educational programmes may be designed to accommodate transportation and logistical difficulties. The Pacific region is also incredibly diverse in terms of the number of languages spoken across islands. Education systems often need to cater to this diversity, especially in countries that emphasise bilingual and multilingual education, which could lead to additional years of study. [2]

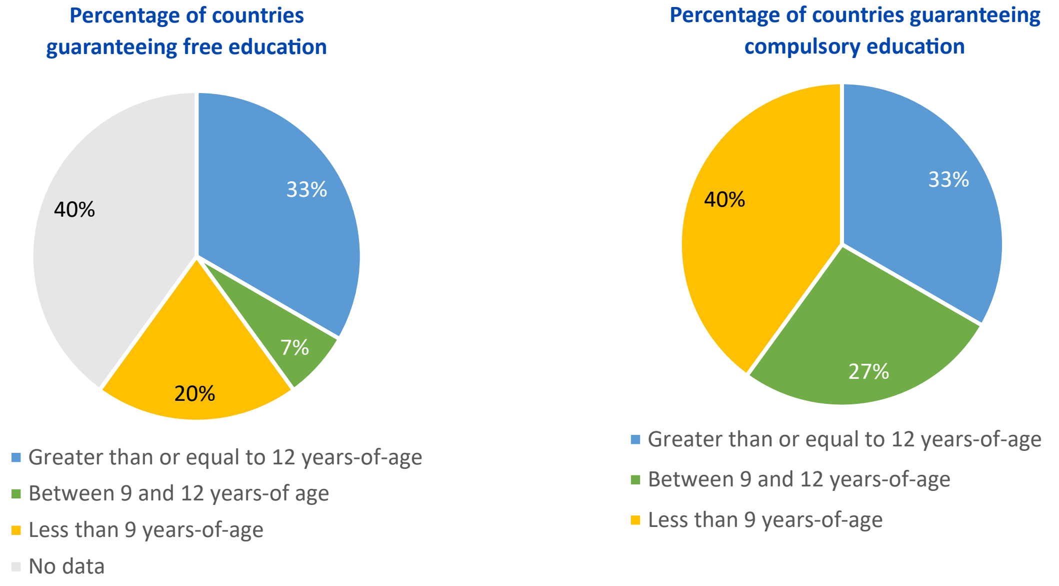
Pacific communities place significant emphasis on customary practices, which include traditional knowledge, skills and cultural values. These elements are often integrated into educational frameworks, which contributes to the extension of secondary education's duration. Moreover, in many PICs, secondary education plays an indispensable role as a transition period in basic education. It serves as a pathway to tertiary education, which encompasses universities or vocational training, or focuses on equipping students with practical skills that are relevant to the workforce, depending on students' preferences. To adequately prepare students for these transitions, curricula often extend beyond the standard six years, which facilitates comprehensive learning and skills development.[3]

3.2 Provision of free and compulsory education in the Pacific region

Education is a basic human right that works to raise people out of poverty, level inequalities and ensure sustainable development. It is an empowering right in itself and one of the most powerful tools by which economically and socially marginalised children and adults can lift themselves out of poverty and fully participate in society. To unleash the full transformational power of education and achieve international aspirations, such as those of the Sustainable Development Agenda, everyone must have access to quality education.

[2] https://eqap.spc.int/sites/default/files/EQAP/Reports/Standard%20of%20Pacific%20Education%20Report.pdf/.
[3] https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/31fde320-d727-437d-b4f8-ad97452c22ae/content/.

Figure 2: Percentage of PICs, by number of years of free and compulsory basic education.



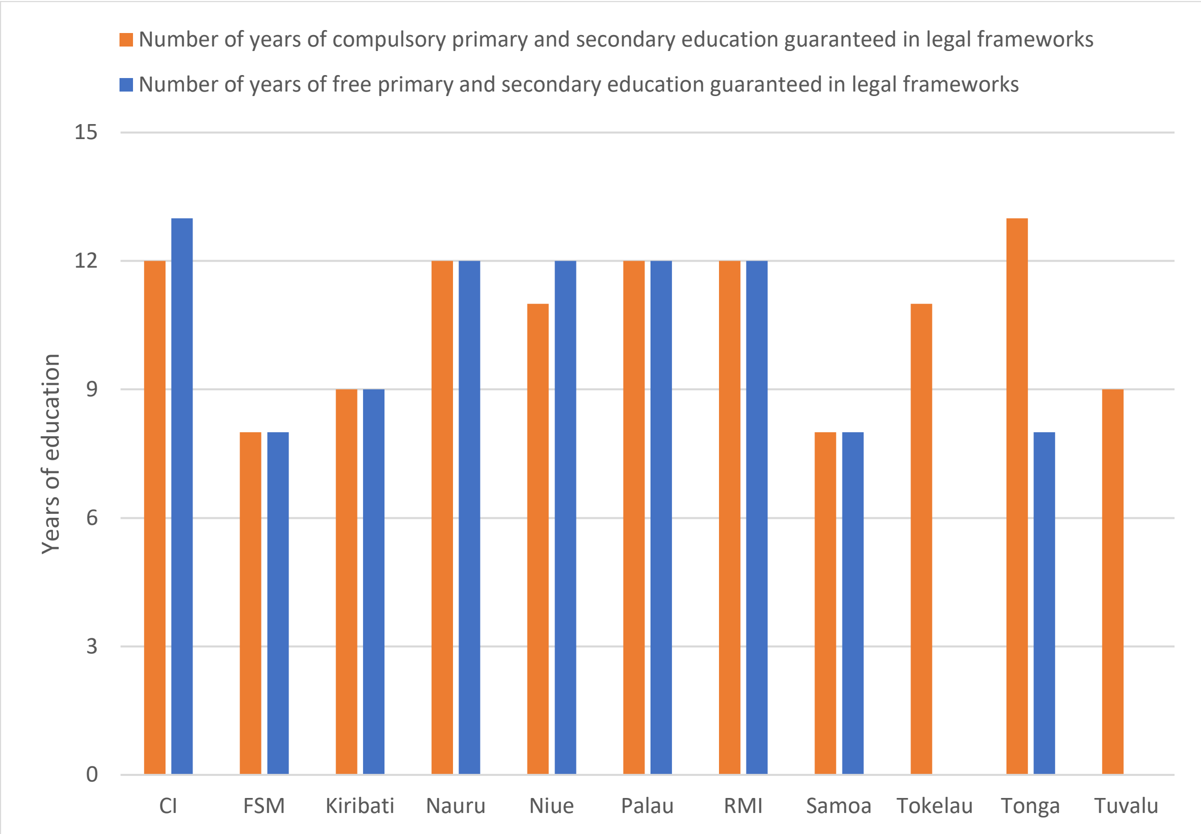
Source: UIS database.

In the Pacific region, progress has been made in ensuring free and compulsory basic education through legal frameworks. Among 15 countries in the Pacific region, six have guaranteed at least nine years of both free and compulsory basic education in their legal frameworks. Sixty per cent of countries in the Pacific region have put in place legal frameworks that guarantee at least nine years of compulsory education, and 40% have also guaranteed no fewer than nine years of free basic education. Between the two indicators of guaranteeing free basic education and guaranteeing compulsory basic education, it is notable that all countries within the Micronesia and Polynesia subregions have achieved at least one of these indicators for a minimum of eight years.

Despite acceptable progress, there remain gaps in the legal provision of free and compulsory education in the Pacific region, particularly within the Melanesian subregion. It is noteworthy that none of the four countries within the Melanesian subregion guarantee either free basic education or compulsory education in their legal frameworks. Considering the significant benefits of quality education at both individual and societal levels, along with the important effects of preventing students from dropping out of schools through the provision of free and compulsory basic education, it is imperative to mobilise relevant stakeholders and policymakers to in order fulfil this missing promise in Melanesian countries.[4]

[4] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366556/.

Figure 3: Number of years of free and compulsory primary and secondary education.



Source: UIS database.[5]

[5] Although Fiji is not portrayed in figure 3, it mentions free education in the Constitution and compulsory education is mentioned in the Education Act 1966 (https://www.laws.gov.fj/Acts/DisplayAct/432) and Compulsory Education Order 1997 (https://www.laws.gov.fj/Acts/DisplayAct/438).
Also note abbreviations: Cook Islands (CI), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI).

4. Quality and relevance

The first PacREF policy objective is to ensure that high-quality, relevant programmes are provided for learners at all levels of education. The goal is for all learners to be provided with a safe and supportive environment, within which they are offered high-quality learning opportunities that are meaningful, valuable, inclusive and future-focused. A key outcome is that curriculum and programmes are embedded in the Pacific context; they reflect Pacific values, cultures, traditional knowledge and skills, and provide a learning environment that supports learning at all levels of education.

4.1 Progress assessment on education access and participation in formal education

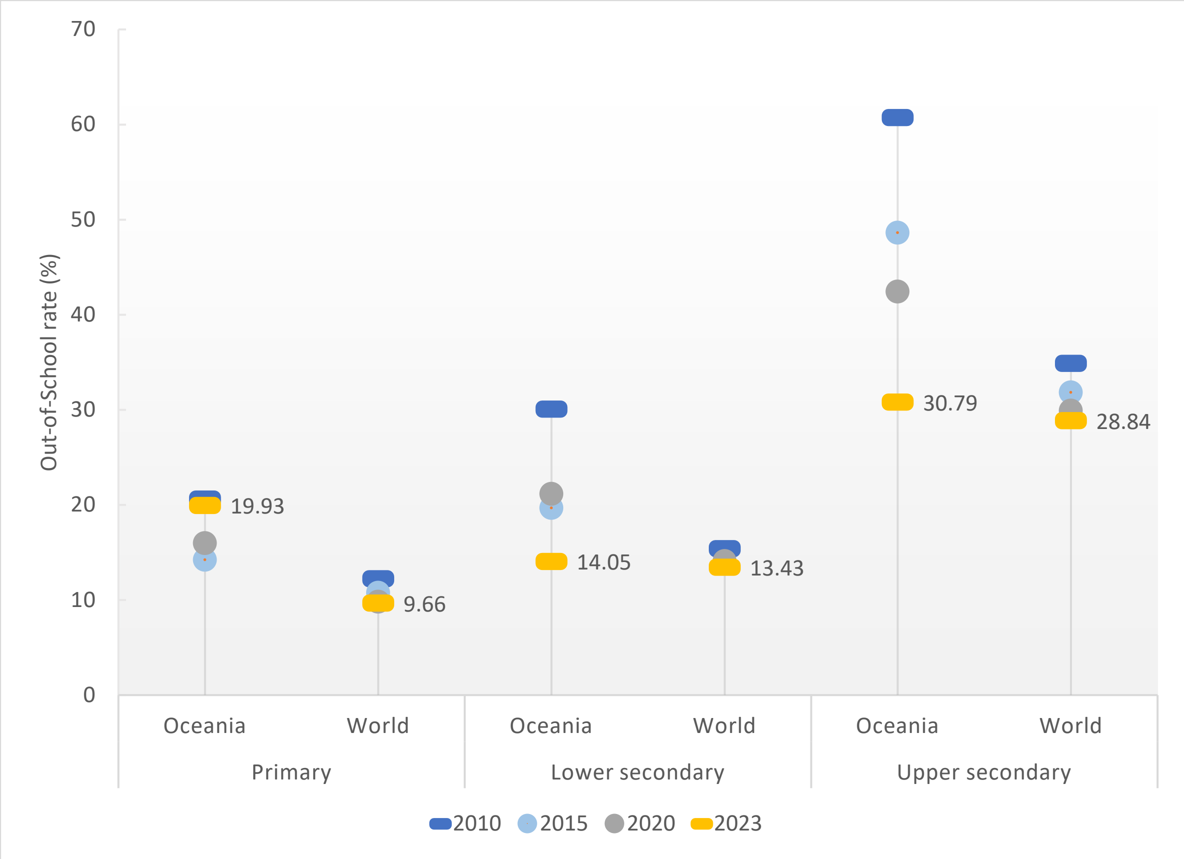
Out-of-school rate, also labelled as SDG 4 indicator 4.1.4, measures the percentage of children and young people in the official age range for the given level of education who are not enrolled in primary, secondary or higher levels of education. The purpose of this indicator is to identify the size of the population that is not enrolled in school for any given level of education, so that timely and targeted policy response can be implemented to ensure that no one is left behind in accessing quality education.[6]

The Oceania region has made significant progress in lowering the percentage of out-of-school students since 2010, especially in the upper secondary level. Based on the regional average estimation by UNESCO Institute of Statistics' (UIS), the Oceania regional average out-of-school rate for upper secondary education was almost halved within the 13-year time span, dropping from 34 percent in 2010 to 17.74 percent in 2023. In comparison, the world average started at a similar level with the Oceania average in 2010 and has since only dropped about six percentage points.

Access and participation in primary level education is concerning. The Oceania regional average of primary out-of-school rate initially dropped by more than 6 percentage points between 2010 to 2015 reaching as low as about 14 percent in 2015. However, it has since bounced back to almost 20 percent by 2023. Usually as students progress through levels of education, fewer and fewer students would continue their studies to the next level, which leads to higher out-of-school rates for higher levels of education. However, in 2023, the Pacific regional out-of-school rate for lower secondary education was lower than the value for primary education, which means that for the Pacific region, access to primary education is even worse than access to lower secondary level. The ripple effect of students dropping out of primary education, usually leads to difficulties in reengaging in higher levels of education, thus causing an increase in out-of-school rate in higher levels in later years. This bounce back in primary level could lead to more reversion in progress in lower secondary and upper secondary levels down the line, if targeted and timely policy response is absent.

[6] https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/metadata-global-thematic-indicators-sdg4-education2030-2017-en_1.pdf/.

Figure 4: Oceania regional average out-of-school rates vs. world average (%).

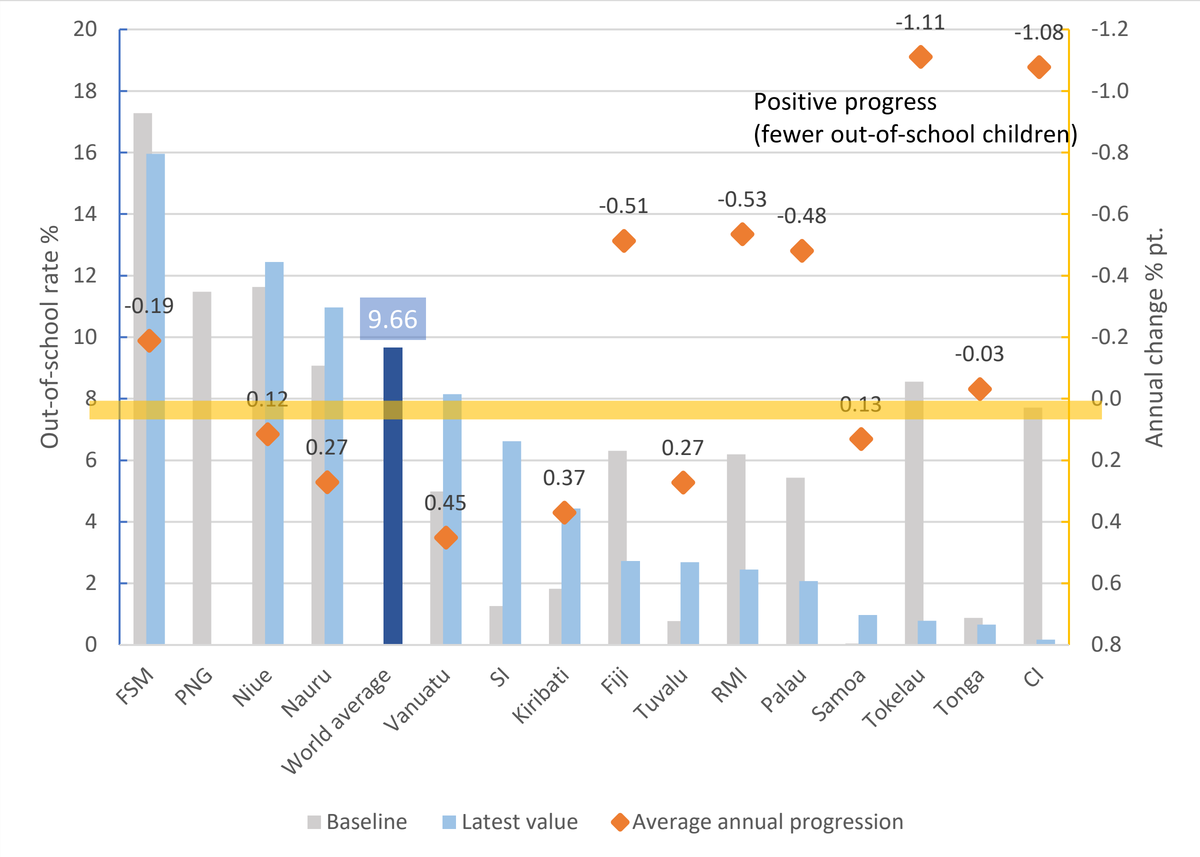


Source: UIS database.[7]

By taking a closer look at country-level out-of-school rates, more evidence can be found that suggests a rebound in the numbers of students dropping out of basic education as early as the primary level. Seven out of 15 countries in the Pacific region (excluding Australia and New Zealand) have displayed an upward trend in primary out-of-school rates since 2015.[8] At the same time, progress is observed in PICs such as Tokelau and Cook Islands (CI), where out-of-school rates for primary level education dropped by more than 1% pt. percentage point on average every year since 2015. However, these PICs are also small in terms of population size, which diminishes their impact on regional averages. While more than 70% of PICs still out-perform the world average in this measurement, an upward trend in out-of-school rate for primary level education ought to be taken into account in countries' education policies and COVID-19 mitigation plans.

[7] "3.4 Equitable access and participation" is the section that shows the parity index indicators by gender.
[8] https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EPDC_NEP_2018_PapuaNewGuinea.pdf/.

Figure 5: Primary school out-of-school rates, by country (%).

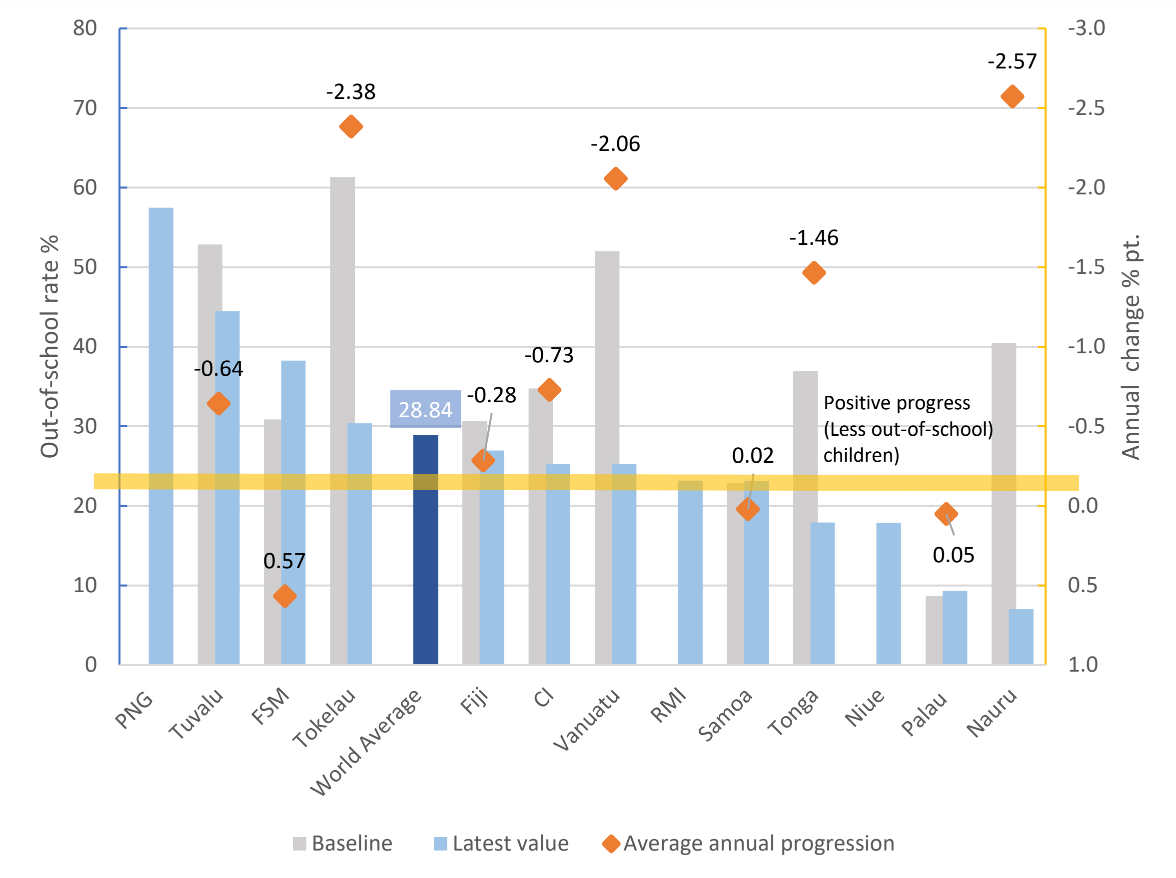


Source: UIS database.

By turning to country-level out-of-school rates for upper secondary level, an overall positive progress is observed in figure 6, which aligns with the pattern in the regional average estimation. Out of 13 PICs that have available data, seven of them reduced the rate of youth of upper secondary school age being out-of-school when compared with baseline values since 2010. Strong progress is spotted in countries such as Nauru, Vanuatu and Tokelau, where the rates dropped by more than 2% pt. on average every year since 2010. Based on the latest country-level values, nine PICs outperformed the world average of 2023, with Tokelau trailing closely behind with a high average annual progression in lowering the out-of-school rate.

The overwhelmingly positive progress at country level in lowering upper secondary out-of-school rates does come with a caveat, which is the missing or regressing data from some of the more populated PICs, which prohibits the analysis for future trend and annual progression. The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is noticeably experiencing a rise in the out-of-school rate ever since it first reported this measurement on the UIS database in 2016. However, positive progress that has been made at both the regional level and country level for most PICs is encouraging.

Figure 6: Upper secondary school out-of-school rates, by country (%).



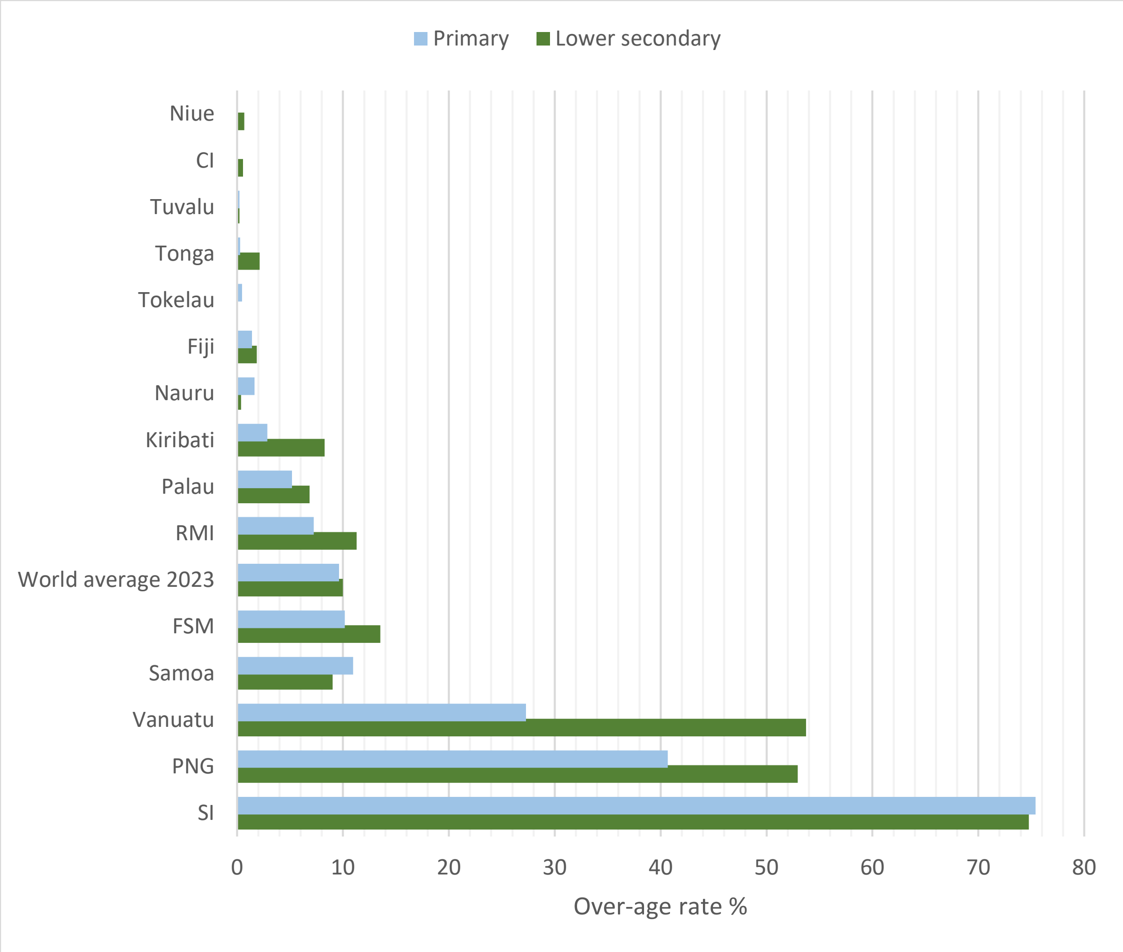
Source: UIS database.

The over-age rate, which is also an SDG 4 indicator labelled 4.1.5, measures the percentage of pupils enrolled in a given level of education who are at least two years over-age for their current grade. The basic education curricula are often designed to be age-specific, under the assumption that cohorts are made up of students from similar age groups. Therefore, having older students in the classroom could lead to several negative outcomes including learning difficulties, in-class tensions and security concerns. Overaged students are also more likely to drop out of school, making them more marginalised and vulnerable to being left out of the benefits from education.[9]

By comparing over-age data in figure 7 with country-level out-of-school rates in the Pacific region, the similarity between the outcomes of the two measurements can be observed, which demonstrates the negative impacts of delayed entrance to basic education. The Solomon Islands (SI), Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Vanuatu are registering significant over-age rates for both primary and lower secondary levels, with SI having more than 70% of students in both levels being at least two years over-age for their current grade. At the same time, all three countries are below or around average in terms of primary and lower secondary out-of-school rates in the Pacific region. Vanuatu and SI have recorded the fastest rates of increasing primary out-of-school rates in the Pacific region since 2015, which indicates the worsening of access to basic education in these two countries.

[9] https://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/too-old-school-tackling-liberias-overage-school-problem-14315/.

Figure 7: Percentage of pupils who are at least two years over-age for their current grade, by country (%).



Source: UIS Database.

While recognising the fact that, especially on the regional level, the PICs are still outperforming world averages in terms of out-of-school rates, the large proportion of over-age students is a longstanding issue that should be addressed. Coordinated and targeted policy efforts are needed to ensure children from all backgrounds, especially those from poorer underserved areas, can enter the education system at the right age, progress through and complete school on time.

4.2 Safe and enabling school learning environment (SDG 4.a)

To achieve the policy objective of providing high-quality and relevant programmes for learners, it is imperative to ensure safe and supportive school learning environments that not only protect the physical and mental health of students but are also adequately equipped to support all relevant skills development of students, including digital skills and ICT competencies. Considering the all-encompassing digital transformations that rapidly revolutionise all aspects of daily life, as well as the great potential of digital technologies in transforming education systems around the world, learning environments today need to go beyond providing essential services like electricity and basic water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities.

Learning environments have undoubtedly changed in the past decades, mostly due to the inclusion of emerging information and communication technologies and online media in the classroom. At the same time, the modern learners are more comfortable with higher degrees of technology-enabled learning, as technology, mobile devices and applications have always been their primary source of information, knowledge and social discourse.[10] Other than its significant application in revolutionising pedagogical method, digital technology has also become a social necessity to ensure education as a basic human right, especially in a world that is experiencing more frequent crises and conflicts. During the COVID-19 pandemic, countries without sufficient information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and well-resourced digital learning systems suffered the greatest education disruptions and learning losses. Adequate ICT facilities, both hardware and software, need to be installed in today's school campuses to not only support the digital transformation of the learning experience – which allows greater flexibility, adaptation, engagement and feedback for the learner that paves the way for more learner-centred environments – but also to increase resilience of the education system by expanding remote education capacity in the face of unexpected challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic.[11]

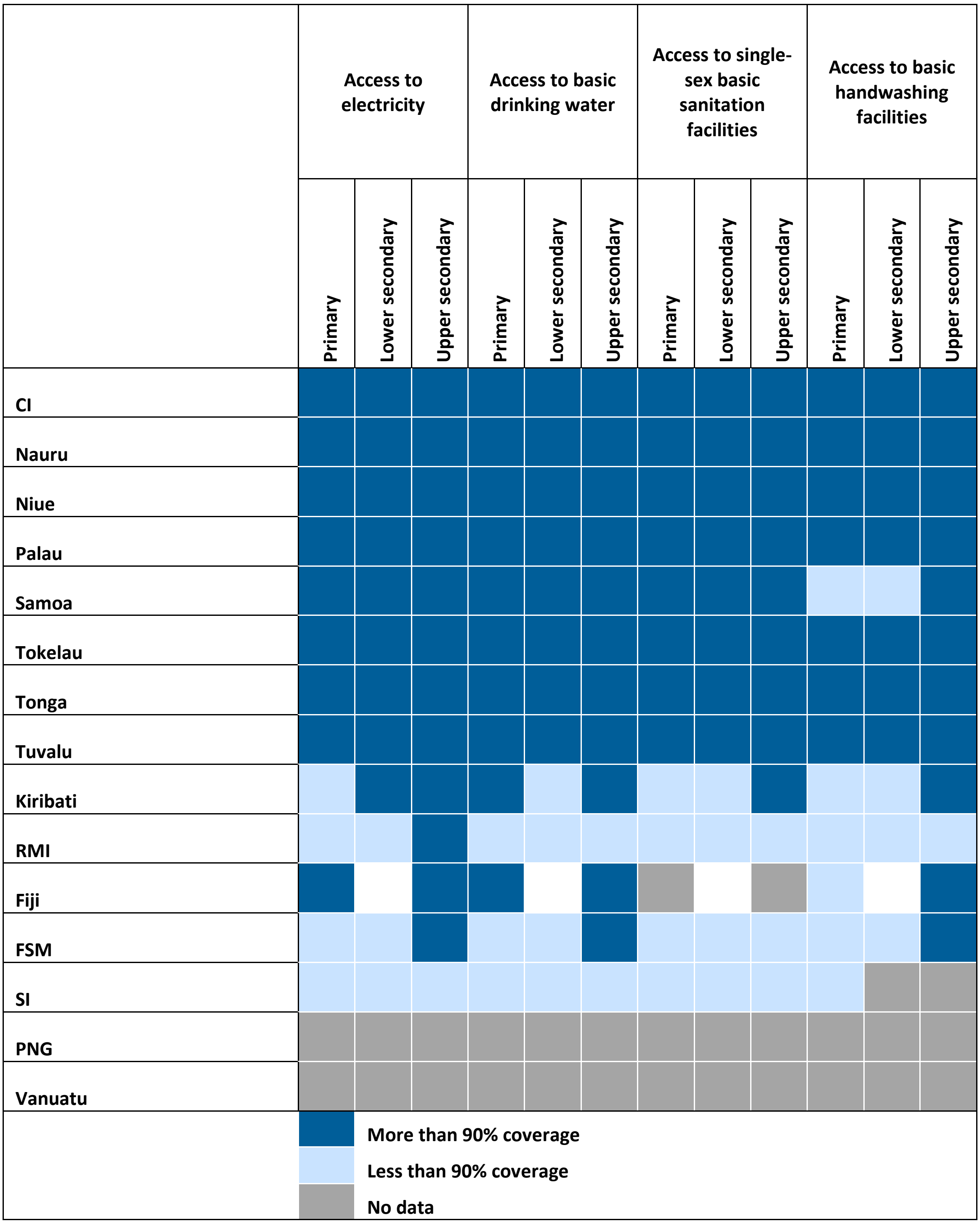
4.3 Access to electricity and basic WASH facilities

Provision of basic services, including electricity and WASH facilities, forms the basis for a safe and enabling learning environment as well as a resilient school health system. Insufficient access to essential infrastructure within schools can directly affect educational outcomes. Access to clean water and handwashing facilities is vital for drinking and maintaining hygiene, and plays a pivotal role in preventing water-related illnesses. A consistent electricity supply is crucial to fostering an enabling learning environment, allowing for the integration of technology in teaching methods and materials, and ensuring that sanitation facilities have uninterrupted water flow. Single-sex sanitation facilities are also important, especially for adolescent girls, in establishing an inclusive learning environment, as without proper and private sanitation facilities, many girls either miss school during their menstrual cycles or potentially drop out entirely due to a lack of privacy and hygiene resources, which perpetuates gender disparities in educational attainment (UNESCO, 2020, Global Education Monitoring Report, Gender Report: A new generation: 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education).

By looking at figure 8, a decent coverage of basic services in basic education campuses, as well as good data availability on these indicators, can be observed in the Pacific region. Out of the 15 PICs that were analysed in this report, 11 of them have recent data on all indicators on provision of basic services in the school boundary at all levels of basic education. Seven PICs have achieved more than 90% coverage for both electricity and basic WASH facilities on schools for all levels of basic education.

[10] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000252335/.
[11] https://www.unesco.org/en/digital-education/need-know/.

Figure 8: Coverage of electricity and WASH facilities on campus, by levels of education.[12]



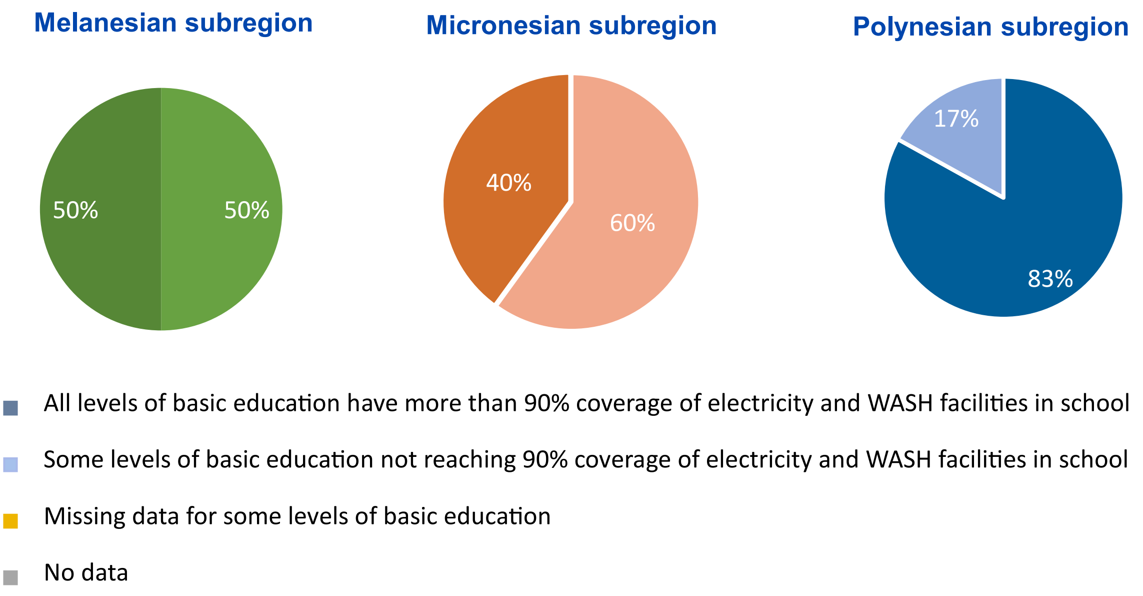
Source: UIS database.

[12] As lower secondary schools do not exist in Fiji, years 7 and 8 of lower secondary classification of UIS questionnaire are included in the primary school data, and years 9 and 10 are included in secondary school data.

When comparing the proportion of schools that have access to essential services between different levels of basic education, it is evident that upper secondary schools tend to have better coverage of electricity and basic WASH facilities within the school boundaries than schools at lower levels. In the cases of access to electricity in RMI, access to electricity, basic drinking water, and basic handwashing facilities in the FSM, and access to basic handwashing facilities in Samoa, all have shown the same pattern of upper secondary level schools being better equipped. Considering the relatively smaller number of upper secondary schools as compared to primary schools, and their proximity to more densely populated areas, the observed tendency of upper secondary schools being better equipped with basic services is understandable. However, this should not undermine the necessity of improving access to electricity and basic WASH facilities on school campuses at lower levels of basic education such as primary and lower secondary levels, even in remote and hard-to-reach areas. Education is a fundamental human right and a safe and well-equipped school is a key enabler of the this right, no matter which stage it is of a student's learning journey. Adequate resources and political will should be allocated to ensure schools at all levels of basic education are properly equipped with necessary basic services.

A closer examination of country performance shows some interesting distinctions between countries of different subregions. The islands countries in Polynesia – which consists of six countries including the Cook Islands (CI), Niue, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga and Tuvalu – not only have recent data available on access of basic services on campus across all levels of education, but also score relatively high coverage on most indicators compared with the other two subregions. In the Polynesian subregion, 83% of countries have more than 90% of schools of each level of basic education (primary, lower secondary and upper secondary) with access to electricity and basic WASH facilities. The subregion has good data availability for monitoring the progress of basic services coverage in all three levels of basic education.

Figure 9: Percentage of countries with 90% of schools having electricity and basic WASH facilities, by subregion.



Source: UIS Database.

In the other two subregions, Melanesia and Micronesia, there is more room for improvement, in terms of both school coverage of electricity and basic WASH facilities, as well as in data availability. In Micronesia, 40% of countries have achieved coverage of at least 90% at all levels of basic education, and the other 40% have recent data available for the monitoring of coverage of all levels, but have not reached 90% coverage in some levels of basic education. On the other hand, in the Melanesia subregion, the data gap is more noticeable. All countries in the subregion have missing data for at least some levels of basic education in terms of access to electricity and basic WASH facilities on campus, and 50% of them have not submitted any data on this indicator so far. Comprehensive and reliable data on school facilities is a critical prerequisite for effective and timely monitoring of students' learning environments. The current data gap, especially in the Melanesian and Micronesian subregions, should be addressed with high priority as it hinders more evidence-based analysis on this topic in the Pacific region.

Every PIC should strive to not only expand access to these basic services to cover as many schools as possible, but also to expand data availability on these crucial indicators to ensure effective monitoring and identification of the "progress-made" and persisting gaps. Considering the fundamental role of a safe and enabling learning environment in promoting education outcomes and keeping students at schools, more commitments from all relevant stakeholders, both in terms of financial resources and political will, are imperative to achieve full coverage of basic services in schools of all levels of education in the Pacific region.

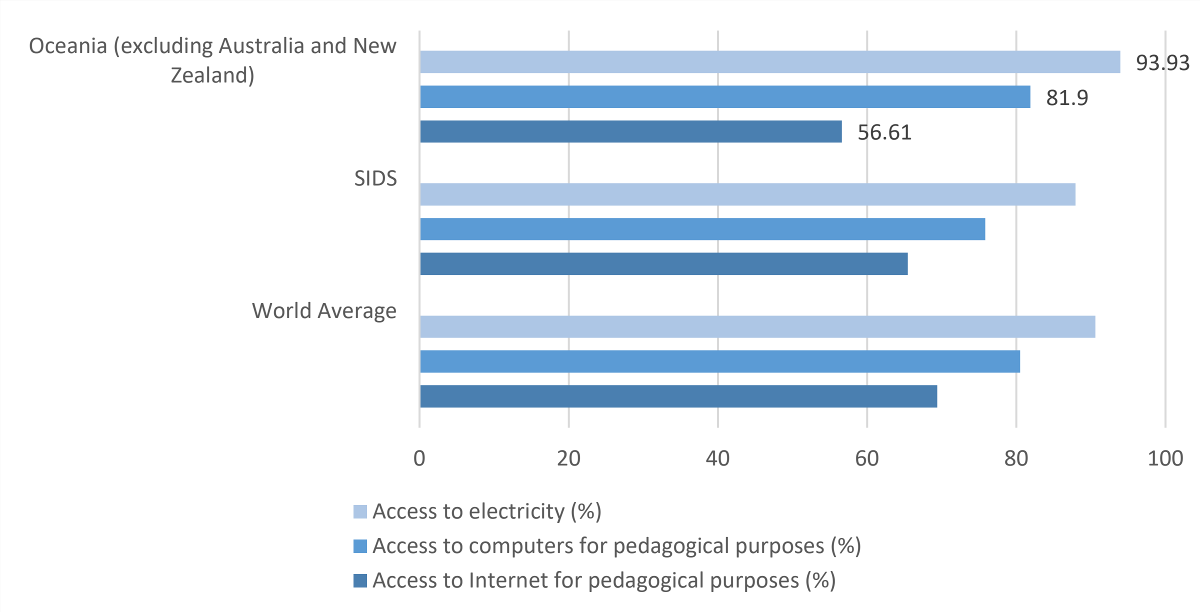
4.4 Digital infrastructure in schools

Regarding the availability of digital infrastructure in schools, a mixed outcome is observed regionally. PICs (Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand) outperform both the world average and Small Island Developing States (SIDs) in terms of both access to electricity and access to computers in upper secondary schools. Within upper secondary schools in PICs, 82% are estimated to have access to computers for pedagogical purposes, which exceeds the world average by 2% pt. and the SIDs average by 6% pt. However, the Pacific region falls short on ensuring internet access in schools, with only 56.6% of upper secondary schools having access to internet for pedagogical purposes, which is lower than both the world average and the SIDs average.

Due to its unique geographic characteristics and spread-out population, the ICT connectivity gap has always been evident in the Pacific region. Submarine cable connections that support the rapid and stable transmission of large amounts of data are not as common as they are in other parts of the world. In the Pacific region, half of the SIDS have only one cable or none connecting them to the outside world.[13] Compared with providing electricity access or ICT hardware such as computers, ensuring stable internet connection in schools, especially via submarine international cables that connect to remote islands, requires more resource mobilisation and coordinated efforts from both within and outside the Pacific region.[14]

[13] https://unctad.org/publication/digital-economy-report-pacific-edition-2022/.
[14] https://www.itu.int/hub/publication/d-ind-dig_trends_asp-01-2021/.

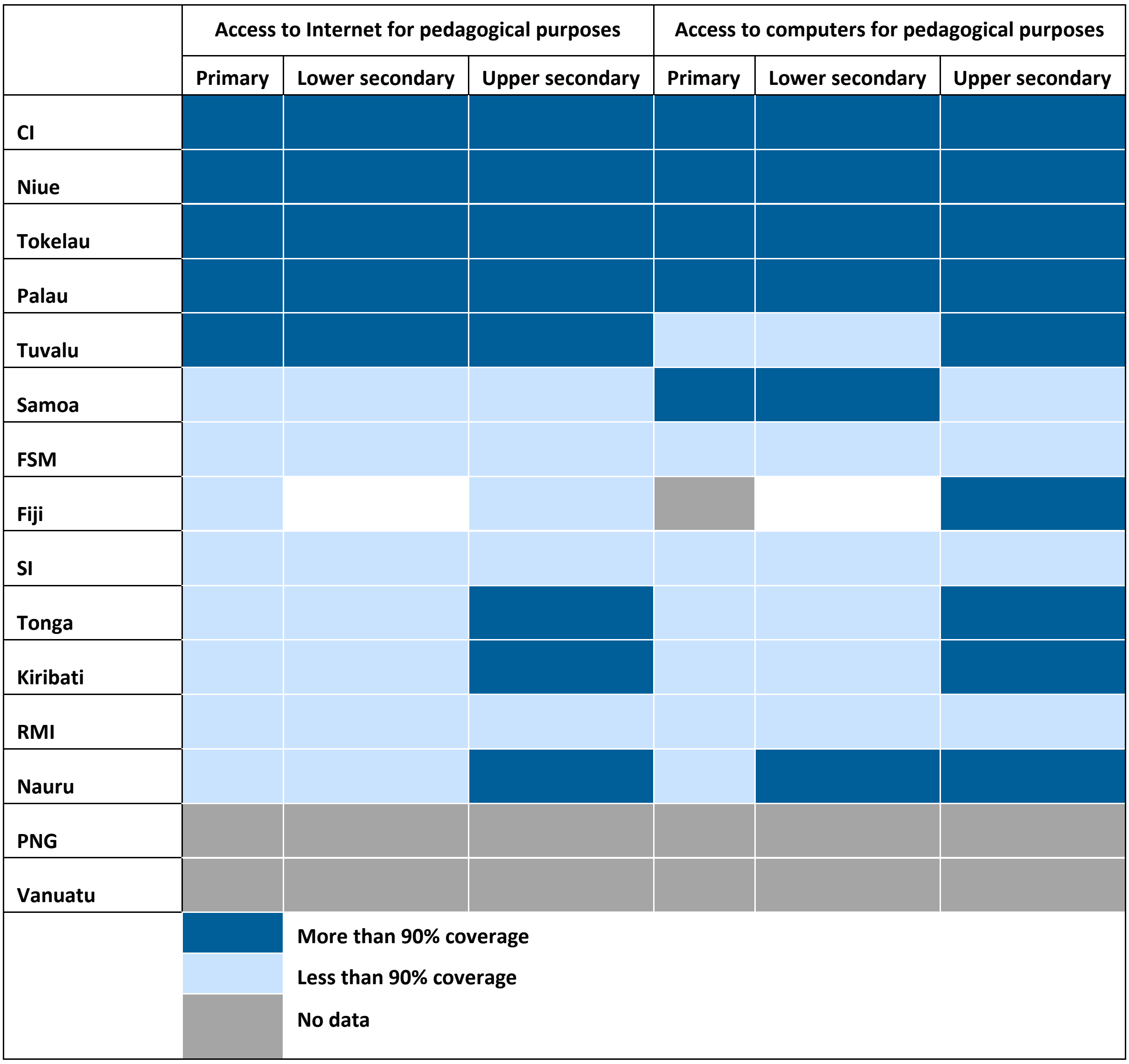
Figure 10: Average of access to digital infrastructure in upper secondary schools (%).



Source: UIS database.

PICs are experiencing increased opportunities for wireless internet connectivity. When looking at the country-level data of digital infrastructure availability in schools, a similar pattern is observed close to the one that has been discovered in access to basic services, as discussed above. Countries in the Polynesia subregion continue to outperform others in providing access to digital infrastructure in schools, where three out of four PICs (CI, Niue, Tokelau) are on the top of the chart, which means they have more than 90% coverage of both internet and computer access for all levels of basic education. At the same time, the Melanesian subregion appears to be falling behind in terms of availability on the topic. Half of Melanesian countries do not have recent data on the availability of digital infrastructure in schools.

Figure 11: Coverage of internet and computer access on campus, by levels of education.



Source: UIS database.[15]

In the face of the ever-changing world that is deeply influenced by rapidly developing technology, especially in the digital domain, equipping future generations with adequate digital competencies and skills seems more important than ever. Digital technology can lower the education access cost for some disadvantaged groups, and it can also improve education quality by encouraging engagement and facilitating collaboration and connection for learners. Not to mention how internet can drastically lower the difficulty for collecting and accessing information, which could significantly bolster the learning process for children. Digital technology tools have been widely adopted by learners, educators and institutions around the world, and now young people are often expected to learn a broad range of skills in order to navigate the digital world.[16] As time goes on, future generations without the required digital competencies and skills will be at risk of being excluded from engaging in the future

[15] As lower secondary schools do not exist in Fiji, years 7 and 8 of lower secondary classification of UIS questionnaire are included in the primary school data, and years 9 and 10 are included in secondary school data.
[16] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385723/.

technology-driven society, as well as being disadvantaged in learning for not being able to access the vast information and knowledge that is available on the internet.[17]

More coordinated efforts and strong commitment from all relevant stakeholders are needed to address the shortage of critical digital infrastructure in schools of all levels of education in the Pacific region. Considering the long-lasting and profound detrimental effects of a future generation of low digital capacity, we need effective and targeted actions in a timely manner. Noticing the strong correlation between coverage of digital infrastructure and coverage of basic services such as electricity, we also need to acknowledge the fundamental role of stable electricity supply in digitalisation of education environments. Provision of basic services cannot be neglected while striving to expand digital infrastructure in schools.

4.5 Access to adapted infrastructure for students with disabilities

As previously mentioned, education is a basic human right for everyone, and that includes people with disabilities. The importance of education for people with disabilities has been emphasised in multiple international declarations and conventions, including the *Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education in 1994*, as well as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted in 2006*.[18] It was further strengthened by the *Incheon declaration for the implementation of SDG 4 – Education 2030 agenda* in its call for inclusive education for all.[19]

Provision of adapted school facilities including ramps, toilets and special equipment, as well as the appropriate teaching and learning materials, is an important step to include children with disabilities in mainstream education systems.[20] By looking at country-level data on access to adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities in schools in the Pacific region, both encouraging progress as well as room for improvement. Niue, Palau and Tokelau have reported achieving more than 90% coverage of schools of all levels of basic education, which lays a strong foundation for inclusive quality education for students with disabilities. More PICs report achieving more than 90% coverage for upper secondary schools (seven) than for lower secondary and primary schools (three), which is similar to the trend that is observed in provision of basic services. Considering the natural progression of students with disabilities, as they have to first survive in and progress through primary and lower secondary education before entering upper secondary schools, the importance of provision of adapted infrastructure and materials in schools of lower levels of basic education cannot be overlooked.

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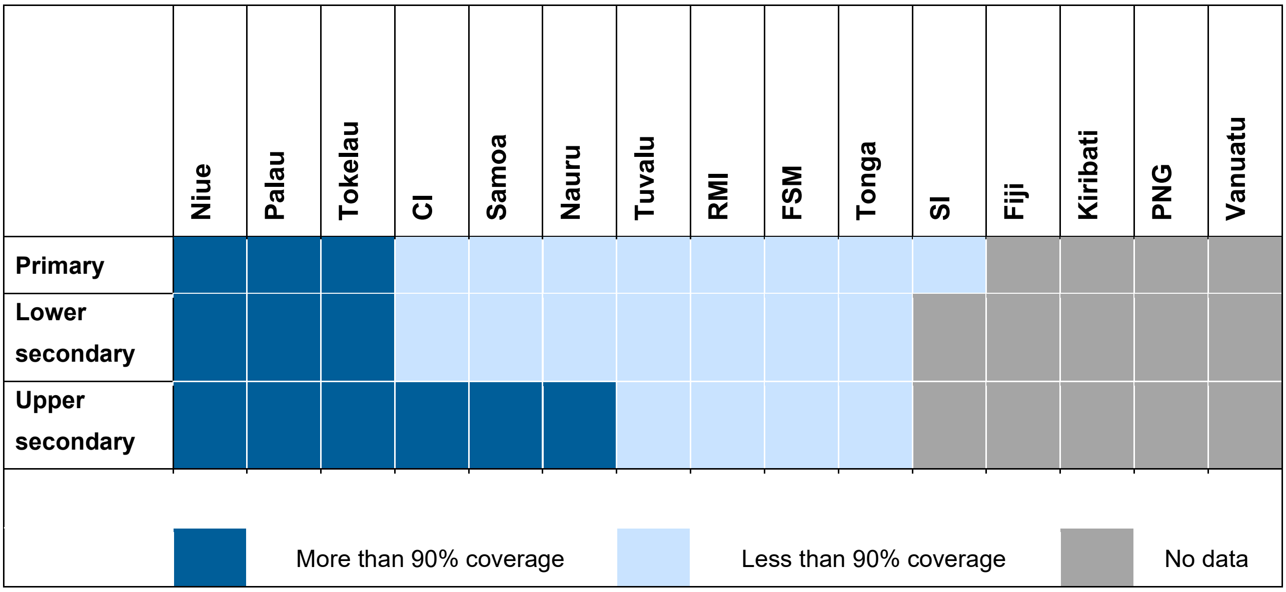
[17] https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/done-right-internet-use-among-children-can-increase-learning-opportunities-and-build/.

[18] Details of the Salamanca Statement: https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/Salamanca_Statement_1994.pdf/.
Details of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd/.

[19] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656/.

[20] https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/en/issue-briefs/improve-learning/disability-inclusive-education-and-learning/.

Figure 12: Provision of adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities.



Source: UIS database.

Compared with provision of basic services and digital infrastructure in schools, it appears that there is a greater data gap in provision of adapted infrastructure in schools. Four PICs have no data available for this indicator. Other than the data gap on adapted infrastructure, a worse shortage of country-level data is found in other disaggregated SDG indicators by disability status. As of the latest update of UIS data on SDG 4 indicators in 2024, in the whole Oceania region, there is no country-level data disaggregated by disability status for target 4.1 indicators such as completion rate, out-of-school rate and minimum proficiencies, all of which are important for monitoring the inclusivity of students with disabilities in each country's basic education system. Without disaggregated data by disability status, especially on access, participation and learning outcomes of basic education, monitoring and review of "progress-made" in promoting inclusive education for students with disabilities will be challenging.

5. Learning pathways

The PacREF policy objective for learning pathways is to ensure that learners' needs are met through a broad range of programmes and delivery modalities. The goal is to provide equal access for all learners to multiple and seamless pathways and modalities of learning that will allow them to meet their full potential. A key outcome is that the youngest learners (pre-schoolers) are prepared to engage in formal schooling and that there are linked pathways between levels of schooling and beyond (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2018. Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018-2030: Moving Towards Education 2030. P. 9).[21]

Early childhood education (ECE) continues to be a priority area of PacREF that encourages increased access and participation of young children in ECE programmes prior to their starting of primary school. However, the mode of ECE provision varies across the Pacific region, with some governments funding ECE teachers' salaries and providing ECE facilities and materials, while others provide policy and regulatory frameworks to support and structure nongovernmental provision of early childhood education.

Although few PICs have achieved full participation in ECE, the majority of children in the Pacific region benefit from some form of ECE.

To improve ECE access and participation, PacREF is developing regional tools and processes that assist PIC ministries of education to implement their ECE policies. The regional tools and processes include policy guidelines for the development of good quality ECE; tools for the governance, management, quality assurance, financing and programme development of ECE; and a framework for the domains of home to school transitions.

PacREF is also developing regional tools and processes that improve secondary and post-secondary pathways, such as TVET programmes, a framework identifying learning pathways from ECE to adulthood, a Pacific skills portal, and a regional Pacific skills dialogue/summit.

5.1 Early childhood education in the Pacific region

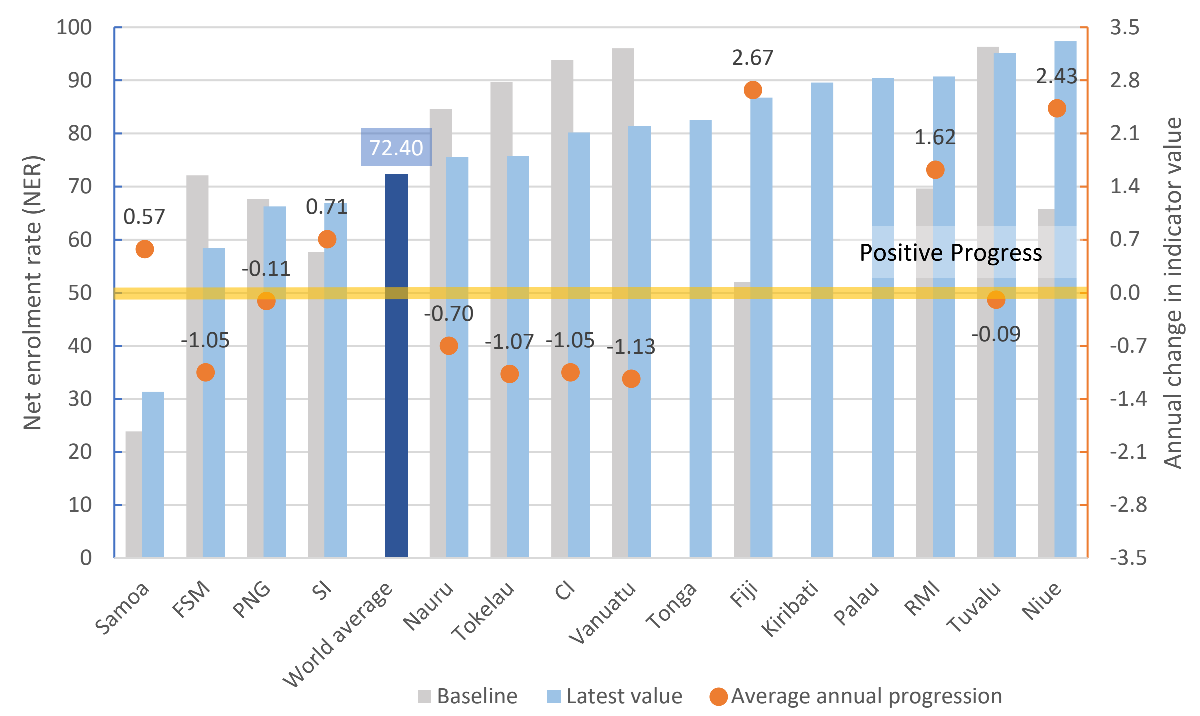
ECE is a vital part of the education system in the Pacific region and plays a key role in fostering children's development and well-being. The period from birth to eight years of age is a crucial childhood development stage because it is the fastest brain development period in one's life, as well as the period when children are the most sensitive to interventions (Black, Maureen M et al. 2017. Early childhood development coming of age: science through the life course. Lancet (London, England) vol. 389,10064).[22] ECE goes beyond preparing children for primary school; it lays the foundation for their emotional well-being and lifelong learning. Children who attend ECE are more likely to enhance their understanding, perform better academically and earn higher incomes as adults (Shariff, Abusaleh. 2018. Cost-Benefit Analysis of Incentives and Improved Quality of Pre-school Education at Anganwadi Centers in Rajasthan).[23] An accessible, inclusive and high-quality ECE system is often regarded as one of the most effective investments a country can make in human capital, as it promotes long-term

[21] https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/PACIFI~1_0.PDF).
[22] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5884058/.
[23] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329706121Cost Benefit Analysis of Incentives and Improved Quality of Pre-school Education at Anganwadi Centers in Rajasthan/.

holistic development, gender equality and social cohesion, and has many other long-lasting positive effects on the society.

In the Pacific region, decent progress can be observed in children's participation in early childhood education. When comparing the results of SDG 4 indicator 4.2.2 – the adjusted net enrolment rate (NER) in early childhood education for children one year before the official primary entry age, which measures the percentage of children in the age group one year prior to the expected age of entrance to primary education who are enrolled in ECE programme – it can be observed that the majority of PICs have recorded NERs higher than the world average, which signals a high level of ECE access. Out of 15 PICs, five of them have recorded positive progress compared with their baseline values, and five countries have recorded regressing trends in this indicator.

Figure 13: ANER one year before the official primary entry age (%) vs. annual % pt. change in ER.

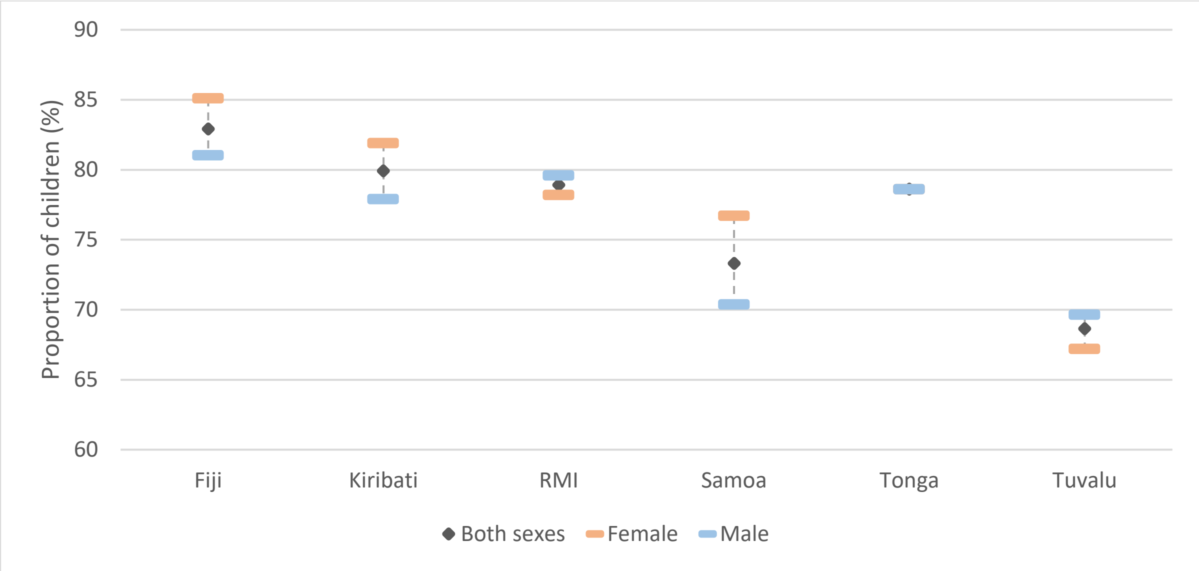


Source: UIS database.

By examining another SDG 4 global indicator, the proportion of children aged 24 to 59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being (4.2.1), children's development and readiness to start primary school can be monitored within the Pacific region. This indicator is measured through household surveys or direct assessments of children. However, variations in the methods that are used to capture children's early childhood experiences and the lack of a commonly agreed-upon definition of what constitutes being "developmentally on track" can limit the effectiveness of this indicator.

As shown in figure 14, all PICs that have available data for this indicator have recorded around or above 70% of children aged 24 to 59 months being developmentally on track, with top performers even reaching 80%. When disaggregating this indicator by sex, it can be seen that in three out of six PICs, which have available data, that girls are more likely to be developmentally on track than boys. This gender gap in school preparedness is most substantial in Samoa, which reaches nearly 6.5% pt., where 76.7% of girls aged 24 to 59 months are developmentally on track, compared with only 70.4% of boys in the same age group.

Figure 14: Children (24–59 months) developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being (%).



Source: UIS database.[24]

Note: For Tonga, male, female and combined are all equal.

Interestingly, by cross-examining the result of indicator 4.2.1 (proportion of children who are developmentally on track) with indicator 4.2.2 (NER in ECE one year before the official primary entry age) reveals that these two indicators do not always correlate with one another. In Fiji, Kiribati, RMI and Tonga, both the NER of ECE and proportion of children who are developmentally on track are relatively high in value, which indicates a positive correlation between these two indicators. However, findings in Samoa and Tuvalu contradict this trend. In Samoa, the adjusted NER in ECE for children one year before the official primary entry age in 2022 was 31.35%, which is less than half in value compared with all other PICs. Yet, in terms of proportion of children aged 24 to 59 months who are developmentally on track, Samoa does not lag far behind from top performing countries, with 73.3% of children aged 24 to 59 months being developmentally on track. Samoa even outperforms Tuvalu in this indicator (73.3% vs. 68.6%), despite Tuvalu recording higher than 95% in the adjusted NER in ECE for children one year before the official primary entry age.

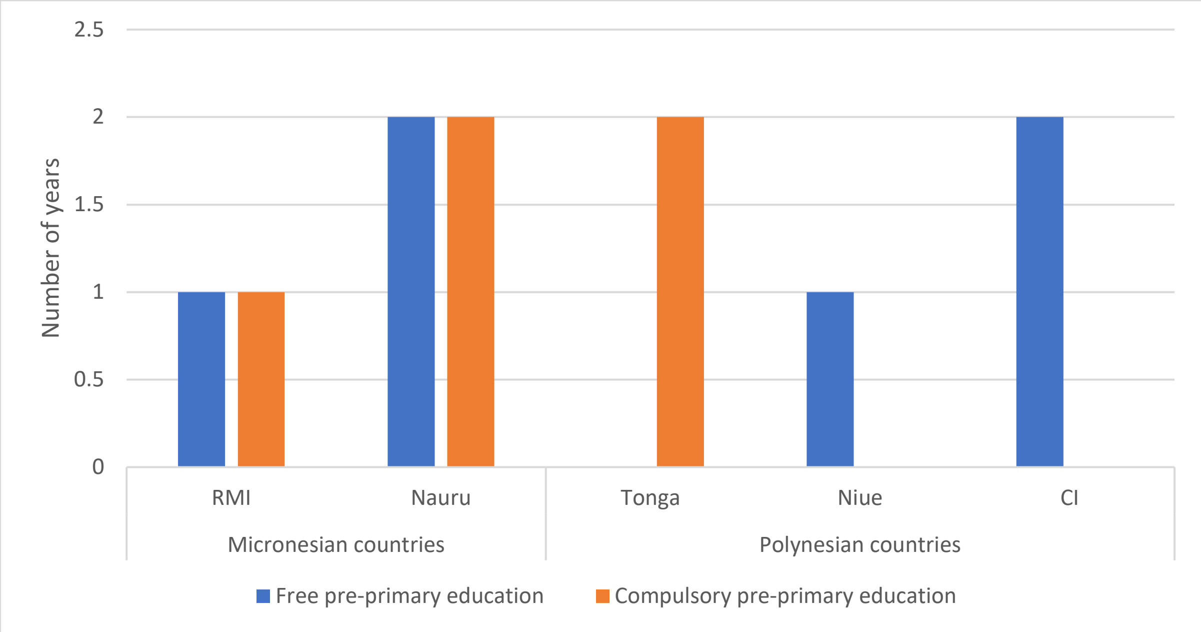
5.2 Expanding the right to education to include early childhood

Early childhood education is widely regarded as having long-lasting positive effects on children's foundational learning, development of fundamental competencies, development of self-regulation and executive functions, and school-readiness. Despite the immense benefits, as of 2024, no international legal framework explicitly guarantees children's right to ECE. In 2015, the commitment to one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education was first announced with the adoption of the Education 2030 Agenda.[25] An SDG 4 indicator (4.2.5) was also dedicated to monitoring the number of years of free and compulsory pre-primary education that is guaranteed in legal frameworks. This call for expanding the right to education to include ECE was further reiterated in the *2022 World conference on early childhood care and education*[26] in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, as well as in the *2024*

[24] For Tonga, male, female and combined are all equal.
[25] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656/.
[26] https://www.unesco.org/en/early-childhood-education/2022-world-conference?hub=70242/.

Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education jointly launched by UNESCO and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).[27]

Figure 15: Number of years of free and compulsory pre-primary education guaranteed in legal frameworks.



Source: UIS database.

Despite the international effort of advocating for free and compulsory quality early childhood education, progress remains limited. Recent UNESCO analysis, which is based on a review of the legal frameworks of 183 countries that have available data, has found that only 63 countries (34% of the countries in the analysis) have established at least one year of free pre-primary education in national legal frameworks, and only 51 countries (28% of all countries in the analysis) have adopted at least one year of pre-primary education as compulsory.[28] A similar situation is found in the Pacific region, where early childhood education is often left out in national legal frameworks regarding the right to education. Among the 15 countries in this analysis, four (27%) have guaranteed at least one year of free pre-primary education, and three (20%) have guaranteed at least one year of compulsory pre-primary education in their legal frameworks. Both percentages are lower than the world numbers, which indicates the need for strong political will and commitment to ensure children's right to education, beginning with the youngest children in the Pacific region.

5.3 Participation in higher education

Learning opportunities beyond basic education, especially TVET and higher education, are crucial in meeting the diverse needs of learners and allows them to reach their full potential. An inclusive, high-quality and labour market relevant post-secondary education system that provides diverse options, including TVET and universities, is an integral component of achieving the goal of PacREF's second policy area.

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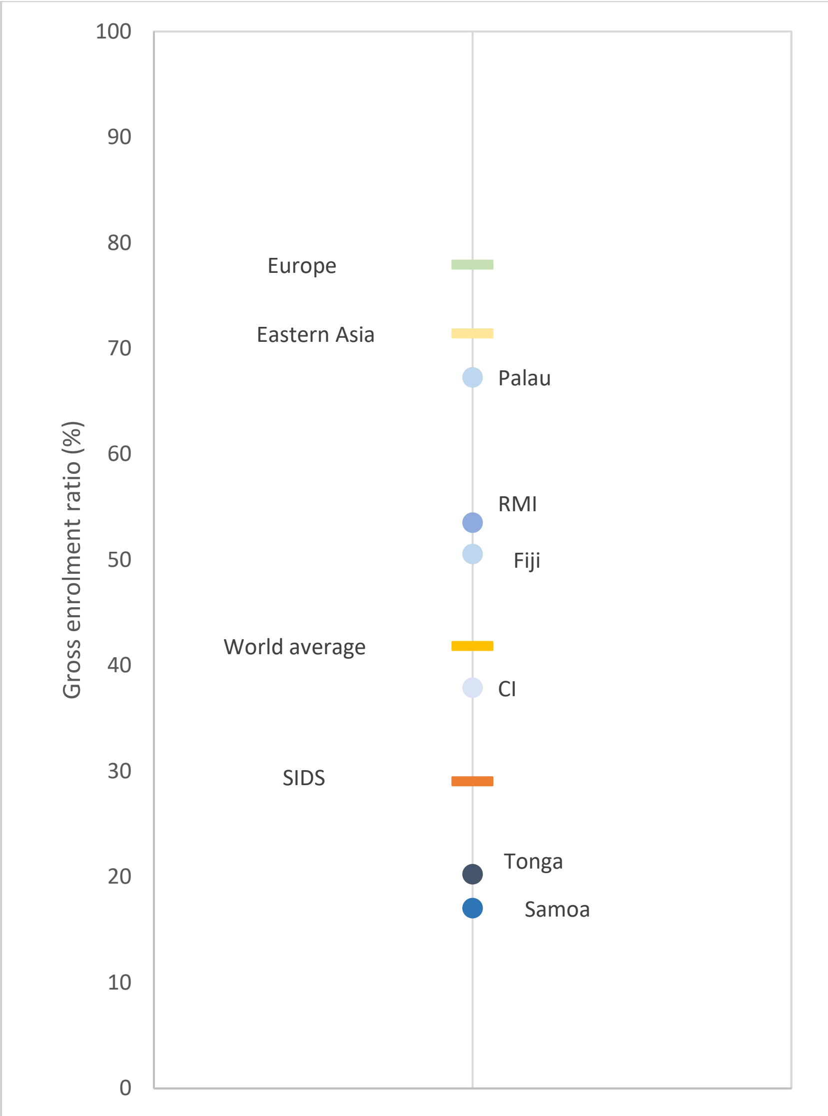
[27] https://www.unicef.org/reports/global-report-early-childhood-care-and-education-right-strong-foundation/.
[28] https://www.unicef.org/reports/global-report-early-childhood-care-and-education-right-strong-foundation/.

Figure 16: Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education, both sexes, by country (%).



Source: UIS Database.

Why does higher education matter to students in the Pacific region? Higher education is a rich cultural and scientific asset that enables personal development and promotes economic, technological and social change. It stimulates the exchange of knowledge, research and innovation, and most importantly, it equips students with the skills they need to meet the demands of the ever-changing labour markets.[29]

To monitor the level of participation in tertiary education in the Pacific region, this analysis uses SDG 4 indicator 4.3.2 gross enrolment ratio (GER) for tertiary education (figure 16), which measures the total enrolment in tertiary education and is expressed as a percentage of the population in the five-year age group immediately following upper secondary education. Among the six countries with available data, half of them are above the world average, and four out of six countries have higher gross enrolment rates than the SIDS average. Like the rest of the world, where large differences exist in tertiary enrolment between different countries and regions, significant differences are observed

[29] https://www.unesco.org/en/higher-education/need-know?hub=70286/.

among PICs. Palau registered nearly 70% GER for tertiary education, which is only slightly below the Eastern Asia regional average. On the other hand, Tonga and Samoa both have relatively low enrolment rates for tertiary education, hovering around 20%, which is lower than both the world average and the SIDS average.

Due to factors such as small student population and limited resources, not all countries in the region have tertiary education institutions that cater for the demands of local students (K.H.Thaman, 2007. The Role of higher education in regional development in Pacific Island countries with specific reference to the University of the South Pacific).[30] Therefore, another characteristic of tertiary education in the Pacific region is the high proportion of students who study abroad. PICs tend to have a high proportion of internationally mobile students, compared with the world average of 2.6% (internationally mobile students' share of total world enrolment in 2021).[31] This allows students from remote and less-populated areas to access higher education. It also encourages the exchange of knowledge and culture, which promotes innovation. While the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent public health measures disrupted international higher education and student mobility, rapid advancements in information and communication technology have created significant opportunities by expanding access to higher education beyond physical campuses and face-to-face instruction. Cutting-edge technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality, are further pushing the boundaries of learning.[32] Given the unique challenges that are faced by the higher education system in the PICs, technology-enabled learning, with full consideration of the digital divide and equitable access to technology, could play a significant role in not only expanding coverage but also improving the quality of higher education in the Pacific region.

5.4 Participation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Other than higher education, TVET also serves as a vital learning pathway for skill development and personal growth after the completion of basic education. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and amid the global shift towards digital and green economies, young people are facing significant challenges in acquiring skills that align with the dynamic demands of the job market. However, these challenges also present immense opportunities to revolutionise the processes of skill development and the transfer of knowledge. This transformation should aim to better prepare students for the future job market, where TVET can play a transformative role. By equipping learners with the right skills and competencies, TVET fosters a seamless transition towards sustainable development, digital and green economies, and cultivates skills for building inclusive and resilient societies.[33]

Although the benefits of quality TVET are considerable, especially in terms of skill development and school-to-employment transition, a relatively low proportion of students choose to enrol in TVET in the Pacific region. By looking at SDG 4 indicator 4.3.3 (figure 17), which measures the percentage of young people aged 15 to 24 years who are participating in TVET, it can be seen that enrolment rates of TVET are substantially lower than the enrolment rate for tertiary education. Three countries in the Pacific region have registered considerable progress in raising enrolment rate for TVET since 2015, and only two PICs, Tonga and Tuvalu, have TVET enrolment rates higher than the world average. Within the total 13 countries that have available data on this indicator, nine of them have fewer than 1% of their

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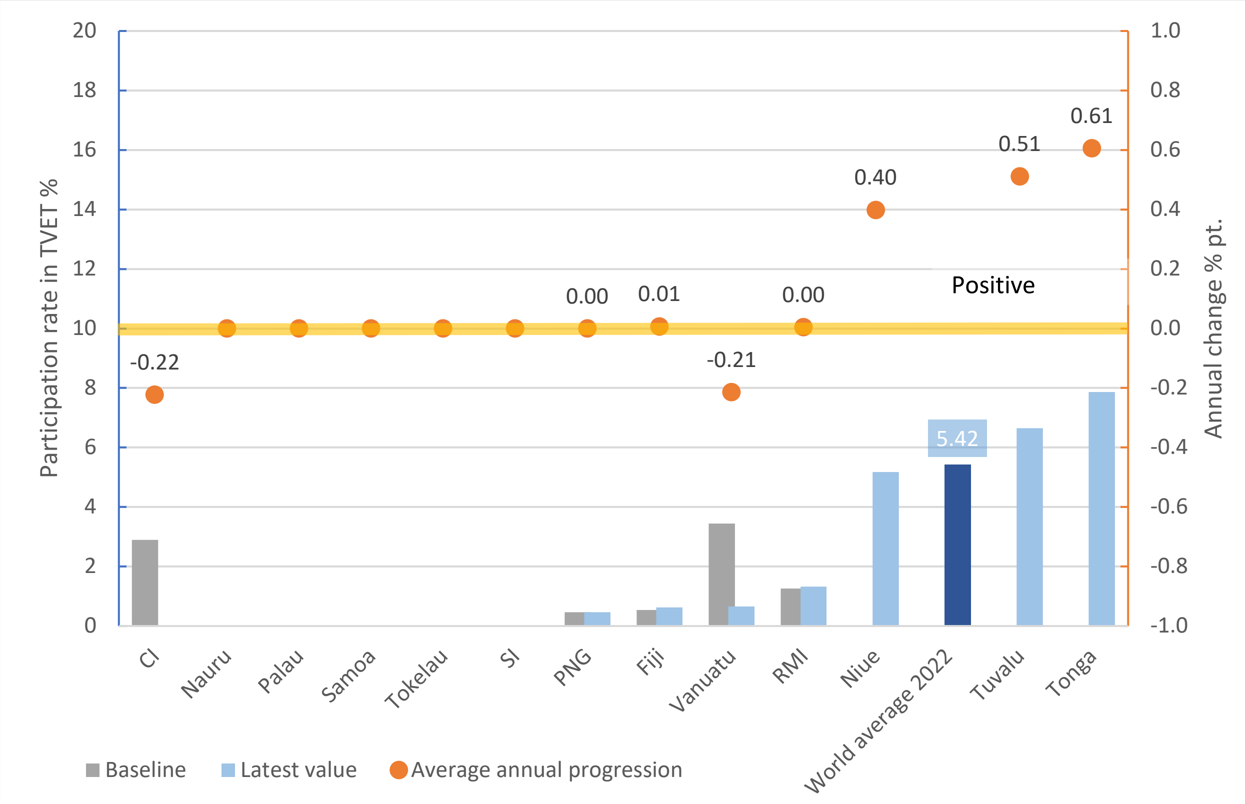
[30] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000157880/.
[31] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389069/.
[32] https://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/higher-education-changing-and-challenging-world-14177/.
[33] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380775?1=null&queryId=73debc60-ef03-4da9-9a8f-1b58b94508b7/.

15 to 24-year-old population enrolled in TVET. In many cases, the rate was stagnated at 0% throughout the years, which indicates no viable TVET option available at all for some PICs.

Figure 17: Proportion of 15 to 24-year-olds enrolled in vocational education (%).



Source: UIS database.

The importance of affordable and quality TVET is not only underscored in the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of SDG 4. 2025),[34] but is also reiterated later in the PacREF 2018-2030 for its "relevance to industry and the labour market".[35] TVET is an essential component of the second policy area of PacREF, given its unique role in bridging education and the world of work in an efficient and flexible manner. More concrete actions and resources that capitalise on new developments in ICT and education may be needed to provide more accessible and quality TVET programmes in the Pacific region. This is crucial in order to fulfil the policy objective of the second policy area, ensuring that "learners' needs are met through a broad range of programmes and modalities."

[34] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656/.
[35] https://pacref.org/about-pacref/establishing-documents/.

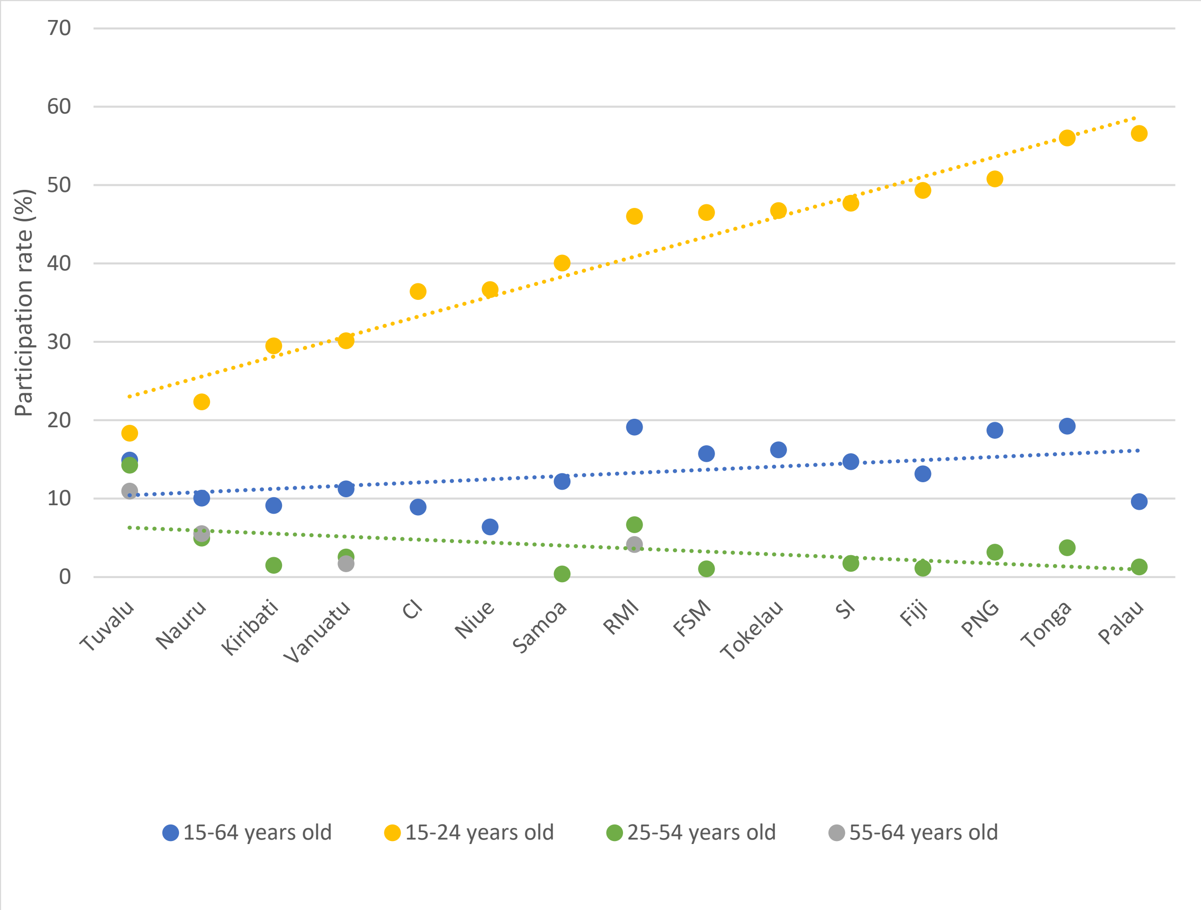
5.5 Lifelong learning opportunities

The rapidly changing world calls for opportunities to learn throughout life, not only for skills development to adapt to job market conditions, but also for individual fulfilment, social cohesion, and economic prosperity. By looking into the participation rates of youth and adults of different age groups in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, which is an SDG 4 indicator (4.3.1), insights into the level of participation in all forms of learning throughout different life stages in the Pacific region can be revealed. In general, PICs perform relatively well in the participation rate for 15 to 64-year-old youth and adults. Nearly all countries that have available data score near or higher than 10% in the participation rate for this overall age group, and three countries in particular – RMI, PNG and Tonga – almost reach 20% in this indicator. In comparison, according to a 2022 report that was produced by UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, fewer than 1% of youth and adults aged 15 and above participate in education and learning programmes in 23% of the countries, which have available data, worldwide.[36]

A Year 9 teacher and student of Sacred Heart College, Fiji, conducting a science experiment together.

[36] https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/grale5?hub=270/.

Figure 18: Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training (%).



Source: UIS database.

In a further breaking down of the participation rate by age, it can be seen that the school-age population between 15 and 24 years of age has the highest level of participation in education, while 25 to 54-years-olds and 55 to 64-year-olds – who are normally finished with basic education and tertiary education, and are within the workforce – tend to have benefited much less than the school-age population. Among the 15 PICs in the analysis, only Tuvalu has a participation rate that is higher than 10% for both 25 to 54-year-olds and 55 to 64-year-olds. The majority of PICs are facing less than 5% participation rate for the non-school-aged population, which means fewer than one in 20 adults in the workforce are benefiting from education in the most parts of the Pacific region. The senior population, which is aged 55 to 64 years of age, tends to have the lowest rate of participation in education compared with other age groups, as well as the lowest data availability. Only four PICs have data that is available on education participation for this age group.

Another observation from disaggregating the participation rate by age is that among PICs, the participation rates of different age groups are not positively correlated in most cases. In other words, a country that has a high participation rate for school-aged youth and adults does not necessarily also score high in the participation rate for other age groups. As shown in figure 18, after adding linear trendlines to the participation rates, it appears that the rate of participation for 15 to 24-year-olds (yellow) might have a negative correlation with the rate for the population above 25 years of age (green and grey). PICs such as Palau and Fiji have high education participation rates for 15 to 24-year-olds but much lower rates for the older population, with both countries' participation rates for 25 to 54-year-olds around 1%. While this inverse correlation may or may not indicate causation between education participation rates of the school-aged and older populations, it could suggest that due to circumstances in the Pacific region, such as limited education resources, if the education participation of one age group is prioritised, the participation of other groups may decrease. Further research on the accessibility of lifelong learning programmes and how much it is affected by tertiary education enrolment for school-aged students is needed to better understand the potential dynamic between education participation of different age groups in PICs.

5.6 Brief conclusion of learning pathways

Learning pathways, when supported with a learner centred approach and differentiated pedagogies, could see successes in related regional and national initiatives. Ministers agreed to the centrality of early childhood learning, and development and resources are directed with the view to maximising returns and producing student centred results.

Early secondary students in Palau conducting science experiments during class.

6. Equitable access and participation

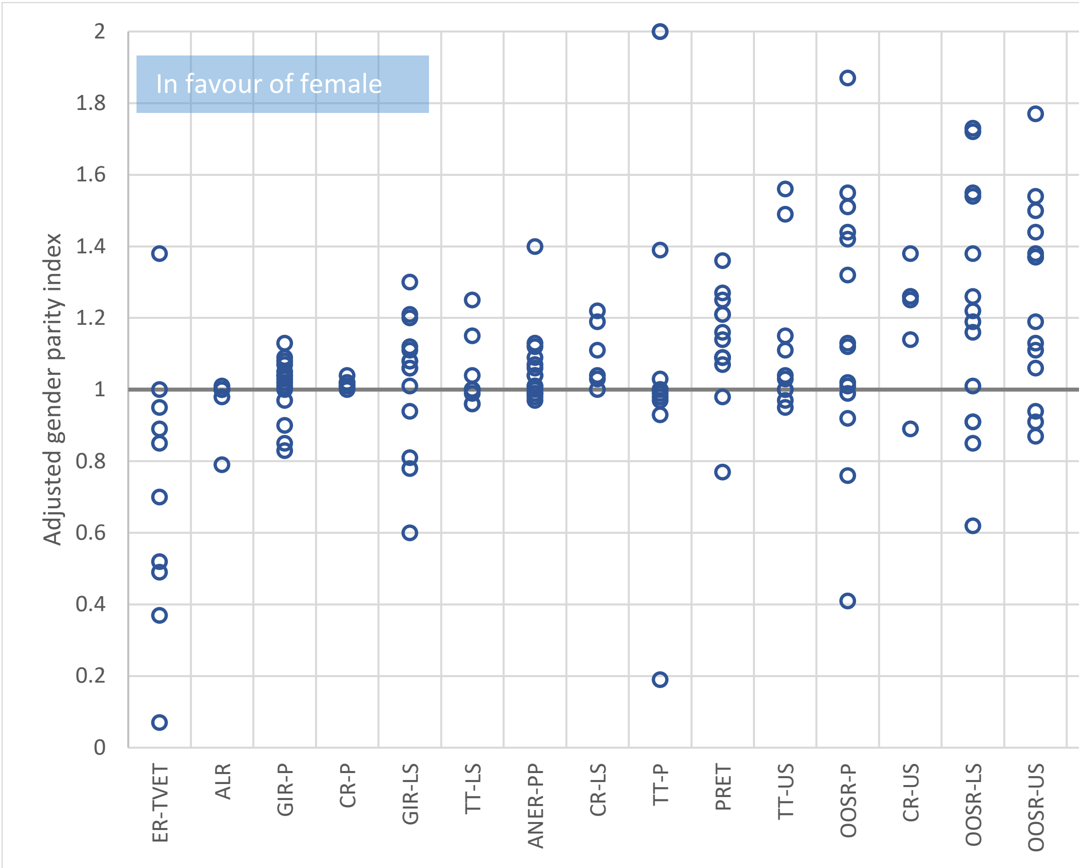
6.1 Introduction

The SDG 4.5 target is: “by 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable” (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). (2018-2030). SDG 4 Data Digest: Progress Towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Education for All.) (UIS 2018-2030). Gender, location, wealth and disability are key variables for disaggregation of education indicators that measure the equity of education access and participation. This section discusses the disparities in education completion rates for lower and upper secondary education.

Students in Vanuatu writing notes during a classroom session.

6.2 Gender equality

Figure 19: Adjusted gender parity indices of key SDG 4 indicators of PICs.[37]



Education Levels:

PP	Pre-primary
P	Primary
LS	Lower secondary
US	Upper secondary
Ter	Tertiary
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

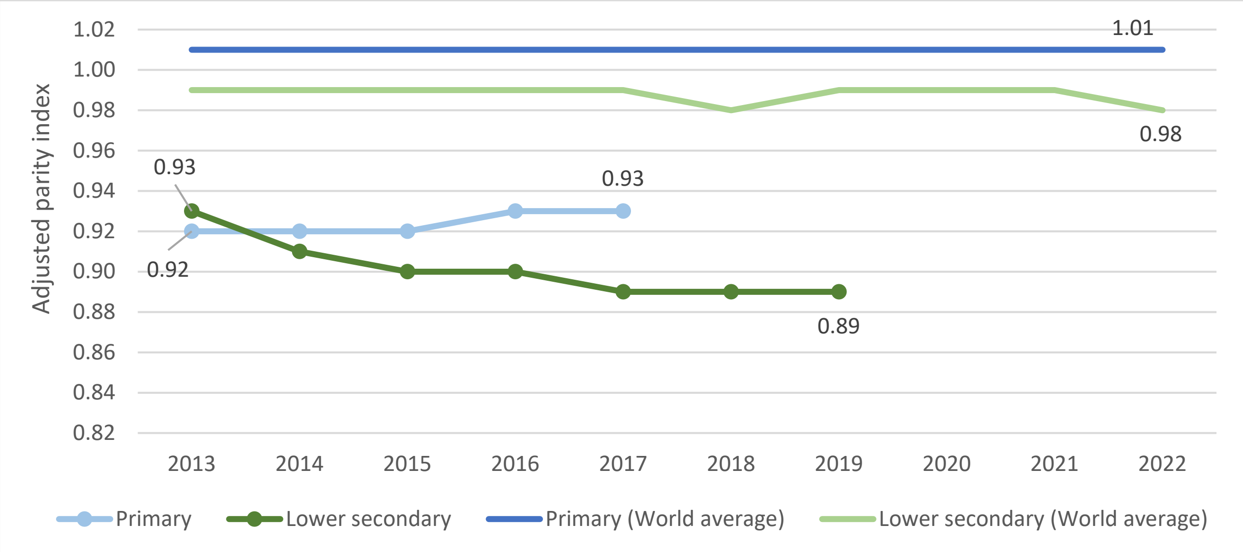
PacREF, especially the policy area 1 "Quality and relevance", calls for curriculum and programmes to promote gender equality. To review the "progress-made" on this commitment, on both the regional level and country level, this section will use adjusted gender parity indices of several SDG 4 indicators including out-of-school rate and gross intake ratio (GIR) to the last grade, depending on data availability.

Adjusted gender parity index (GPIA) measures the general level of disparity between males and females regarding a given indicator and is calculated by the indicator value of the likely more disadvantaged group (in this case, females) divided by the indicator value of the other group (male). For example, in the figure 20 below, the GPIA is calculated by using female regional gross intake ratio divided by the male regional gross intake ratio of the same level of education (adjustment if the result is bigger than 1, to make the indicator symmetrical about 1). The GPIA lies in the range of 0–2, where

[37] GPIA for out-of-school rate has been reversed so it can be interpreted in a same manner as other indicators. A GPIA higher than 1 indicates in favour of female.

a value above 1 would mean that the indicator for females has a higher value than the same indicator for males and vice versa, and a value of exactly 1 indicates perfect parity between the two groups.[38]

Figure 20: PIC regional average vs. world average gross intake ratio to the last grade, GPIA.



Source: UIS database.

Due to limited data on regional average adjusted gender parity index, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) SDG 4 data portal does not have Oceania regional average data of GPIA of some of the more widely used indicators for monitoring access and participation such as completion rate and out-of-school rate. Fortunately, Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) regional average of GPIA of gross intake ratios to the last grade for both primary and lower secondary schools are available, and thus will be used in this section to support the analysis on regional progress to ensure gender equality in completion of basic education.

Gross intake ratio to the last grade of a given level of education, which is also SDG 4 indicator 4.1.3, is a proxy measure of school completion. It measures the percentage of proper-aged population entering the last grade and is calculated by the total number of new entrants in the last grade of the given level of education, divided by the population of the intended entrance age of that grade. A high ratio indicates a high degree of completion of the given level of education, therefore a higher GPIA value (greater than 1) of the gross intake ratio means in favour of females, and a value less than 1 would suggest in favour of males.

As shown in figure 20, the GPIA of gross intake ratio to the last grade of primary education in the Oceania region (excluding Australia and New Zealand) has been hovering around 0.92 to 0.93 from 2013 to 2017 without a clear upward or downward trend. On the other hand, the Pacific regional GPIA of lower secondary level has shown an opposite trend during almost the same period, declining from 0.93 in 2013 to 0.89 in 2019. This indicates that gender equality in lower secondary students' completion has been deteriorating in PICs, although it can be recognised that most of the changes took place before 2015 and has remained practically unchanged since the launch of the 2030 Agenda.

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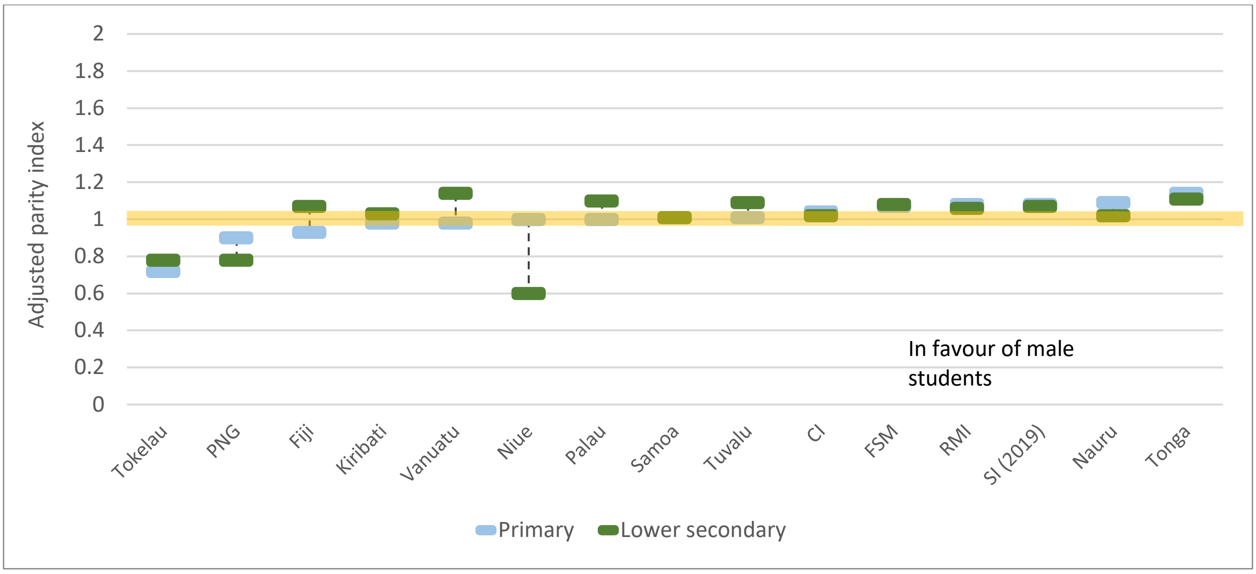
[38] https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/metadata-global-thematic-indicators-sdg4-education2030-2017-en_1.pdf/.

When comparing the Oceania regional average GPIA (excluding Australia and New Zealand) with world averages, gaps in both ensuring gender equality in students completing primary and lower secondary education, as well as in monitoring gender equality under SDG 4, can be identified. While PIC averages have stagnated around 0.9 for both primary and lower secondary levels, the world averages sit around 1, which indicates gender parity. Ensuring students from all backgrounds can successfully access and complete basic education is one of the key aspirations of SDG 4, and it is imperative for the Pacific region to mobilise necessary resources and political will to provide young girls in the region with equal opportunity for completing basic education.

Other than young girls being less likely to enter the last grade of primary and lower secondary education, and thus possibly also having lower chances of completing basic education, limited data availability on regional GPIA is also a concern. On one hand, on the regional level, adjusted gender parity indices for other more widely used indicators such as completion rates and out-of-school rates are not available, which may cause difficulty in conducting evidence-based gender equality analysis on education access and participation on a regional level. Even for an indicator that has available regional average data of GPIA, that is, the gross intake ratio to the last grade, there is still constraint on analysis, which is caused by outdated data. The most recent data entry for this indicator was 2019 for lower secondary level, and 2017 for primary level, without any entry after 2020. This lack of recent data prohibits analysis on latest regional development on equitable access to and participation in basic education, and therefore would pose challenges for more accurate and timely policymaking in addressing education equality issues in the Pacific region.

By turning to the country-level data on this same indicator, GPIA of the gross intake ratio to the last grade, more insights of gender equality in completing basic education in PICs can be discovered. Most PICs have achieved near gender parity in gross intake ratio to the last grade of both primary and lower secondary levels of basic education. PNG, Tokelau and Niue (for lower secondary) are outliers for having relatively lower GPIA, which indicates it is more in favour of male students in basic education completion and access compared with other PICs. Considering the vast disparity in terms of population size among PICs, in particular PNG making up more than half of the total regional population (excluding Australia and New Zealand), its relatively low country-level GPIA might bring the regional averages down.

Figure 21: Gross intake ratio to the last grade, adjusted gender parity index, by levels of education, by country.



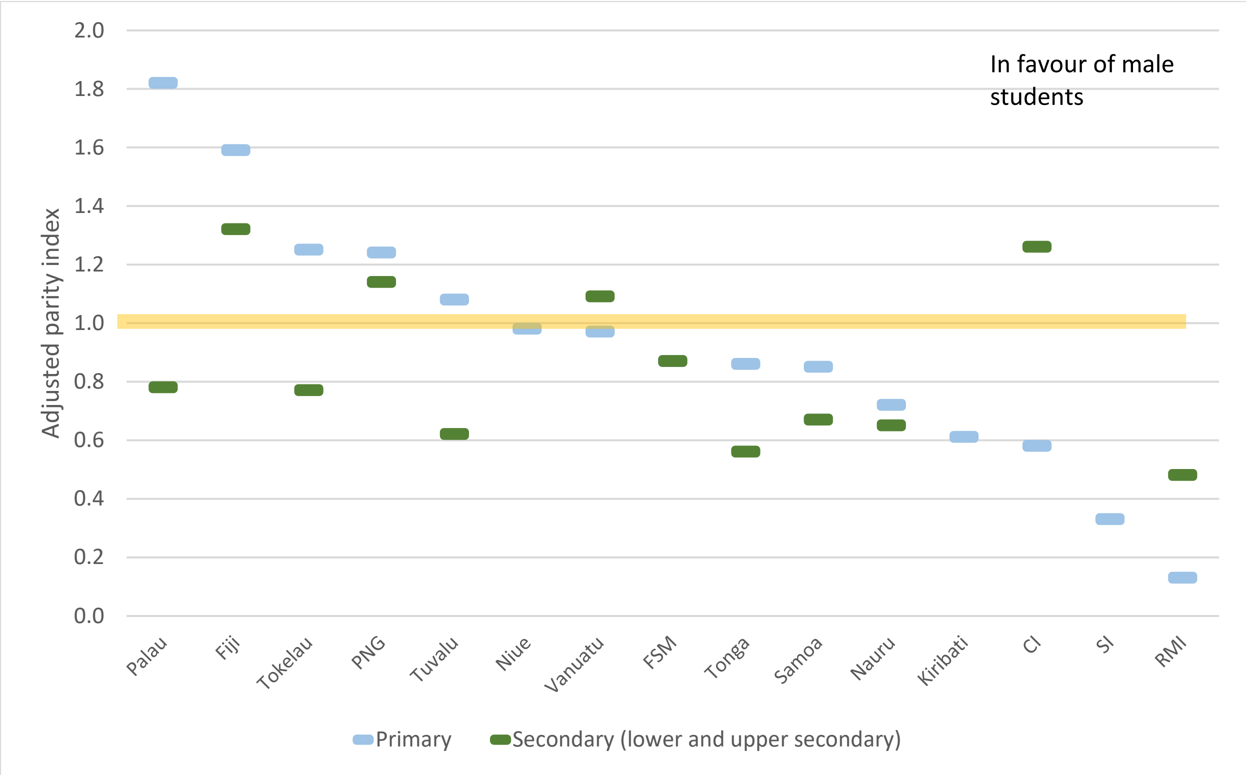
Source: UIS database.

When looking at the figure 21, it is also worth noticing that the majority of PICs do have recent data on this indicator. Missing country-level data, especially from countries that make up a large proportion of total regional population, could hinder the estimation of the regional average, causing data limitations on the regional level. Targeted technical assistance and capacity building for data collection and monitoring competencies of countries that are in need could be beneficial for effectively improving data availability in the Pacific region.

When turning to country-level GPIA of out-of-school rates for primary and secondary education (figure 22), it can observed that there are more discrepancies among PICs. Unlike gross intake ratio, where a higher number is desirable, a higher out-of-school rate means lower rate of participation in basic education. Therefore, the GPIA of the out-of-school rate should be interpreted in an opposite manner, where a value above 1 means a higher percentage of female students out of school, and a value lower than 1 indicates a higher percentage of male students being excluded from access to education.

In general, while the GPIA of the out-of-school rate for primary school of different PICs is evenly spread out across the spectrum, the same indicator for secondary level is more likely to be in favour of girls, which indicates that there are lower out-of-school rates for female students of secondary school age than male students in most PICs. The GPIA of the out-of-school rate for secondary level tends to be lower than the primary level measurement (in eight out of 15 PICs), which indicates that across PICs, participation in secondary education tends to be more in favour of female students than primary level.

Figure 22: Out-of-school rate, adjusted gender parity index, by levels of education, by country.



Source: UIS database.

No other clear trend is observed in this indicator on the country level, as there are large discrepancies not only between different countries, but sometimes even between data from different levels of education within the same country. The lowest GPIA of the out-of-school rate for primary school in the Pacific region, which also means most in favour of girls, is recorded in RMI with a value of 0.13. Yet, the highest recording of the same indicator in the Pacific region reaches 1.82 in Palau, which is extremely in favour of boys. Interestingly, within the same country, Palau registers 0.78 in GPIA of the out-of-school rate for secondary school, which would indicate the exact opposite kind of gender disparity than the primary indicator shows, and similar scenario can also be observed in other countries such as Tokelau, Tuvalu and CI.

There are two potential causes for the large discrepancies that are observed within same country. The first reason is outdated data, as in the case of Palau and CI, although the gender parity indices for primary level are significantly different from secondary level, but they are also recorded in a different time. In this case, in Palau and CI, the GPIA of the out-of-school rate for secondary level was measured and reported to UIS SDG 4 Data Portal after 2020, while the same indicator for primary level has not been updated since the from 2014 to 2016 . This large interval in the reporting time could cause discrepancy in results, as progress may have been made between the beginning of the 2030 Agenda (2015) and post-2020.

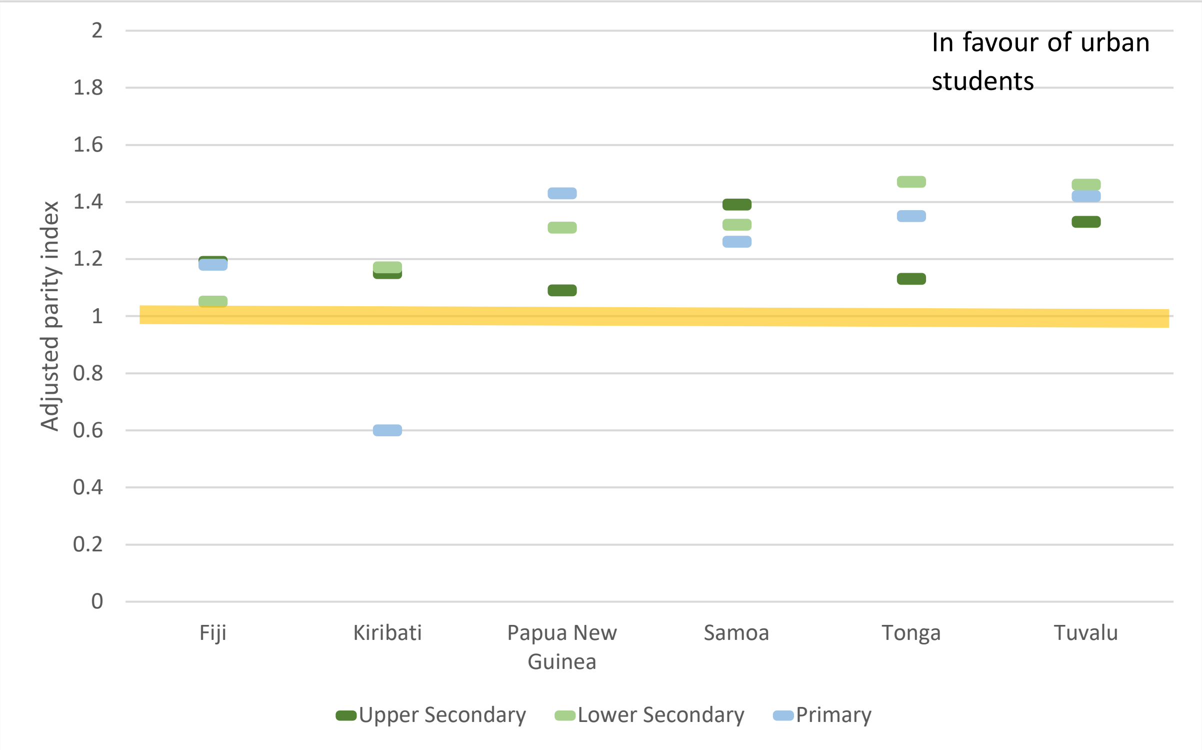
Another potential cause is the small population size of PICs. From figure 22, it can be seen that in Tokelau and Tuvalu, even though data was collected recently without any delay or data gap, there are still considerable differences between the GPIA of out-of-school rates for primary level and secondary level. However, these two countries also have small school-age populations, thus very small numbers of out-of-school children and adolescents. For Tuvalu, the total number of out-of-school adolescents and youth of secondary school age was 309 in 2022, and the number for primary school age out-of-school was 38 in 2023. For Tokelau, the numbers are even smaller with 68 for secondary level, and only 2 for primary level.[39] This means that a small natural fluctuation in numbers of students dropping out of school could have a relatively large impact on GPIA as it is a ratio of female numbers versus male numbers. In this case, GPIA can still be referenced as an important indicator for gender parity, but not without considering the implication of a small population size on this indicator.

6.3 Disaggregated data by location

Other than the gender aspect of education inequality, data disaggregated by location can also provide important insight on access and participation for vulnerable and marginalised students. Figure 23 shows the adjusted location parity index (LPIA) of out-of-school rate for each level of basic education for PICs that have available data. This indicator is calculated by using the out-of-school rate for the rural population, divided by the urban values. A value that is higher than 1 would indicate that the rural out-of-school rate is higher than the urban counterpart, thus in favour of urban students in terms of access to and participation in a given level of education.

Within the six countries that have available data (except in Kiribati for primary school), the LPIA for almost all levels of education are above 1, which means urban students are, in general, more favoured to have access to and participate in all levels of basic education. PICs are often subject to geographic remoteness, with small populations spreading across many islands.[40] This unique characteristic poses challenges for PICs in the covering of populations in hard-to-reach areas with quality education that potentially leads to students from rural areas being left out.

Figure 23: Out-of-school rate, adjusted location parity index (rural vs. urban) by levels of education, by country.

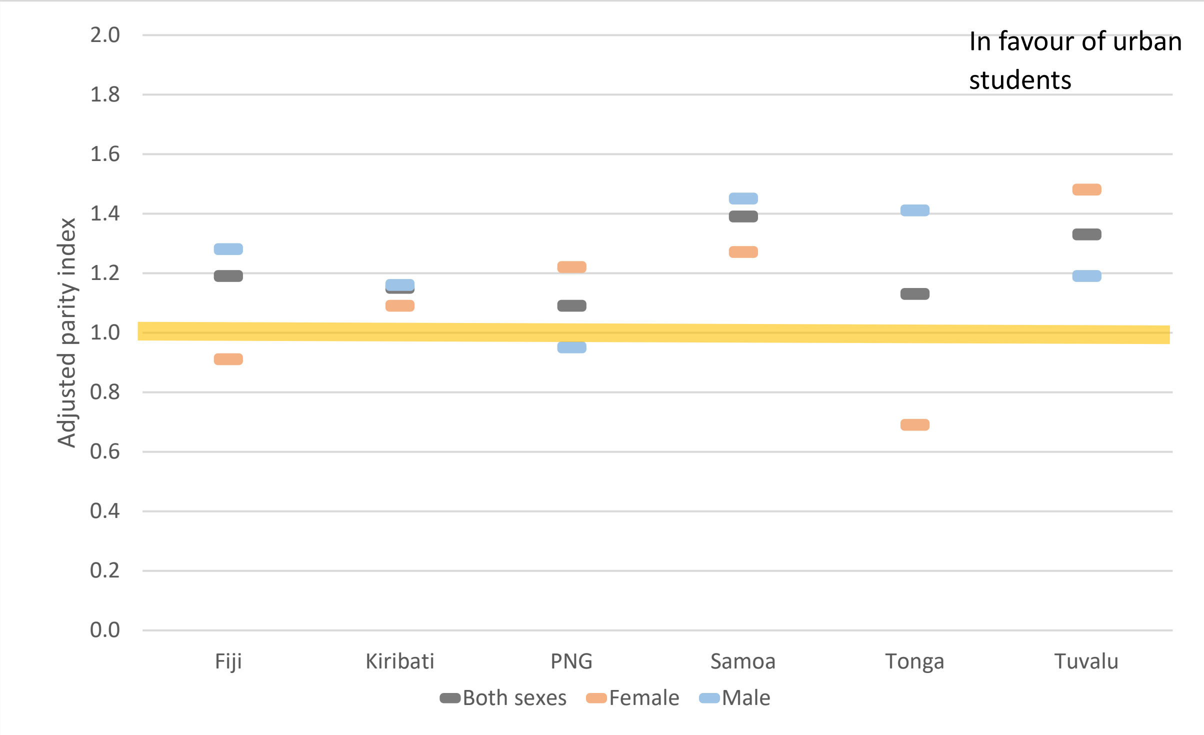


Source: UIS Database.

[39] http://data.uis.unesco.org/#/.
[40] https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pacificislands/overview/.

When further disaggregating the adjusted location parity index for out-of-school rate by gender, as shown in figure 24, more insights into the gender and location education disparity in the Pacific region are discovered. Students of different sexes are impacted differently by their locations, which is demonstrated by noticeable differences in LPIA of the upper secondary out-of-school rate, and disaggregated by gender, in five out of the six countries that have data. There seems to be intersectionality between the gender and location dimensions of inequality, which should be analysed to better understand the barriers to education for marginalised populations in the Pacific region.

Figure 24: Upper secondary out-of-school rate, adjusted location parity index (rural vs. urban by gender).

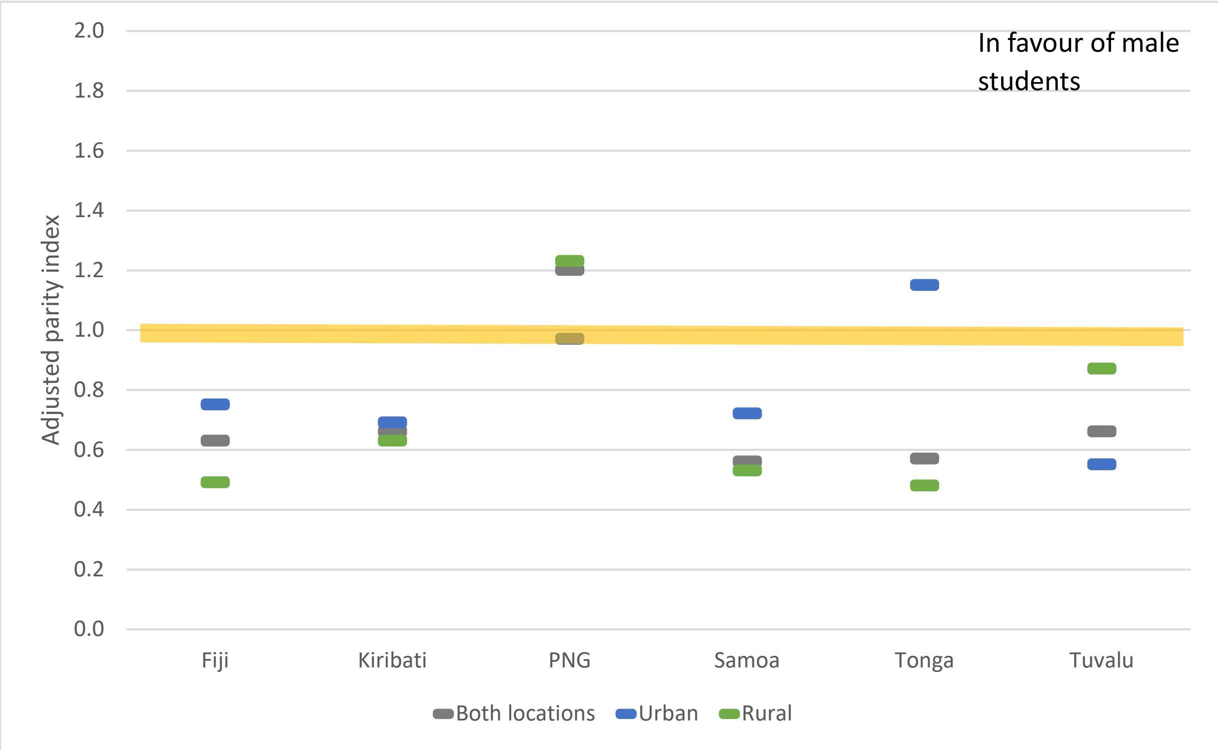


Source: UIS Database.

In four out of the six countries, LPIA of the upper secondary out-of-school rate for males is higher in value than for females, which means male youth of upper secondary school age encounter greater location disparity in access to education in these countries. Before disaggregated by gender, the LPIA in all six countries is in favour of urban students. However, after adding a gender lens to the analysis, it can be seen that in three countries (Fiji, Kiribati and Tonga), the same indicator for female students is close to or even below the value of 1, which indicates location parity or is in favour of rural students in terms of the upper secondary out-of-school rate. While recognising that rural students generally have less access to and participation in basic education than their urban counterparts in the Pacific region, data from most countries show that male students in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to dropping out of upper secondary school. This vulnerability might be due to the necessity of providing for their families, which prevents them from continuing their studies.

This observation is further supported by the GPIA of the upper secondary out-of-school rate, which is disaggregated by location, from the same countries that have available data in the Pacific region. In figure 25, in four out of six countries (Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa and Tonga), GPIA of the upper secondary out-of-school rate is lower in value in rural areas than among the urban population, which indicates that in these four countries, youth of the upper secondary age in rural areas are subjected to greater gender disparity in favour of female students than their urban counterparts. Male students from rural areas are not only less likely to stay in upper secondary schools than urban students but are also more disadvantaged than female students from rural areas.

Figure 25: Upper secondary out-of-school rate, adjusted gender parity index, household, by location, by country.



Source: UIS database.

In PNG and Tuvalu, an opposite trend is observed as different from the majority of countries in the Pacific region. When looking at location disparity alone, like all other PICs that have available data, PNG and Tuvalu follow the same trend where urban students tend to have better access to and participation in all levels of basic education. However, when looking at data that is further disaggregated by gender, the difference in impact of gender on location disparity in these two countries versus others in the Pacific region can be seen. For the LPIA of upper secondary out-of-school rate disaggregated by gender, the female LPIA is higher in value than the male measurement in PNG and Tuvalu, which indicates a worse location disparity for female students. In PNG in particular, the male LPIA even reaches slightly below 1 where it sits at 0.95, which would mean that for male upper-secondary-age youth, being in an urban or rural area would not have a significant impact on access and participation in upper secondary education.

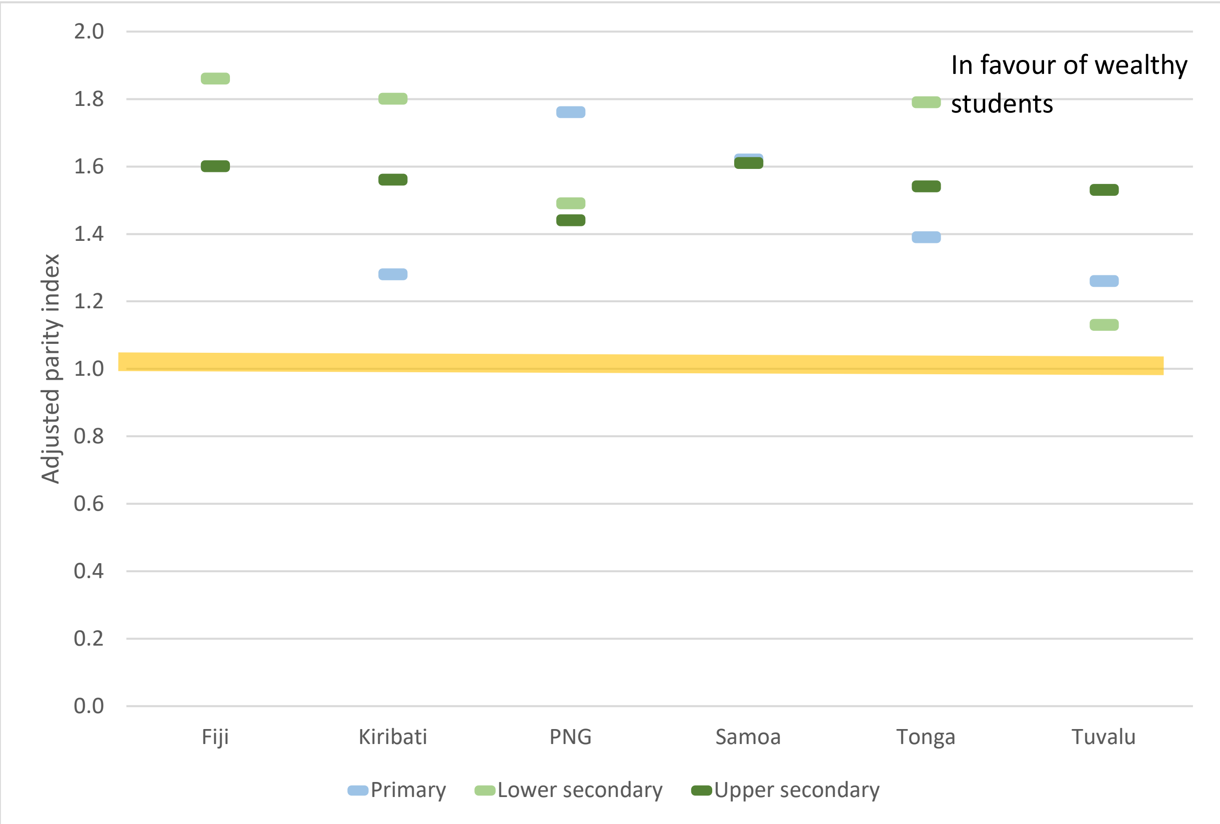
Location disaggregated data of the GPIA of the upper secondary out-of-school rate for PNG and Tuvalu also reinforce the observation above. Both countries have reported a higher value of GPIA of upper secondary out-of-school rate in rural areas than among the urban population, which means that it is more in favour of male students. Especially in PNG, against the backdrop of the upper secondary out-of-school rate being generally in favour of female students in the Pacific region, the rural GPIA for PNG is 1.23, which is the highest in value compared with all other countries, indicating a sizeable gender disparity in access to and participating in upper secondary education against female students in rural area. Since the urban disaggregated GPIA suggests near gender parity, future initiatives on promoting gender equality in education in PNG may consider prioritising rural areas for more accurate policy targeting.

6.4 Disaggregated data by wealth

Household income is another important factor that affects students' access to and participation in basic education, and data from the region proves that it is also true in PICs. In its 2018 policy paper on inequality of education opportunities, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has found that in the Asia–Pacific region, wealth is the most important circumstance for most countries in determining students' educational attainment, and wealth alone determines more than half of the inequality in several PICs.[41] Poverty is the circumstance that is often shared by disadvantaged groups, and being unable to participate and benefit from education only worsens the intergenerational poverty, which causes a vicious cycle of inequality.

In figure 26, it can be observed that within all six countries that have available data, the adjusted wealth parity indices (WPIA) for all three levels of basic education indicate an overwhelmingly better participation for students from more wealthy families. Compared with other parity indices, including GPIA and LPIA, the WPIA on country level tends to be further away from 1, which indicates greater disparity in education participation that is caused by wealth. Not only are all measurements of the WPIA higher than a value of 1, but most of them even surpass 1.5, which indicates a relatively high disparity between students of different socio-economic backgrounds.

Figure 26: Out-of-school rate, adjusted wealth parity index levels of education, by country.

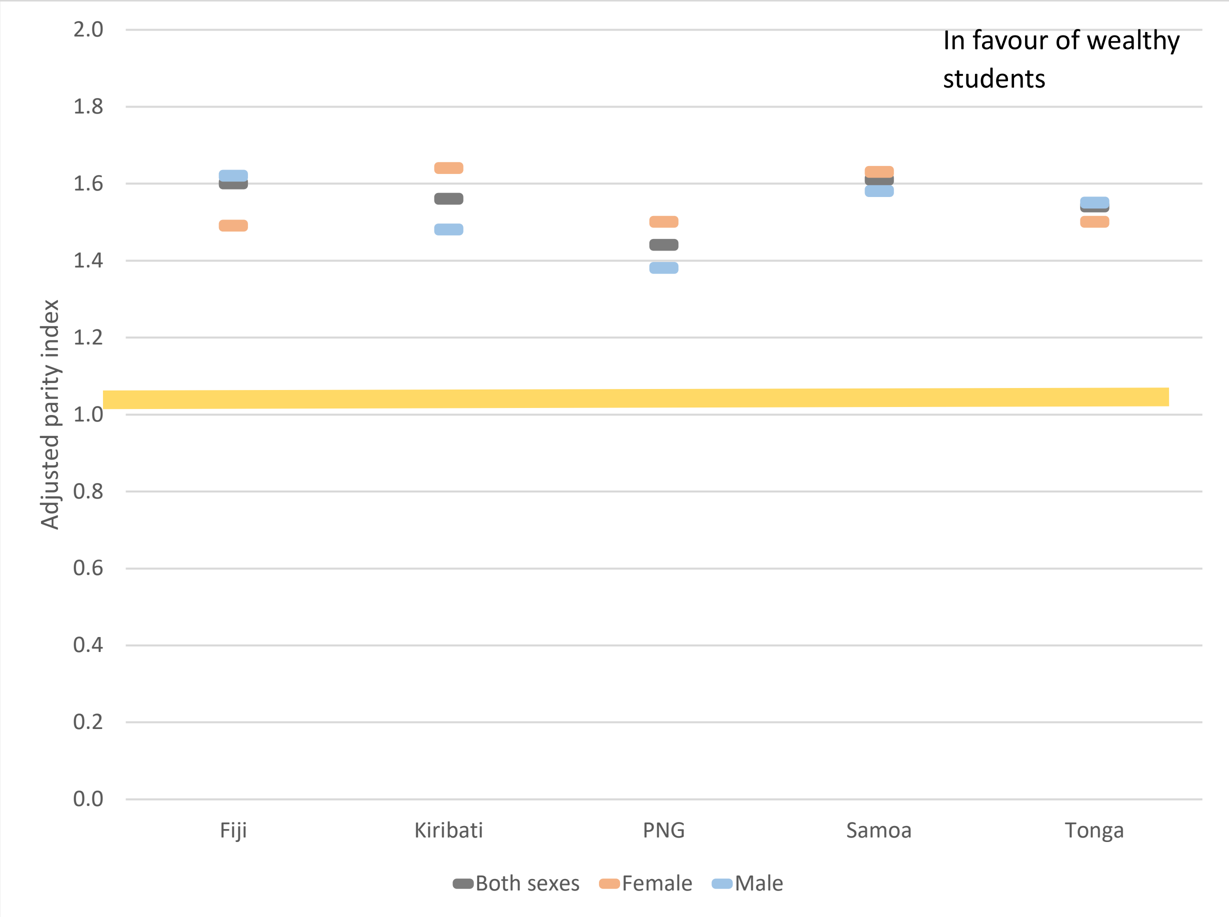


Source: UIS database.

[41] https://repository.unescap.org/handle/20.500.12870/548/.

By looking at further at disaggregated country-level WPIA of upper secondary out-of-school rate by gender, it can be observed that gender has a minimal effect on wealth disparity in PICs . Unlike the LPIA discussed above, there is no significant difference between male and female WPIA in any PIC, which suggests a weak intersectionality between wealth and gender in education disparity in this region. In Kiribati, PNG and Samoa, the WPIA for male students is marginally closer to wealth parity, which indicates that females are experiencing slightly more wealth disparity in education participation in upper secondary schools. The opposite is observed in Fiji and Tonga, as the female WPIA is closer to 1, although by a very small margin as well.

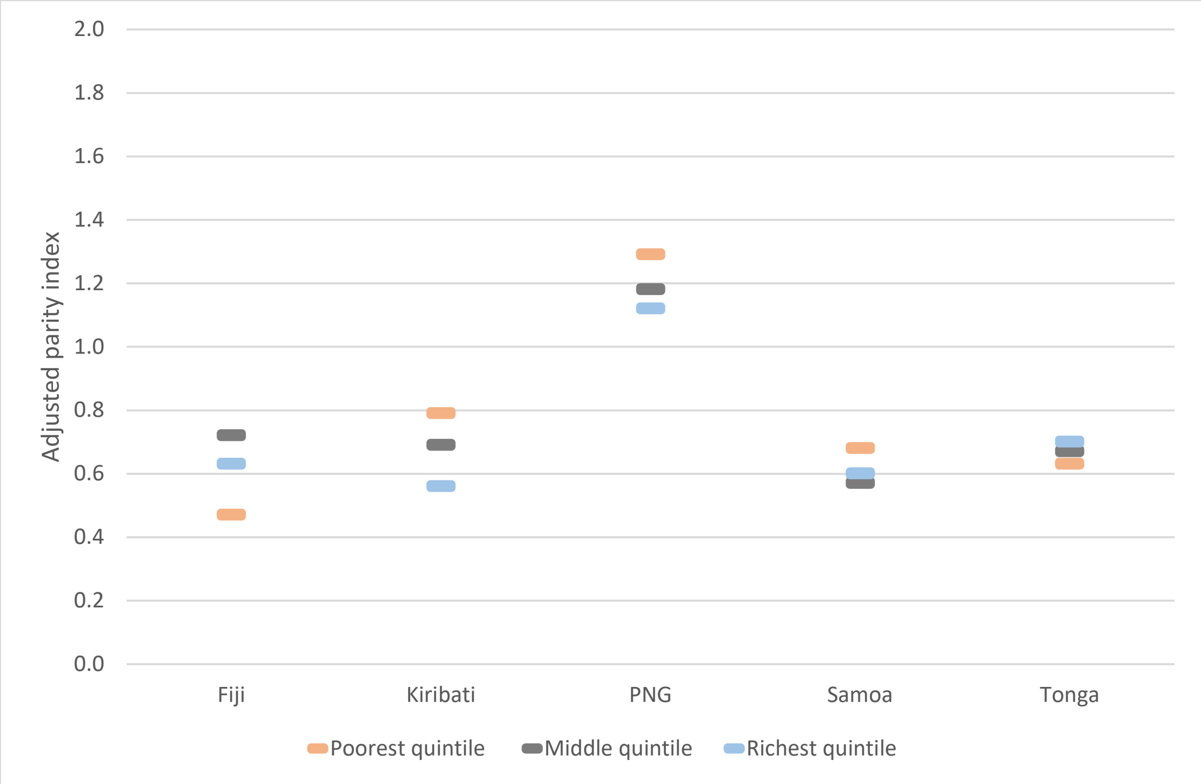
Figure 27: Upper secondary out-of-school rate, adjusted wealth parity index by gender by country.



Source: UIS Database.

This weak intersectionality is further demonstrated in the GPIA of upper secondary out-of-school rate, which is disaggregated by income group, as shown in figure 28. No overarching pattern is observed between PICs in terms of how the GPIA shifts with sample populations of different income groups, and countries are showing different national trends. In PNG and Tonga, the GPIA gradually moves closer to gender parity (a value of 1) as the sample population moves from the poorest quintile to the richest quintile, indicating better gender equality in education access and participation among wealthy population. However, in Kiribati, an opposite trend is observed, as the GPIA actually moves further away from gender parity in favour of females, as the sample population moves from the poorest to the richest. Lastly, no linear progression in the GPIA in correlation with change in household income is observed in Fiji and Samoa, which again suggests weak intersectionality.

Figure 28: Upper secondary out-of-school rate, adjusted gender parity index, by income group by country.



Source: UIS database.

In general, wealth disparity remains as the biggest factor in determining inequality in access to and participation in education in the Pacific region, and unlike location disparity, it does not intersect with gender in a significant way. Considering the immense benefits of education in human capital development and poverty alleviation, ensuring adequate access to quality education for students in poverty should be recognised with priority.

6.5 Identifying the furthest behind with in-depth country cases

To stay true to the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – leaving no one behind – it is imperative to identify the most discriminated against and marginalised populations in order to reach those who are left furthest behind. After examining the adjusted parity indices across various dimensions of inequality and discrimination at a macro level, this section will delve into three in-depth country-level data disaggregation studies, which will elucidate the education participation gap at the upper secondary level in a clear and intuitive manner. This approach will provide profound insights into intra-country disparities and the intersection of various inequality dimensions, thereby revealing the most marginalised and underserved populations in terms of upper secondary education participation.

To capture a comprehensive view of education participation disparity that better represents PICs, one case study is selected from each of the three subregions, considering data availability and development status. This section analyses disaggregated upper secondary out-of-school rates from the following three countries: Samoa from the Polynesia subregion, Kiribati from the Micronesia subregion, and PNG from the Melanesia subregion. The figures presented will display disaggregated out-of-school rates in a cascading manner, progressing from the national average without disaggregation on the left, to more narrowly disaggregated, multi-dimensional data on the right. As the level of disaggregation increases from left to right, more insights into the gaps between groups with different characteristics will emerge. The group with the highest upper secondary out-of-school rate will be marked in red, indicating those furthest behind in terms of education participation, while the group with the lowest rate will be marked in green, in figures 29, 30 and 31.

6.5.1 Samoa country case study

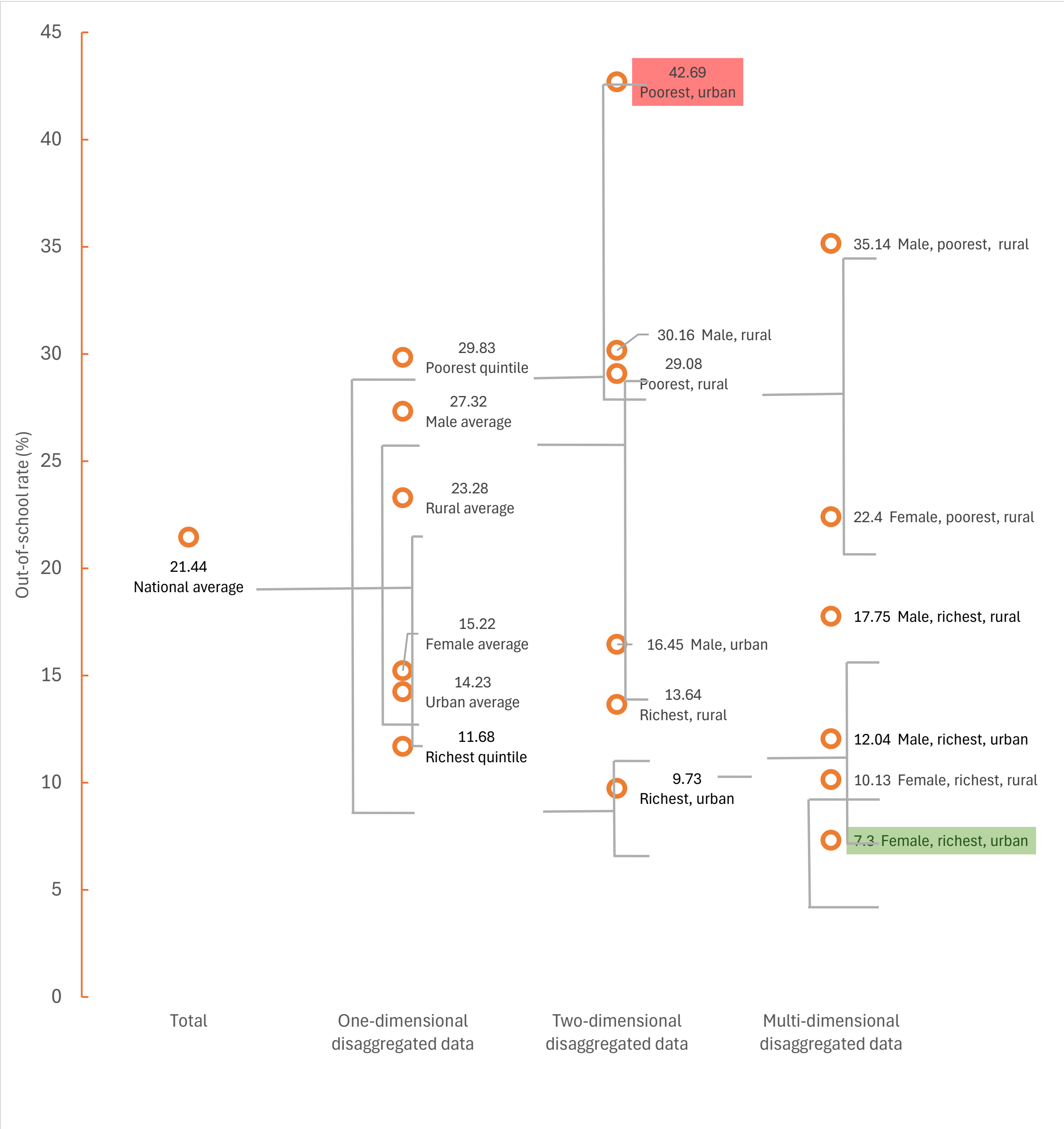
To start the deep dive into education disparity within countries, the disaggregated upper secondary out-of-school rate of Samoa is observed. With a population of around 222,000 (2022), and an annual gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (constant USD) of USD 3591 recorded in the same year, Samoa is a lower-middle-income country in the Polynesia subregion.[42] The national average of upper secondary out-of-school rate, based on household survey in 2019,[43] is measured at 21.44, which significantly outperforms the world average rate of 28.84 (2023 estimates). However, after further disaggregation, gaps and weaknesses in education participation for certain marginalised groups can still be identified.

When looking at one-dimensional disaggregated data in figure 29, it can be observed that wealth disparity is the most influential dimension of inequality within Samoa, which is evidenced by the relatively large gap between the upper secondary out-of-school rates of the richest quintile (11.68%) and the poorest quintile (almost 30%). The gender gap in upper secondary education participation is also noticeable and is in favour of female students, as female average out-of-school rate for upper secondary level is nearly half of the male's average. Lastly, although not as significant as gender and wealth disparity, there remains a nearly 10% pt. gap between rural and urban average out-of-school rates, with urban students having better access and participation in upper secondary education on average.

[42] https://data.worldbank.org/country/samoa/.

[43] UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, https://mics.unicef.org/news_entries/207/SAMOA-LAUNCHES-ITS-FIRST-MICS-REPORT/.

Figure 29: Samoa out-of-school rate for youth of upper secondary school age, disaggregated data, 2019.



Source: UIS database.

Further disaggregating the out-of-school rate data with two or more dimensions of inequality reveals more insights on education disparity in Samoa. Most of the trends observed in one-dimensional disaggregated data remain true in multi-dimensional disaggregated data. The gender gap that is in favour of female students persists in all disaggregated population groups, but seems to get worse in rural and poverty settings. Wealth disparity also remains significant no matter what other dimensions of inequality are applied. All disaggregated data that are affiliated with the "poorest quintile" are higher in value than the national average upper secondary out-of-school rate (21.44%), which illustrates the overwhelmingly negative effect of poverty on education participation in Samoa.

Location disparity, on the other hand, appears to have different impacts on education participation depending on other dimensions of inequality that are faced by marginalised populations. On average, urban youth of upper secondary school age have a lower out-of-school rate than their rural peers, and this location disparity trend holds true in most disaggregated groups including in males overall and in the richest quintile. However, within the population from the poorest quintile, it is reported that location disparity reverses, as the disaggregated upper secondary out-of-school rate for youth of the "poorest, urban" group (42.69%) is significantly higher than the "poorest, rural" group (29.08%). This observation indicates a strong intersectionality between poverty and urban settings in Samoa, and youth coming from poor families in urban areas are facing significant barriers to participation in upper secondary education. The glaring gap in upper secondary out-of-school rate between the "richest, urban" group (9.73%) and the "poorest, urban" group (42.69%) underscores the concerning wealth disparity in education participation in urban Samoa.

Unfortunately, due to insufficient disaggregated data, there is no access to the further disaggregation of the "poorest, urban" group by gender, which impedes more accurate identification of the group that is furthest behind. Considering the consistent gender disparity trend that is in favour of females – observed in the "poorest, rural", "richest, rural", and "richest, urban" groups – it is likely that male students in the poorest quintile from urban areas might be the furthest behind in Samoa in terms of upper secondary education participation.

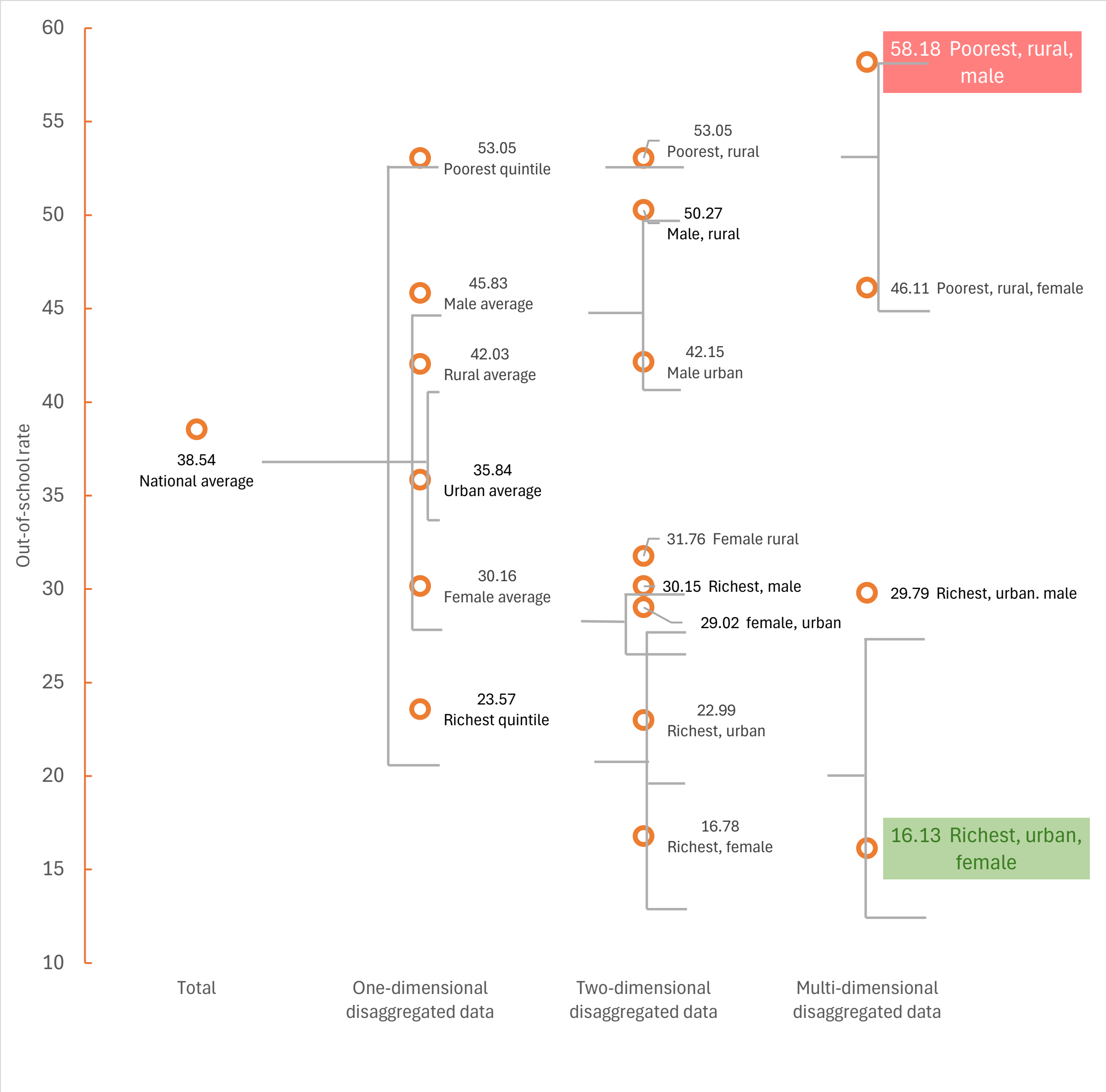
6.5.2 Kiribati country case study

With an annual GDP per capita (constant USD) of USD 1433 (2022), Kiribati is a lower-middle-income country located in the Micronesia subregion. Like many other countries in the Pacific region, Kiribati belongs in the group of SIDs, as its population of more than 131,000 (2022) lives across 33 islands that spread over 3.5 million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean.[44] Kiribati's national average out-of-school rate for youth of upper secondary school age, based on household survey data collected in 2019[45], is 38.54%, which is higher than Samoa, as well as the world average in 2023. This relatively high national average rate indicates that considerable barriers to participation in upper secondary education remain in Kiribati.

After breaking down the national average into one-dimensional disaggregated data, disparity trends similar to those found in Samoa can be observed. Wealth disparity remains the most significant dimension of inequality, as the out-of-school rate for the poorest quintile (53.05%) is more than twice of the rate for the richest quintile (23.57%). Gender disparity is the second most significant factor of inequality in education participation, which is also similar to the findings in Samoa. The male average upper secondary out-of-school rate is higher than the female average by more than 15% pt. Location disparity exists between urban and rural population, although only by fewer than 7% pt.

[44] https://data.worldbank.org/country/kiribati/.
[45] UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, https://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/4158/study-description/.

Figure 30: Kiribati out-of-school rate for youth of upper secondary school age, disaggregated data, 2019.



Source: UIS database.

Further disaggregating the out-of-school rate data with two or more dimensions of inequality reveals more insights on how different dimensions of inequality affect the marginalised groups' education participation in Kiribati. While all trends observed in one-dimensional data remain true after further disaggregation, some disparity seems to deteriorate in certain settings. As previously mentioned, on the national level, the male average upper secondary out-of-school rate is higher than the female average by around 15% pt. However, this gender gap widens to almost 20% pt. in favour of females in the rural areas, while it narrows to about 13% pt. in the urban areas. A similar discrepancy can also be found in location disparity when further disaggregated by gender. On the national level, the average upper secondary out-of-school rate for rural areas is higher than the urban average by little more than 6% pt. However, for male youth of upper secondary school age, the out-of-school rate in rural area is 8% pt. higher than their urban counterparts (50.27% vs. 42.15%), while the location disparity for female youth is only 2% pt. in favour of urban population (31.76% vs. 29.02%). Male youth of upper secondary school age in rural areas of Kiribati appear to face more barriers to continuing their education compared with other groups, which is possibly due to the necessity to economically provide for their families. More targeted research is needed to better understand the intersectional disparity that is faced by male students in rural areas.

Within the multi-dimensional level of disaggregated data in figure 30, it can be observed that the "richest, urban, female" group, marked in green, has the lowest upper secondary out-of-school rate of 16.13%, while the "poorest, rural, male" group, marked in red, has the highest rate of 58.18%. Due to data constraint, there is currently no disaggregated data for the poorest quintile in urban areas. Considering the consistent location disparity in favour of urban areas that is showcased in all other disaggregated data, it is likely that this trend stays true, and the poorest population in urban areas might have a lower out-of-school rate than the "poorest, rural" group. Further data collection, especially targeting the poorest quintile in urban Kiribati, is needed to better understand the reality in terms of access to and participation in education, as well as the barriers that are faced, which will thereby accurately identify those who are furthest behind.

6.5.3 Papua New Guinea country case study

Similar to Samoa, Kiribati and more than half of PICs, PNG is a lower-middle-income country, with an annual GDP per capita (constant USD) of USD 2462 (2022).[46] Located in the Melanesia subregion, PNG has a population of more than 10 million people living across more than 600 islands and atolls, making it not only the biggest country by population size in Melanesia but also the most populated among PICs (excluding Australia and New Zealand).[47] The national average out-of-school rate for youth of upper secondary school age, based on a household survey conducted in 2018[48], is 38.12%, which is higher than both the world and Oceania regional averages. This indicates relatively low participation in upper secondary education in PNG, which may have long-lasting negative impacts on human capital development and social equality.

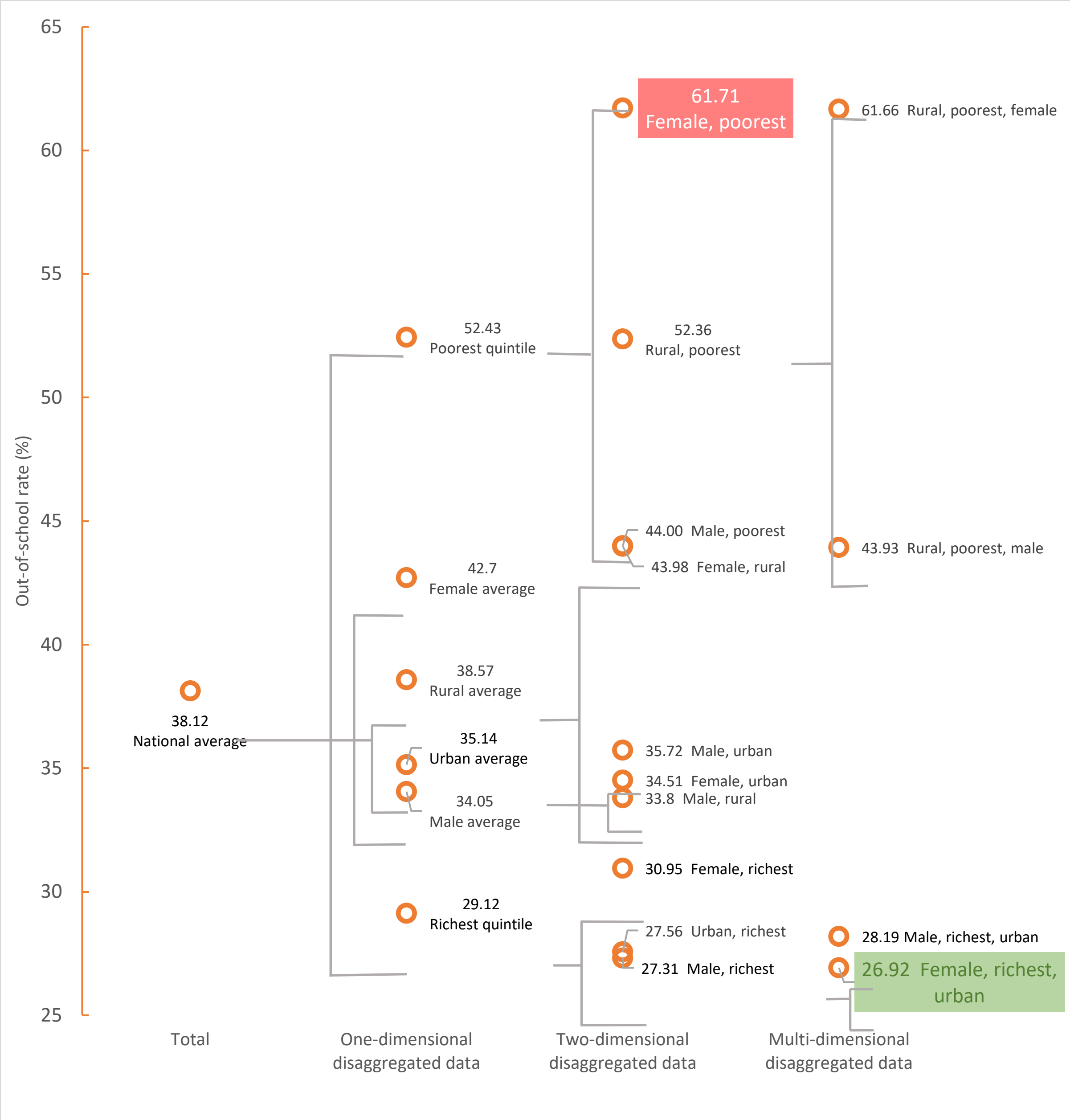
In terms of one-dimensional disaggregated data, similar patterns of inequality in wealth and location disparities can be observed in PNG compared with Kiribati and Samoa. Regarding location disparity, there is a small gap of around 3.5% pt. in the upper secondary out-of-school rate in favour of the urban population (rural 38.57% vs. urban 35.14%). As for wealth disparity, a more significant participation gap of over 22% pt. in out-of-school rates is found in favour of the richest quintile, similar to trends in other PICs (poorest quintile 52.43% vs. richest quintile 29.12%). However, PNG shows an opposite trend in gender disparity in upper secondary education participation compared with Kiribati and Samoa. The out-of-school rate for female youth of upper secondary school age in PNG is more than 8% pt., which is higher than that of males (female 42.7% vs. male 34.05%), indicating a considerable gender disparity favouring males in upper secondary education participation.

[46] https://data.worldbank.org/country/papua-new-guinea/.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Papua New Guinea Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2016-18. https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-fr364-dhs-final-reports.cfm/.

Figure 31: PNG out-of-school rate for youth of upper secondary school age, disaggregated data, 2018.



Source: UIS database.

Further breaking down one-dimensional disaggregated data by gender reveals more insights about this gender disparity among different groups of marginalised populations. The gender gap tends to be more pronounced within populations that are simultaneously subjected to other disadvantages. In rural areas of PNG, there is a gender gap of more than 10% pt. in upper secondary out-of-school rates in favour of males (female, rural 43.98% vs. male, rural 33.8%). When disaggregating the average out-of-school rate for the poorest quintile by gender, the gender gap expands to almost 18% pt. in favour of males (female, poorest 61.71% vs. male, poorest 44.00%). On the other hand, within more privileged populations, gender disparity becomes a less dominant factor of students' participation in upper secondary schools. In the richest quintile, the gap between male and female out-of-school rates is merely 3% pt. (female, richest 30.95% vs. male, richest 27.31%). In urban areas, gender disparity even reverses in favour of females, as the urban male out-of-school rate (35.72%) is around 1% pt. higher than the urban female rate (34.51%). These observations indicate that gender disparity in PNG intersects strongly with other forms of inequality, disproportionately disadvantaging female students in already marginalised groups. This explains why the group with the best participation “female, richest, urban” (marked in green) and the group with the worst participation “female, poorest” (marked in red) both involve females. Future policies that attempt to address gender disparity in education participation should consider prioritising female students in marginalised communities.

A potential weakness of this country case study is the missing data on the poorest quintile within urban areas, as well as all further disaggregated data of this group in upper secondary education participation. Similar to the situation in the Kiribati country case study, crucial disaggregated data on the upper secondary out-of-school rate for the poorest quintile in urban areas is missing. This lack of data prohibits further analysis of PNG’s education participation and hinders the accurate identification of the group that is furthest behind. Further efforts in data collection on the poorest quintile in urban areas will be crucial in filling the current data gap and improving the monitoring of education participation in PNG.

6.6 Conclusion of the equitable access and participation

Prioritising equitable and inclusive learning for all and ensuring knowledge, competencies and skills that are relevant and respond to learner’s needs, in a flexible manner, is quite important.

A young boy and girl participating in class in Palau.

7. Student outcomes and well-being

7.1 Introduction

PacREF has a policy objective to enable learners at all levels of education to achieve their full potential. The goal is to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attributes that enable them to contribute to their families and communities, and nation building. A key outcome of PacREF is to increase the percentage of learners that achieve expected levels of literacy and numeracy at all levels of education, particularly by the end of the primary cycle (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2018. Pacific Regional Education Framework PacREF 2018–2030: Moving Towards Education 2030. P. 10).

7.2 Completion rate

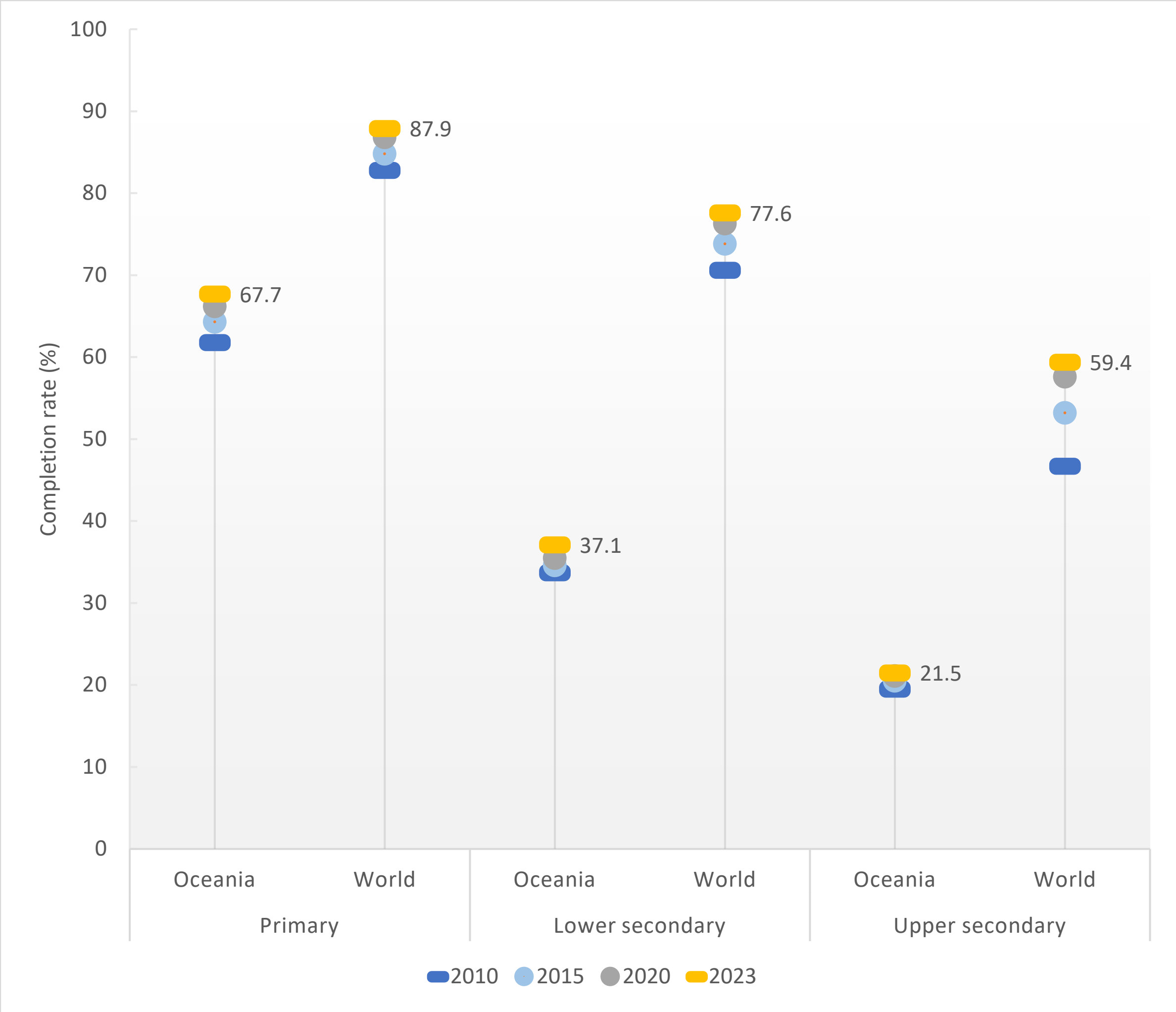
The completion rate for each level of basic education is an important indicator in measuring the progress of SDG 4, particularly in measuring the effectiveness of programme completion for different levels of basic education. This indicator measures the percentage of a cohort of children or young people who are aged 3 to 5 years above the intended age for the last grade of each level of education and have completed that grade.[49] The completion rate not only measures how well students can access and stay within the basic education system, but also measures how well students can progress and complete each level.

On the regional level, completion rates for all three levels of basic education have been slowly improving since 2010. The regional average completion rate for primary school increased by 6% pt. from 61.8% in 2010 to 67.7% in 2023. When comparing with the world average throughout the same time period, from 2010 to 2023, the world average of primary completion rate increased by a little more than 5% pt., from 82.8% in 2010 to almost 88% in 2023.

Less progress is made in improving secondary level completion in the Pacific region, especially when compared with the world average numbers. Lower secondary completion rate increased by 3.4% pt., from 33.7% in 2010 to 37.1% in 2023, while the completion rate for upper secondary education has been basically stagnated, recording a 2% pt. increase from 19.5% in 2010 to 21.5% in 2023. On the contrary, significant improvements have been observed in world averages in completion rates for both lower and upper secondary education during the same time span, indicating "progress-made" in other regions of the world in terms of ensuring that students complete and progress through secondary education. Between 2010 to 2023, the world average lower secondary completion rate increased by 7 percent, from 70.6% in 2010 to 77.6% in 2023. Upper secondary completion rate recorded an impressive almost 13% increase in world average, jumping from less than 47% in 2010 to almost 60% in 2023. World average completion rates for all three levels of basic education are now all above the Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) regional average values by more than 20% pt.

[49] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/.

Figure 32: Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) regional average completion rates vs. world average.

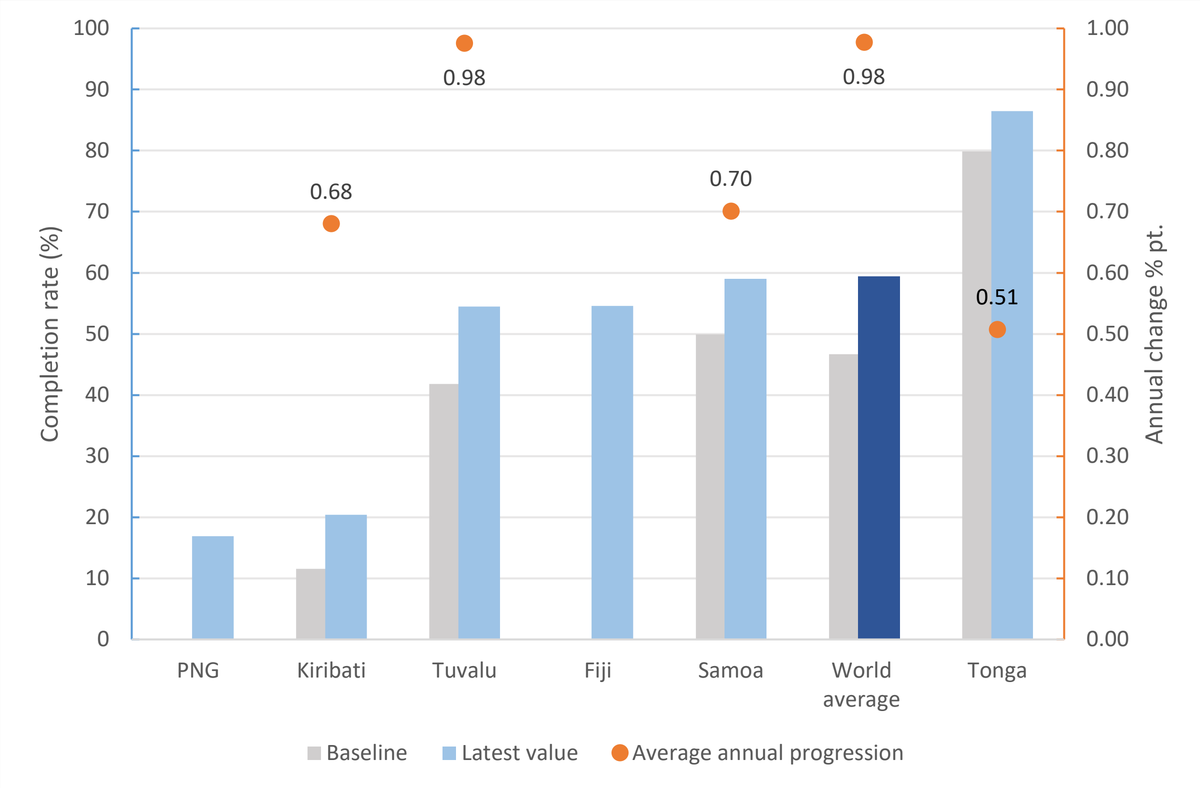


Source: UIS database.

This underperformance in ensuring that students complete secondary education is further supported by data on the national level. Out of the six countries with available national data on upper secondary completion rate, only one country, Tonga at 86.5%, is above the world average of upper secondary completion rate in 2023 of 59.4%, and no country in the Pacific region has progressed faster than the world average progression rate since 2010. Tuvalu records the fastest progression in raising upper secondary completion rate in the region, increasing the rate by 0.98% per year on average, which is on a par with the world average.

While all countries with available country-level data record positive progress in ensuring students complete upper secondary education in a timely manner, the data availability is concerning and a barrier for further analysis. Out of all 15 countries in the Pacific region (excluding Australia and New Zealand), less than 30% have submitted time series data that allows analysis on trend and progression on this fundamental SDG 4 indicator. Considering the stagnating regional average numbers, there is a high possibility that there might be stagnating and even regressing progress in countries that have not submitted national-level data for upper secondary completion rate.

Figure 33: Upper secondary education completion rate (%) and average annual progression by country.

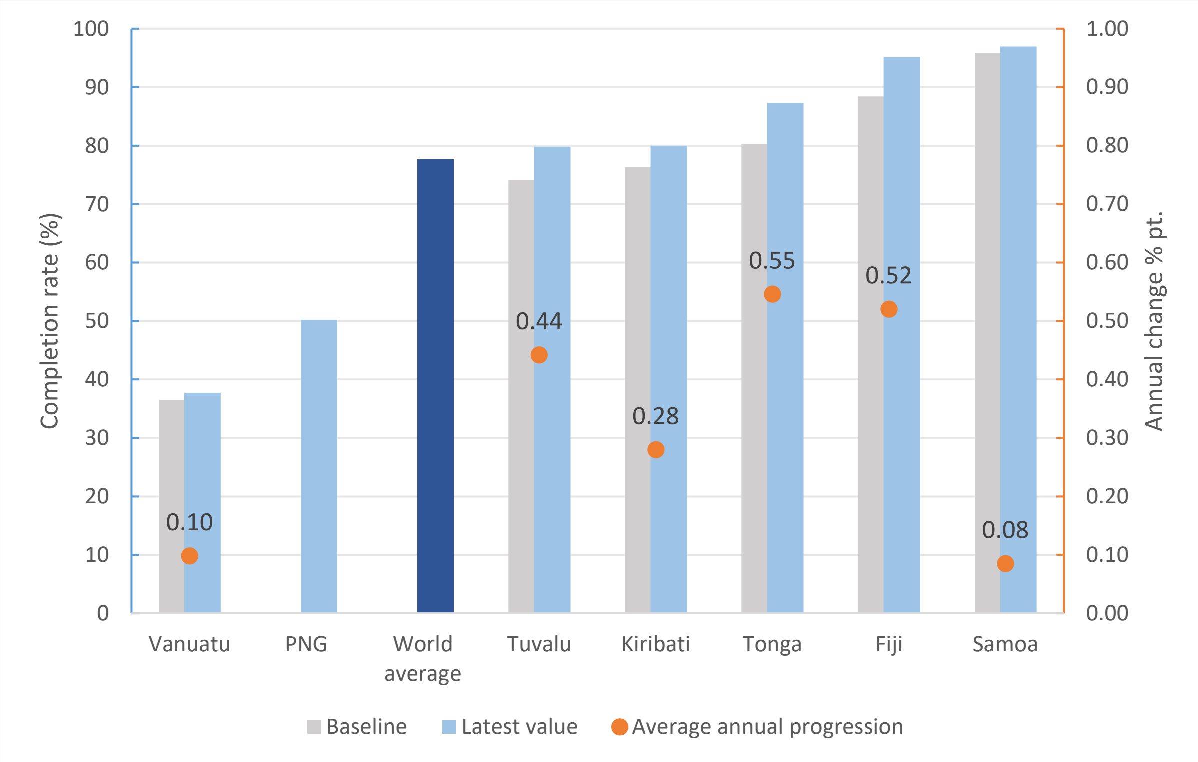


Source: UIS database.

At the lower secondary level, five out of seven countries with available data are above the world average in terms of completion rate. Notably, Samoa, Fiji and Tonga are either close to or exceed a 90% completion rate, which means that nine out of 10 lower secondary students in these countries finish on time. However, on a regional level, the average lower secondary completion rate in the Oceania region has stagnated since 2010 and is nearly 6% pt. lower than the world average in 2023. This suggests that while countries with available data have reported encouraging levels of lower secondary education completion, the situation may be worse in countries without reported data, and likely have national completion rates lower than the world average.

In terms of average annual progression of lower secondary completion rate, it can be observed that all countries with available data for trend have recorded a positive annual progression. Countries like Tonga and Fiji are raising the rate of lower secondary completion by more than 0.5% pt. per year on average since their 2010 baselines. In countries with relatively lower rates of completion, like Vanuatu and PNG, the progression trend is either slow or unavailable, which casts a shadow on countries' prospect on achieving SDG 4 targets and benchmarks on time.

Figure 34: Lower secondary education completion rate (%) and average annual progression.



Source: UIS database.

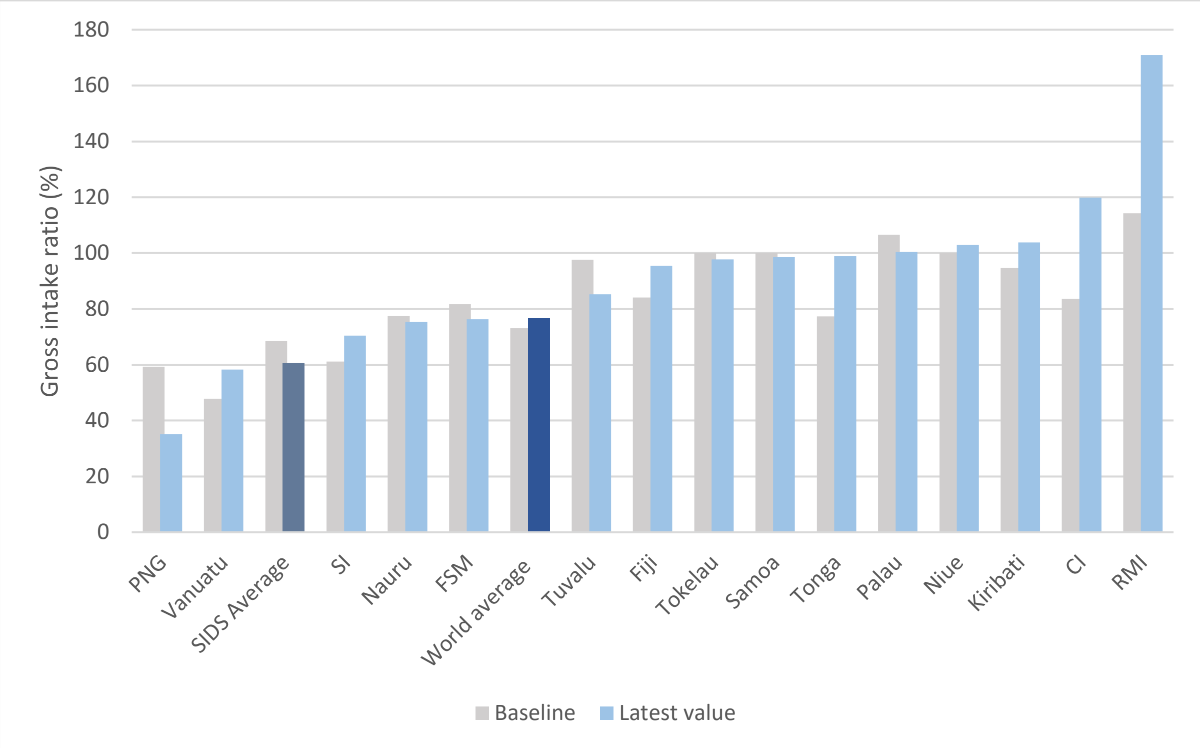
Although there remains a data gap in secondary completion rates that hinders a more comprehensive analysis covering all PICs, another SDG 4 indicator can be examined: the gross intake ratio (GIR) to the last grade of lower secondary education (unfortunately this indicator does not monitor the upper secondary level). This measure is considered a proxy for completion rate, and all PICs have submitted data for it. The GIR is calculated by taking the number of new entrants in the last grade of the given level of education, regardless of age, and dividing it by the population of the intended entrance age for that grade level. It can reflect students' access to and progression through the early grades, and indicates the education system's capacity to accommodate the population of the intended entrance age for the last grade of the given level of education.

However, when using the GIR as a proxy indicator for completion, it is important to remember that it does not indicate how many students complete the last grade – only how many enter it. Another limitation of the GIR is that, as a gross measure, it can exceed 100% when there are large numbers of students entering school either early or late. Students who repeat grades and take longer to progress and complete each level of education can also cause inflations in the GIR. These limitations make the GIR more difficult to interpret than the completion rate. Nonetheless, it can still serve as a proxy for school completion, especially when the other indicators are unavailable.

When looking at the gross intake ratio of PICs, a similar result compared to the completion rate can be observed. PICs with high completion rates including Tonga, Fiji and Samoa, are also recording strong performance in the GIR, as all three countries have recorded higher than 95% GIR for lower secondary level. At the same time, on the other end of the spectrum, it can also be observed that the results of GIR in PNG and Vanuatu are similar to the results of completion rate, which confirms the need of further raising the student completion level in the lower secondary education in these two countries.

While almost all PICs exceed the SIDS average, and more than half surpass the world average in terms of the GIR for lower secondary education, it is important to recognise that this indicator can exceed 100% since it is a gross measurement. Therefore, a higher GIR should not be simply interpreted as better completion level in the given education level. In CI and RMI, the GIR for lower secondary education is substantially higher than 100%, especially in the latter, where the most recent value reached 170%. While this high GIR can indicate a robust education system capable of accommodating a large number of students beyond the population of the intended age group, it may also suggest that a substantial proportion of students are taking longer to progress and complete lower secondary education, potentially repeating one or more grades before completion. This is also evidenced by high repetition rate in lower secondary education, which jumped to 23.14% in RMI in 2021, meaning almost one out of four lower secondary students in the country have repeated at least one grade in lower secondary schools.

Figure 35: Gross intake ratio to the last grade of lower secondary, by country (%).



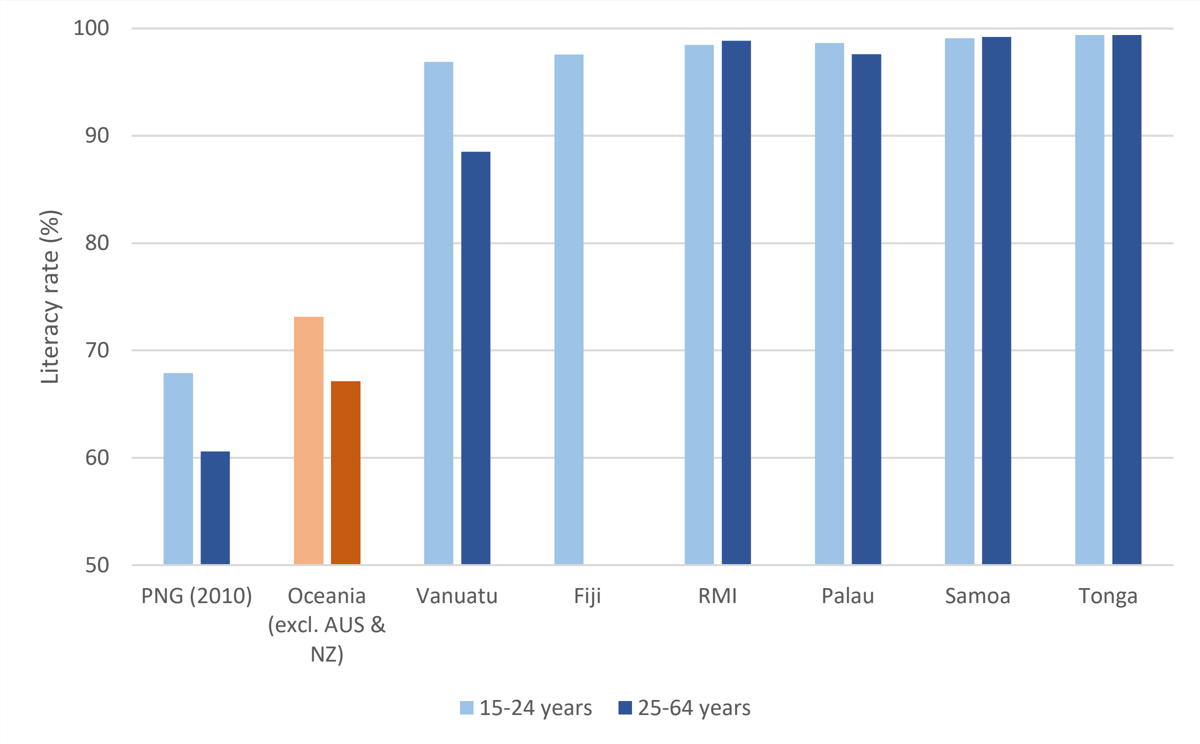
Source: UIS database.

Due to the limitations of the GIR, which has been discussed earlier, it can serve as a proxy for completion rates but cannot replace them for monitoring the level of completion for a given level of education. The completion rate for each level of basic education is both an SDG 4 global indicator and a global benchmark indicator. It plays a crucial role in assessing the effectiveness of national basic education systems in ensuring that students progress through educational levels in a timely manner. Currently, more than half of PICs are missing data on this indicator, which hinders comprehensive analysis of student completion at each level of basic education on a country-by-country basis. Monitoring and evaluating progress in achieving SDG 4 will be impossible without evidence-based analysis and robust country-level data. Greater efforts from all relevant stakeholders, including education ministries, statistics officials and development partners, are needed to address the current data availability challenges.

7.3 Youth and adult literacy

Functional literacy is a primary focus in policy area 3 of PacREF. It is not only highlighted in the first outcome of the "learning outcome" policy area, but is also heavily referenced in the proposed strategies for both phase 1 and beyond. Achieving an adequate level of literacy is often considered a desirable outcome of basic education because it forms the foundation for children's further development and enables participation in education, the workplace, civic engagement and other areas.[50] The importance of promoting literacy (and numeracy) in society is also fully recognised in SDG 4. One of the ten targets of SDG 4, target 4.6, is fully dedicated to ensuring that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults achieve literacy and numeracy by 2030.

Figure 36: Youth and adult literacy rate, by country, both sexes (%).



Source: UIS database.

In the Pacific region, solid progress in some countries has been observed, but also a concerning level of data gaps in others. Countries such as Palau, Samoa and Tonga have reported near-universal literacy rates for both the age groups of 15 to 24 years of age, and 25 to 64 years of age. In other countries, however, analysing literacy levels may be hindered by a lack of recent data. Only seven out of 15 PICs have reported any data on this indicator (4.6.2 youth and adult literacy rate) available in the UIS database, and only four of these seven countries have recent data available for both of the aforementioned age groups. The latest data on youth and adult literacy rates for RMI and PNG were reported in 2011 and 2010, respectively – both more than a decade ago from the time of this analysis and were prior to the launch of the SDGs and the Education 2030 Agenda. This undermines the accuracy and relevance of the data.

[50] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388811/.

Based on the available data, the literacy rate for the 15 to 24 years of age group tends to be higher than that of the 25 to 64 years of age group, especially in countries with lower literacy rates. This may be due to a large number of illiterate adults who lack access to educational opportunities. The Oceania regional average (excluding Australia and New Zealand) shows a similar pattern, with the youth literacy rate for the 15 to 24 age group being almost 6% pt. higher than the adult literacy rate for the 25 to 64 years of age group. This calls for more research into adult literacy and an increase in the accessibility and coverage of adult literacy programmes within the Pacific region, which is also underscored in the policy area 3 of PacREF.

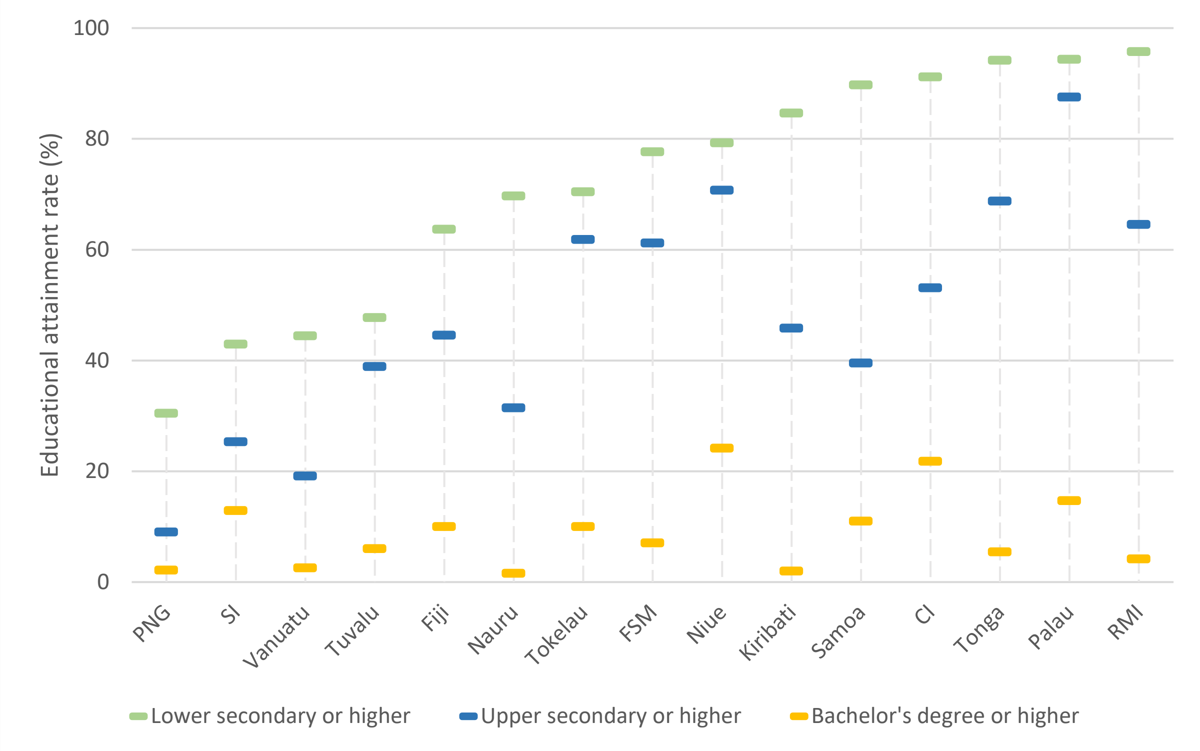
7.4 Educational attainment rate

Although it usually takes longer than other indicators to reflect the effects of policies, the educational attainment rate, which shows the level of human capital across entire countries, can be analysed to understand the broader outcomes of basic education in the Pacific region. This indicator typically measures the percentage of the population aged 25 years and older who have completed at least a given level of education, which is why it tends to react slowly to education policy changes, as the measured population is large and has already completed its education.

In the Pacific region, decent levels of educational attainment can be observed for both lower and upper secondary education. More than half of the PICs have a lower secondary education attainment rate near or above 80%, meaning at least 8 out of 10 people aged 25 years and older have completed lower secondary education. At the upper secondary level, seven out of 15 PICs have an attainment rate higher than 50%, indicating that more than half of the population aged 25 years and older have completed upper secondary education in these countries. These high levels of educational attainment suggest a high quality of human capital and strong educational outcomes in these countries.

While many PICs exhibit high levels of educational attainment for secondary education, others face significantly lower rates, leading to a considerable education attainment gap within the Pacific region. Six countries report upper secondary education attainment rates below 40%, and two countries are below 20%. The highest upper secondary education attainment rate for population aged 25 years and older in the Pacific region is 87.56%, while the lowest is below 10%. This results in a disparity of more than 70% pt. in upper secondary education attainment, indicating a large gap in human capital between PICs.

Figure 37: Educational attainment rate, completed given education levels, 25+ years of age, (%).



Source: UIS database.

At the university level, the educational attainment rate tends to be lower in the Pacific region. Other than Niue and the CI, all other PICs are below 15% in terms of the proportion of the population aged 25 years and older who have completed a bachelor's degree or higher. In the majority of the PICs, fewer than 1 in 10 people aged 25 years and older have completed a bachelor's degree or higher. In comparison, Australia's educational attainment rate for the population aged 25 years and older who have completed at least a bachelor's degree is 36.84%, while it is 34.54% for the Republic of Korea and 36.84% for Singapore. Higher education plays a crucial role in skills development, especially in equipping students with up-to-date knowledge on ever-evolving technology. Populations that have a higher level of attainment of university degrees is often associated with greater national economic growth, especially in technology-driven industries.[51]

7.4.1 Assessing the student learning outcomes

For data on the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA), please see the *2021 Regional Report*.[52]

[51] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380519.
[52] https://pilna.eqap.spc.int/2021/regional/.

8. Teaching profession

8.1 Introduction

The role of teachers as key stakeholders and change agents is in pursuit of transforming the “what” and “how” of learning to achieve SDG 4, and harnessing technology and innovation. This role of teachers also includes the **emerging role of generative artificial intelligence (AI) and digital transformations** to improve the access, quality and management of education and training systems.

The proportion of trained and qualified teachers and student–teacher ratios in primary and secondary education are SDG 4 thematic indicators of the quality of the teaching profession in the Pacific region.

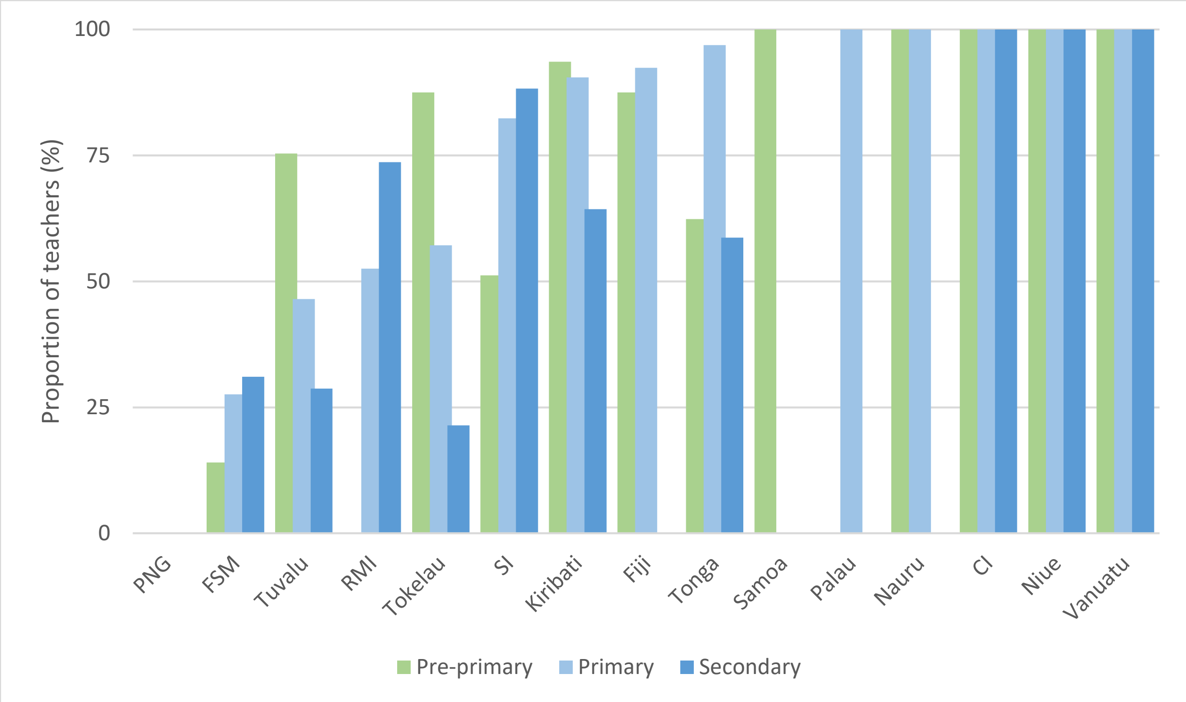
8.2 Empowering teachers in the Pacific region through organised teacher training

The fourth and final policy area of PacREF is dedicated to teacher professionalism, which aims to ensure the teaching profession is supported and empowered in the Pacific region. This requires political commitment to establish and promote continuous teacher training and relevant skill development programmes for teachers at all educational levels. Additionally, improving the working conditions of teachers and avoiding teacher shortages are crucial.

Regarding professional development and training for teachers, which is measured by SDG 4 indicator 4.c.1 (proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications), results are mixed. Top-performing countries like Vanuatu, Niue, and CI have ensured that 100% of teachers at all three educational levels (pre-primary, primary and secondary) have received the minimum required training and qualifications. However, countries on the lower end of the spectrum are far from achieving this benchmark, especially at the secondary level. In FSM, Tuvalu and Tokelau, only around 30% or less of secondary teachers have received the minimum required training.

Data availability on teacher training is another area of concern. For the secondary level, five out of 15 countries lack data in the UIS Database on the proportion of teachers who receive the minimum required training. Better data coverage is observed at the primary and pre-primary levels, with only two and three countries, respectively, missing data. PNG, in particular, is missing teacher training data for all levels of education, which poses a challenge for evidence-based analysis and monitoring of teacher training status in the country.

Figure 38: Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications, by education level, both sexes (%).

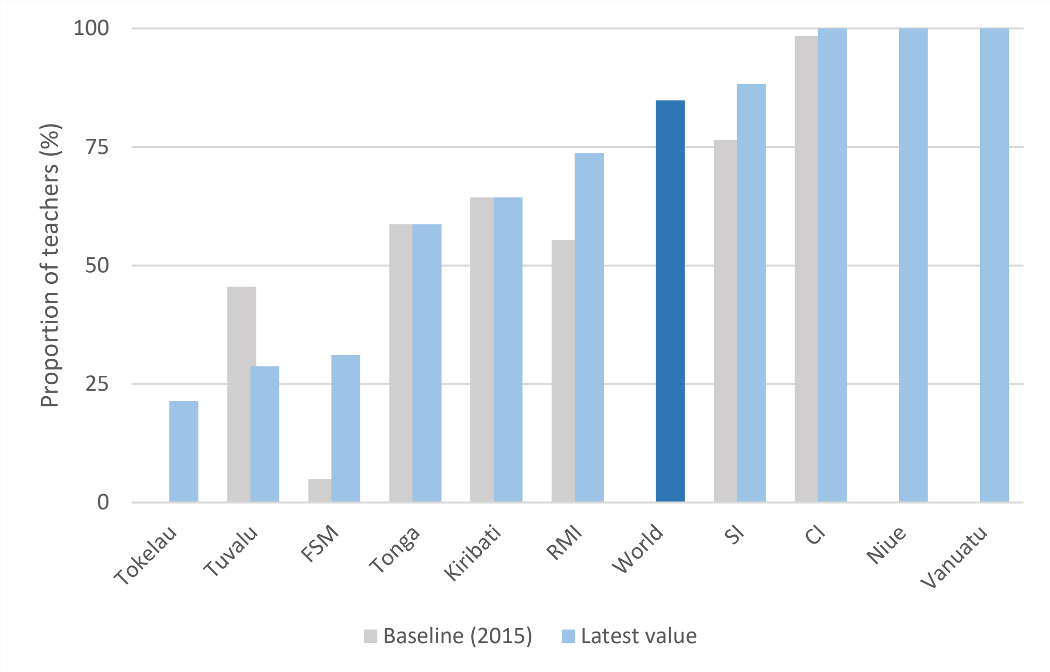


Source: UIS database.

Overall, a moderate level of progress has been made in increasing the coverage of teacher training in the Pacific region since 2015. When comparing the latest data with the 2015 baseline for the proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications and training for secondary education, only three countries show an increase of more than 10% pt. In the FSM, the proportion of trained secondary-level teachers increased by over 25% pt. from the baseline, reaching 31% in 2021. Conversely, Tuvalu experienced a decline in the proportion of trained secondary-level teachers, dropping from 45.5% in 2015 to 28.7% in 2022, making it the only PIC that has available data to experience setbacks in secondary education teacher training.

Continuous teacher training and skill development programmes are essential for ensuring teachers are well-equipped and qualified for their educational level. These programmes also enable teachers to adapt to new technological developments and effectively utilise technology in teaching. Among countries with available data on secondary teacher training, 60% of them are below the world average in the latest values, as can be seen in figure 39. More efforts and commitment are needed to ensure that teachers at all educational levels in the Pacific region are empowered by accessible quality training, skill development and lifelong learning opportunities.

Figure 39: Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualification, secondary level (%).



Source: UIS Database.

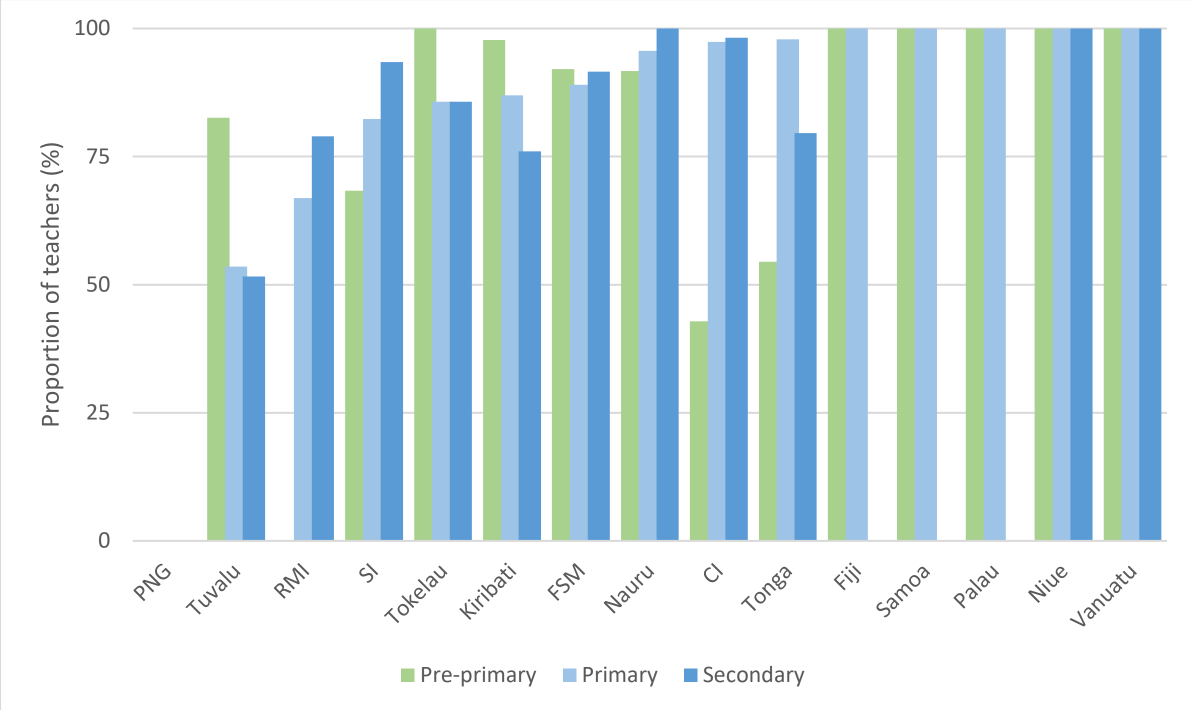
8.3 Ensuring teachers are qualified according to national standards

Considering the key role of teachers is ensuring the quality of education, it's important that they not only receive adequate and relevant pedagogical training but also be well-qualified academically in the subjects that they teach, in compliance with national standards. The SDG 4 indicator 4.c.3 measures the proportion of teachers at a given level of education who are qualified according to national standards, as can be seen in figure 40. Although the definition and requirements for qualified teachers vary by country, this indicator remains a crucial metric for monitoring the overall quality of a country's teaching workforce of each educational level.

In the PICs, better results are found in the proportion of nationally qualified teachers compared with the indicator on teacher training. Seven out of 15 countries report above 95% of pre-primary teachers being qualified according to national standards, and eight countries have above 95% teachers qualified in terms of primary level. The gap between high- and low-performing countries is also smaller in proportion of qualified teachers. Almost all countries in all levels of education (where data is available) report more than 50% of teachers being nationally qualified, except only at pre-primary level in the CI (42.86%).

As for data availability on nationally qualified teachers, it is slightly better than data on trained teachers. Similar to the trend in the proportion of trained teachers, secondary level has a more significant data gap than primary and pre-primary in proportion of nationally qualified teachers.

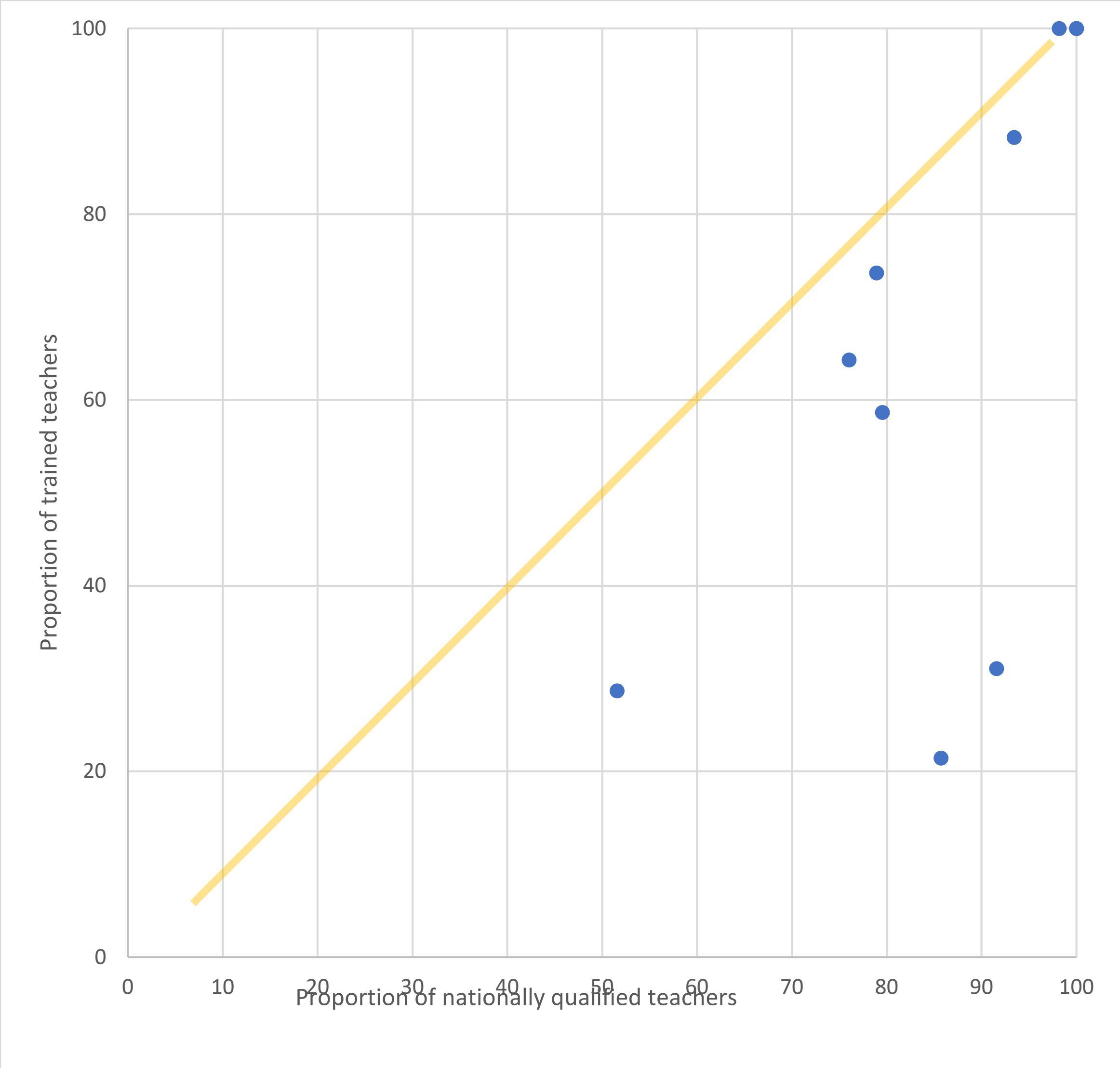
Figure 40: Percentage of teachers qualified according to national standards, by education level, both sexes (%).



Source: UIS database.

Comparing the proportion of teachers who are trained and the proportion of those who are qualified, as shown in figure 41, further reveals the need for expanding teacher training in PICs. Figure 41 is a scatterplot chart that demonstrates the relationship between proportion of teachers who are trained and proportion of teacher who are qualified in one country. Each blue dot in the chart is a PIC, and the vertical axis shows the proportion of secondary teachers with the minimum required teacher training while the horizontal axis shows the proportion of secondary teachers who are qualified according to national standards. In this figure, it can be seen that almost all countries (where data is available) from this region are below the 45-degree yellow line, which represents equilibrium between the two measurements. This indicates that nearly all PICs have a higher proportion of teachers that are qualified nationally than those who are trained. The gap between trained teachers and nationally qualified teachers is considerable, where in some cases the proportion of qualified teachers is three to four times higher than the proportion of trained teachers.

Figure 41: Proportion of secondary teachers with the minimum national qualification standards, by country (%).



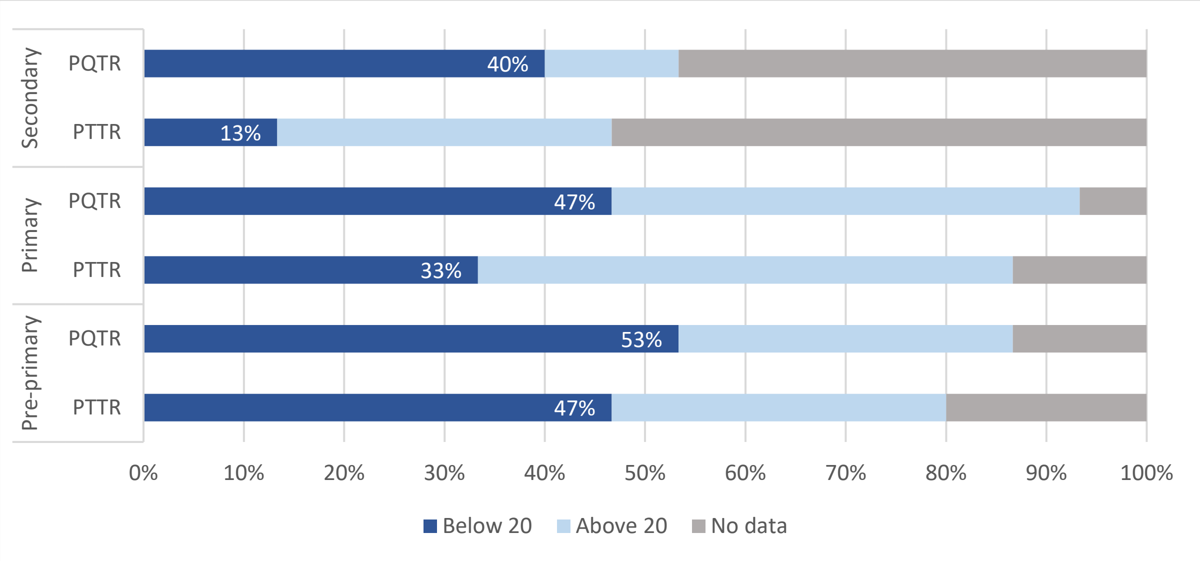
Source: UIS database.

When analysing teacher supply in the Pacific region, as indicated by the pupil-trained teacher ratio (PTTR) and the pupil-qualified teacher ratio (PQTR), several key findings emerge across different levels of education. The proportion of PICs with a PQTR below 20 is relatively consistent across all three levels of education. This indicates that around 50% of PICs are maintaining a good supply of qualified teachers across all educational levels, even though the supply is slightly lower in secondary schools compared with primary and pre-primary levels.

However, when considering the supply of trained teachers, the situation is different. The proportion of countries with a PTTR below 20 is significantly lower at higher levels of education compared with PQTR. Only 13% of PICs have ensured a PTTR below 20 for secondary schools, meaning that only a small percentage have achieved a ratio of no more than 20 students per trained teacher at the secondary level. In contrast, the gap between PQTR and PTTR at the primary and pre-primary levels is less pronounced. For pre-primary education, 47% of countries have a PTTR below 20, while 33% of countries have achieved this ratio at the primary level.

The lack of data on pupil–teacher ratios, particularly at the secondary level, is especially concerning. Nearly half of the PICs have not reported any data on PQTR or PTTR for secondary education, which hampers further analysis of the supply of trained and qualified teachers relative to student numbers. Ensuring that teachers are not overburdened with too many students is crucial for maintaining the quality of education. Therefore, improved data coverage on this topic is needed.

Figure 42: Proportion of countries in the Pacific with pupil–teacher ratio (PTTR vs PQTR)) below 20.



Source: UIS database.

8.4 Overall progress, issues and challenges

There is a recognition of the need to prioritise continuous professional development and leadership training for teachers and school administrators to enhance the quality of education. This calls for a commitment to increasing support to programmes that ensure quality of teachers in the Pacific region and providing the opportunity for sharing best practices through exchange programmes.

Regional status and progress

The current status of the key education indicators for the Pacific region by PacREF policy area is shown in figure 43. In the outer circle, the green colour shows that positive progress has been made for the indicator since the commencement of PacREF implementation. Conversely, the red colour shows that there has been a negative trend for the indicator. The orange colour denotes little or no change.

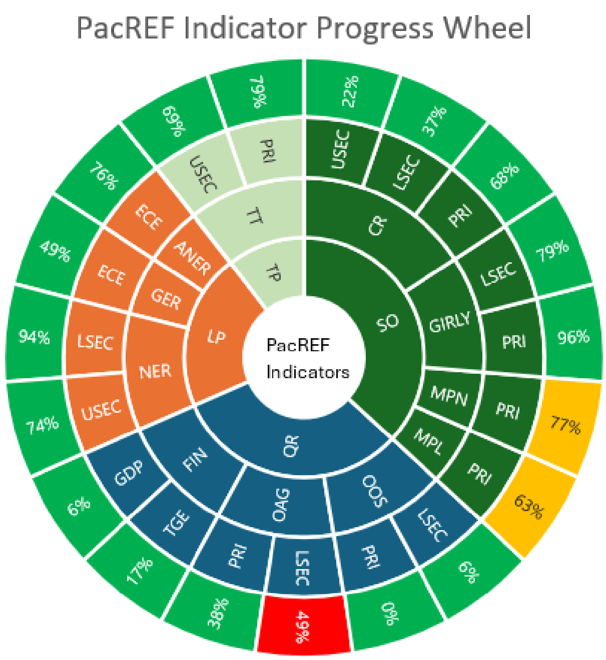
For the quality and relevance policy area, positive progress has been made towards improving the out-of-school rate for primary-aged children, but there has been little change for lower secondary-aged adolescents. Neither has there been any progress in reducing the number of over-age students at primary level, but there has been some progress at lower secondary level. The finance indicators show that there has been a reduction in government spending on education since the beginning of the implementation of PacREF.

For the learning pathways policy area, progress has been made towards increasing the overall number of young children enrolled in early childhood education, but fewer children aged one year prior to primary age were enrolled. For secondary education, there has been no progress in increasing the enrolment of students at lower secondary level, and at upper secondary level there was a declining trend.

For the student outcomes policy area, there has been progress in the completion of education at all levels. That is, more students are completing their schooling at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels. While there has been no progress in increasing the intake to the last year of primary education, there has been improvement in the intake of students to the last year of lower secondary education. Recent regional assessments show that more primary children are meeting minimum proficiency levels in literacy, but fewer are now proficient in numeracy.

For the teaching profession policy area, there has been progress in increasing the number of trained teachers who teach in both primary and secondary schools.

Figure 43: The PacREF indicator progress wheel.



Key:

Policy Areas	
QR	Quality and Relevance
LP	Learning Pathways
SO	Student Outcomes
TP	teaching Profession
Sub Sectors	
ECE	Early Childhood Education
PRI	Primary Education
LSEC	Lower Secondary Education
USEC	Upper Secondary Education
Indicators	
ANER	Adjusted Net Enrolment Rate
CR	Completion Rate
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GIRLY	Gross Intake Rate to Last Year
MPL	Minimum Proficiency - Literacy
MPN	Minimum Proficiency - Numeracy
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
OAG	Over-Age for Grade
OOS	Out of School Rate
TGE	Total Govt. Expenditure
TT	Trained Teachers

Policy recommendations

National policies need to continue their focus on improving access to education even for students who have never been enrolled. Distance to schools and affordability of attending may be leading issues that would need to be addressed. A comprehensive survey on education barriers among households may be required to shed light on the issue.

When young people leave school after completing lower secondary education, PICs should investigate reasons and incentives behind why they are not continuing with upper secondary education. TVET opportunities would need to be strengthened so that young people can follow clear pathways towards employment. Policy initiatives could explore practical approaches for collecting individual data on children who have left or have never enrolled in school and the gathering of this data would enable related targeted interventions.

Investigation into the reasons for children being over-age should be carried out to explore equity reasons of starting school at an older age and/or repetition of grades. Barriers to education access are likely linked to the phenomenon, referring to urban/rural location (distance), socio-economic status and disability.

Basic safe drinking water access and sanitation facilities, such as separate toilets with flushing water supply, are still lacking in schools and some PICs. The lack of ensuring very basic human needs is likely to factor in school attendance barriers. The reasons for the missing services at schools need to be explored for regulatory remediation.

The enhancing of digital infrastructure in schools, particularly improving internet connectivity, requires a policy direction and collaborative approach. Regional cooperation and public–private partnerships can strengthen resources and expertise, and help to bridge the digital divide. Integrating digital literacy into the curriculum and upskilling educators will empower both students and teachers to excel in an increasingly digital world.

The gender-disparate participation of women and men in both TVET and tertiary education needs to be addressed by means of identifying the reasons behind both populations decisions to join or not to join either educational path. The geographical availability of TVET and tertiary education in the PIC context may be a likely factor.

A clear policy direction is needed to prioritise the expansion of adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities across all education levels, especially in primary and lower secondary schools. Strengthening data collection and reporting on disability status will enable effective monitoring and ensure progress toward inclusivity. Regional collaboration will promote the sharing of best practices and resources, by enhancing access to inclusive education across the Pacific region. By providing targeted teacher training, we can empower educators to better support students with disabilities, which will reduce dropout rates and boost participation in education.

The low proportions of students with minimum literacy and numeracy skills require a thorough review on the underlying issues that impede the acquisition of these skills. Motivational issues and pedagogical methods may require assessment among both the student and teacher populations.

Policies need to be informed by evidence on the supply and demand for qualified and trained teachers. There needs to be research into the factors that affect the recruitment, retention and attrition of teachers, including teachers' salaries and employment conditions. The analysis should assess the equity of teacher provisions with the education sector, with specific reference to the urban/rural location of schools, since ratios significantly differ according to school location.

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Suva Regional Office
Private Mail Bag
Suva, Fiji
+679 337 0733
spc@spc.int | spc.int

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