

UNICEF Pacific Multi-Country Office

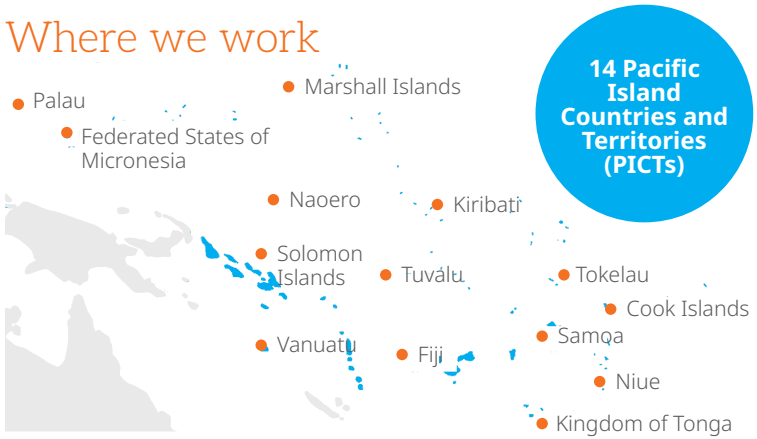
Gender Equality

At the heart of our mandate, our work, and our results

unicef
for every child

Gender equality is woven through every aspect of UNICEF's work – its programmes, governance and internal culture. From the moment a child is born, gender shapes her or his opportunities in life. Yet in the Pacific region, gender inequality remains among the most acute in the world. UNICEF works across the entire life course to dismantle the barriers that hold back girls, women and gender-diverse people - turning rights commitments on paper into real results.

Where we work



Grounded in binding treaties	Delivered through regional frameworks	Guided By UNICEF's gender frameworks
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 14/14 PICTs	2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent	Pacific Gender Equality & Adolescent Strategy 2024-2027
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 12/14 PICTs[1]	Pacific Platform for Action 2018-2030[2]	UNICEF Gender Equality Action Plan (Global) 2026-2029
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilitie (CRPD) 14/14 PICTs	Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration[3]	

UNICEF's Approach

UNICEF prioritizes those furthest behind, since progress is only meaningful if it reaches the most excluded. Gender issues are addressed through the entire life course: from prenatal to birth and early childhood, adolescence and into adulthood.

Who we work with

- Governments
- Academia
- Civil society
- Media
- Faith-based organizations
- Communities

At the UN level

- United Nations Country Team (Pacific)
- UNICEF
- Wider partners
- Other UN agencies

Inside UNICEF Pacific

The Gender and Adolescent Development and Participation Working Group coordinates gender, adolescent and youth focal points across all programme teams in the Pacific.

Financial Commitment

USD 118.5 million of UNICEF Pacific spend in the current Multi-Country Programme (2023–2027) has gender equality as a principal or significant objective.

The Life-Course Approach

Gender inequality is not a condition that appears in adulthood; it is built and reinforced at every stage of childhood: in the home, the classroom, the community. No other organisation has the reach to engage children and families at the very moments when attitudes and life trajectories form: from prenatal care, through adolescence, to adulthood and parenthood.

Adolescence is the accelerator: the stage when gender disparities sharpen but transformation is most possible. This is why adolescent girls sit at the centre of UNICEF's work: for every girl to have the freedom, skills, power and well-being to decide her own future, supported by equitable households, communities and systems.

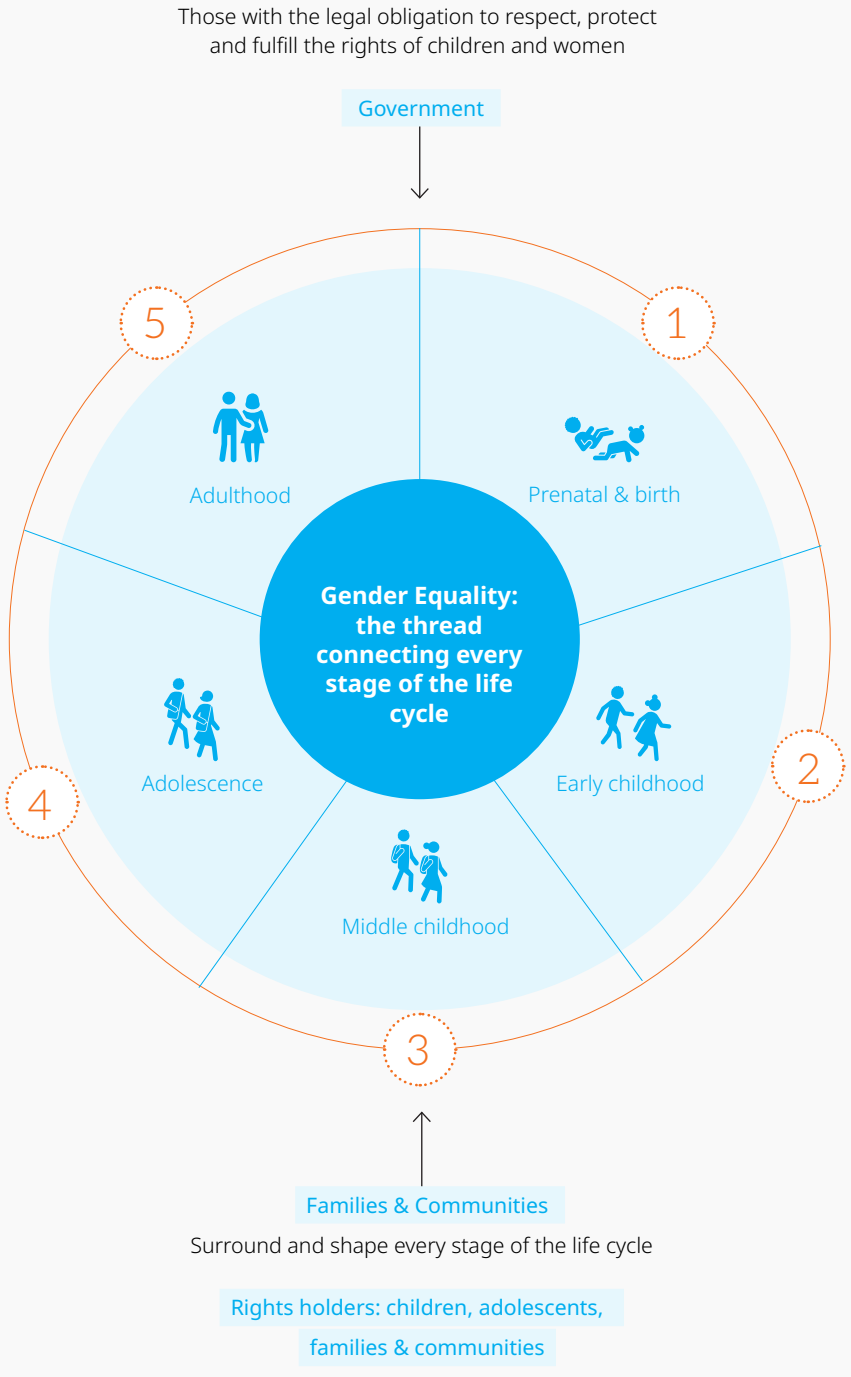
This life-course approach is anchored in two core principles

1. Human Rights-Based Approach
   Gender equality is a legal duty, not charity

- Binding under the CRC, CRPD and CEDAW
- Governments are the duty bearers
- Rights apply across the whole life-course

2. Leave No One Behind
   Reach the furthest behind first

- End poverty, exclusion and discrimination
- Transform the systems that exclude
- Overlapping barriers multiply — disability, remoteness, climate



Health & Nutrition

Across all PICTs, women and girls often lack decision-making power over their own health and nutrition needs. Women also face mobility and cost barriers to services and adolescent girls confront stigma and misinformation on reproductive issues including HPV vaccination.

These patterns are rooted not in health-system gaps alone. They also come from inequality based on gender, and layered with other factors like class, race, disability or ethnicity. These inequalities shape basic things within a household: who gets to eat first, who is able to get healthcare or protection, and who has the final say over health decisions.

41 per 1,000[4]

The adolescent birth rate is significantly higher than the Asia-Pacific regional average.

20–30 cases

per 100,000 females[5] of cervical cancer (HPV) Stigma around HPV limits vaccine awareness and uptake.

More than

1 in 3 adolescent girls suffer from obesity in some countries.[6]

At the same time,

anaemia rates among women and girls of reproductive age (15–49) range from 20% to 35%.[7]

From strategy to action

Across all PICTs, women and girls often lack decision-making power over their own health and nutrition needs. Women also face mobility and cost barriers to services and adolescent girls confront stigma and misinformation about issues such as HPV vaccination. Women, girls and other groups can increasingly access gender-responsive primary health care on equitable terms due to:

- Stronger national health and nutrition systems and more reliable supply chains.
- School-based delivery that reaches girls where they are.
- Greater community trust, built by engaging faith and community leaders to counter misinformation.
- Behavioural insights and human-centred approaches.

HPV immunization is now part of national health systems:

89,000+ girls have been vaccinated across nine PICTs.

This is largely due to UNICEF's USD **8.6 million** investment in low cost vaccines.

Cook Islands • Niue • Naoero • Kiribati • Samoa • Tuvalu • Vanuatu • Tonga • Tokelau

UNICEF integrates child protection into nutrition systems. Malnutrition care protocols in Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu now include pathways to identify and refer caregivers facing gender-based violence.



© UNICEF/UNI554998/Herwig

Climate-Resilient Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Adolescent girls and women across the Pacific face barriers to dignity, learning, opportunity and protection because of a lack of safe water and sanitation facilities. More than half of schools in the Pacific lack basic water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, which can expose women and girls to gender-based violence and lead girls to miss school during their periods. Stigma, disability, limited knowledge, and entrenched social norms compound the burden.

340,000 people lack[8]
access to drinking water.

50%+ schools lack basic
WASH services.

850,000+ people
lack basic sanitation services.

25–50% of girls[9]
lack menstrual hygiene management facilities.

From strategy to action

UNICEF works directly with governments to strengthen national systems so that menstrual health is supported in schools, communities and during emergencies. This includes:

- Integrating Menstrual Health and Hygiene management (MHHM) and WASH directly into school curricula.
- Developing MHHM teaching materials to educate both girls and boys.
- Making menstrual hygiene supplies fully accessible to girls.
- Delivering climate-resilient water systems and gender-safe sanitation in schools, health centres, and communities.

191,000 (over 105,000 children) now have access to safe WASH services in:

366	2,300	244	28
schools	households	health facilities	communities

Fiji • FSM • Marshall Islands • Solomon Islands • Kiribati • Vanuatu • Samoa • Tuvalu



Education

Most PICTs have made important progress towards gender parity in early childhood and primary education, but parity in access is not the same as equality in learning, safety, agency or opportunity.

There is a two-sided problem. Girls tend to read and do math better than boys and stay in school longer, so boys falling behind and disengaging is its own gender issue. At the same time, girls still run into their own barriers: being steered away from certain subjects, care responsibilities, menstrual health, teenage pregnancy, safety concerns, less access to STEM and tech skills, and a harder transition into decent work.

Less than 50%

Secondary completion in some PICTs.[10]

Boys lag behind

girls in foundational reading and numeracy[11] and are at risk of disengagement and dropout.

Girls

face structural barriers in safety, voice, STEM, digital skills and transition to employment.

Children with disabilities,

especially girls, remain among the most excluded from quality education.

From strategy to action

As a result of UNICEF's support, gender equality is now built into the way Pacific education systems are planned and run:

10 PICTs have gender-responsive strategies embedded in education plans, analyses and Early Childhood Education (ECE) policies — gender is a design feature, not an add-on.

Cook Islands • Fiji • Kiribati • RMI • FSM • Samoa • Solomon Islands • Tonga • Tuvalu • Vanuatu

15 PICTs share the evidence and experience on the status of inclusive education and good practices in the Pacific Regional Inclusive Education Review.

Shifting the norms
Engaging fathers and boys on positive masculinities; girls challenging stereotypes; stronger PSEA.

Now scaling region-wide through the Pacific Regional ECE Systems Toolkit

These advances are reshaping the classroom experience — from gender-responsive curricula, teaching materials, and teacher development to inclusive foundational learning, digital and skills pathways, and violence-free schools, and regional education products such as the Pacific Regional ECE Systems Toolkit.



© UNICEF/UNI993795/Sagaga/MP Studios

Child Protection

Violence across the Pacific cannot be seen as anything less than an emergency. Pervasive, highly gendered, and passed down through generations. It begins early and follows girls azcross the life course: from violent discipline in childhood, to sexual abuse in adolescence, to violence in adult relationships. The Pacific records the highest rate of childhood sexual violence against girls in the world.

64–79%

Women experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

80–92%

Children experience violent discipline at home (PICTs) ~27%.[12]

34%[13]

Girls experience sexual assault or rape before turning 18 in Oceania, the highest level in the world.

Up to 1 in 4,

around 27%[14] girls marry before age 18 in Oceania.

7% of girls[15]

are married before age 15, (23,000 girls) in Oceania.

From strategy to action

Today communities across the Pacific are increasingly equipped to recognize, reject and prevent violence against children. This includes work with fathers and boys, initiatives that equip adolescent girls to challenge harmful stereotypes, and stronger capacity among partners to respond to violence.

As a result of UNICEF's evidence-based policy advocacy:

- Laws and policies: children and adolescents now have stronger legal protection.
- Institutional capacity: girls experiencing violence, child marriage, and abuse can now be identified, referred, and supported.
- Response services: stronger case management and psychosocial support systems have been developed across health, education, and social service sectors.

UNICEF's work has led to stronger family and child protection laws and policies.

Solomon Islands • Fiji • Tonga

On the ground, 500 social workers and frontline staff have strengthened their capacity in case management and psychosocial support (PSS).

RMI • FSM • Fiji • Solomon Islands

17,000 people have increased their awareness of child development and protection through awareness sessions.

Vanuatu

23 church enablers are now carrying child protection messages into religious sermons and congregational life.

FSM



© UNICEF/UN093752/Sagaga/MP Studios

Social Policy

In the Pacific, children face widespread and often multidimensional poverty. Girls bear the heaviest load, carrying far more unpaid care work while benefiting less from household resources. This imbalance shapes their time, opportunities and futures from an early age.

40% Children

in PICTs at risk of falling below the poverty line. Girls are hit hardest[16]

25% to 65%

of children live in multidimensional child poverty[17]

Women and girls

(15+) spend 16% of each day on unpaid domestic and care work.

Men and boys spend just 6%.[18]

Cross-Cutting Strategies[19]

Gender equality functions as one of UNICEF's cross-cutting priorities. It is not confined to a single sector but runs through all of UNICEF's work–across every programme area. This ensures equality is built in, not added on. Each programme area advances gender equality in different ways:

- Social and behaviour change shifts harmful norms,
- Early childhood development reaches children while their gender attitudes are still forming.
- Emergency and climate action keeps girls protected and heard in crises that would otherwise leave them last.

From strategy to action

By 2025, five of the fourteen PICTs had recorded marked improvement in child-sensitive social protection coverage,

90.4% Naoero

88.3% Fiji

82.4% Kiribati

Continued gains in Samoa • Tuvalu • Tonga

Data is the key to making progress for women and girls visible.

UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys give Pacific partners robust evidence to track the SDGs, measuring violence, child marriage and corporal punishment while strengthening national statistical offices.

Seven PICTs: Fiji • Kiribati • Naoero • Samoa • Tonga • Tuvalu • Vanuatu have published data; FSM • RMI • Solomon Islands are conducting their first surveys.

In Fiji, a new National Action Plan is advancing gender-responsive protection for adolescent girls.

Advancing disability rights

- 324 people across 10 PICTs strengthened their knowledge of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
- 69% were women and girls.
- Representatives from diverse disability groups are now helping advance disability rights, with support from UNICEF and the Global Disability Fund.



© UNICEF/UNI965325/Bax

Preparedness and Emergency Response

In the Pacific, emergencies hit women and girls hardest. Existing gender inequalities and caregiving burdens leave them more exposed, and every crisis amplifies risks they face – to their health, safety, education, livelihoods and voice in recovery.



Gender-based

violence rates for women and girls with disabilities are 2-3 times higher during emergencies and disasters.[20]



Existing

gender inequalities and caregiving burdens leave women and girls more exposed.



Women, girls

and their organizations are largely absent from disaster preparedness and response.[21]



Earthquakes,

cyclones, drought, coastal flooding, displacement and disease outbreaks disrupt access to water, health care and education.

From strategy to action

UNICEF's humanitarian response is designed to meet these risks head-on, so that those most exposed are not the last to be reached. In 2025, UNICEF responded to 16 emergencies across nine PICTs.

112,000+ people received protection and psychosocial messaging.

Vanuatu

567 women accessed direct protection services.

13,000+ hygiene kits, incl. 6,000+ MHM supplies for women and girls.

Vanuatu

12,000 people restored water services.

2,100+ girls accessed temporary learning spaces.

Samoa

2,355 female caregivers received nutrition messaging.

Samoa

4,000 pregnant women received vaccinations.

Samoa

270,000 adolescent girls targeted through pre-positioned emergency supplies, education materials, and psychosocial support across the Pacific.

Local civil society and community-based organizations are increasingly leading and shaping humanitarian action in the Pacific: from Fiji's digital Community Feedback Mechanism, which gives children and caregivers a direct voice in the response, to strengthened participation by persons with disabilities in emergency planning across ten PICTs.

Climate Change

Across the Pacific, women and girls remain largely absent from the decisions on how communities prepare for and respond to the impacts of climate change. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the central frameworks for governments' climate commitments, have historically overlooked the needs of children, girls and women.

Women and girls make up the vast majority of those displaced by climate disasters, heightening risks of gender-based violence and loss of access to basic hygiene and sanitation. Meanwhile, girls with disabilities face compounded barriers to reaching evacuation shelters and receiving emergency information during extreme weather.

Women and girls

are disproportionately affected by climate change.

Women and girls

are more dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods and have less capacity to respond.[22]

From strategy to action

UNICEF's work in the Pacific is designed to close these gaps, ensuring that those most affected help shape policy, and that national climate frameworks cover girls, women and children with disabilities. That means integrating ambitious child-centred and gender-responsive priorities into each country's NDCs.

Updated NDCs

- ✓ Dedicated chapter on child rights.
- ✓ Youth and women priorities
- ✓ Spanning water and sanitation

Fiji • Solomon Islands • Vanuatu • Republic of the Marshall Islands • NDC 3.0 (2025–2035)



© UNICEF/UNI1006599/Watson

Early Childhood Development (ECD)

Social norms around gender take shape in the early years of life, long before children reach school. This makes early childhood development (ECD) one of the most powerful, and most overlooked, entry points for gender equality.



© UNICEF/UN0298083/Donnell

From strategy to action

As a result of UNICEF's support, gender equality is increasingly built into the systems that shape children's earliest years – reaching children at the very moment their sense of gender is forming.

ECD is anchored at the highest levels of regional leadership.

9 Pacific governments

have adopted gender-responsive early childhood policies that build equality in from the start.

Fiji • Solomon Islands • Tuvalu • FSM
Marshall Islands • Tokelau • Vanuatu
Kiribati • Samoa

Parenting programmes

are helping caregivers raise girls and boys free of gendered expectations.

Vanuatu • Fiji • Kiribati

UNICEF also leads regional research that underpins these gains and informs ECD policy and parenting programmes across the Pacific.

Social & Behaviour Change

Behind every programme area sit the strategies that target gender norms underpinning inequality:

- Social and Behaviour Change (SBC)
- Parenting support
- Communications and Advocacy
- Risk Communication Community Engagement (RCCE) in Emergencies.

UNICEF sees parenting as a shared community responsibility, not just a private family matter. To achieve this, UNICEF works closely with key stakeholders to develop strategies and tools that build more equal gender attitudes from early childhood.

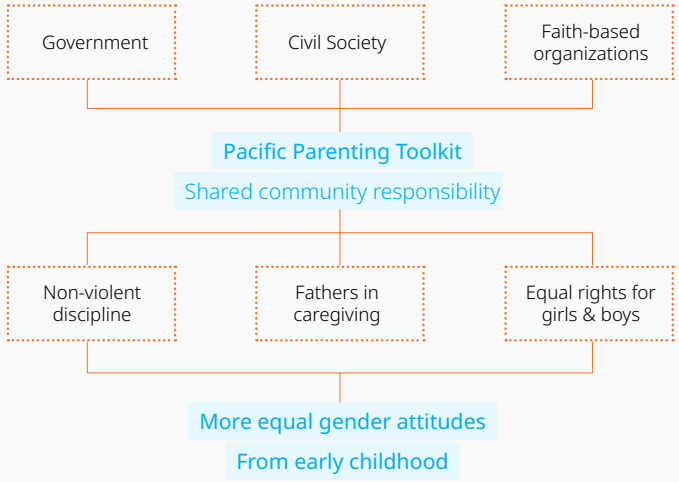


© UNICEF/UNI693727/Ijazah

From strategy to action

As a result of UNICEF's support, more adolescents, especially girls and those most often unheard, have access to trusted information and a say in the decisions that affect them. This has been achieved by working with stakeholders to:

- Create and scale up digital platforms like Laaha, Pacific U-Report, and support youth councils which give young people reliable information and a voice.
- Ensure adolescent girls and young women are recognized as decision-makers.
- Promote dialogue with traditional leaders and faith-based organizations.
- Engage boys as allies in advancing gender equality.



Young Pasifika Wayfinders programme for boys from

11 Pacific countries.

62%

rise in bystander intervention.

94%

reported talking about gender equality with peers.

100%

increase in confidence to challenge harmful gender stereotypes.

Moving Forward

Progress on gender equality in the Pacific is real, but it is not yet secure. The task ahead is to protect what is working, reach the girls who remain furthest behind, and turn commitments into services that change lives.

The UNICEF Strategic Plan (2026-2029) positions gender equality — with adolescent girls at its centre — as an accelerator across the programme.

Adolescence is the point in the life course where investments yield the great returns, with change carrying forward into families, communities and the next generation. Placing adolescent girls at the centre is not an additional area of work; it is how every other result is achieved faster.

UNICEF Pacific will continue to measure what it spends, track who it reaches and stand with the region's girls and women until equality is not an aspiration but an everyday reality.



Endnotes

1 Palau and Tonga have yet to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

2 Pacific Platform for Action | The Pacific Community

3 Revitalized Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration

4 World Bank, Adolescent Fertility Rate for Pacific Island Small States, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. June 21, 2026. Note: With substantial variation across countries: Fiji (21) Tonga (25) Kiribati (44) RMI (60).

5 International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), Global Cancer Observatory: Cancer Today, Lyon, France: IARC, 2022. Note: Cervical cancer incidence across PICTs varies widely, ranging from approximately 7 to 35 cases per 100,000 women, with many countries clustering around 20-30 per 100,000, based on WHO/IARC GLOBOCAN 2022 estimates - e.g., Cook Islands 7.5, Samoa 11-12, Niue 13, Vanuatu 13-17, Tuvalu 18, FSM and RMI, 23, Tonga 24, Solomon Islands 25-26, Kiribati 29, Fiji 30, Naoero 35, Palau 37

6 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Feeding Profit: How food environments are failing children. Child Nutrition Report 2025, UNICEF, New York, September 2025.

7 World Health Organization (WHO), Global Health Observatory (GHO): Anemia in women of reproductive age (15–49 years). Geneva: WHO. Available at WHO GHO database.

8 WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) Data portal https://washdata.org/

9 WHO-UNICEF 2024 Joint Monitoring Report https://washdata.org/data/household#!/dashboard/new- Lack of MHM facilities drives girls out of school and affect learning outcomes impacting 50% of girls in Naoero, 40% in Vanuatu and 25% in Fiji

10 MICS, National EMIS, other administrative datasets, and UNICEF Children's Factsheet 2025

11 (PILNA, 2021: Year 4 Numeracy; Year 6 Numeracy; Year 4 Reading; Year 6 Literacy).

12 https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-profile-east-asia-pacific/

13 https://data.unicef.org/resources/when-numbers-demand-action/

14 https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-profile-east-asia-pacific/

15 Ibid

16 https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/what-we-do/social-inclusion

17 Multidimensional Child Poverty Reports for Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu.

18 https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/did-you-know/2022/12/stat-of-the-week-females-15-spent16-of-their-time-24-hour-day-on

19 Multidimensional Child Poverty Reports for Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu.

20 https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/publications/disability-inclusion-gender-based-violence-programming

21 https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2015-10/un_women_gender_equality_and_pacific_humanitarian_response.pdf

22 Morioka, K. (2016), Time to Act on Gender, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction, UN Women.

for every child,

Whoever she is.

Wherever he lives.

Every child deserves a childhood.

A future.

A fair chance.

That's why UNICEF is there.

For each and every child.

Working day in and day out.

In more than 190 countries and territories.

Reaching the hardest to reach.

The furthest from help.

The most excluded.

It's why we stay to the end.

And never give up.

Published by UNICEF Pacific
www.unicef.org/pacificislands
© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), September 2026

Cover: © UNICEF/UNI965325/Bax

unicef
for every child