

UNICEF Pacific/2014/Alcock

Most violence against children happens at the hands of the people they know and in their own homes. 80 to 92 per cent of children in countries where MICS data has been collected, have experienced violent discipline. Considering that two-thirds of women experience domestic violence, an exceptionally high number of children are double burdened by the impact of being exposed to recurring acts of violence against their mothers, and having violence directly perpetrated against themselves. Exposure to such violence affects every aspect of a child's development including their mental health, their ability to concentrate and to learn. Research suggests that boys who are exposed to violence are much more likely to become perpetrators of violence themselves.



Children face a higher risk of violence following natural disasters.
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UNICEF PACIFIC ISLANDS

Child Protection (CP)

Overview

Child protection covers prevention and response to violence, exploitation and abuse perpetrated against children. Violence occurs at home, online and in schools. It encompasses bullying, exposure to domestic violence, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, neglect and child marriage, family separation and child labour.

Progress has been made in building child protection systems across the region, but significant gaps remain, including protection for children who come in contact with the law, shifting harmful norms and enabling changes in behaviour. There is also a need to establish a social workforce cadre that is trained to respond to cases of violence against children.

A very large investment in addressing critical gaps is required if Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTS) are to reach SDG 5 by 2030.



SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.



SDG 16.2: Protect children from abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence.

Legal protection in PICTs

Social protection schemes
Cook Is, Kiribati, Fiji

CP legislation
Cook Is, Kiribati, Marshall Is, Nauru and Solomon Is

CP bill
Fiji, Samoa, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

No CP legislation
Palau, FSM, Tokelau, Tonga, Niue

Violent discipline at home

80 → **92%**
Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Is, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu
No data 7 PICTs

Intimate partner violence

20 → **64%**
Cook Islands, Fiji, FSM, Kiribati, Marshall Is, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Is, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu
No data 2 PICTs

Source: MICS, DHS

Source: MICS, FHSS, national studies

Where we are now

Child labour has devastating consequences on a child’s education, leads to fewer job opportunities and perpetuates a cycle of poverty.



More recent data is needed in some PICTs but based on existing data, overall, the prevalence has decreased over time.

Violence

There is a high level of tolerance for violence against children and women in communities across the Pacific, which is embedded in social norms. Many Pacific Islanders across all sectors of society believe that corporal punishment is the best way to influence positive behaviour. Significant engagement at the community level will be required to increase understanding of the impact of violent discipline on children, to enhance parental knowledge of children’s psychological, emotional, and social development stages and needs, and to equip parents with alternatives to corporal punishment. Furthermore, gaps in understanding exist around children with disabilities and developmental delays, which means they face increased vulnerability. In schools, whilst corporal punishment is prohibited by law in 10 out of 14 countries, most teachers still believe this is the best way to educate children and are unaware of and untrained in alternative behaviour management methods.

Sexual abuse

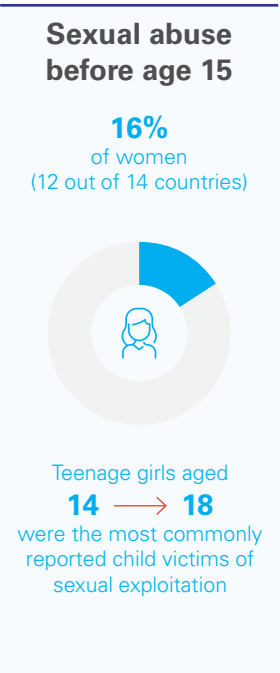
Research confirms that childhood sexual abuse can have repercussions that last a lifetime – deeply affecting mental health, social, sexual, interpersonal, and behavioural as well as physical health. Online child sexual exploitation and abuse are primarily addressed as a cyber-security issue in the Pacific, with limited protective factors for children.

On average across the region, 16 per cent of women experience sexual abuse before the age of 15 (MICS/DHS/FHSS 12 countries). According to a 2019 report¹ which covered Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and PNG, teenage girls aged 14-18 were the most commonly reported child victims of sexual exploitation. While girls made up the majority of child victims, boys represented 32 per cent.

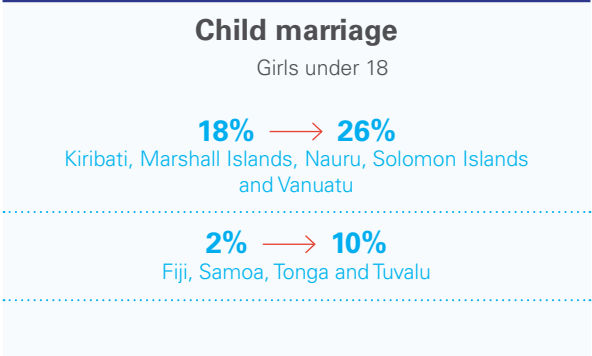
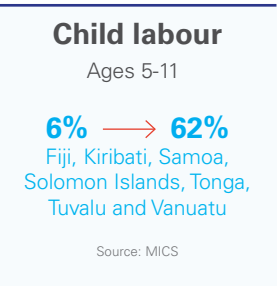
¹ECPAT International. (2019). Perceptions of Frontline Welfare Workers on the Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Pacific.

Child labour

Children are most often engaged in work in rural areas, including helping their parents with household chores, learning and participating in agriculture, fishing, and other crafts. This work is considered part of traditional life skills education; however, it becomes harmful when it impacts a child’s opportunities to be engaged in formal education and acquire skills which lead to job opportunities, as it tends to perpetuate the cycle of poverty.



Source: MICS, DHS, FHSS, ECPAT



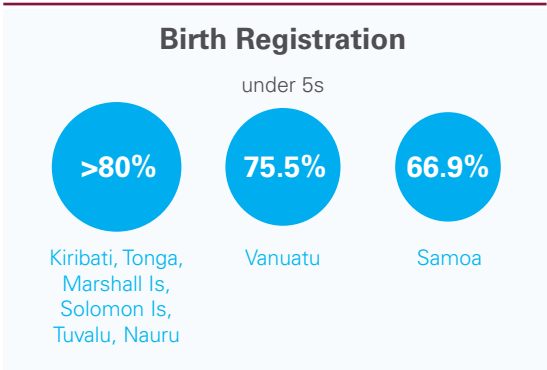
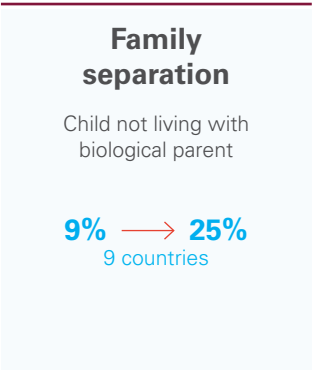
Without a birth certificate, children are left uncounted and invisible. © UNICEF/2018/Sokhin



A birth certificate underpins the child’s rights so they “officially exist”. Children without birth certificates face uncertain futures, and because they cannot prove their age, they are more vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation.



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Child marriage

More recent data is needed in some PICTs but based on existing data, overall, the prevalence has decreased over time. While rates of marriage before 15 years of age remain relatively low in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu, they reach up to 26 per cent in some countries in the Pacific. Child marriage is often the result of entrenched gender inequality, and girls who marry before the age of 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence and less likely to remain in school. They have worse economic and health outcomes than their unmarried peers, which are eventually passed down to their own children.

Family separation

In much of the Pacific, children are left in the care of grandparents or other relatives when parents migrate to urban areas or abroad for better work opportunities. Children from rural areas are also sent to relatives living in urban areas or abroad to get a better education. Even though there may be benefits, there is also a strong emotional impact of being separated from biological parents and a heightened risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Birth registration

The good news is that birth registration in the Pacific is relatively high. As a crucial component of Child Protection, without legal proof of identity, children are left uncounted and invisible. A birth certificate underpins a child’s rights so they “officially exist”. Children without birth certificates face uncertain futures, and because they cannot prove their age, they are more vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation. They can also be cut off from routine vaccinations and other health care. They may be prevented from receiving social assistance, inheriting property, attending school or registering for exams. Official figures are not available for Cook Islands, Niue, FSM, Tokelau and Palau. More up-to-date data is also needed in most PICTs.

Children in contact with the law

Data on children in contact with the justice system is limited throughout the Pacific. In general, few children are arrested, and those who are, have committed minor offences and are diverted by the police or sentenced to community-based non-custodial alternatives by the courts. Fiji is the only country with separate facilities for juvenile offenders.

What is UNICEF doing?

UNICEF is the main development partner providing support directly to child protection systems in the region. UNICEF's new programme (2023-27) builds on previous work and puts greater focus on preventing violence and harmful practices, supporting stronger and more inclusive systems, targeting interventions for children at greatest risk, ensuring access to responsive services and empowering families, parents, and caregivers.

Key Elements

- Child protection systems and structures have strengthened evidence, legal, policy and coordination frameworks to plan, coordinate, monitor, and adequately resource the delivery and expansion of quality and resilient child protection services.
- Government and other service providers have strengthened capacities to deliver quality, inclusive and integrated child protection services.
- Caregivers, communities, youth, adolescents, and children are better informed, equipped and supported to generate transformative and protection-focused, gender-equal social

norms, as well as prevent and respond to violence, abuse, exploitation, and harmful practices.

UNICEF will address immediate, underlying and structural causes by supporting, developing and enhancing laws, policies and regulations. UNICEF will also draft multi-sectoral, integrated implementation action plans and establish and strengthen services. This includes universal prevention, which targets the whole population; early intervention, which targets children at risk and their families; and response, which targets children needing care and protection. Specific issues affecting each country will be taken into account in programme content and development. UNICEF will also support improved data, and monitoring and evaluation activities to support the overall programme.

UNICEF will also help build the capacity of child protection front line staff. This includes supporting the establishment of accredited qualifications, investing in long term capacity building/mentoring on the job, particularly to deal with the most difficult cases.

The extended family, traditional organizations and church play a significant role in peoples' lives in the Pacific.

UNICEF works closely with faith-based organizations to engage children, young people, parents, families and traditional leaders to promote protective behaviours and norms, and to embrace more positive parenting and gender-equal roles. Under the new programme, UNICEF's partnership with the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), which reaches 75 per cent of the region's population, will remain essential for social and behaviour change. UNICEF will also continue to invest in developing social behaviour change strategies at the community level that are appropriate to specific countries, to help break the inter-generational aspects of violence against children and women.



Estimated budget for the Child Protection programme 2023-2027:

US\$27 million

UNICEF Pacific Multi Country Office

Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.

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