

Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in the Pacific Region

June 2021

CROP Taskforce

Working draft report as at June 15th 2021- CROP SEIA Taskforce

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I. Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APTC	Australia Pacific Training Coalition
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CROP	Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DPO	Disabled Persons Organisation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FFA	Forum Fisheries Agency
FJD	Fiji Dollars
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organisation
NCD	Non-Communicable Diseases
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PHP-C	Pacific Humanitarian Pathway- COVID 19
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PICT	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
PTI	Pacific Trade and Invest
RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
SPC	Pacific Community
SPTO	South Pacific Tourism Organisation
TC	Tropical Cyclone
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund
USP	University of the South Pacific
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organisation

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III. Executive Summary

The impact of COVID-19 in the Pacific region continues to challenge our social, economic and financial wellbeing. Resources are required to strengthen social protection systems, protect ecosystems, and provide innovative solutions for Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs).

About this report

2. The socio-economic impact assessment (SEIA) report of COVID-19, as endorsed by Forum Economic Ministers in 2020, seeks to:

- i. understand the social dimensions of COVID-19 and its impacts in the Pacific,
- ii. address vulnerability, inequality and social exclusion,
- iii. ensure human rights, social inclusion, social support and resilience are considered,
- iv. build resilience to external shocks that account for diverse cultural contexts and needs; and
- v. strengthen regional coordination to achieve sustainable recovery.

3. A Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) Taskforce compiled this report. The Taskforce is co-chaired by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Pacific Community (SPC). COVID-19 literature was reviewed by CROP, civil society organisations (CSO) and development partners. These include regional and national assessments completed with information available from national surveys and reports by CSOs and relevant partners.

Methodology

4. The SEIA report covers socio-economic issues including health, education, impacts on persons with disabilities and youth. Based on desktop reviews and literature from international, regional and national data sources on COVID-19, ten areas were identified in February 2021.

5. These are:

- i. health system and services
- ii. education
- iii. gender, disability groups, and vulnerable communities
- iv. youth and children
- v. climate change and disaster
- vi. digital technology and communication
- vii. fisheries
- viii. labour mobility
- ix. skills and employment
- x. economy

6. The findings fall into five thematic areas:

- i. Health and wellbeing
- ii. Integrated pathways for economic recovery and resilience
- iii. Inclusive social protection systems
- iv. Adaptive learning and employment pathways, and
- v. Sustainable livelihoods and food systems.¹

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/action-tracks>

Challenges and limitations

- Qualitative analysis of secondary data was conducted using impact assessment reports by development partners, CSOs and the private sector.
- Lack of coordination at the regional level has led to diverse policy advice and recommendations for Pacific island governments.
- As the COVID-19 crisis is evolving, information and data in this report has been superseded. However, some general trends can be observed.

Main Findings of the SEIA Report

(i.) Health and wellbeing

7. The Pacific islands region with its vulnerable health systems faces significant challenges in managing the COVID-19 pandemic if countries are unable to contain community transmission. Member countries have mostly been successful with border quarantine measures, apart from Fiji and Papua New Guinea. In the Pacific 70% of deaths are related to NCDs (diabetes, cardiovascular, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases), one of the highest rates in the world. COVID-19 increases these health risks.

8. Sexual and reproductive health remains a concern with isolation measures and restrictions also limiting access for other health services. Mental health and psychosocial support measures are in place to respond to increasing numbers of counselling calls, reports of domestic and child violence, and emotional support for frontline workers as they deal with COVID-19. Increased services were activated during lockdown to respond to gender-based violence including hotlines and counselling services for women and children. With COVID-19 measures highlighting social distancing and good hygiene, access to clean water and sanitation is a challenge in some areas with even more limited access for women, children and persons with disabilities. The crisis provides the opportunity for countries to address improved or vulnerable infrastructure of WASH facilities as the region works towards 'building back better'.

(ii.) Integrated pathway for economic recovery and resilience

9. The economic impact of COVID-19 will have greater impacts on vulnerable and disadvantaged communities in the areas of education, employment and access to public health services. With key industries such as tourism affected by travel restrictions, unemployment numbers jumped in some countries. In 2020, Vanuatu tourism lost 70%² of jobs; Fiji's tourism industry released 115,000 workers,³ and a survey in Samoa reported 26% of business workers lost jobs.⁴ For Pacific tuna fisheries, COVID-19 reduced the operations of domestic longline fleets which saw falls in employment, income, exports and related activities.

10. For countries depending on the fisheries sector such as Tuvalu and Kiribati, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) remained positive compared to Fiji, Samoa and Tonga. Literature analysis also reported Pacific island communities that benefit from labour mobility through remittances and transfer of skills and knowledge were impacted during the crisis. Workers from Tuvalu and Kiribati who have extended working

² Joint Survey on COVID-19 and TC Harold impacts on tourism industry https://images.impartmedia.com/vanuatu.travel/documents/National_Tourism_Business_Impacts_Survey_TCHarold_COVID-19.pdf.

³ <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/Initial-numbers-show-115000-workers-affected-by-COVID-19--ILO-x5r8f4/>

⁴ ILO Rapid Assessment, Impact of COVID19 on employment and business in the Pacific, July 2020, pg 2

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periods abroad due to travel restrictions, have reported increased levels of anxiety.⁵ Those who were unable to participate due to border closures reported a loss of income with only Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu and Tonga recently sending seasonal workers to Australia.⁶

(iii.) **Inclusive social protection systems**

11. Social protection systems in the Pacific islands region received stimulus packages to provide economic and private sector assistance. Traditional social protection systems, social structures and community safety nets have also supported communities and families who are experiencing difficulties in meeting needs. This effort involved governments, CSOs, churches and community networks, alumni associations, and the private sector.

12. Assistance towards vulnerable groups such as women, persons with disabilities, youth and the elderly were not as representative across the region. Further study is needed on ways to ensure assistance is received at all levels. Cultural practices and family values of food sharing can provide relief, although cultural dynamics play out differently in urban and rural settings. The traditional and family structures have become supporting networks that many were slowly moving away from as people adapted to a more modern ways of living.

(iv.) **Adaptive learning and employment pathways**

13. Education and training of children and youth must remain at the forefront of recovery. A drop or reallocation in these investments will have a significant impact on any long-term plans for social and economic stability. Education systems actioned contingency plans for teachers and students during lockdown periods that closed schools. Online learning platforms and media such as TV and radio were used to educate children although this varied across the region and for some were only available for national exam preparation of certain grades.

14. While support was provided during the crisis, children with disability were the most affected with limited access to education material and learning tools. Mental health support was also raised for teachers and students. Investments are needed in early childhood education, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes, strengthening education systems, and in virtual learning for both students and teachers. Skills development towards labour mobility needs to be considered in economic recovery and for labour market policies.

(v.) **Sustainable livelihoods and food systems**

15. The pandemic has highlighted the need to strengthen governance for resilient food systems to achieve greater food security for Pacific communities. Market vendors, small business enterprises and operators have been significantly affected with lesser income during COVID-19 lockdown and zoning restrictions particularly for women in business. Trade impacts have affected food supply for countries that are dependent on imports such as Tuvalu and RMI. This however has provided the opportunity for domestic food programmes that are cost effective and of higher nutritional value.

16. Innovative methods of farming for countries with limited land mass provides support and solutions for long term food security and sustainability, empowering Pacific communities to be self-sufficient. Looking at natural resource management and innovative ways to strengthen food systems, increase investment in agriculture and fisheries both oceanic and

⁵ IOM Kiribati Country Report, April 2021, pg 10

⁶ IOM Kiribati Country Report, April 2021, pg 10

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coastal, and protect the ecosystems is a long-term recommendation for building back better livelihoods that will support sustainable food systems. Findings also recognised traditional knowledge and practice were reintroduced, such as food storage and bartering for communities that had less cash due to closed businesses or unemployment.

Policy recommendations for consideration:

(i) Health and wellbeing

- Prioritise containment and prevention measures of COVID-19 with vaccination roll-out as the highest priority and public health expenditure for medical supplies and equipment to combat the pandemic.
- Strengthen coordination to support regional frameworks and public health policies to respond to COVID-19 and future shocks as reflected in this report.⁷
- Strengthen psychosocial support and mental health measures in national humanitarian response plans and protocols.
- Integrated health and service protocols that address gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, child protection and the needs of persons living with disabilities.
- Enhanced efforts of public health policy initiatives under the Pacific Healthy Islands Monitoring Framework aligned to the Universal Health Coverage taking into consideration findings from the SEIA report.⁸
- Develop policies and implementation plans to ensure resilient supply chains of bio-medical and lab strengthening equipment and services.
- Strengthen policies, plans and programs to ensure the Pacific NCD Roadmap is implemented in a whole of government and whole of society approach.

(ii) Integrated pathways for economic recovery and resilience

- Use regional mechanisms responding to COVID-19 for humanitarian efforts, to explore trade and economic opportunities for Members.
- Strengthen disaggregated data collection systems by sex, geographical location, and age to inform policy reforms.
- Strengthen regional cooperation to trade for economic resilience, labour mobility and employment, and support regional efforts for economic recovery.
- Support fiscal policy development that supports the economy, low-income earners, small business, vulnerable communities, and strategies to rebuild economies.
- Comprehensive analysis on natural resource management and governance within the context of climate change to inform National Development strategies.
- Ensure women, persons with disabilities, youth and marginalised groups are engaged in policy and decision-making processes as countries consolidate resources and response efforts to become self-reliant.

(iii) Adaptive learning and employment pathways

⁷ Includes the Pacific Healthy Islands Framework, NCD Roadmap, Eliminations of child obesity plan, work by the Mental health and psychosocial support cell.

⁸ Includes disaggregated data collection for all groups, reporting, monitoring, support countries with training, lab strengthening, public health policy development

- Support regional education frameworks for early childhood education, inclusive education, equality in learning pathways for all learners and distance learning with appropriate technical capacity and equipment for recovery and future shocks.⁹
- Identify technical needs required to inform priority areas of study at regional and national level and scholarship awards in relevant fields.
- Strengthen regional data collection systems and monitoring to inform education policy reforms and implementation plans.
- Strengthen employment prospects with appropriate labour market policies that are informed by industry and labour market demands analysis and performance ensuring equal and inclusive participation of all individuals.
- Strengthen psychosocial support and mental health training within education systems for students, teachers and families.
- Ensure dynamic innovative approaches to education curricula, including eLearning to educate youth and other societies and safely apply appropriate measures to protect learners and teachers.

(iv) **Inclusive and contextualised social protection systems**

- Research social protection systems across the region within the context of climate change, disaster risks and COVID-19 to inform policy development, recognising limitations and risks of current fiscal environments for PICTs.
- Strengthen national statistics disaggregation of data of vulnerable groups¹⁰ for policy reforms to ensure implementation and distributions of welfare and social protection schemes reach all individuals.
- Revisit social protection systems and research options that will protect vulnerable groups and inform design of long-term social protection systems for both formal and informal workers in PICTS.
- Develop equitable, inclusive and accessible gender responsive social protection policies that are human rights based and contextualised to the Pacific.
- Strengthen legislation and policies on family violence, child protection, and forms of discrimination for vulnerable communities.
- Improved understanding, promotion and strengthening of social capital as a basis for social resilience including women's groups and marginalised groups.

(v) **Sustainable livelihoods and food systems**

- Assess resourcing required to ensure food sovereignty and robust food systems for strategies towards 'building back better' Pacific communities. These include issues of land rights, tenure and where relevant relationship to food systems. ¹¹
- Strengthen governance and management of the regions natural resources and investments such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and domestic food supply for long term

⁹ Outcomes and recommendations of the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) and endorsed by Education Ministers meeting April 2021.

¹⁰ Collaborative effort of CROP for disaggregated data on women, children, elderly, youth, diverse sexual orientation groups, and persons living with disabilities.

¹¹ Food System working group chaired by Minister for Health of Tonga, CROP led SPC and technical agencies

sustainability and ability to respond to future shocks ensuring participation of women and youth in policy dialogue.¹²

- Consultations and policy dialogue that strengthens food sovereignty, land and oceans governance and management to become secure and self-reliant economies post COVID-19.
- Integrate complementary value of traditional knowledge, skills and expertise alongside technical and scientific knowledge and skills to strengthen food production practices and policy reforms on trade, fisheries, agriculture.
- Revisit trade policies and agreements that explore other industries based on natural resources, minerals, agricultural products to protect Pacific economies long term

¹² Food System working group chaired by Minister for Health of Tonga, CROP led SPC and technical agencies

Part 1: Introduction

A. COVID-19 measures taken by Pacific Island Countries

17. In December 2019, the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China escalated to a global health and economic crisis. COVID-19 has worsened social inequalities and development challenges in the Pacific region into its second year.¹³

18. Geographic isolation and swift action to close borders has helped the region to deal with the pandemic. COVID-19 has resulted in over 130 million cases and close to 3 million deaths across the world.¹⁴ Over 1 million people have recovered, and over 22 million cases were active in April 2021. In the Pacific, 7 of the 18 Forum Island Countries remain COVID-19 free. As at June 15th, over 45,000 total COVID-19 cases have been reported¹⁵ with French Polynesia, Guam Papua New Guinea and Fiji the most affected in the region.

Pacific situation of COVID-19

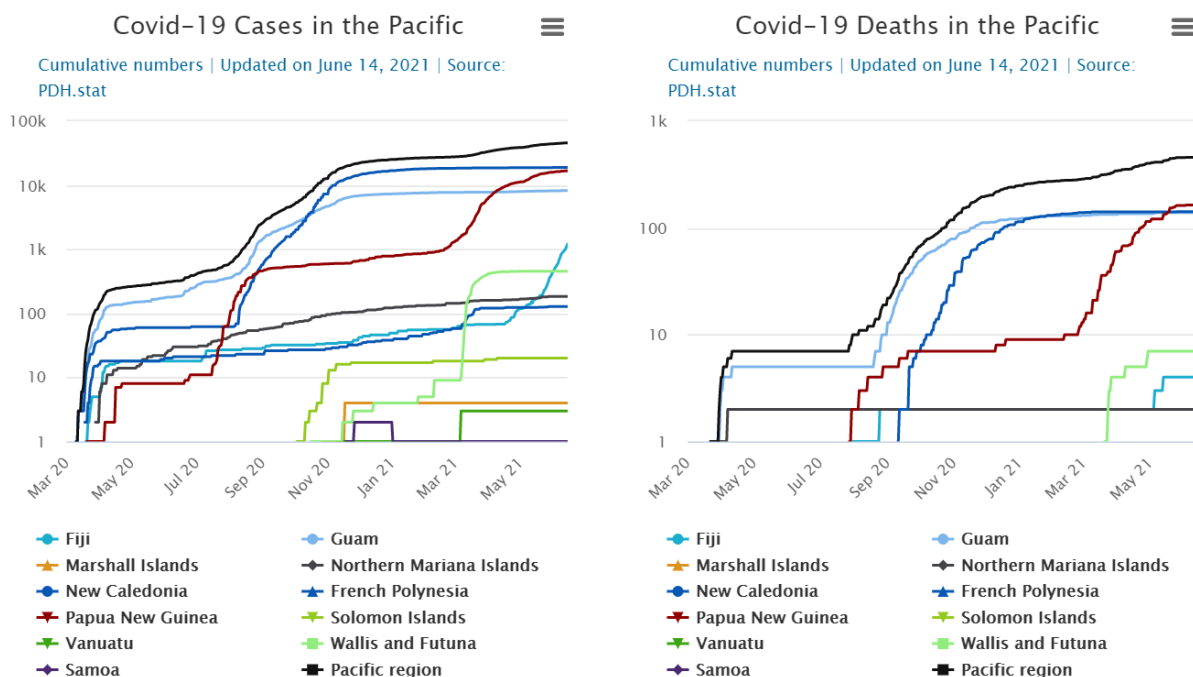


Figure 1- Source by SPC on situation of COVID 19 cases in the Pacific reported weekly as of June 15, 2021. Note figures will continue to change on the link provided: <https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/2021/06/covid-19-pacific-community-updates>

19. With the easing of travel and other restrictions to allow for social and economic activity, there are significant concerns about the impacts of COVID-19. Recognising that the Pacific islands region has very small populations, the pandemic must be contained to protect people.¹⁶ This report identifies opportunities for policy development for resilient communities in the region.

¹³ First Quadrennial Sustainable Development Report 2018

¹⁴ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>, July 2020

¹⁵ <https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/2021/03/COVID-19-pacific-community-updates>

¹⁶ <https://www.spc.int/resource-centre/publications/2020-pacific-islands-population-poster>, accessed on April 2021.

20. The effects of natural disasters in some Pacific countries during COVID-19 contributed to further social and economic impacts.

21. In April 2020, Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold hit Tonga and Solomon Islands at category 3, strengthened to category 4 for Fiji, and category 5 for Vanuatu, leaving devastation in its wake. TC Yasa, also category 5, hit Fiji again in December 2020.

22. Shortly after, TC Ana at category 5, destroyed homes, schools and businesses in the Northern division of Fiji. TC Zazu caused significant flooding and landslides in Samoa. In April 2021, Typhoon Surigae hit Palau causing damage to homes. For countries such as Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), frequent droughts made it difficult to access safe and clean drinking water, increasing health and sanitation risks. King tides have impacted low-lying atoll countries such as RMI and Kiribati.

23. These challenges make it more difficult for persons living with disabilities, the elderly, and women as carers of families. More resources are needed to deliver basic needs and services.

B. Regional Response Efforts and mechanisms

24. With the support of Forum Foreign Ministers, a Pacific Humanitarian Pathway for COVID-19 (PHP-C) was established, enabling a policy mechanism for member countries to receive immediate medical and humanitarian needs. CROP¹⁷ continues to support members with technical advice on emerging health, economic and social issues brought on by 19.

25. In March of 2020, the Joint Incidence Management Team (JIMT) coordinated by WHO in the Pacific with representation from CROP and development partners was established to address critical supply needs and technical advice for public health measures. Support working groups also include the Mental Health and Psychosocial Cell group and the Pacific Health Surveillance Network.

26. The report recommendations support regional processes such as the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (FPR), Framework for Resilient Development to Climate Change and Disaster Risks (FRDP), Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development, the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED), Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights, Pasifika Call to action on Early Childhood Development, Pacific Youth Development Framework, Pacific Islands Non-Communicable Diseases Roadmap, Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) and the Pacific Framework for Rights of Persons with a Disability (FRPD) and other regional frameworks.

27. The regional policies and mechanisms are aligned to national priorities. This report will assist in national planning to ensure resilience is strengthened in key areas.

28. The COVID-19 Economic Recovery Taskforce (CERT) and PHP-C recommends immediate, medium and long-term recovery efforts within the 2030 Global agenda and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

C. Impact of COVID-19 on progressing the 2030 Agenda

¹⁷ CROP agencies consist of Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Pacific Community, Pacific Aviation Safety Office, Forum Fisheries Agency, South Pacific Tourism Agency, University of the South Pacific, Pacific Power Association, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Pacific Islands Development Program

29. Considering the global response and recovery plans to COVID-19, the 2030 Agenda remains the global blueprint to ensuring a human rights-based approach to sustainable livelihoods and resilience to social and economic shocks. Strategies to improve health and education, reduce inequality and stimulate economic growth - while addressing climate change and protecting our oceans and forests - go hand in hand to end poverty.¹⁸

30. With COVID-19 it will be a challenge to "leave no one behind". Increased risks are evident due to limited resources, vulnerable health and social systems, and economic inequalities.¹⁹

31. The social and economic impacts of COVID-19 also undermine country efforts to achieve the Paris Agreement. Developed country Parties have found it difficult to meet the commitment they made pre-COVID to deliver USD100 billion per year by 2020. Secondly, COVID-19 has delayed the convening of COP26 planned for 2020 on the Paris Agreement Rulebook to fully implement the Paris Agreement. Thirdly, COVID-19 has made it difficult for country Parties to submit their revised Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets in 2020 to limit global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius by 2100. To date all NDC targets submitted are on track for 2.4 degree Celsius of global warming and not 1.5 degree Celsius.

32. While Pacific island countries are dealing with climate-induced disasters with annual economic losses of USD500 million, COVID-19 has worsened the stress on small public administrations. For example, Cyclone Harold cost human lives and damaged infrastructure in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji in April 2020 as Pacific island countries were trying to contain COVID-19. In early 2021, three cyclones struck Fiji within six weeks as the country was responding to the pandemic. These examples are likely to increase the debt burden on Pacific island countries.

33. At the global level, whilst COVID-19 resulted in a temporary decline in carbon dioxide emissions by 6.4% in 2020, emissions have risen since late 2020.²⁰ The average global temperature rise is at 1.2 degree Celsius which, on current trends, will be far more severe than the impacts of COVID-19.²¹ Countries need to ensure their economic recovery from COVID-19 promotes a clean, low-carbon, sustainable, healthy and resilient future.

34. The United Nations has developed a global framework for socio-economic responses to the impacts of COVID-19.²² The framework describes assessments, programme design, advocacy and policy advice. The UN approach includes understanding the problem before offering solutions and acknowledging the ongoing nature of the crisis. The focus for the SEIA report was identified by key findings at national level.

¹⁸ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>, accessed on June 2020

¹⁹ A UN Framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, 2020

²⁰ <https://wedocs.unep.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/34426/EGR20.pdf?sequence=3>, June 2020

²¹ <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/climate-change-indicators-and-impacts-worsened>- June 2020

²² A UN Framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, 2020

Part 2: Economic Impacts of COVID-19

A. Theme 1: Health and wellbeing

1.1 Health services and supplies

35. Spending on COVID-19 measures including medical supplies, human resources and quarantine facilities will reduce other health spending. This may widen the gap for services to vulnerable groups such as the elderly, youth, women and children, and persons living with a disability.

36. Countries face challenges in dealing with COVID-19 as their health systems lack infrastructure, equipment and qualified personnel. However, progress has been made through the PHP-C mechanism, including roll out of COVID-19 vaccinations (Figure 2).

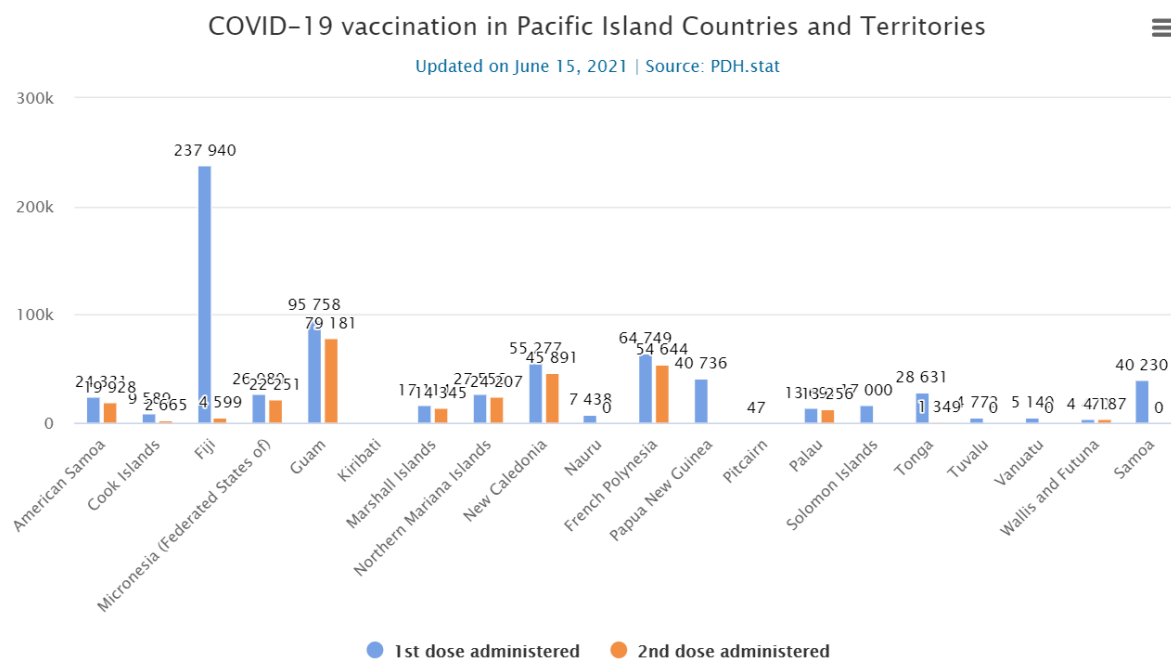


Figure 2: Source SPC. The figure provides an update on vaccination in the Pacific as of June 15th, 2021. Note figures will continue to change and can be accessed on link:

37. There is limited space to strengthen health services, as budget allocations have reduced due to the economic downturn. It is important to look at the impacts, resilience and recovery from a holistic perspective spanning the physical, economic, social and mental wellbeing of people and their communities.

38. Countries that rely on the airline and maritime industries, tourism, fisheries, imported food and remittances from overseas have experienced sharp decreases in revenue. This will impact all aspects of the health and wellbeing of Pacific island communities. This report looks at the impacts on crucial health issues in the region, specifically NCDs, sexual and reproductive health, and psychosocial and mental health.

1.2 Impact on Non-Communicable diseases in the Pacific

39. Vulnerable health care systems and infrastructure worsen ongoing health challenges such as NCDs, including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases. These are the main causes of premature mortality in the Pacific and cause widespread disability from amputations, blindness and illness. The Pacific islands region has one of the highest rates of diabetes and obesity in the world.²³

40. With COVID-19 straining medical services, it is imperative that countries strengthen NCD strategies on prevention and control of risk factors. According to WHO the high rates of NCDs in the region create a higher risk of severe COVID-19 related illnesses.

41. At the time of this report, WHO worked with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and SPC to survey service delivery for NCDs reporting significant disruptions. Monitoring of impacts in the region under the Pacific NCD Roadmap²⁴ is ongoing. The disruptions to health service delivery during COVID-19 will add to existing economic and social challenges.

42. Increased awareness of NCDs is crucial. There is an opportunity to reinforce messages addressing NCDs and healthy food choices. Promotion of physical activity will also contribute to healthy lifestyles and address mental health issues.

In addressing the NCD agenda, further support is required for women health care workers who make majority of the health care work-force and social service delivery across the region.

1.3 Impacts on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH)

43. Limited access to services for sexual reproductive health has been reported, particularly with lockdown restrictions and unemployment. Such services should be included in national COVID-19 response and recovery plans, including improving access to contraception, reproductive health kits, and screening services for prevention of cervical and breast cancer. A 2020 survey by WHO notes the disruptions to stocks of contraceptives due to manufacturing and global supply problems. This may contribute to unintended pregnancies.

44. WHO reports 80% of annual cervical cancer related deaths are in developing countries.²⁵ In the Pacific islands a 2016 study found 63% of women's deaths in a year were due to cervical cancer - the most common cancer amongst Pacific women.²⁶ WHO reports more than 50% of the countries have postponed public screening programmes.²⁷

45. With countries redirecting resources and capacity to containing COVID-19, partner agencies and CSO's are working closely with governments to provide much needed sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services to communities. These include antenatal clinics for mothers, sexual reproductive information and treatment, measures for unintended pregnancies, screening and tests for sexually transmitted diseases, and cervical cancer.

²³ Ng et al., Global, regional, and national prevalence of overweight and obesity in children and adults during 1980–2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013

²⁴ Pacific NCD Roadmap Report, 2018,

²⁵ WHO Human Papillomavirus and HPV Vaccines: Technical information for policymakers and health professionals, 2007, pg 3

²⁶ The report, Situation Analysis and response to cervical cancer in the Pacific, 2016, pg 94

²⁷ <https://www.who.int/news/item/01-06-2020-COVID-19-significantly-impacts-health-services-for-noncommunicable-diseases>, accessed on May 2021.

46. Most frontline workers in the region are women,²⁸ making women's health a priority.

1.4 Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

47. Strategies are recommended to address mental health, reduce vulnerability, ensure community plans are inclusive, and maintain access to health care and essential services for marginalised and vulnerable groups including youth, women and persons with disabilities. Mental health support and other services are also needed for people affected by this crisis recognising that there are pre-existing barriers that hinder access to mental health.²⁹ These include stigmatisation or lack of mental health practitioners.

48. In the Pacific, Guam reported a suicide every six days from June-August 2020 compared to one in every eight days in 2019.³⁰ Fiji reported 90 suicide cases and 82 attempts in 2020. Hotline services and some Women Crisis Centres were active in Kiribati, Fiji, PNG, Samoa and Tonga to respond to requests for help. These included services for victims of domestic violence, including women, girls and boys.

49. A report by the Pacific Trade and Invest (PTI) highlights the financial and negative emotional impact of COVID-19 on small businesses and the private sector.³¹ Nine surveys were conducted in 2020 covering 16 countries, with over 60% of respondents reporting negative mental health impacts due to COVID-19.³²

50. These results contribute to family distress, conflicts and violence (including against women and children) which can lead to depression or high-risk behaviour. Other coping mechanisms include substance abuse which affect the wellbeing of our communities and increase the burden on strained health services.

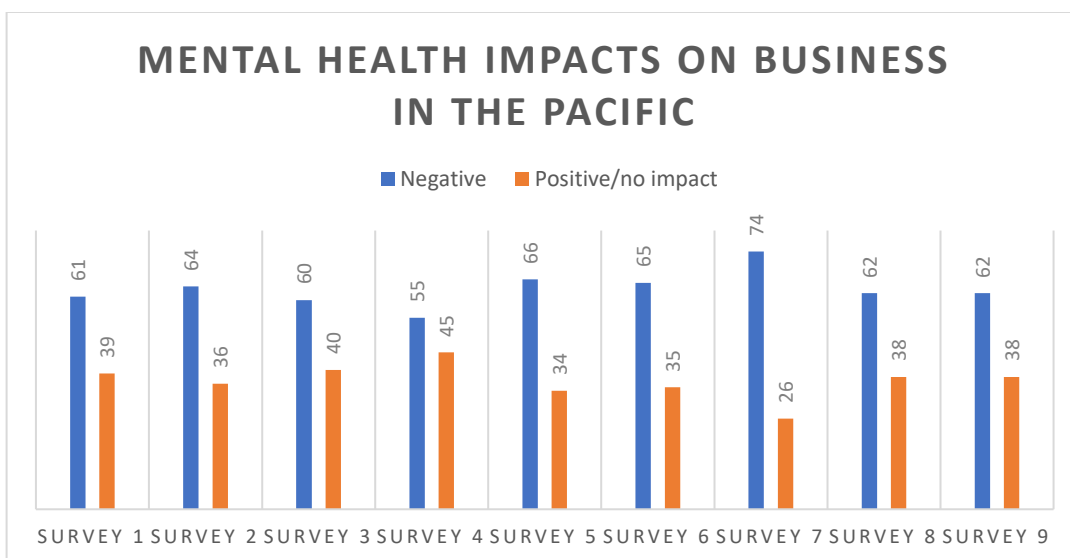


Figure 3: Nine surveys in 16 PICS for 2020 showing negative impacts of mental health. PTI Pacific Business Monitor.

²⁸ AP Journal, The COVID-19 Pandemic and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the Pacific, 2021

²⁹ SPC, Policy review on Pacific youth and COVID 19, 2021

³⁰ <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/about/how-we-work/pacific-support/news/detail/10-10-2020-mental-health-in-the-pacific>, accessed 10/05/21

³¹ PTI Monthly monitor, March 2021

³² PTI Business Report, 2020

50. A survey by the Pacific Women Support Unit, Pacific Girls Speak Out: COVID-19, reports five key issues affecting adolescent girls as disrupted education; increased anxiety and loneliness; feeling isolated and unsafe at home and online; increased care burden at home, and disrupted access to menstrual hygiene and sexual health services. These services need to be included in the COVID-19 management strategies at the national level.

1.5 Impact on water, sanitation and hygiene

51. The Pacific region has the lowest water coverage and the second-lowest sanitation coverage globally.³³ The availability of soap is challenging, especially in remote communities. Water and sanitation impact workloads in different ways, as women are often responsible for water needed for washing and maintaining household hygiene. In the Pacific, women report significant difficulties with accessing sanitation facilities and may experience violence in doing so.³⁴

52. Water and sanitation facilities that do not consider the needs of people with disabilities can limit their ability to protect themselves and affect other parts of their lives. Preventive measures for COVID-19 include hand washing with soap and keeping unwashed hands away from the face. Some areas lack access to clean water for drinking and washing, increasing the risk of COVID-19 infections. Access to water differs across the region (Figure 5).

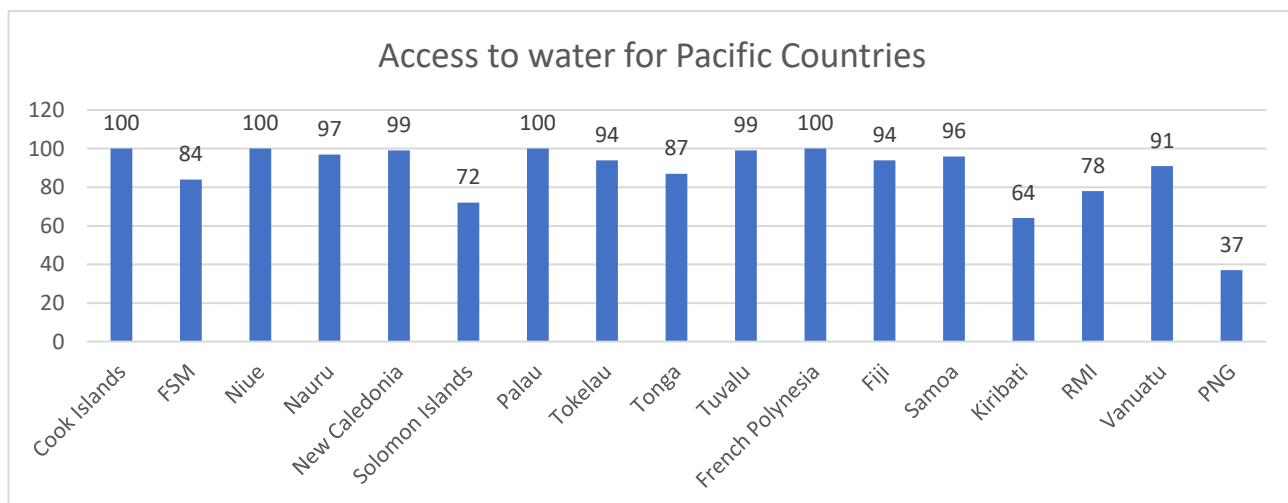


Figure 4: Source- SPC HIES Pre-Covid 19 baseline 2021, UNICEF Water and sanitation report 2017 and washdata.org-WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring programme 2017

53. In 2020, FSM had four months of drought while in 2021 Kiribati had more than two months of drought making it difficult to access clean water for washing and drinking. This also caused illness and skin diseases as well as increased infections for children and babies.

54. There is concern around population migration out of urban to rural areas as a result of impacts brought by COVID-19 such as unemployment which increases household living, overcrowding and adds pressure to already inadequate WASH facilities in communities.

1.6 Country responses

³³ UNICEF, A snapshot of water and sanitation in the Pacific, 2017

³⁴ CARE Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region, March 2020, pg 3

55. Stimulus packages with additional spending towards health and containment measure were implemented by Governments across the region. Further information is provided in Annex 1.

56. Prevention and containment protocols developed by countries to respond to the crisis and preparation for ease of travel restrictions and mobility. Governments have worked closely with CSOs and development partners to strengthen health services and help communities cope with COVID-19. Development partners and donors have assisted with medical supplies and equipment delivered through the PHP-C. Retired nurses and midwives were mobilised to work with health officials on community outreach programmes.
Stimulus packages

57. Toolkits have been developed by WHO through the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) cell which health care workers can use to deliver psychosocial support to vulnerable groups such as women groups, and persons living with disabilities.

1.7 Opportunities

- Strengthen regional mechanisms e.g. Pacific Healthy Islands Monitoring Framework and the Pacific NCD Roadmap with development partners, private sector and CSOs.
- Promote domestic food supply and increase investment in agriculture and fisheries.
- Enhance management and governance of natural resources, biodiversity and healthy ecosystems to improve livelihoods and sustainable food systems that are healthy and affordable.
- Engage regional and national sporting bodies to promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles to combat NCDs and respond to mental health issues.

B. Theme 2: Integrated pathways for economic recovery and resilience

2.1 Impacts on tourism

58. The global economic impacts of COVID-19 have stalled years of progress and will require innovative approaches for economic recovery. The ADB projects negative GDP growth for the Cook Islands, FSM, Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu but remain positive for Kiribati and Tuvalu.

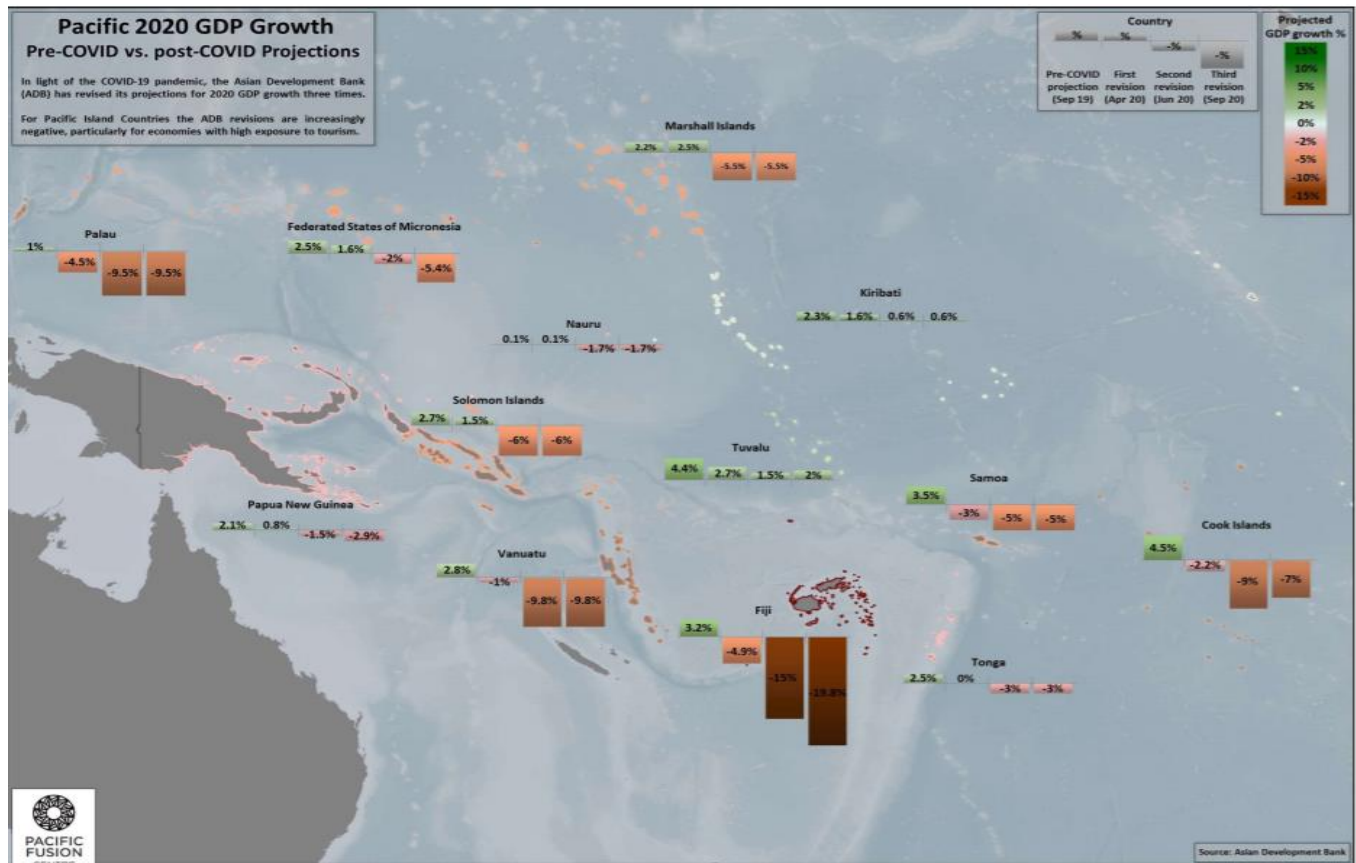


Figure 5: Source- Pacific Fusion Hub, November 2020, The Asian Development Bank continues to monitor the economic impacts in the Pacific, noting negative GDP growth as demonstrated in the graph below.

59. In 2020 the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) projected the global economic impact on tourism to be five times that of the 2008 global financial crisis, with 100.8 million job losses and a 2.9% rise in global unemployment.³⁵ For the Pacific, the impacts weigh heavily on tourism and fisheries dependant economies.

60. In 2020, Vanuatu lost 70% of tourism jobs in six weeks, with the sector making up 40% of GDP.³⁶ A survey by the Ministry of Employment Fiji and International Labour Organisation (ILO) shows 115,000 Fijian workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁷ ILO findings for Samoa show 26% of business workers have lost jobs, two thirds of them females.³⁸

³⁵ World Travel and Tourism Council Report, 2020

³⁶ Joint Survey on COVID-19 and TC Harold impacts on tourism industry https://images.impartmedia.com/vanuatu.travel/documents/National_Tourism_Business_Impacts_Survey_TCharold_COVID-19.pdf.

³⁷ <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/Initial-numbers-show-115000-workers-affected-by-COVID-19--ILO-x5r8f4/>

³⁸ ILO Rapid Assessment, Impact of COVID19 on employment and business in the Pacific, July 2020

61. The border closures led to an increase in unemployment and decrease in tourist arrivals across the region. The first quarter of 2020 arrival numbers were down 18.7% on average over the same quarter of 2019. In the second quarter of 2020, as border closures were extended, the decline in arrivals reached 99.3%.³⁹ Cook Islands, Fiji, PNG and Solomon Islands showed fewer job vacancies in 2020. The month-on-month decreases were around 14.7% and 67% for January and December, respectively, indicating a continued decline for major industries such as tourism and limited domestic labour demand.⁴⁰

Visitor Arrivals reported for 2019 and 2020.

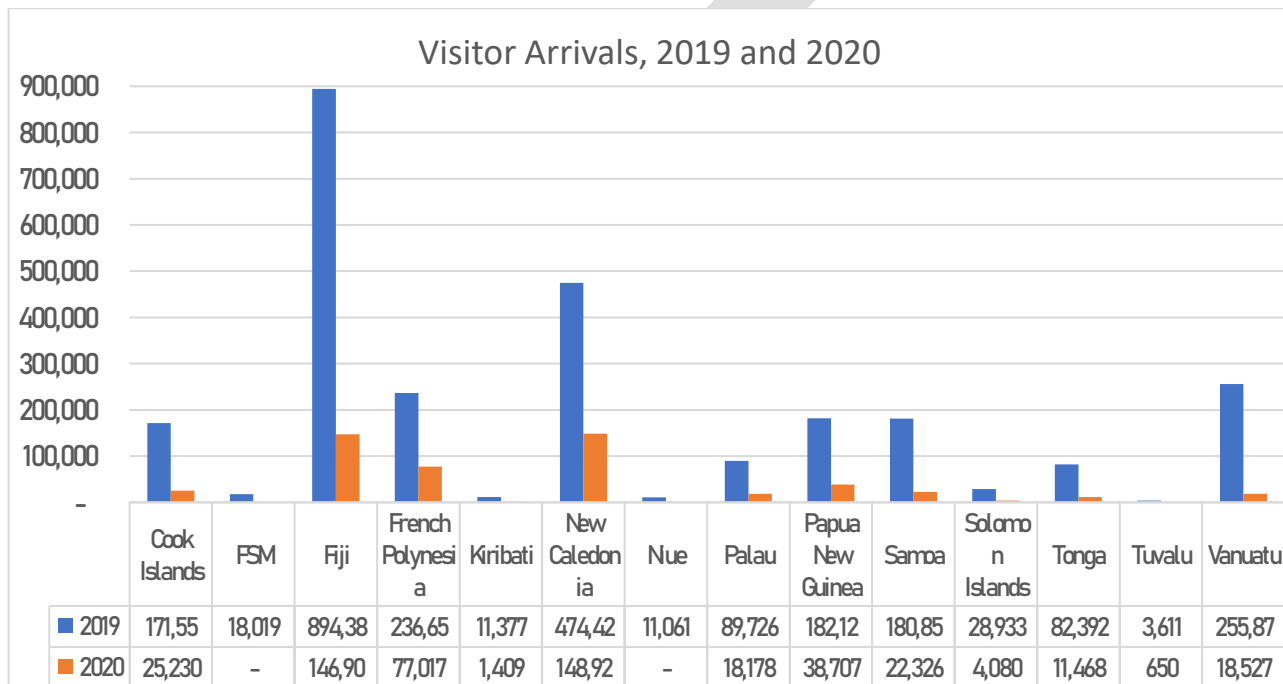


Figure 6: Source SPC, figures include both air and sea arrivals. Data for FSM and Niue was obtained from the National Statistics Office, and may not be directly comparable with the other PICT data.

62. The tourism-dependent economies such as Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu are experiencing a recession as a result, requiring innovative ideas and strategies to revive the industry.⁴¹ There are also increased impacts on the small businesses that rely on tourism.

63. For this report, annual Tourism Earnings in 2020 represented below:

- Significant declines for Fiji (84.8%), PNG (72.9%), Samoa (88.4%), Solomon Islands (79.7%) and Tonga (67.8%) compared to 2019.

Quarter 4, 2020 Estimated Tourism Earnings represented:

- Decreases of 99.3% and 92.8% respectively for Fiji and the Solomon Islands over the December Quarter of 2019.
- Increases of 9.7% and 63.3% respectively for Fiji and the Solomon Islands over the previous quarter.

Tourism Earnings Decline

	% Change over previous quarter	% Change over same quarter last year
	2020	2020

³⁹ SPTO report, 2020, Visitor arrival numbers slump in the Pacific Island Countries and Territories, 2020

⁴⁰ COVID-19 Economic Impacts – Quarter 3, 2020

⁴¹ ADB Pacific Monitoring Report, 2020

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cook Islands	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Fiji	-41.8	-98.6	-26.2	9.7	-42.5	-99.4	-99.5	-99.3
PNG	38.9	-37.1	-79.7	...	-64.1	-87.1	-68.8	...
Samoa	-56	-100	0	0	-31.9	-100	-100	-100
Solomon Islands	-66.4	-90	30.7	63.6	-3.7	-93.7	-91.4	-92.8
Tonga		-94.1	234.3	...	-43.6	-97.1	-92.3	...
Vanuatu	-31.2	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

Figure 7: Source SPC: Note: Solomon Islands and PNG, travel receipts used as indicator for tourism earnings (includes both tourists and returning residents foreign exchange receipts).

... data not available.

2.2 Impact on fisheries

64. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) outlook for the global fisheries and aquaculture sectors is shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic and the new market landscape. Fish supply, consumption and trade revenues continue to decline due to restrictions on demand, logistics, prices, labour and business planning.⁴²

65. The reduced activity for domestic longline fleets impacted employment, income, exports and related business. Fewer observers worked due to the suspension of the requirement for 100% observer coverage in the purse seine fishery.

66. However, the effort levels in the purse seine fishery and revenues from the Vessel per Day Scheme (VDS) were at similar levels to previous years. While the ADB showed a decline in Pacific GDP growth, PICs reliant on tuna fishing licenses for income experienced a slight increase in GDP growth. For example, Tuvalu is projected to experience 2% and Kiribati 0.6% GDP growth in 2020, compared with Fiji's projected 19.8% GDP decline.⁴³

67. Data and evidence gathered through various studies and reviews on the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions highlight the following effects on fisheries and aquaculture in the Pacific:

- aquaculture production has been negatively affected due to a shortage in inputs (feed, seed, equipment) disrupting production cycles, due to international and domestic travel and transport restrictions and lockdowns.
- Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) of fishing activities, management of fish stocks and the fight against IUU fishing have been negatively affected by suspension of observer activities
- fisheries research disrupted in the short and medium term
- decline in levels and conditions of employment in capture fisheries and aquaculture
- reduced local demand for fisheries products, in particular high-value products destined for the tourist market and reduced exports

⁴² FAO, COVID-19: Impact on global fish trade, November 2020

⁴³ PFC-AR-Impacts of COVID 19 on the Pacific Fishing industry, January 2021

68. With higher unemployment, coastal areas have become more important for food security. These risks putting extra pressure on coastal resources, some of which were already under pressure pre-COVID.

2.3 Impact on labour mobility and remittances

69. Pacific Possible - a report by the World Bank - highlighted how Pacific island communities benefit immensely from labour mobility through remittances and the transfer of skills that can lead to new business and markets.⁴⁴ Seasonal workers from Samoa account for 6.0%, Tonga 14.7% and Vanuatu 8.1% of the workforce.⁴⁵ This has been negatively impacted by travel restrictions, border closures and quarantine measures as a response to the pandemic.

70. Reduced hours and less work also meant lower remittances.⁴⁶ Interestingly the report states that 69% of workers in New Zealand reported lower earnings due to reduced working hours, but only 47% reduced their remittances. Forty per cent of those earning less maintained or increased remittances for their families, while 11.4% of workers reported not sending money back since March 2020.⁴⁷

71. Seasonal workers programme for Member countries experienced decline in participation which saw re-engagement in late 2020 and early 2021 specifically for the agriculture and meat processing sectors in Australia and New Zealand.

NZ Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme and the Australian Seasonal Workers Programme

Countries	Absolute Numbers			Annual % change		
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-2020	2017-18	2018-19	2019-2020
Fiji	606	880	714	3.5	4	-18.9
Kiribati	595	640	435	3.5	2.9	-32
Nauru	14	19	5	0.1	0.1	-73.7
PNG	216	300	250	1.3	1.4	-16.7
Samoa	2,405	2,992	2,952	14	13.7	-1.3
Solomon Islands	818	1,010	984	4.8	4.6	-2.6
Tonga	4,689	5,775	4,024	27.2	26.5	-30.3
Tuvalu	80	92	115	0.5	0.4	25
Vanuatu	7,793	10,095	9,058	45.3	46.3	-10.3
Total	17,216	21,803	18,537	16.9	26.6	-15

Figure 8: Source: Data from Department of Home Affairs, DFAT and ABS and from ANU Dev Policy Centre

72. A regional report by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) covering Fiji, RMI, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu on impacts on workers who cannot participate in the labour schemes abroad, found increased levels of anxiety due unemployment coupled with disaster recovery. This partly reopened in 2021 for some workers to Australia for the peak harvest season. For workers that

⁴⁴ Pacific Possible: Labour Mobility. <https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/555421468204932199/pdf/labour-mobility-pacific-possible.pdf>

⁴⁵ World Bank, Pacific Labor Mobility, Migration and Remittances in Times of COVID-19: Interim Report, Nov 2020, pg 9

⁴⁶ World Bank, Pacific Labor Mobility, Migration and Remittances in Times of COVID-19: Interim Report, Nov 2020, pg 41

⁴⁷ World Bank, Pacific Labor Mobility, Migration and Remittances in Times of COVID-19: Interim Report, Nov 2020, pg 44

were already participating in labour schemes abroad reported experiencing anxiety due to extended periods of family separation.⁴⁸ This exponentially increases the psychosocial impact on the migrant worker and their families left behind particularly for women as they care for families during this crisis.

73. At the time of this report, annual remittance in 2020 represented below:

- Increases of 9.4%, 10.8% and 14.4% for Fiji, Samoa and Tonga respectively when compared to 2019

Decreases of 45.2% for Solomon Islands relative to 2019.

Change in Remittance Level

Countries	% Change over previous quarter					% Change over same quarter last year					Annual % change	
	2020				2021	2020				2021	2019	2020
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1		
Cook Islands	...	...	...	...		...	...	...	...		15.6	
Fiji	1.4	-12.3	31.5	15.1		6.1	-16.1	14.2	34.6			9.4
PNG	-	97.7	-15.1	-31.2	...	-67.9	-72.7	-71.1	...		613.9	
Samoa	-4.4	8.4	8.7	0.4		0.2	14.6	15.1	0			10.8
Solomon Islands	-	49.7	41.2	11	-38.2	-32.7	-67.5	29.9	-51.3			-
Tonga	-	14.2	16	21.7	8.6		2	1.1	20.6	31.6		14.4
Vanuatu	...	...	...	...		...	...	...	...

Figure 9: Source SPC on annual remittances levels

....Data not available

2.4 Impact on trade

74. The region will continue to face impacts on trade with disrupted imports and exports arrangements with trade partner countries. Border closures with reduced shipping and aviation movements will continue to result in further declines and related revenue. Results on impacts for imports are provided.

75. Annual Imports in 2020 represented:

- Declines for Cook Islands (22.1%), Fiji (37.6%), French Polynesia (20.9%), New Caledonia (13.8%), Samoa (19.7%), Solomon Islands (18.2%), Tonga (14%) and Vanuatu (15.5%) when compared to 2019.
- An increase for Kiribati and Tuvalu by 1.9% and 4.9%, respectively, but relatively weaker than the 2019 growth rates.

Change in Imports

Countries	% change over previous quarter		% change over same quarter last year					Annual % Change	
	2020	2021	2020				2021	2019	2020

⁴⁸ IOM Regional report on the impacts of COVID 19 on Labour Mobility, 2020

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1		
Cook Islands	-28	26.8	46.8	21.9		8	-31	-17.5	-39.6		6.1	-22.1
Fiji	45.9	19.4	-0.3	2.9		-19.3	30.8	-36.1	-55.2		5.5	-37.6
French Polynesia	...	...	...	8.8		0	20.1	-32.5	-7.9		-1.4	-20.9
Kiribati	6.4	3.5	9.5	-8.8		133.7	41.1	13.5	10		16.4	1.9
New Caledonia	24.4	-0.5	-7.5	20.7		-3.6	-10	-23.7	-15.9			-13.8
Palau	...	...	...	...		...	...	...	...		9.3	
PNG	1.5	16.6	-10	...		-20.9	30.9	-18.1	...		171.3	
Samoa	30.5	-15	18.7	14.7	-5.5	-9	31.4	-17.3	-19.7	9.3	9.8	-19.7
Solomon Islands	34.9	40.5	13.4	23.2	16	-34.1	7.6	-5.7	-34.9	8.4	-12.9	-18.2
Tonga	26.7	19.1	30	21.8		-9.3	35.3	-4.2	-6.1		20	-14
Tuvalu	-3.1	42.9	11.8	16.1		-31.1	45.4	-12.6	41.6		37.7	4.9
Vanuatu	20.3	-8.7	13.6	-0.5		16	-6	-1.4	-17.8		-4.8	-15.5

Figure 10: Source: NSOs, Ministry of Finance, Central/Reserve Banks of Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Palau, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu

76. With impacts on imports, decline in export are also reported based on data available at the time of this report.

Annual Exports in 2020 represented:

- Declines for Fiji (19.6%), French Polynesia (43.9%), Kiribati (23.4%), New Caledonia (3.4%), Samoa (23.6%), Solomon Islands (17.3%), Tonga (82.8%), Tuvalu (82.8%) and Vanuatu (17.2%) when compared against 2019.
- An increase of 12.5% for the Cook Islands which was higher than the 2019 increase of 5.6%.

Quarter 4, 2020 exports from:

- Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa and Solomon Islands declined by 39.9%, 15%, 15.5% and 14% respectively when compared to Quarter 3, 2020.
- French Polynesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Tonga and Vanuatu increased by 66.8%, 43.7%, 17%, 26.5% and 29.2% respectively whilst Tuvalu's exports rose by more than two-fold when compared to the previous quarter.
- Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu declined by 13.5%, 28.8%, 21.2%, 7.6%, 32.6%, 18.1%, 15.1% and 89.4% respectively when compared to December quarter in 2019.
- Cook Islands and Vanuatu rose by 37% and 6% respectively when compared against December quarter in 2019.

Latest exports in Quarter 1 2021 represented:

- A slight increase of 0.2% for Solomon Islands against Quarter 4, 2020. Against Quarter 1, 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic, exports were lower by 31.8%.
- For Samoa there were decreases of 12.5% and 21.5% for Samoa against the

Exports (Quarter and Annual Percent Changes)

	% change over previous quarter					% change over same quarter last year					Annual % change		
	2020				2021	2020				2021	2019	2020	
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1			
Cook Islands	112	-	49.8	114.3	39.9	340.4	17.5	38.1	37		5.6	12.5	
Fiji	-16.7	-	10.8	40.1	-15	-19.4	21.8	21.7	13.5		5.1	-19.6	
French Polynesia	...	...	...	66.8		0	58.2	38.3	28.1		18.8	-43.9
Kiribati	101.6	-49	-46.7	43.7		67.2	48.2	-64	21.2		60.5	-23.4	
New Caledonia	-19.1	-5	2.9	17		15.9	8.7	21.1	-7.6			-3.4	
Palau	...	...	...	...		...	...	...	...		-4.2	
PNG	-12.6	-	16.8	-3.2	...	-2.3	26.4	27.8	...		11.4		
Samoa	-24.9	9.9	-3.3	15.5	12.5	-20.2	15.9	25.4	32.6	-21.5	9.1	-23.6	
Solomon Islands	20.1	-	13.6	-8.3	-14	0.16	-12.5	14.8	20.8	18.1	-31.8	16.9	-17.3
Tonga	-33	-	59.8	149.1	26.5	37.3	67.2	26.4	15.1		59.8	-23.7	
Tuvalu	-54.4	-	74.7	-59.2	125	-39.6	90.5	96.2	89.4		62.9	-82.8	
Vanuatu	-4.9	-	26.1	16.6	29.2	0.7	15.5	17.2	6		-5.2	-17.2	

Figure 11- Source: NSOs, Ministry of Finance, Central/Reserve Banks of Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Palau, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu

... data not available

Note: Export data sourced from the Reserve/Central Banks are used as proxies and will be revised when NSOs data are available

2.4 Country responses

77. The impacts to projected GDP include Fiji contracting at 19.8%, and Kiribati maintaining 0.6% GDP growth.⁴⁹ Policy responses include provisional tax adjustments, tariff reductions and tax payment relief for countries such as Cook Islands, Fiji, New Caledonia, Niue, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. More analysis is provided in **Annex 1**.

⁴⁹ ADB Pacific Monitoring Report, 2020

78. ADB reported that 28.9% of COVID-19 response packages was for vulnerable groups, unemployed, the elderly and persons with disability; 21.3% to business support; 14.8% to health measures; 8.5% to food security and 4.7% to infrastructure; and 21.8% to other categories.

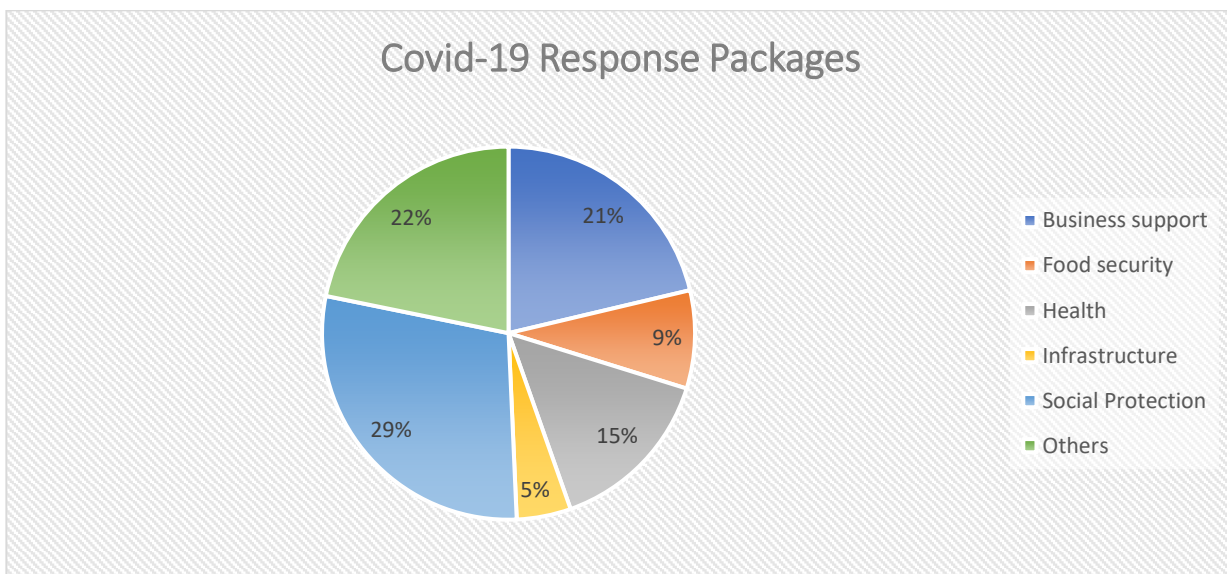


Figure 12: Source ADB on COVID-19 response packages of Pacific developing member countries.

2.5 Opportunities

- Increase investment in agriculture and innovative farming solutions for sustainability.
- Strengthen support for informal workers to build resilience including financial literacy and financial product.
- Strengthen skills training for opportunities at national level and for labour mobility.
- Increased engagement with CSOs, FBOs, and diaspora communities for support in recovery and resilience.
- Adapt traditional practices of trade and economics to help families.
- Include youth and women in policy development.
- Enhance regional efforts for e-commerce, trade, private sector and sustainable financing.
- Diversify Tourism operator income streams through Agribusiness, incorporating farming and promotion of local foods as alternate income source during border closure and as part of new focus of Tourism when borders reopen (emphasis on use of local foods for wellness and reduction of NCDs and linkages to trade discussions on food imports and exports)

Theme 3: Adaptive learning and employment pathways

3.1 Impact on Education in the Pacific

79. A UNESCO report notes half of global students are affected by school closures. In the Pacific, development partners such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) are working with the CROP to support education.

80. The Pacific region has approximately 800,000 children in schools and early childhood centres who faced disruptions to learning due to COVID-19 measures.⁵⁰ **Annex 2** provides summary of country level measures by education systems.

81. Limited ICT infrastructure and affordable access remains a concern with more investment needed. Niue, PNG, Samoa and Tonga reported challenges to online learning at all levels with the most affected being children with disabilities, increasing their vulnerability.⁵¹

82. Government of Fiji reported a 79% pass rate for Year 13, and 74% for Year 12 exam results, a 1% increase compared to results from 2019.⁵²

3.2 Impact on Skills development and training

83. Findings by the APTC, in line with advice from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), confirm the importance of education to mitigate unemployment, especially among young people who make up half the Pacific population.⁵³

84. An APTC⁵⁴ Pacific Labor Market Assessment looked at the initial impact of COVID-19 in nine PICs in 2020 and 2021. The report notes it will be essential to monitor the economic impacts on key industries (primarily tourism), and to respond flexibly.

85. The potential of a growing youth population across the Pacific equipped with TVET and other qualifications remains significant. A focus for TVET is for shortages in areas such as agriculture, value-adding in fisheries and aquaculture, business, middle management, ICT, construction and technical trades, education and health care. The report notes a likely increase in demand on the regional labour mobility front once COVID-19 recedes.

3.3 Country responses

	Online platforms	TV	Radio	Take Home packages
Cook Islands				
FSM				
Niue				
Nauru				
New Caledonia				
Solomon Islands				
Palau				
Tokelau				
Tonga				
Tuvalu				

⁵⁰ UNICEF report, 2020

⁵¹ Sources: UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Bank. 2020. Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures, <http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/survey-education-COVID-school-closures/> accessed 09 May, 2021

⁵² By Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, <https://fijisun.com.fj/2021/01/29/ministry-records-79-pass-rate-for-year-13-74-pass-rate-for-year-12-provisional-results/>, accessed 20 May, 21

⁵³ APTC Discussion paper- The role of TVET and skills for employment in the response to COVID-19, Dec 2020.

⁵⁴ APTC Pacific Labour Market Assessment, November 2020, yet to be publicly released

French Polynesia				
Fiji				
Samoa				
Kiribati				
RMI				
Vanuatu				
PNG				

Figure 13: Sources: UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Bank. 2020. Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures <http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/survey-education-covid-school-closures>

86. Other issues include the need to strengthen ICT infrastructure for student learning; the need for psychosocial support and mental training for teachers; more parent and teacher engagement to plan for future shocks, and better access for children with disabilities.

3.4 Opportunities

- Support the Pacific Regional Education Framework and Ministerial decisions on remote learning through development of digital platforms.⁵⁵ Ensure safety measures are in place to combat cyber threats for students and teachers.
- Increase investment in early childhood education as a long-term strategy.
- Strengthen skills development for employment, social entrepreneurship, and small business with focus on youth population.
- Strengthen inclusive education and curricula to build resilience and sustainability.

Theme 4: Inclusive social protection systems

4.1 Social Protection measures

87. All member countries allocated special budgets and stimulus packages for health care, unemployment, business operations, social insurance and other assistance. Traditional social protection systems, social structures and community safety nets have also supported communities and families who are experiencing difficulties in meeting needs. This effort involved governments, CSOs, churches and community networks, alumni associations, and the private sector.

88. UNESCAP recently reported Asia and Pacific region has one of the lowest social protections systems in the world as reported by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) with some countries allocating only 2% of GDP allocated, compared to the global average of 11%. Further research is required for analysis for the Pacific. Assessments showed more developed countries implementing social protection measures and support for employment and revenue.

89. The Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) network⁵⁶ covering FSM, Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu found that food sharing is being revitalized and continues at the village level. Such cultural and traditional kinship practices that has always been part of the Pacific lifestyle help communities to respond in times of crisis, while still observing COVID-19 measures.

⁵⁵ Forum Education Ministers Meeting Outcome Statement, April 2021

⁵⁶ The international network of natural resource management practitioners who have joined together to share best practices, lessons learned and to amplify their community voices

90. One concern is informal workers who have lost jobs and social insurance benefits as they are not eligible for unemployment benefits from government.⁵⁷ Unpaid caregivers, mostly women, do not receive assistance through the formal social protection system. In countries such as Fiji, Palau, Solomon Islands, Samoa and Tonga, access to pension funds, utility waivers, or hardship allowances were provided as COVID-19 responses. However, this was insufficient.⁵⁸ The poverty rates in Samoa of 18.8%, Tonga 4.4%, Fiji 28%, and PNG 37.5%⁵⁹ will see higher unemployment and reduced hours for those affected by COVID-19.

91. An interesting phenomenon during the pandemic is the surge in online bartering providing a social net and a modern twist on a traditional practice. In Fiji, a Facebook page created on 21st April 2020 to encourage non-cash trading accumulated nearly 200,000 members in a few weeks, which has been replicated in other PICs.⁶⁰ The members, mostly women, barter agricultural produce, books, household items, art and crafts, baked goods and groceries. Similar schemes followed in Samoa "Le Barter"; Tonga "Barter for Change"⁶¹ with 11,000 members, and Vanuatu "Barter for Nambawan Life Vanuatu",⁶² all of which helped families facing financial strain due to COVID-19.

92. Online bartering trades goods or services in exchange for groceries and household items. While some have used the platforms in a commercial manner, the typical bartering provides some relief where government resources are limited.

93. The on-going support and assistance at national and community level by CSOs and NGOs during this crisis is on-going with diaspora communities, alumni associations, and the private sector.

4.2 Impacts on Women

94. The pandemic has severe and disproportionate impact on women and girls - increasing economic insecurity, rising levels of gender-based violence, and the continued inaccessibility to essential health, education, justice, police and other social services. COVID-19 has exposed inequalities globally and even more so in the Pacific with the added interrelated crises of climate change and disasters, derailing efforts to accelerate gender equality.

95. The shutdown of markets as part of the COVID-19 restrictions has translated into a huge income reduction for women.⁶³ A 2020 rapid assessment of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in Tuvalu revealed that women and men are indeed affected differently, with more women experiencing loss of income primarily due to the nature of women's income-generating activities – many depending on hospitality, restaurants and handicraft selling⁶⁴.

96. Women are more likely than men to work in low-paying, informal and precarious work, without safety nets, job security, paid leave or insurance for economic shocks.⁶⁵ Likewise, women who sell

⁵⁷ APTC Discussion paper- The role of TVET and skills for employment in response to COVID-19, Dec 2020

⁵⁸ World Bank Report, December 2020.

⁵⁹ ADB, Poverty Data for Samoa, PNG, Fiji and Tonga, adb.org accessed 18/05/21

⁶⁰ Barter for Better Fiji- Face book online accessed 30/04/21

⁶¹ Barter for Change, Tunga Facebook, accessed 30/04/21

⁶² Barter for Nambawan Life Vanuatu, Facebook page, accessed 30 April 2021

⁶³ Pacific Women, 2020. COVID-19 effect on WEE

⁶⁴ Tuvalu-COVID19-Rapid-Assessment-Report_Summary.pdf (pacificwomen.org)

⁶⁵ A summary of Pacific Women's Webinar on Women's Economic Empowerment and COVID-19 - Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development

produce and/or market primary produce have reduced incomes due to shrinking economies as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.⁶⁶

97. Women are on the front line protecting their communities' health and wellbeing. Across the Pacific region most health care workers are women, as high as 70% in some countries such as Tonga and Tuvalu. The pandemic has also seen women take on more unpaid work with the 'opportunity cost' of women not having spare time to engage in income generating activities that would have allowed them some economic independence.

98. Taking on increased childcare and domestic labour responsibilities due to closure of school and workplaces has added to their existing unpaid workload. Home-based and community infection prevention measures (such as hand washing and supporting the social isolation of the elderly) will often fall to women and girls as the primary carers for children, the elderly, and sick relatives.⁶⁷

99. Gender equality matters in COVID-19 response and recovery. Women's participation and leadership in all aspects of the recovery process is critical as our Pacific countries reopen borders, begin or complete vaccinations, build economies and strengthen interventions for heightened resilience.

4.3 Violence against women and children

100. In March 2021 WHO published global estimates that 1 in 3 women, a quarter of whom are 15-49 years old, experience physical, sexual or intimate partner violence.⁶⁸ The prevalence of partner and non-partner violence in the Pacific is high, estimated at 60 to 80%.⁶⁹ During a crisis such as COVID-19, gender-based violence intensifies with women less able to seek help, medical care, temporary shelter, or escape abusive and violent partners.⁷⁰ Service providers and shelters have had to, in some cases, scale down services and close, leaving a shortage of shelter options for women and children escaping family violence⁷¹.

101. Increasing concerns on gender-based violence and violence against children are evident across the Forum membership related to stress and increased vulnerabilities. During the pandemic, an increase in gender-based violence due to confinement is being observed across countries with more calls to helpline services and counselling.⁷²

102. Women living in abusive relationships, enforced social isolation, and quarantine are particularly at risk as they are confined with their abuser. The Government of Fiji reported a 606% increase in calls to helplines between February–April 2020, during COVID-19 lockdowns.⁷³ 1452 child abuse and neglect cases were reported in 2020.⁷⁴ Child neglect includes lack of food, clothing and shelter, sexual and physical abuse and lack of supervision.

103. PNG reported 63% of women experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse with 85% knowing of survivors turned away from services due to COVID-19 restrictions.⁷⁵

⁶⁶ The Pacific Community (SPC); 2021; 14th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women's Economic Empowerment Brief.

⁶⁷ <https://pacificwomen.org/topic/ending-violence-against-women/>

⁶⁸ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>, accessed 02/05/21

⁶⁹ UNFPA, 'Population and Development Profiles: Pacific Island Countries' page 8

⁷⁰ Gender and COVID-19 in the Pacific: Emerging gendered impacts and recommendations for response, Pacific Women, April 2020

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² World Bank Policy Note, April 2020

⁷³ Fiji Government, Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation, 2020

⁷⁴ <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/1452-cases-of-child-abuse-and-neglect-reported-last-year---Vuniwaqa-x5r48f/>, accessed 20/05/21

⁷⁵ UNFPA Take Action- COVID 19 and Gender-Based Violence, 2020

104. Tonga's Women and Children Crisis Centre recorded twice as many family violence cases during 15 days of lockdown.⁷⁶ In Samoa, a 48% rise in domestic violence was reported by the Samoa Victims Support Group (SVSG).⁷⁷ The high rates of gender-based violence is unlikely to drop when lockdown measures are lifted or relaxed, particularly with ongoing stress in the household relating to economic insecurity and reduced mobility⁷⁸.

4.4 Impacts on persons with disabilities

105. Since the onset of COVID-19 and restrictions implemented by Pacific countries, the plight of persons with disabilities highlights the need to be inclusive and ensure their needs are met. Public information about COVID-19 was not always passed on effectively to those with disabilities, although many countries tried to be inclusive.

106. An estimated 15% of people in the Pacific have some form of disability as reported by WHO.⁷⁹ Persons with disabilities are at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 due to barriers to information, access to clean water and sanitation, and reliance on physical contact with the environment or support persons.

107. The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) has highlighted that public health advice, such as social distancing or home isolation, may not be options for people who rely on assistance to eat, bathe and dress. PDF emphasises that 'to enforce physical distancing between a person with disability and their family/support persons for activities including blind persons being guided by a sighted guide, and deaf blind persons being provided with tactile sign interpretation, national response plans must consider the bubble around the person with disability and their support person, but not between them'.⁸⁰

108. This includes containment areas and lockdowns where persons with disabilities are unprepared with basic needs such as food and other support. Furthermore, people with disabilities are often unemployed and living in poor living conditions.

109. Women and girls with disabilities face additional, gendered risks, particularly sexual violence and isolation with abusive carers or family members. With quarantine and social isolating measures, women and girls have less access to outside support and help because many services and facilities are closed. Children with disabilities and high support requirements face significant disruption in their usual support system.

110. Statistics also show a decline in academic performance and an increase in dropouts, given that these students are not provided with the special attention required from teachers.

111. The PDF, WHO and the Pacific Joint Incident Management Team (JIMT) worked closely to help national Disability Partner Organisations (DPOs) communicate health advice was shared through appropriate means. National DPO in Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Samoa,

⁷⁶ UNWomen <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/feature-pacific-crisis-centres-respond-to-COVID-19-amid-natural-disasters>

⁷⁷ Pacific Women, Shaping the Pacific, 2020,

⁷⁸ Gender and COVID-19 in the Pacific: Emerging gendered impacts and recommendations for response, Pacific Women, April 2020

⁷⁹ <https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/world-report-on-disability>, accessed April 2021

⁸⁰ PDF, 09 April 2020 Disaster Response in COVID-19 outbreak Ref No. COVID-19_PDF_09, pg 2

Tonga and Tuvalu promoted COVID-19 preventative measures, advised on sexual reproductive health, and used sign language interpreters for TV updates.⁸¹

4.5 Youth impacts and vulnerabilities

112. The State of the Pacific Youth Report 2017 shows young people make up half the population in the Pacific. This group needs to be included in policy development for social protection and recovery. Keeping people in schools will be tested during the COVID -19 disruptions to education, and may bring higher risks of unemployment, substance abuse, crime and lack of motivation.

113. Prior to COVID-19, youth unemployment in the Pacific stood at 23%. Most youths are employed informally and are five times less likely to secure employment compared to older workers.⁸² Without the benefits and protection offered to formal workers, youth are more likely to experience social challenges and barriers to growth. With the loss of jobs in the tourism industry, most of whom are young people, youth unemployment will increase.

114. The Pacific Women Support Unit reports that the impacts on young women will differ due to family expectations and social norms where young girls take on more household responsibilities. Many women have also lost their jobs. This will worsen as the pandemic unfolds.

4.6 Country responses

115. Various social protection schemes are available, many created during the pandemic to cater for the unemployed, elderly, private sector and students. Some countries offer more cover than others.

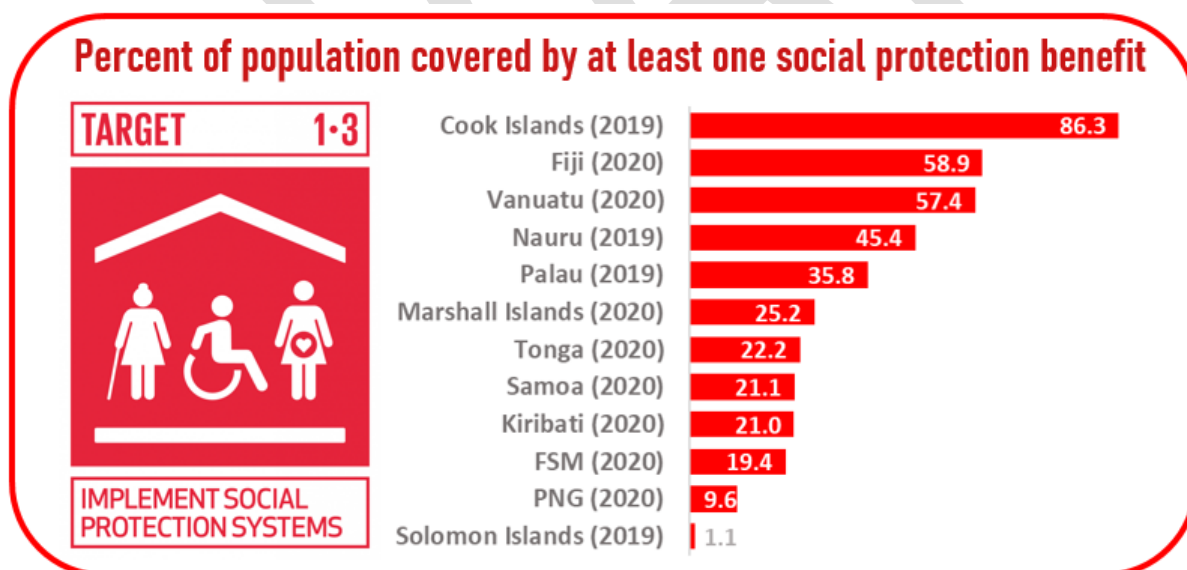


Figure 14 Source- SPC provides a summary of countries that provided at least one social protection benefit

116. For example, the percentage of people with severe disability receiving cash benefits was 16.2% for Tonga, 16.1% for Fiji and 67.7% for Nauru.⁸³

⁸² SPC Pacific Youth Development Framework 2015

⁸³ SPC, Social Protection data, April 2020

COVID-19 assistance 2020-21

	Social Protection measures	CI	FJ	FP	FSM	KI	NRU	NC	NIUE	Pal	PNG	RMI	SM	SI	TG	TUV	VAN
1	COVID -19 Stimulus packages																
2	COVID-19 unemployment benefit scheme																
3	COVID 19 Allowances for the elderly																
4	COVID 19 Allowances for persons living with disability																
5	COVID 19 Social insurance schemes																
6	COVID 19 social protection programs																
7	COVID 19 social protection pension measure																
8	COVID 19 Debt payment measures (housing/loans)																
9	COVID 19 Labour market measures (wage subsidies, retention strategy)																
10	COVID 19 Education measures																
11	COVID 19 Economic stimulus packages																
12	COVID 19 private sector support and assistance																
13	cash payments																
14	Social protection for women and children																

Yes	no

Figure 15: Source: World Bank and ADB Report, data as at April 2020 on countries implementation of social protection response measures.

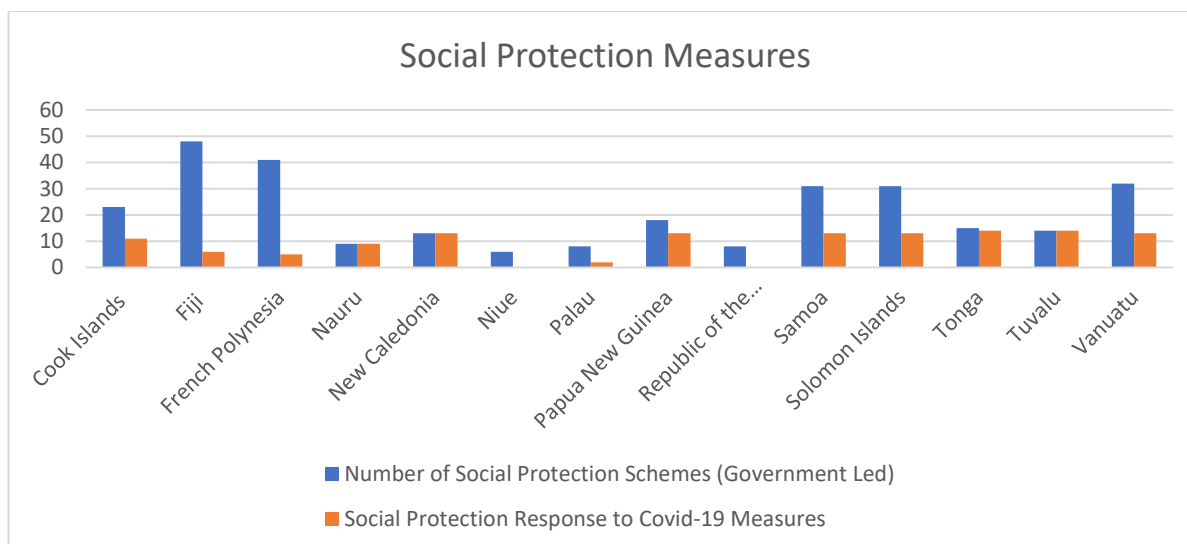


Figure 16: Source: ADB/WB and country response for social protection measures of COVID-19

4.7 Opportunities

- Review existing social protection systems, based on quantitative data analysis, to inform policy that ensures equal coverage and distribution for vulnerable communities. ⁸⁴
- Share information around social protection policies and examine alternative approaches for the informal sector.
- Develop policies that protect informal workers, who are mostly women and youth, and engage more with the private sector and employer associations.
- Involve more women, youth and persons with disabilities in decision-making for programmes
- Develop livelihood substitution programmes for society's most vulnerable through new opportunities for youth, women and people with disability – seed funding, training and small business incubation and mentoring programmes are working throughout region (Examples: V-Lab in Vanuatu, APTC programmes in Solomon Islands for Youth Business incubation in partnership with National Youth Congress)

C. Theme 5: Sustainable livelihoods and food systems for the region

5.1 Impacts on food systems

117. Government measures to sustain food and income security have impacted on agricultural production, income and food choices at the national and household levels.⁸⁵ Changing food patterns due to rising unemployment, poverty and social insecurity will make it harder for low income families. The impacts from the pandemic add to regular disruptions from disasters such as cyclones.

118. PICTs need to adapt agricultural programmes for Pacific farmers to provide food security and feed their own populations. More investment is required for research and study for improved options, technical staff and equipment,⁸⁶ and addressing issues of land management and governance.

⁸⁴ Women, youth children, elderly and persons with disability.

⁸⁵ Impacts of COVID-19 on agriculture and food systems in PICs: Evidence from communities in Fiji and Solomon Islands, 2021

⁸⁶ Impact survey of COVID-19 and Agriculture- Pacific Farmers have their say, May 2020, pg 6

119. A survey of food security in Solomon Islands highlighted food shortages when populations increase.⁸⁷ The survey of 20 villages showed they adapted by growing more food. With less cash in circulation, bartering for food became more common.

120. For countries with limited land mass such as Tuvalu, food supply is backed by fishing while innovative schemes such as the ‘Tuvalu Food Future’ project have helped to provide vegetables and other crops.⁸⁸ To increase soil nutrients, the project uses composting as part of wider efforts to be more sustainable and offer healthier food choices.

121. Border closures have disrupted imports of food and other products, prompting countries to try to boost domestic supplies while also managing resources in a sustainable way. The impact on domestic markets has included reduced incomes⁸⁹ in agriculture and fishing. In addition, the impacts of climate change with sea level rise, salinity of soil, land degradation and natural disasters also pose a threat.

122. Traditional methods of preserving and storing food have been encouraged as part of community responses to disruption from the pandemic.

5.2 Impact on livelihoods

123. Livelihoods are particularly vulnerable to shocks due to semi-subsistence lifestyles and a high reliance on the informal sector for incomes. The pandemic has worsened existing challenges to women’s income and economic empowerment. Government stimulus packages usually miss out the informal sector where many women work to support their families. Some countries have offered one-off payments for this sector, but the packages do not meet basic needs.

124. The closure of micro and small businesses, with job losses, impact a larger share of informal workers. In Samoa small and medium enterprises (SMEs) make up 88% of all businesses⁹⁰. Samoa’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry indicated a severe negative impact on employment and business confidence in 2020, which affects families and households dependent on small businesses.⁹¹

125. Market vendors across the region have lost income due to COVID-19 restrictions. In Fiji 85% of market vendors are women who report being hit hard with less income and higher costs of transport.⁹² The second largest revenue earner for the Solomon Islands is tuna which is badly affected due to COVID-19. Soltuna, which employs over 1000 workers, has downsized some operations.

126. There is a need for programmes promoting longer term investments such as savings plans and financial skills to help small business be more self-sufficient during a crisis. Working closely with financial institutions and other stakeholders on such schemes will need to be enhanced.

5.3 Country responses

⁸⁷ Changes and adaptations in village food systems in Solomon Islands A rapid appraisal during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020, pg 4

⁸⁸Powering past the pandemic: Bolstering Tuvalu’s socio-economic resilience in a COVID-19 World, 2021, pg 18

⁸⁹ Pacific Farmers have their say: Impact survey of COVID-19 and agriculture

⁹⁰ Samoa observer, 2018

⁹¹ Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises’ Access to Finance in Samoa COVID-19 Supplementary Report and Recommendations, 2020 pg 5

⁹² <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/08/surviving-in-the-market-space>, accessed May 2021

127. A report by the FAO on Food and Nutrition Security highlighted that most young people who have lost jobs live in urban areas where there is limited access to land; this leads to a change in the pattern of buying with consumers purchasing the cheapest but not necessarily the healthiest foods.⁹³ FAO also reports that existing threats to the food system are amplified by COVID -19 disruption as movement or large-scale migration of displaced people adds pressure on local food systems. Agencies and donors continue to support food security efforts for countries across the Pacific including Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Samoa.

128. Fiji's Ministry of Agriculture has provided FJD1 million (USD460,000) to support food security through the Farm Support Programme with free seeds and planting materials for fast-growing crops on small plots.⁹⁴ Tonga allocated TOP3.2 million (USD1.4 million) for food preservation supplements and food vouchers as well as food supplies to the outer islands.⁹⁵

129. There is a need to boost domestic food production in the short and medium-term to promote local consumption for sustainability. These strategies will further ensure nutritious food is available to improve diets and reduce reliance on highly processed imported food, a contributing factor to high NCD rates. Immediate action is needed to engage youth in agricultural production, including financial services to enable youth-led small-scale farming.⁹⁶

130. To address governance issues, CROP agencies such as SPC are implementing Food Security Governance Projects to empower Pacific communities and recognise traditional knowledge and practices. The projects also promote appreciation of the region's natural resources that need to be protected.

5.4 Opportunities

- Strengthen capacity as resource holders of the land and ocean and structure economies to become self-reliant.
- Engage youth in agricultural production, providing financial inclusion services for youth-led, small-scale farming, and small and medium enterprises to build cash flow; distribute inputs for primary agricultural production to ensure food availability in the poorest areas; and provide digital services for agriculture and education.
- Reduce reliance on imported foods by helping countries produce more of their own food and promote investment in smart agriculture.
- Enhance financial programmes for informal workers, market vendors and small business to help them save and invest.
- Invest and revive traditional knowledge and cultural practices to strengthen food systems and improve livelihoods including land management, tenure arrangements and governance.

Part 3: Conclusion and Recommendations

⁹³ FAO Socio-economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on Food and Nutrition Security

⁹⁴ Small Island Developing States Response to COVID-19: Highlighting Food Security, Nutrition and Sustainable Food Systems

⁹⁵ Socio-economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on Food and Nutrition Security

⁹⁶ COVID 19 and Pacific Youth

131. COVID 19 is worsening existing inequalities and deepening the social and economic impacts, with limited opportunities for economic growth in the near future. Containment and prevention measures have generally worked well apart from community transmission of COVID-19 in some countries such as Fiji and PNG.

132. Border closures have greatly affected countries depending on tourism, although others who rely on fisheries revenue, such as Tuvalu and Kiribati, are expected to see stable economic growth. There is an opportunity to diversify investments in fisheries and agriculture to promote food security, employment and incomes as resource stewards that are self-reliant.

133. Unemployment may not ease until the pandemic is brought under control. Despite the disruption, countries should ensure education for primary and secondary schools is supported to avoid long term impacts on school enrolment and completion rates. Over the years literacy and numeracy rates have improved as education systems develop better learning and teaching models that motivate children to learn. Online platforms and distance learning options are also useful measures to adapt to future shocks.

134. Social protection measures offer some relief to those affected by COVID-19 although it is a budgetary challenge to keep these measures in place. There is room to design better social protection systems that are sustainable. As most unemployed fall within the informal sector they are unable to access employment benefits or financial assistance as formal workers do.

135. There is an opportunity to explore schemes that assist the most vulnerable including the elderly, women, youth and persons with disabilities. This will also address gender inequality as the informal sector is mostly women.

136. Young people are often excluded from policy dialogues. Engaging youth in helping to find innovative solutions will allow for the intergenerational exchange of skills and knowledge.

137. Increased engagement with CSOs and the private sector in recovery plans and policy development strengthens coordinate efforts across thematic areas covered in this report.

137. The recommendations consider commitment to the 2030 Global agenda and the development of the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy of the Blue Pacific Continent.

Recommendations	Potential Collaboration	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Thematic area		12-18 mths	18-36 mths	36 mths +
Health and wellbeing				
Prioritise containment and prevention measures of COVID-19 with vaccination roll-out as the highest priority and public health expenditure for medical supplies and equipment to combat the pandemic	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Strengthen coordination to support regional frameworks and public health policies to respond to COVID-19 and future shocks as reflected in this report. ⁹⁷	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Strengthen psychosocial support and mental health measures in national humanitarian response plans and protocols	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Integrated health and service protocols that address gender-based violence, child protection and persons living with disabilities	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Enhanced efforts of public health policy initiatives under the Pacific Healthy Islands Monitoring Framework aligned to the Universal Health Coverage taking into consideration findings from the SEIA report. ⁹⁸	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Develop policies and implementation plans for resilient supply chains of bio-medical and lab strengthening equipment and services	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Strengthen policies, plans and programs to ensure the Pacific NCD Roadmap is implemented in a whole of government and whole of society approach.	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Economic recovery and resilience				
Use regional mechanisms responding to COVID-19 for humanitarian efforts, to explore trade and economic opportunities for Members.	CROP/Partners/CSOs			

⁹⁷ Includes the Pacific Healthy Islands Framework, NCD Roadmap, Eliminations of child obesity plan, work by the Mental health and psychosocial support cell.

⁹⁸ Includes disaggregated data collection for all groups, reporting, monitoring, support countries with training, lab strengthening, public health policy development

Strengthen disaggregated data collection systems by sex, geographical location, and age to inform policy reforms	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Strengthen regional cooperation on trade for economic resilience, labour mobility and employment, and support regional efforts for economic recovery. ⁹⁹	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Support fiscal policy development that supports the economy, low-income earners, small business, vulnerable communities, and strategies to rebuild economies.	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Comprehensive analysis on natural resource management and governance within the context of climate change and disaster to inform National Development strategies	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Ensure women, persons with disabilities, youth and marginalized groups are engaged in policy and decision-making processes.	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Adaptive learning and employment pathways				
Support regional education frameworks for early childhood education, inclusive education equality in learning pathways for all learners and distance learning with appropriate technical capacity and equipment as preparedness for future shocks. ¹⁰⁰	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Identify technical needs required to inform priority areas of study at regional and national level and scholarship awards in relevant fields.	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Strengthen regional data collection systems and monitoring to inform education policy reforms and implementation plans.	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Strengthen employment prospects that are equal and inclusive of all individuals, with appropriate labour market policies that are informed by industry and labour market demands and performance	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Strengthen psychosocial support and mental health training within education systems for students, teachers and families	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Ensure dynamic innovative approaches to education curricula, including eLearning to educate youth and other societies and safely apply appropriate measures to protect learners and teachers.	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Inclusive social protection systems				

⁹⁹ Existing work with COVID-19 Economic Recovery Taskforce and consider the PHP-C to expand support to trade, mobility and interregional economic initiatives.

¹⁰⁰ Outcomes and recommendations of the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) and endorsed by Education Ministers meeting April 2021.

Research social protection systems across the region within the context of climate change and COVID-19 to inform policy development, recognising limitations and risks of current fiscal environments for PICTs.	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Strengthen national statistics disaggregation of data of vulnerable groups ¹⁰¹ for policy reforms to ensure implementation and distributions of welfare and social protection schemes reach all individuals.	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Revisit social protection systems and research options that will protect vulnerable groups and inform design of long-term social protection systems for both formal and informal workers in PICTS.	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Develop equitable, inclusive and accessible gender responsive social protection policies that are human rights based and supportive of positive cultural practices	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Improved understanding, promotion and strengthening of social capital as a basis for social resilience including women's groups and marginalised groups.	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Sustainable livelihoods and food systems				
Assess resourcing required to ensure food sovereignty and robust food systems for strategies towards 'building back better' Pacific communities. ¹⁰² These include issues of land rights, tenure and where relevant relationship to food systems.	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Strengthen governance and management of the regions natural resources and investments such as agriculture, fisheries and domestic food supply for long term sustainability and ability to respond to future shocks ensuring participation of women and youth in policy dialogue. ¹⁰³	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Consultation and policy dialogue to strengthen food sovereignty, land, tenure arrangements and oceans governance and protection for secure and self-reliant economies post COVID 19	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Integrate complementary value of traditional knowledge, skills and expertise alongside technical and scientific knowledge to strengthen food production practices and policy reforms on trade, fisheries and agriculture	CROP/Partners/CSOs			
Revisit trade policies and agreements to explore other industries that could rebuild Pacific economies	CROP/Partners/CSOs			

¹⁰¹ Women, children, elderly, youth, diverse sexual orientation groups, and persons living with disabilities.

¹⁰² Food System working group chaired by Minister for Health of Tonga, CROP led SPC and technical agencies

¹⁰³ Food System working group chaired by Minister for Health of Tonga, CROP led SPC and technical agencies

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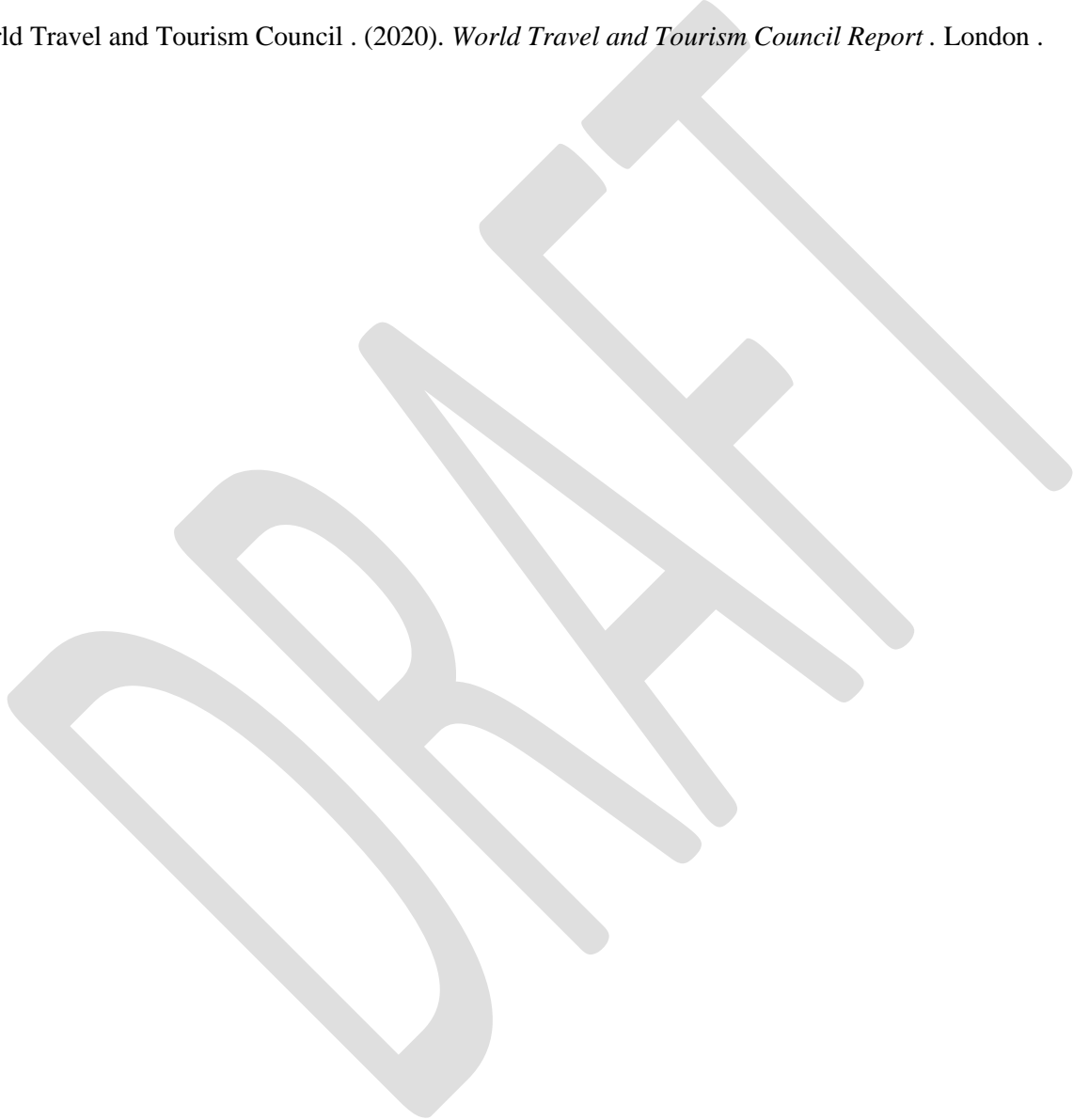
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COVID-19 Policy Responses

Policy responses	Fiscal	Monetary and Macro-Financial
Cook Islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 2020: Total stimulus of NZD 61mn (11.1% GDP) provided with the following breakdown: (i) NZD5 mn, Ministry of Health; (ii) NZD2.3 mn support for self-isolation; (iii) NZD2mn small capital works program; (iv) NZD12 mn major capital projects; (v) NZD0.97 mn unemployment benefit; (vi) NZD22.51 mn wage subsidy; (vii) NZD1mn child benefit payment; (viii) NZD0.87mn one-off welfare payment; (ix) NZD50 thousand redeployment program; (x) NZD3.36mn business grants; (xi) NZD2.32mn indirect costs (tax relief, TAU, etc). • For Local businesses: provisional tax adjustments and tax payment relief, income tax credit of \$2,000 for short-term accommodation providers with up to 10 beds, one-off payment for registered businesses of: \$2,000 for Sole-traders; \$5,000 for those with turnover less than \$300,000. \$10,000 for those businesses with a turnover between \$300,000 and \$5 mn. • Social assistance: one-off welfare payment of \$400 to old age pensioners, care givers and the infirm and destitute. • Employment: one month of benefits at the minimum wage for all individuals who have become unemployed due to COVID-19, employment Services scheme to assist individuals in finding new employment, reduction in individual employee Cook Island Superannuation Fund (CINSF) contributions from 5 to 3% for a 3-month period. • Households: 100% electricity subsidy for households on Rarotonga and Aitutaki for 3 months starting from the 19 March 2020, payment of \$100 for each child for every fortnight of school closure, provisional tax adjustments and tax payment relief for individuals. 	

Policy responses	Fiscal	Monetary and Macro-Financial
Fiji	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two major fiscal stimulus packages in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (one on March 26 and one on July 17). The first package entailed up to FJ\$1 bn (8.7% of GDP) in supplemental expenditures on public health, lump sum payments through the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF), tax and tariff reductions, and loan repayment holidays (up to F\$ 400 mn of the total envelope) aim at protecting public health, supporting the economy and ensuring food security. The second fiscal package was announced as part of the FY2020-21 budget for the fiscal year beginning in August. The stimulus mainly consists of sizeable tax and tariff cuts. Fiscal and import excise duties on over 1,600 items were reduced or eliminated. Similarly, the budget includes cuts to the service turnover tax, environmental tax and departure tax. The budget also entails a total of F\$100 mn for unemployment assistance and a subsidy to Fiji Airways of F\$60 mn to incentivize first 150,000 tourists in new fiscal year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Reserve Bank of Fiji reduced the overnight policy rate to 0.25% from 0.5% on March 18 to counter the economic impact of COVID-19. The RBF also: (i) expanded the SME Credit Guarantee Scheme to assist small entities, (ii) raised its Import Substitution and Export Finance Facility by FJ\$100 mn to provide credit to exporters, large scale commercial agricultural farmers, public transportation and renewable energy businesses at concessional rates, (iii) raised its Natural Disaster and Rehabilitation Facility to FJ\$60 mn (renaming it the Disaster Rehabilitation and Containment Facility) to provide concessional loans to commercial banks for them to on-lend to businesses affected by COVID-19, and (iv) purchased FJ\$280 mn of Government bonds in the first half of 2020 to help finance the Government deficit.
French Polynesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On August 7, 2020 French Polynesia signed up for a \$285 mn loan from France due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The loan has a term of 25 years at an interest rate of under 1.4 percent. The local government has spent EUR 7 mn to indemnize 1,904 small companies and 3,895 workers for the period from March 20 to March 31. MSMEs and self-employed entrepreneurs with an annual turnover below XPF 120 million can benefit from the Solidarity Fund for Small Enterprises. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loan support and deferral of loan repayment: L’Institut d’Émission d’Outre-mer injected XPF 5.9 bn in liquidity to Polynesian banks to help reduce the cost of financing granted to businesses and ease the conditions for accessing loans. The French Public Investment Bank (Bpifrance) provides credit guarantee to assist MSME with a 1% interest rate. No loan repayment will be demanded the first year. The company can choose to amortize the loan over a maximum of five years. On 10 August 2020, there have been 634 beneficiaries representing XPF 43.2 bn. Bpifrance ATOUT Loan Scheme: MSMEs are able to borrow up to XPF 596 mn. The loan may be granted for periods of three to five years, with a possible deferral of capital repayment of 6 to 12 months depending on the duration of the loans. The French Development Agency (AFD) granted a guaranteed loan amounting to XPF 28.6 bn.

Policy responses	Fiscal	Monetary and Macro-Financial
Kiribati	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A stimulus package was approved in June 2020. The package amounts to AUD 15.5 mn, equivalent to 7.5% of GDP. It consists of unemployment support (AUD 2.6 mn), private business stimulus (AUD 4.5 mn plus AUD 3.5 mn cargo buffer), and SOE stimulus (AUD 5.2 mn). This excludes the first response package of AUD 11.5 mn that has been largely donor-funded. • The specific measures include: unemployment benefit via partial income substitution, employer cost sharing for off-shore observers, sea farers, and fruit packers, reduction in social security contributions for both employers and employees, and loan support through government-owned financial intermediaries. 	No measures reported.
Marshall Islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government has approved an initial budget of \$63.1 mn dollars (around 27% of GDP) for the national preparedness plan in response to the global health pandemic on COVID19. Much of funding will cover urgent needs for RMI's Ministry of Health and Human Services (including infrastructure, medical supplies and equipment, and surge support) and support to the Outer Islands COVID19 preparedness plans. The authorities have received USD 50 mn grant support to cover these expenditures (out of which USD 19.6 mn from the Asian Development Bank). • To date, the RMI has spent around \$21 mn on medical equipment and supplies, personal protection equipment, surge capacity and major infrastructure projects such as the new isolation and quarantine buildings in both Majuro and Ebeye. • Other major activities include building of hand-washing stations, RMI foreign missions assisting the Marshallese citizens living abroad impacted from COVID19, economic relief payouts to local companies currently affected by COVID19 impacts (The Cabinet approved an initial \$6 mn Economic Relief package from ADB, and about 128 local businesses have received the assistance), and activities in the Response Plan for the Neighboring Islands/Outer Islands i.e. food baskets, fishing gears and farming tools. 	

Policy responses	Fiscal	Monetary and Macro-Financial
FSM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The national government has prepared a US\$20 mn (5% of GDP) COVID-19 Response Framework, to develop quarantine and isolation facilities across the nation, provide infection control training for all first responders, and increase testing capacity and ventilators for each island state in the FSM. On April 3, 2020, the government announced the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program of up to US\$36 mn (9% of GDP), supported by the U.S. Department of Labor, through March 2021. On March 23, 2021, the PUA program was extended through September 6, 2021. On April 22, 2020, the government approved the economic stimulus package of US\$15 mn (3.8% of GDP). This included measures to support affected businesses, including wage subsidies, debt relief, as well as social security tax and other tax rebates. In December 2020, the government announced a social protection scheme of US\$14 mn (3.5% of GDP) to provide cash transfers for low-income households and vulnerable individuals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and strengthen social awareness. 	No monetary policy response. With the U.S. dollar its legal tender, the FSM does not have a central bank.
Nauru	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Containment efforts have been sizeable and expenditures on keeping the national airline and other SOEs afloat have been about 8% of 2019 GDP. Initial estimates are AUD 3.5mn for health expenditures and isolation costs, AUD 5.1mn on liquidity injections to Nauru Airlines, AUD 0.5mn in budget support to SOEs in managing inventory from limited freight and cargo services. Authorities have reprioritized expenditures and drawn down on cash buffers and general reserves to support fiscal measures. The ADB approved a US\$5mn policy-based grant to support public investment management, fiscal sustainability in Nauru; and to help the Government improve the management of public expenditure and national infrastructure, as well as the governance of state-owned enterprises (SOEs). 	No measures reported.
New Caledonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social contribution and tax payments are deferred for enterprises and self-employed entrepreneurs. The Employment Safeguard Scheme (also known as chômage partiel) eases the financial burden on businesses and enables companies to retain employees since April 2020. To do so, the State finances 70% of the gross salary used as the basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new State-guaranteed loan scheme (via Bpifrance in New Caledonia) has been set up to meet the cash flow needs of companies affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Companies with less than 5,000 employees and a turnover of less than XPF 179 billion and the self-employed can benefit from it.

Policy responses	Fiscal	Monetary and Macro-Financial
	<p>for calculating holiday pay. The allowance for the general sector amounts XPF 493,191 per month and XPF 133 086 per month for the agricultural sector. This scheme has been extended for companies deeply affected by the crisis for a period of three months, from June 1, 2020 to August 31, 2020, with the possibility of extending it for an additional three months.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deferral of electricity and water charges payments for April and May 2020. • A system of direct provincial aid, co-financed with the State, is provided in favour of micro-enterprises and self-employed workers economically affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Companies with fewer than 11 employees (including the self-employed) and a turnover of less than or equal to XPF 120mn can have access to the Solidarity Fund for Small Enterprises. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credit mediation: support from L'Institut d'Émission d'Outre-mer to negotiate a rescheduling of bank loans. Credit mediation helps companies facing difficulties with one or more banking institutions. This national system has been simplified to deal with the COVID-19 crisis.
Niue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government provided tax relief for imported products. • ADB grant of \$93,000 on April 13, 2020 for essential medical supplies to combat the pandemic. On October 5, 2020 the ADB Asia Pacific Disaster Response Fund grant package of \$500,000. December 17, 2020: Supporting Recovery by Micro, Small and Medium- sized Enterprises in the Pacific from the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic (USD0.2 million). 	<p>The Niue Development Bank implemented deferred measures of loan repayments of companies.</p>
Palau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government has initiated actions that appropriately support the health sector and hard-hit individuals and businesses. The parliament has appropriated an additional \$916,808 (0.3% of GDP) to the Hospital Trust Fund to help with prevention and preparation for COVID-19. • The government has also announced measures totaling \$20 mn (8% of GDP) to mitigate economic and social hardship through targeted support to affected businesses and individuals. These include a new unemployment benefit scheme, temporary subsidies for utility bills, a new temporary job creation scheme for public works, and a lending scheme for the private sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Development Bank of Palau announced plans to provide financial relief to affected business and households, including interest only payments, term extension, loan consolidation, and temporary payment deferral. Some private banks have introduced loan deferral and forbearance programs for three months.

Policy responses	Fiscal	Monetary and Macro-Financial
PNG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On April 2, 2020 the PNG government announced a K5.6bn economic stimulus package, including a K600mn credit line to support businesses and individuals, in coordination with the banks and financial institutions, and K500mn in support from superannuation savings to employees affected by the economic slowdown. Support for businesses includes K200 mn in guarantees for loans to SMEs. Moreover, the government has allocated K645mn more to support health, security and economic sector. • For 2021, the government has allocated K600mn (0.7%) to COVID-19 mitigation measures, and approved a similar amount to support primary healthcare and hospitals, including on capital spending to expand facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bank of Papua New Guinea (BPNG) reduced the Kina Facility Rate (KFR) – the main policy rate - by 200 basis points to 3% from 5% and asked the commercial banks to reduce their respective Indicative Lending Rates. BPNG also reduced the Cash Reserve Requirement to 7% from 10% to provide additional liquidity to the commercial banks. In addition, BPNG purchased K750mn of government securities in the secondary market in a program to increase liquidity to the private sector. • To encourage interbank activity, BPNG increased the margin on central bank borrowing by 25 basis point to 100 basis points of both sides of KFR. • All financial institutions agreed to provide relief of 3 months on loan repayments and interest payments to customers who have lost their jobs. To cover this loan repayment holiday for borrowers severely affected by the COVID crisis, BPNG suspended loan-loss provisioning for affected loans during this period. • A total of K806mn is estimated to be paid out to members from their superannuation savings. The amendments to Superannuation Act allow its members to withdraw up to 20% of their contribution or a maximum of K10,000.

Policy responses	Fiscal	Monetary and Macro-Financial
Samoa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fiscal and economic response package amounting to 66.3 mn Samoan tala (about 3% of GDP) was approved by parliament on April 7, 2020, centered around the mission of “Support the private sector so they can feed the nation.” It included: (i) expenditure to cover the immediate medical response; (ii) assistance to the private sector; and (iii) assistance to individuals and households. • Support for the private sector includes: a temporary exemption on import duties on most commonly bought food items for households; duty concessions to be applied to an expanded list of agricultural and fishing materials; a grace period of three months to be applied for all loan payments; and a six-month moratorium on pension contributions for the hospitality sector. • Support for citizens includes: establishment of the Emergency Price Control Board to keep wholesale and retail prices in check and bring them down, if necessary; provision of financial assistance to members of the National Provident Fund in the form of a refund of their loan payments for March 2020; and a temporary reduction of utility bills (both electricity and water) for six months through September 2020. • On June 30, Parliament approved the FY2021 budget, including the second phase of the fiscal and economic response package that amounts to 83.1 mn Samoan tala (about 3.8% of GDP). The budget is centered around the mission of “Weaving a prosperous and secure future for Samoa together,” and includes a similar set of measures as in the first stimulus package. It provides a dividend payout by Samoa National Provident Fund, a benefit of 50 tala per citizen for a national ID registration, a special one-off pension payment, unemployment benefit, financial support for utility bills, and paid training for the hospitality sector. The health sector continues to be a priority sector and the package finances construction and upgrade of rural hospitals. The government will continue to assist remote education services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Central Bank of Samoa (CBS) continues to maintain an accommodative monetary policy. The CBS has encouraged commercial banks to reduce interest rates and associated bank fees and charges. • The CBS is maintaining ample liquidity in the banking system to support businesses and stands ready to activate its lending facilities for financial institutions. The fiscal and economic response package included provision of a three-month grace period to be applied for all loan payments. To compensate part of the losses in interest income, local commercial banks received payments from the government.

Policy responses	Fiscal	Monetary and Macro-Financial
Solomon Islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned additional spending towards health and containment measures and fiscal stimulus amounted to about 3.6% of GDP in 2020, financed by government and donors. The package aims to provide social assistance to vulnerable households and firms, as well as supporting economic recovery. It includes ongoing payroll support for non-essential public servants; employment support for youth and women; subsidies for copra and cocoa; capital grants to businesses to support investment in productive and resource sectors; tax and utility relief for affected businesses in specific sectors; equity injection to government owned companies; and advancing planned infrastructure investment. • On June 8, 2020, the new Development Bank of Solomon Islands (DBSI) was officially launched. On June 15, 2020 cabinet revoked the decision on half-pay for non-essential public servants that started on March 31, 2020. Salary withheld will be repaid when officers are recalled to duty. The fiscal response triggered a supplemental 2020 budget appropriation bill, approved in September 2020. • On April 25, 2020 the government issued its first COVID-19 domestic development bond of SI\$120mn to finance its COVID-19 economic stimulus package. The government also reallocated SI\$156mn in previously budgeted spending to fund the COVID-19 preparedness and response plan. On December 22, 2020, the government issued additional bonds worth SI\$60mn. Two SOEs (Solomon Islands Ports Authority and Solomon Islands Electricity Authority) have provided dividend payments to support the government's COVID-19 plan. Additional support was provided through exceptional early withdrawals from the National Provident Fund (SINPF) until end-June 2020, amounting to SI\$95mn. • The government is receiving funds and medical supplies from several countries, including Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, the United States, and development partners to support its COVID-19 response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Central Bank of Solomon Islands (CBSI) confirmed its commitment to continuing an expansionary monetary policy stance. The bank will be rolling out an Export Finance Facility to assist exporters in the country and has implemented a new repurchase facility for participating commercial banks. The bank has also reduced its stock of Bokolo Bills and relaxed some commercial banks' prudential guidelines. • Effective June 15, 2020, the CBSI has reduced the cash reserve requirements from 7.5% to 5% to ensure additional liquidity support. The government also encouraged commercial banks to grant a three to six-month grace period for all loan repayments. On December 21, 2020, CBSI purchased its first COVID-19 domestic development government bond valued at SI\$60 million in the secondary market. • The IMF has provided debt service relief through its Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT).

Policy responses	Fiscal	Monetary and Macro-Financial
Tonga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government of Tonga announced an Economic and Social Stimulus Package of 60mn Tongan pa'anga (around 5% of GDP) for FY2020 on April 2, 2020. This package was intended to provide short-term assistance to all affected sectors in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over a third of the funds were to be directed to the health sector, while the rest were to support the other sectors, including tourism, transport, agriculture, education and security. In addition, the Government of Tonga announced a 3-month moratorium on Government Development Loans & TC Gita Recovery Loan Fund, deferral of retirement contributions and hardship allowances for laid-off employees (up to 3 months), needs-based financial assistance, tax and duty relief during the pandemic, and assistance with the payment of utility bills by public enterprises. • The FY2021 budget, approved by Parliament on June 22, envisages a deficit of 37.4mn Tongan pa'anga (some 3.5% of GDP) for FY2021. Spending on health has been identified as one of the top priorities for the government, accounting for 21% of the total budget of 589.6mn Tongan pa'anga. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In March 2021, the National Reserve Bank of Tonga (NRBT) reiterated that its supportive monetary and financial sector policy stance will continue unchanged, given the weak economy. On March 19, 2020, the NRBT Board approved the provision of liquidity support to the banking system. It also committed to easing exchange control requirements if needed. It placed monetary policy, which was accommodative given low inflation and slow economic recovery, on hold. The NRBT is supporting banks in their effort to mitigate the negative impact of the COVID-19 virus on the economy as well as provide essential financial services to households and businesses. • Commercial banks are assisting customers affected by the COVID-19 virus on a case by case basis by: (i) reducing or suspending the principal loan repayments to interest only loan repayments; (ii) restructuring loans to businesses that have reduced business hours, in affected sectors such as tourism and related industries like transportation and to individuals who have been laid off; (iii) extending the terms of loans to reduce repayments; (iv) reducing loan interest rates on a case by case basis; and (v) providing access to short-term funding, if required.

Policy responses	Fiscal	Monetary and Macro-Financial
Tuvalu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuvalu’s strategic COVID-19 Economic and Financial Relief Package was released on May 6, 2020, as a reference to mobilizing external support for accessing the COVID-19 facilities. It includes the Talaaliki Plan, which forms worst-case scenarios of (i) food, fuel and other essential imported goods become unavailable; and (ii) an outbreak (i.e., one confirmed case) of COVID-19 in the country. • Out of the total \$18.9mn under the first supplementary budget for 2020 that was approved by Parliament on March 24, 2020, a total amount A\$10.5mn (17.8% of GDP) was for COVID-19 response. Of this, A\$5.7mn was allocated to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare for the procurement of personal protection equipment, ventilators, COVID-19 testing equipment and other essential equipment. By end-November 2020, total COVID-19 related expenditure was A\$6.77mn (about 10% of GDP) of which health-related expenditure was A\$1.88mn. This was used largely for purchasing medical equipment, as well as enhancing readiness of the health system and renovating peripheral clinics. • Another \$4.9mn was allocated for other expenses including the relocation to outer islands, repatriation of Tuvalu students studying abroad, maintenance of relevant infrastructure for quarantine purposes, maintenance of schools, improving broadband for internet connectivity, additional police personnel and a grant to assist the private sector. In addition, an amount of A\$670 thousand was allocated to finance other relevant COVID-19 measures across the Government including risk allowances and civil servant allowances. • \$300,000 was allocated under the Ministry of Finance for a grant to assist the private sector in response to the effects of the COVID-19. 	No measures reported.

Policy responses	Fiscal	Monetary and Macro-Financial
Vanuatu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Vanuatu National Provident Fund (VNPF) provided Hardship Loans, an interest-free withdrawal from a member’s account for 6 months of up to 100,000 vatu, after which the member either chooses a repayment plan with interest or permanently withdraws the funds with a penalty. When the loan facility closed on May 1, 2020, the VNPF had paid out about 1.5 bn vatu (US\$12.5 mn). • On April 8, 2020, a fiscal package worth over 4bn vatu (over 4% of GDP) was announced. It includes: deferred and cancelled taxes, license fees and charges for businesses in 2020 (796mn vatu); backdating to start of 2020 some reductions resulting from forthcoming business license reforms; the Employment Stabilization Payment (ESP) (reimbursing employers 30,000 vatu per employee per month for four months, plus an additional 12% to the employer, for a total of 2.5bn vatu); SMEs (turnover of less than 200mn vatu) will also receive the value of their business license fees (roughly 400mn vatu); Commodity Support Grant will be provided to producers of copra, kava, cocoa and coffee (300mn vatu); Shipping Support Grant to facilitate farmers’ access to major market centres such as Port Vila and Luganville (100mn vatu); secondary school tuition fees are suspended for 2020 (42,000 vatu per student for a total of 510mn vatu, paid directly to schools). The package is financed by the government’s cash reserves, re-prioritization of expenditures, some debt, and development partner assistance. • The government closed the reception for new ESP applications on September 15, 2020, and for new SME Grant applications on November 30, 2020. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On March 27, 2020, the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu (RBV) cut its policy rate from 2.9% to 2.25%. The RBV also undertook other measures at its March 27 and 30 meetings, that along with its policy rate cut, were consistent with its twin policy objectives to maintain inflation within a target range of 0-4 percent and official foreign exchange reserves above a minimum threshold of 4 months of import cover. • Other RBV measures include: a reduction of commercial banks’ Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) from 12.0% to 10.0%; and the reactivation of the Bank’s Imports Substitution and Export Finance Facility (ISEFF) and the Disaster Reconstruction Credit Facility (DRCF).

A tabulated report on the impacts of education in the region and country responses

Country	COVID-19 Impacts on Education Systems
Cooks Islands	Cook Islands continue education provision with all schools open. Survey findings reveal that COVID-19 pandemic had not impacted the delivery of prescribed national curriculum at all levels except from tertiary. The tertiary education seemed to be slightly affected as the USP Cook Islands campus closed two weeks of 2020. Findings reveal that teachers had been provided with additional support in the specific context of Covid-19 to help them with transition to distance learning. Staff was provided with ICT tools as well as professional, psychosocial and emotional support in using chat groups, online forums to share ideas and educational contents effectively.
Fiji	Empirical data reveals that not one, but all groups of learners have been affected by the sudden change of teaching mode from face-to-face to online and remote learning in Fiji. Males, females, indigenous learners, physically challenged, rural and maritime felt disruptions to examination timetables and were not as prepared for the rapid transition to online and remote learning. The Ministry continues to look at ensuring all learners continue education and assistance provided where required to both teachers and students.
French Polynesia	Government issued notice to close schools for a month in 2020 and faced difficulties with operating online. The more vulnerable students lost contact during this time. Some students faced psychological difficulty and students have not all been able to return to school.
FSM	The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) Government had developed a COVID-19 Contingency Plan for the country. School continuity strategies were in place for students and teachers.
Kiribati	Following the development of the national plan, Ministry of Education (MoE), through technical and financial support from UNICEF, developed a contingency plan for COVID-19 which specifically focused on education sector, in alignment with the national plan, to ensure that education system is well prepared for possible closure of schools and adequate on-going support is provided to students during school closure and after reopening of the schools.
Nauru	The government has preventative measures in place of flights and traveling, but there is no specific restrictive policy on schools. Furthermore, schools were not closed with no adjustment to current and coming school year calendar, so disruptions were not reported.
New Caledonia	As of 18 March 2021, Schools in New Caledonia have been instructed to close until the 12 of April due to the high risk of COVID-19 infections. Disruptions to the education sector is on-going. ¹⁰⁴
Niue	Findings reveal that schools were not closed in Niue and education was not disrupted. It is noted that strengthening internet connectivity in the Department and schools would be needed in preparation for the future, as the current internet connection in the country does not support capacity for teachers to offer online lessons, and students to make use of them
Palau	Considering the outbreak of COVID-19, the Ministry of Education had school closure in April 2020, and continued to provide students with lessons and activities to do while at home through the Internet or other means. The Government of Palau has aggressively implemented preparedness and response measures to minimize the risk of importation and potential local transmission of COVID-19 to Palau.
PNG	In Papua New Guinea, schools were closed on 24 March 2020 disrupting the education for all 2.4 million students. The closures of schools and universities across PNG took its toll on parents and students alike as well as the academic calendar. PNG students studying abroad were forced to return, whilst others opted to remain overseas due to travel restrictions. Overseas students enrolled in PNG educational institutions returned home. The academic calendar was re-adjusted, and this resulted in the loss of approximately K1 billion. The loss includes costs related to tuition fee refunds,

¹⁰⁴ New Caledonia Country report, March 2020

	free deferral of study, realignment of teaching calendars, changes in student boarding and lodging, and teachers' salaries. ¹⁰⁵
RMI	The private and public schools took a precautionary measure by utilizing one to two weeks of spring breaks to thoroughly clean school building. ¹⁰⁶ In addition, the RMI government together with agencies had documented Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention and Controls in schools. Ministry of Education also assigned reading and exercises for home study developed by accelerated education strategies. Thanks to these efforts, education in Marshall Islands has not been severely affected by school closure as classes resumed after a week of closure.
Samoa	The learners in Samoa experienced disruptions in the educational services as schools were closed. In addition, Samoa introduced precautionary measures and declared State of Emergency. The schools also implemented school closure and re-opened with ease in nation-wide restrictions. ¹⁰⁷ Disruption in education services were compensated with additional remedial or extended learning hours. Findings suggest that the learners in Samoa are between low – moderate risk of facing major disruption in the educational services as schools re-opened in the last year.
Solomon Islands	All schools and early childhood centers were closed from in 2020 during a lockdown period. Opening of the schools were staggered depending on the provinces and the forms the students were in. To accommodate the loss of learning hours, the current academic schooling calendar had shifted and new arrangements for the new school year. Relevant authorities have backed using radio platform to complement delivery of curriculum via the Solomon Islands Radio Broadcast platform. At secondary level, the curriculum coverage has been reduced and assessments would only be based on the modified curriculum
Tonga	Findings reveal that pre-primary level has not been impacted by COVID-19 in the delivery of prescribed national curriculum while other levels have been slightly affected. This is because their schools were opened in 2020 for face-to-face classes and students had already caught up with the work required. The response from the survey by UNESCO disclosed that COVID-19 slightly impacted the delivery of national curriculum.
Tokelau	The learners in Tokelau did not experience major disruptions in the educational services as schools had re-opened in 2020. There was no adjustment in school academic calendar and content coverage in Tokelau. The findings of the UNESCO survey suggest that the learners in Tokelau are at low risk of facing disruption in the educational services
Tuvalu	All schools in Tuvalu were closed after declaring state of emergency on 20 th March, 2020. With the closure of schools many students relocated to their home island and only one inter-island vessel was servicing the route. Some of Tuvalu's outer islands are a day travel from capital and re-opening schools was challenging, as it required massive relocation. There was an obvious degree of reluctance from parents and communities in sending their children back to schools. Hence, government dispatched a team of officials to some islands to explain and convince parents to send their children back to school.
Vanuatu	All schools in Vanuatu resumed normal operations from Monday 18th May 2020 unless they had been damaged by TC Harold. Schools have enforced regular hand washing with safe water and soap on a daily basis with disinfection and cleaning of school surfaces. The Ministry of Education encourages principals, teachers, parents, students and school communities to stay informed on the development of the COVID-19 situation through relevant websites, Facebook pages, radio and television programs.

¹⁰⁵ Source: Adapted from UNDP. (2020). Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of Papua New Guinea. Delivered by the United Nations through the United Nations Development Programme. *Report*

¹⁰⁶ Source: Koroivulaono, T., & Reiher. W. (2020). Keeping COVID-19 at bay in the Marshall Islands. Retrieved from <https://devpolicy.org/keeping-covid-19-at-bay-in-the-marshall-islands-20200416/>

¹⁰⁷ Source: Adapted from Radio New Zealand. (2020). Restrictions around school and church eased in Samoa. Retrieved from <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/415629/restrictions-around-school-and-church-eased-in-samoa>

Impacts and interventions on Food Security

Impacts on subsistence and semi – commercial production (as of September 2020)	Examples of opportunities and Interventions (as of September 2020)
Lack of access to land for farming for urban and informal communities reducing production, income and food supply	Communal farming, land sharing and arrangements from government, church, cluster farmers. For example, Mainstreaming of Rural Development and Innovation Tonga Trust (MORDI TT) NGO through Tonga Rural Innovation Project (TRIP) 2 is facilitating cluster-farming activities involving women farmers.
More people moving to rural areas has increased pressure on limited water supplies and local resources. New arrivals from urban areas have increased land disputes, theft of high value crops, fruits and livestock. “New farmers” practice unsustainable cropping systems – Short and long term reduced production, income and food	Increase in labour for farming but need resource management, water use efficiency. NGOs are conducting training for farmers and distributing farming tools and seedlings. E.g. MORDI TT in Tonga, Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises (FRIEND) in Fiji and Kastom Gaden Association (KGA) in Solomon Islands.
Limited supply of planting materials especially vegetables, non-seed crops and fruit trees; no supply of livestock feed and breeding stock – Decreased production, income and food	Increase in nurseries and skills in how to cultivate seeds/seedlings and increase home gardens. Fiji: The Ministry of Agriculture's Home Gardening Program provides gardening seed packages to all households in urban and peri-urban areas. The Corporate Employee Seed Package (CESP) provides planting materials for corporate employees who lost their jobs. The Farm Support Package provides planting materials and open-pollinated seeds to farmers around Fiji at no cost. One million Fijian dollars (around US\$ 452 thousand) was allocated for this latter initiative with aims to boost production of fast maturing crops (FAO, 2020 ; Ministry of Agriculture, 2020).
Intensive cultivation of land to increase production in a short period of time will cause a decline in soil fertility. Increase cutting down of forests for increasing farming and production – Long term decrease of production	Cultural practices of sharing labour and helping each other, for example, <i>na solesolevaki</i> (communal support) in Fiji and the barter system (Wairiu et al., 2020a ; Wairiu et al., 2020b).
Lack of access to fertilizers and chemicals – Reduced production, income and food	Tonga: To increase local food production, TOP 3.2 million (US\$ 1.36 million) was allocated to the ministries managing agriculture and fisheries. MAFF targeted production and distribution of two weeks old 30,000 broilers and 6500 layers, sheep, goats and pigs (Tonga Broadcasting Corporation, 2020).
Not enough farming equipment and fishing gear and less labour – Reduced production, income and food	MORDI TT is widely distributing different varieties of vegetables, fruit tree seedlings and root crops in all islands.

<p>Impacts of cyclones, floods, droughts – Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands have suffered devastating impacts of TC Harold in April. Agricultural response activities are targeted at COVID-19 and TC Harold. Meteorological droughts are observed (May-September 2020) in central-western South Pacific countries. Cyclone season starts from October (2020) – April (2021) – Reduced production, income and food</p>	<p>Promote organic, use of composting and Integrated Pest Management. FAO is supporting Farmers Field Schools to learn composting and IPM skills in Tonga. Other NGOs are supporting farmers to promote organic and soil management practices.</p>
	<p>Vanuatu: Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) introduced a “COVID-19 Food Security Response Plan” which prioritizes promoting backyard gardening (MALFFB, 2020).</p>
	<p>The Fisheries Department is promoting backyard fish farms in an effort to respond to COVID-19. Fisheries Department made free Tilapia fingerlings and feed available to the public in Port Vila and Santo (MALFFB, 2020).</p>
	<p>Solomon Islands: Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, The Kastom Gaden Association and Solomon Tobacco Company Limited have taken the initiative in the past five months to support the distribution of seeds to urban, peri urban and rural communities in the Solomon Islands (Sherzad, 2020).</p>
	<p>The SID 2.7 million (US\$ 331 thousand) Solomon Islands government funding programme towards SAPE Farm Project (May 2020) has supported the farm in terms of farming machineries and tools (Sunday Isles, 2020).</p>
	<p>Under the preparedness for response to COVID-19 the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) signed a contract with SAPE Farmers Group requiring that the SAPE Farmers Group cultivate Cassava on 40 ha of land to increase local food production and guarantee food supply for Honiara city (Sherzad, 2020).</p>
	<p>Samoa: WST 1 million or US\$ 360 thousand (of US\$ 1.26 million) was allocated to increase local food production. Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) purchased seeds of short cycle crops [fruits, vegetables, etc.] and distributed these to families. A partnership between MAF and the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD) also distributed planting materials [cassava, sweet potato and taro] in an effort to increase food production (Sherzad, 2020).</p>
	<p>Tuvalu: The government is supporting home gardens through providing seedlings. The government is also fast-tracking existing agriculture projects in the capital and the outer islands.</p>
	<p>The government has encouraged landowners and producers to practice customary food stockpiling techniques, including drying fish and root crops, preserving breadfruit, and storing coconuts. Local communities and chiefs were encouraged to organize community-based stockpiling and rationing (Devpolicy, 2020).</p>