

focused on the perpetrator rather than the child. This highlights the importance of awareness-raising among caregivers, siblings and other members of households on the range of child protection services available, the need to seek assistance from formal health and justice systems, and cultivating responses that are child-centred and in the best interests of the child.

Q. How aware are children of the existence of community plans related to child protection?

A. Child respondents demonstrate the least amount of knowledge about child protection plans (additionally, very few adults were able to confirm whether such plans existed).The report recommends that communities should be encouraged to develop, publicise and regularly monitor plans, with full participation from the entire community, supported by Community Welfare Volunteers, who are currently being deployed to communities.

Q. Do schools provide a safe environment for children?

A. School-going child survey respondents report experiencing physical harm and verbal insults from both teachers and other children at school and inappropriate touch by other children and adults, including teachers. (70% of education KIs admit teachers physically hurt children, sometimes due to frustration, stress, anger or ignorance). Bullying, poor physical environment and lack of understanding about child abuse also features as things that make children feel unsafe in schools. Teacher education and curriculum development needs to include non-violent forms of discipline. Policies prohibiting teacher misconduct should be strictly enforced and school rules and policies should include child protection measures that are mutually agreed upon with all stakeholders, including parents and children.

Q. Do caregivers and community leaders practice behaviour that protects children from violence, abuse and exploitation?

A. Despite demonstrating a high level of awareness of positive discipline techniques, 72% of adult survey respondents admit to physically hurting children in their household; 26% of them say this is for 'discipline' or 'education'. The baseline report recommends that Police conduct awareness programmes during visits to rural communities on the laws relating to child protection as well as how/when/where to report cases of violence, abuse, and exploitation of children. It also highlights the importance of carrying out a campaign on non-violent parenting and childrearing practices in communities.

Q. How do adults feels about the risks of sending their children to live away from home?

A. According to the survey, 17% of respondents had biological children of their own under-18 currently living outside their households. These children live with other relatives and are mostly away from home for the purpose of going to school. 34% of relevant respondents seem aware of risks associated with sending children away from home (those who stated that their children are not safe, or they do not know if they are safe). 63% feel that their children are safe in their alternative places of residence, but this is based largely on assumptions, trust in the hosts (particularly when the hosts are family members) and feedback from the hosts rather than from the children themselves.

The survey recommends to start a nationwide campaign aimed at increasing awareness about the long-term impacts of children being separated from their parents or main caregivers. It also advocates for more checks on the welfare of children to be done, both at boarding institutions and for those children known to be living away from home.

Q. Are children aware of their protection rights and form and express their views at home and in school?

A. All respondents in the baseline survey felt that children could speak out most freely in informal spaces. However, only 49% of children agreed they could say what they wanted without fearing punishment. The research also found that children experience more violence than they report, only 43% of children who had experienced violence spoke out about the abuse. The baseline report recommends that child protection programmes be conducted for children both in school, and in the community and for each school to have a designated counsellor, preferably trained, to look after the welfare of children.



Key Findings

Protect me with love and care

A Question & Answer on the Baseline Report for creating a future free from violence, abuse and exploitation of girls and boys in Solomon Islands



Q. What is the Government of Solomon Islands/UNICEF Pacific Child Protection Programme?

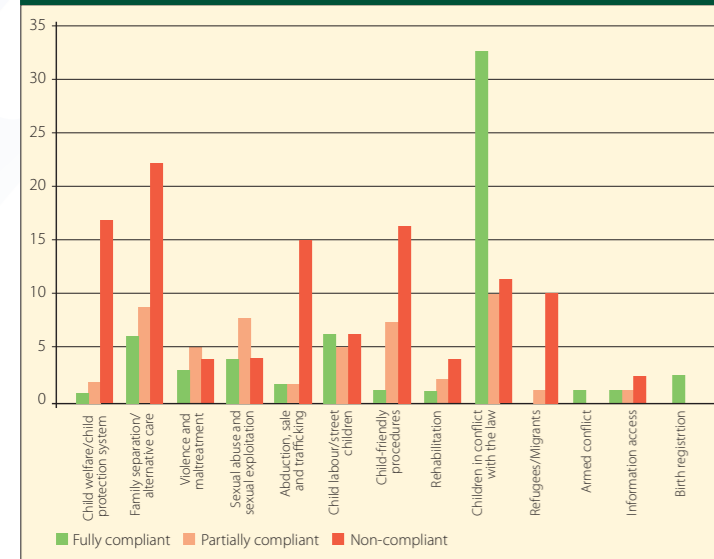
A. The Child Protection Programme provides strategic direction for child protection interventions in the country. It takes a child-centred, holistic and long-term approach to keeping children from harmful situations, preventing child abuse and exploitation, and addressing the social reintegration and recovery of those who have been abused. It runs from 2008-2012.

Q. What is the Solomon Islands Child Protection Baseline Report?

A. The Solomon Islands Child Protection Baseline Report was completed with the assistance of a large team of people from the Solomon Islands and internationally. The research was guided by a National Steering Committee, made up of members of the Solomon Islands National Advisory Committee on Children - Child Protection Subcommittee, chaired by the Social Welfare Division of the MoHMS. The committee gave advice and endorsement at every stage of the research.

The research covered 30 communities in 8 provinces and included 274 questionnaires with children, 273 questionnaires with adults, 278 group activities with children and young people, as well as a review of policies, laws and regulations in the Solomon Islands and 187 interviews with key informants from government and other organisations. Information was also collected through the observations and diaries of field researchers.

Alignment of Solomon Islands Child Welfare and Protection Laws with CRC indicators



Q. What factors make children particularly vulnerable in the Solomon Islands?

A. In the Solomon Islands, traditional practices, sexual exploitation resulting from economic difficulties, ethnic tensions, and the effects of natural disasters such as the 2007 earthquake and tsunami all contribute to children's vulnerability to violence, abuse and exploitation.

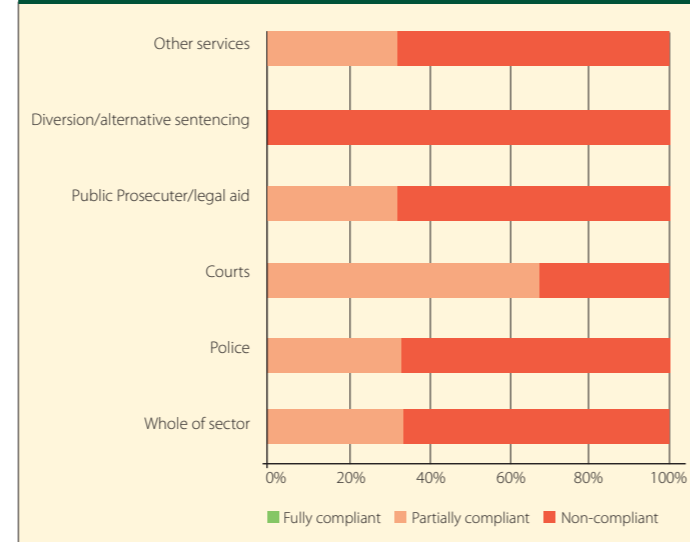
Q. Is current legislation aligned with good Child Protection principles such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)?

A. Of the CRC indicators assessed, the review found Solomon Islands' legal provisions were fully compliant with 61 indicators, partially compliant with 51, and non-compliant on 111. Currently, there is no national legislation or policy for child welfare/child protection. Discussions around draft bills are ongoing and existing laws, such as the Penal Code 1963, are currently undergoing comprehensive review. Stronger protection for children would be achieved if they were made more specific and comprehensive. The baseline study recommends that the National Children's Policy and Plan of Action and the Rights of the Child Convention Bill are redrafted, finalised and approved as a matter of priority.

Q. How well-placed is the Solomon Islands Justice System to apply good principles of juvenile justice?

A. Standing orders (police operating procedures) contain some specific provisions relating to the treatment of children in conflict

Compliance of the justice system with good principles of juvenile justice



with the law, including a 'no drop' policy for sexual crimes and domestic violence. However, there are no written procedures guiding how police, prosecutions, courts or public solicitors deal with child victims/witnesses. Support services are limited although police do refer sexual assault victims to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS). Only a few police in the capital have received specialised training and there are no specialised court procedures for such cases. Clear protocols, procedures and guidelines are needed across the justice system both for dealing with child abuse and exploitation, and for dealing with children in conflict with the law. Awareness-raising activities are also needed about determining which cases are relevant for the traditional system to deal with and which require more formal procedures.

Q. How do traditional authorities handle children in conflict with the law

A. Police estimate that while 50% of suspects in crimes are under 18, in 2005, young offenders made up less than 5% of criminal charges in the courts. Formal diversion options do not exist - instead, police informally divert children back to the community, and traditional processes are often applied in lieu of police intervention (unless they fail), including for sexual assault cases and other cases involving children.

Most respondents (63%) agree that children in conflict with the law are accepted back into their communities. Chiefs/traditional authorities demonstrate some (but not much) awareness of child-friendly practices and there is some evidence that some groups, such as women, do not have confidence in the chiefs. Clear protocols, procedures and guidelines are needed for police and wider judiciary system, traditional justice processes, the Social Welfare Department and the sexual offences unit. Dedicated training and awareness raising about child protection issues are also required for these groups.

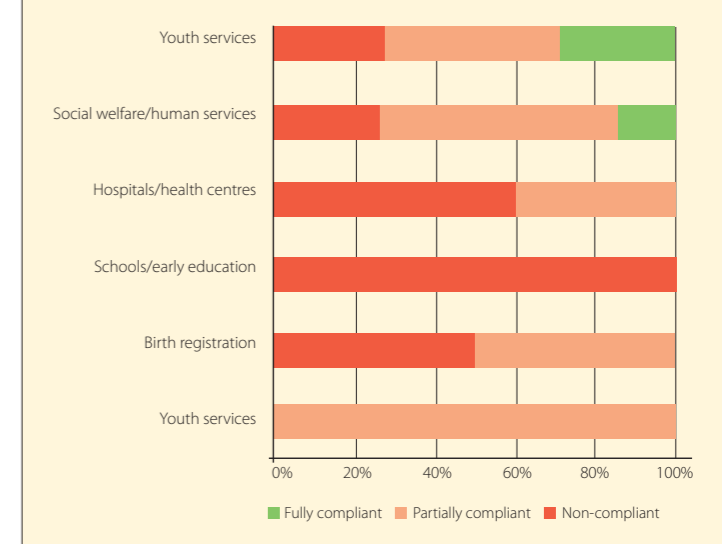
Mentoring programmes and providing support to returning offenders would help their reintegration.

Q. How well-positioned are social welfare officers to carry out duties assigned to them?

A. Although in its infancy, Solomon Islands has a clearly mandated department for child protection, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services' (MHMS) Social Welfare Division (SWD). It is making progress in strengthening its capacity and ability to undertake the core responsibilities as set out in its Strategic Plan.

However, only four out of nine provinces currently have social welfare officers and currently, government departments including hospitals, schools and courts do not routinely refer children's cases to SWD. The report concludes that social work still needs to be recognised as a profession in the Solomon Islands, and that existing social welfare staff require further training and supervision.

Compliance of key stakeholders with child protection principles



Q. How well-positioned are other services that deal with child protection?

A. Only the SWD (out of seven relevant ministries) has a strategic work plan that incorporates child protection. Pertinent agencies that do not have child protection components in their Strategic Plans include Ministries of Finance, Justice, Education and Home Affairs, the Police (although they do have standing orders), and the MHMS (apart from Social Welfare Division). Opportunities exist for stronger partnerships between NGOs and government services, including SWD, particularly in the areas of primary prevention, victim / survivor support and rehabilitation of offenders / diversion programmes.

Q. How widespread is birth registration?

A. Birth registration in the Solomon Islands is estimated to be the lowest in the Pacific region (approximately 0.1% of all births were registered formally in 2007). Information and awareness on the importance of birth registration is widely lacking. A communication programme for improving knowledge of the population on the importance of birth registration and how to register children is vital. The report also recommends integrating birth registration into ongoing basic service programmes.

Q. Do caregivers and community leaders know what to do if a child is badly hurt by someone?

A. Overall, 72% of key informants and 83% of adult respondents interviewed indicated they would refer to informal measures if they suspect or if someone tells them about a child being abused or neglected; however, they are aware of the availability of formal services. The majority of the informal measures responses (68%)