



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

The Pacific Security Outlook Report 2023-2024



PACIFIC
FUSION
CENTRE

© Copyright Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Pacific Fusion Centre, 2024

All rights for commercial / profit reproduction, in any form, are reserved. PIFS and PFC authorises the partial reproduction or translation of this material for scientific, educational or research purposes, provided that PIFS, PFC and the source document are properly acknowledged. Permission to reproduce the document in any form, whether for commercial / profit or non-profit purposes, must be requested in writing.



Henry Puna, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum



In the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, Forum Leaders outlined a vision for a resilient Pacific region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, prosperity, that ensures all Pacific peoples can lead free, healthy and productive lives.

We are fortunate to enjoy relative peace across our Blue Pacific Continent. But as we have seen over the past two years in Europe and the Middle East, peace can be fractious. Peace can never be taken for granted.

To promote and maintain a peaceful and secure Pacific region, Forum Leaders issued the Boe Declaration on Regional Security, which highlights an expanded concept of security for our Blue Pacific Continent.

Key to ensuring our peace and security, is the monitoring and analysis of threats in a timely manner, so we can formulate responses before those threats reach our shores. The development and sharing of this regional security outlook report helps us to do just that.

Climate change remains the single greatest threat to the security and wellbeing of Pacific peoples. As affirmed in the Pacific Climate Security Assessment Guide, released in July last year, climate change will continue to challenge livelihoods and the blue economy, threaten land availability and usability, exacerbate pressures on food, water and health systems, compound the effects of disasters, erode the resilience of our governments, communities and vulnerable groups, affect mobility trends and impact national sovereignty and regional stability.

While COVID-19 is no longer considered a public health emergency of international concern, other vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks and future waves of COVID-19 community transmission are expected, meaning health security remains a significant priority for all Pacific peoples.

Nuclear legacy issues continue to affect human security. As the custodians of 43% of the earth's oceanic exclusive economic zones, Forum Members have been rightfully concerned by the discharge of treated wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Now that the discharge has commenced, the Forum will continue to facilitate ongoing dialogue with the Government of Japan and the IAEA to ensure that Forum Members are privy to the latest information and updates on the matter.

The activity of cybercriminals and state-sponsored cyber actors has increased, with Pacific individuals, businesses, and governments directly targeted. Transnational organised crime groups continue to adaptively exploit our vulnerabilities and place pressure on our operational security agencies. Illicit drug crime remains the greatest transnational crime threat within the region, though trafficking in humans and small-arms remains a concern. There is much we can do to protect ourselves. All Pacific peoples must take steps to protect our families and communities.

The protracted Russian invasion of Ukraine, conflict in Gaza, tension in the Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula and broader geostrategic uncertainty are driving partners to increase



military spending, contrary to our interests in seeing global attention focussed firmly on addressing climate change and our development challenges. The Blue Pacific Continent remains committed to principles of democracy, good governance, and non-interference in national affairs, yet we know that corruption remains a lingering problem across the region, directly undermining Pacific security.

Finally, all security challenges require adequately resourced responses, and while our economies are recovering faster than expected, progress remains uneven, inflation still hasn't peaked, and the cost of basic commodities continues to rise.

Forum Leaders highlighted their vision in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. That vision is our destination, and as we start to plot our course, assessments such as this will help us understand how we should best prioritise our efforts to ensure that our region remains comparatively peaceful. With that in mind, I am pleased to herein present you the second edition of the Pacific Security Outlook Report.



Contents

HENRY PUNA, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM	3
SECURITY ENVIRONMENT – HORIZON 2025	6
CLIMATE SECURITY	8
HUMAN SECURITY	11
DISASTERS AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE	12
FOOD SECURITY	14
HEALTH SECURITY	16
ENVIRONMENTAL AND RESOURCE SECURITY	18
CYBERSECURITY	21
TRANSNATIONAL CRIME	23
TRADITIONAL SECURITY	25
ECONOMIC SECURITY	27
PRESERVING THE RULE OF LAW	30
IMPLICATIONS OF DYNAMIC GEOPOLITICS	32



SECURITY ENVIRONMENT - HORIZON 2025

Over the next 24 months, the Pacific region will confront an increasingly complex security environment dominated by intersecting strategic challenges, both national and regional. The region will remain heavily impacted by global processes and international events over which it has limited control, such as climate change, supply chain inflation, global economic drivers, increasing geopolitical tensions and oppositional use of the multilateral system. External actors will continue to seek to increase their influence in the Pacific region within the context of an increasingly dynamic international security environment.

Climate change will continue to amplify other security challenges, restricting Pacific countries' capacities to respond to concurrent or subsequent crises. Climate-related disasters have the potential to further deepen economic challenges, exacerbate the security implications of poverty,¹ and increase the need for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) and financial assistance. As one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world,² the Pacific will firmly remain at the coalface of the first, second and third order effects of climate change. A likely severe El Niño phase will further exacerbate existing human and economic security issues to varying degrees across the region.³

Access by the Pacific to timely, effective climate financing to fund adaptation and mitigation efforts will remain difficult into the near future, although there are some signs that key financing bodies – like the Green Climate Fund – are taking steps to improve accessibility and streamline applications.⁴ Larger economies, remain major emitters of greenhouse gases. They will also continue to have a greater capacity to fund climate financing and support green energy transitions to mitigate the trajectory of climate change.⁵ Recent acknowledgement of loss and damage has been nominal and climate financing generally remains subject to donor's priorities. Domestic and other international pressures will affect countries follow through on key climate commitments. Pacific Island Countries will remain challenged by the accessibility, suitability, and quantum of external climate financing available for mitigation and adaptation; and to international failure to effectively restrain continuous warming beyond 1.5 degrees.

Concurrent traditional security flashpoints in various regions are deteriorating the international security environment and straining multilateral systems.⁶ The Russian invasion of Ukraine surpassed its 600-day mark in October.⁷ In addition to grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law,⁸ the conflict continues to create compounding security challenges globally and in the Pacific region. The conflict between Israel and Hamas surprised many in terms of its rapid escalation and posed consular crises for many Pacific countries. With no clear end in sight to hostilities, the conflict may have broader security implications for the Middle East and potential flow on effects globally, including to the Pacific. Potential flashpoints in

1 Climate Change - United Nations Sustainable Development

2 Pacific Islands | OCHA (unocha.org)

3 El Niño Southern Oscillation Forecast: Global Weather Hazards Likely to Hit Hard (foreignpolicy.com)

4 From the Green Climate Fund: updated simplified approval process for LDCs, SIDS and African States | LDC Portal - International Support Measures for Least Developed Countries

5 Climate-finance commitments are not being met (dandc.eu)

6 Amid Strained Multilateral System, States Must Recommit to United Nations Charter Obligations, Prioritize Human Rights, Secretary-General Tells Security Council | UN Press

7 In pictures: 600 days of war in Ukraine - October 18, 2023 | Reuters

8 UN Commission has found an array of war crimes, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law have been committed in Ukraine | OHCHR



the South China Sea, on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait continue to simmer and will shape dynamic geopolitics into the future, not only drawing energy and resources away from Pacific priorities, but also with the potential to directly affect the Pacific given the level of trade that passes through the region. The risk of military miscalculation, although heightened, is unlikely to boil over in the near term.⁹ Within this environment, the multilateral system will remain strained.¹⁰

Dynamic geopolitics and protectionism of strategically significant sectors will likely continue to influence technology inputs and standards.¹¹ Major power decoupling of strategically significant sectors will influence advances in technology, with implications for the Pacific. The growing concentration on access to rare earth minerals will also continue to add pressure to existing divergent views on deep seabed mining.¹² The technology underpinning important infrastructure and ICT systems will increasingly diverge in this environment, with impacts on national and regional infrastructure and ongoing interoperability in the Pacific.¹³

Global inflation is showing signs of tapering off, with prices on commodities of crucial importance to the Pacific beginning to stabilise,¹⁴ however pressures in China's economy and the impact of recent conflict in Gaza could negatively impact global commodity markets in the near future.¹⁵ With the already high price of commodities, in particular oil and energy, and with compounding crises across the world, many economies in the region will struggle to rebound from additional shocks.¹⁶ The increasingly complex combination of security challenges facing the globe will further strain the capacities of Pacific governments to finance investments to meet public demands and maintain economic growth, particularly amidst climate-related pressures.

To respond to this contested geopolitical environment, at the 52nd meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum, Pacific Leaders welcomed Fiji's concept of a 'Zone of Peace' and directed for its further development including specific initiatives and activities, inclusive of the Joints Heads of Pacific Security (JHOPS), are aligned with Forum regional security arrangements. This will be further considered by Leaders at their next meeting.¹⁷

Notwithstanding there remain significant barriers to addressing a number of the security challenges facing the Pacific, there is also increasing support to address these issues, both from within the Forum membership and from those outside the region. Whether it be offers of financing for the Pacific Resilience Facility,¹⁸ information sharing on cyber threats through the Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network (PaCSON),¹⁹ addressing transnational crime through the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre (PTCCC),²⁰ or support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on sexual and reproductive health,²¹ the Pacific is well placed to leverage its regional and bilateral relationships to address ongoing and emerging threats to the region.

9 Avoiding War Over Taiwan | Asia Society

10 The UN and the multilateral system are in crisis – what the Global South must do (theconversation.com)
11 Iodic shifts in the ocean-atmosphere systems dynamic. In July 2023, the World

11 Unpacking the geopolitics of technology - Atlantic Council

12 What We Know About Deep-sea Mining and What We Don't | World Resources Institute (wri.org)

13 The Geopolitics of Technical Standardization | DGAP

14 1. Outlook for Asia and the Pacific: Challenges to Sustaining Growth and Disinflation1 in: Regional Economic Outlook, Asia and Pacific, October 2023 (imf.org)

15 Conflict in Middle East Could Bring 'Dual Shock' to Global Commodity Markets (worldbank.org)

16 G20_Report_on_Macroeconomic_impacts.pdf

17 FINAL-52nd-PIF-Communique-9-November-2023-1.pdf (forumsec.org)

18 Saudi Arabia pledge US\$50 million to kick start the Pacific Resilience Facility | PINA

19 WELCOME TO PaCSON | Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network (PaCSON)

20 AFP combatting crime with Pacific partners | Australian Federal Police

21 UNFPA Pacific Island Countries | UNFPA in Pacific Island Countries



CLIMATE SECURITY

Current Situation

Several key decisions were made at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP27). Most significant for the Pacific was the agreement to progress the development of a Loss and Damage framework. However, global ambition and global commitments still do not correlate given that although countries contributing three-quarters of greenhouse gases aspire to reach net-zero by 2050, if their current commitments for 2030 are met, these represent less than two thirds of the reductions needed to meet temperature goals.²² However, developing countries are also limited in their levels of ambition, especially when reliant on donor funded climate financing pathways to fund their mitigation and adaptation plans as well as transition to net zero efforts. This reliance on funding from large emitters and producers may create diplomatic complexity and hard policy choices.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Synthesis Report²³ confirms that continued greenhouse gas emissions will increase global warming, with the best estimate of reaching 1.5°C by 2040, with every increment of global warming intensifying multiple and concurrent hazards. Cognisant of this existential threat, at the regional level, Forum Leaders endorsed a Declaration on Statehood and Persons Affected by Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise, as well as continuing to call for greater ambition and commitment to limiting global warming to 1.5°C at COP28.

All global climate indicators²⁴ – greenhouse gases, temperature, ocean heat and acidification, and sea level rise – continue to increase, meaning a continued decline in the state of our global climate. This underlying global temperature systemic shift is more complex with periodic shifts in the ocean-atmosphere systems dynamic. In July 2023, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) confirmed the onset of El Niño conditions in the Pacific.²⁵ This is likely to last till April 2024.

Horizon 2025

At the global level, key outcomes for COP28 include the establishment of the Loss and Damage Finance Facility, and commitments to ramp up climate finance (old and new commitments), fast-track energy transition and slash emissions, and to put nature, people, lives and livelihoods at the heart of climate action.²⁶ Furthermore, despite the International Energy Agency (IEA) stating that there can be no more new oil, coal and gas sources developed for the world to limit warming to 1.5C,²⁷ some fossil fuel producers continue to issue approvals for new coal mines,²⁸ and others are ramping up production of gas and oil.²⁹ On the demand side, it is encouraging that global demand for fossil fuels is projected by IEA to peak by 2030.³⁰ However, if both production and use

22 Not Yet on Track: Climate Threat Demands More Ambitious Global Action [imf.org]

23 https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf

24 <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20230317-the-state-of-the-climate-in-2023>

25 World Meteorological Organization declares onset of El Niño conditions | World Meteorological Organization [wmo.int]

26 Decisions from Dubai: A review of COP28 outcomes - Climate Champions [unfccc.int]

27 No new oil, gas or coal development if world is to reach net zero by 2050, says world energy body | Fossil fuels | The Guardian

28 Coal Mine Tracker | The Australia Institute

29 US oil and gas production set to break record in 2023 despite UN climate goals | Fossil fuels | The Guardian

30 World oil, gas, coal demand to peak by 2030, IEA says | Reuters



is not curbed, these trends may continue to jeopardise the achievement of global commitments and ambitions and may put the viability of several Pacific Islands Countries at stake.³¹³²

Given the current global security, geopolitical and economic environment, and the consistent lack of commitment as evidenced by the on-going challenge to meet the climate financing goal of US\$100 billion per year, the potential for new climate funding sources is uncertain. Recently, some development partners have diverted financial aid to Ukraine.³³³⁴ The humanitarian, and potential regional, crisis in the Middle East has the potential to impact economic indicators and flows of Official Development Assistance, particularly humanitarian assistance, into the near future. Given that there is a funding gap of US\$6 trillion by 2030 for developing countries to meet their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) – efforts to curb global warming at or below 1.5°C will be hampered. The new Loss and Damage Facility, critically important for the Pacific, and capitalisation of the Pacific Resilience Facility may be adversely impacted.

The onset of El Niño in the tropical Pacific will shape weather patterns until April 2024 and its impacts may continue beyond that. The WMO Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update issued in 2023, stated that there is a 66% likelihood that the annual average near-surface global temperature between 2023 and 2027 will be more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for at least one year.³⁵ As a result, storms across the Pacific will be more intense. There is also potential for increased drought and bushfires, given the El Niño effect, which creates hotter and drier conditions across the western areas of the region. At the time of writing of this report, Vanuatu has experienced three Tropical Cyclones (Category 4 and above) in the space of 8 months, Fiji a category 2 cyclone, several major bushfires were on-going in north-eastern Australia, regions in eastern Australia were under a “total fire ban”, and a state of drought has been declared in Tonga, and Reliefweb predicts a state of drought in Micronesia in the first quarter of 2024³⁶.

Over the coming 12 to 24 months, climate change indicators are envisaged to continue to worsen. With increasing frequency and severity of tropical cyclones (9 to 14 predicted for 2024)³⁷, and the potential for drought and extreme rainfall in different areas, water and food security and agriculture will be impacted.³⁸ Human security may also be significantly impacted with an increased potential for localised conflict as a result of these pressures on communities. Due to a warming Pacific Ocean, tuna species will move to areas where they and their prey can find their preferred water temperature³⁹, potentially affecting revenue streams, in differing ways, for Pacific Islands Countries that are heavily dependent on this commodity.

Significant engagement and advocacy at political level is projected in support of Australia’s bid to co-host the UNFCCC COP in 2026 with Pacific Island Countries. If successful, and Pacific support is appropriately leveraged, hosting COP31 in the region provides an opportunity to profile the impact of climate change in the Pacific region, shape the agenda and drive greater global climate action.

32 <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/655081503691935252/pdf/119111-WP-PUBLIC-p154324-ppClimatechangebackgroundfinal.pdf>

33 UK diverts climate finance to military aid for Ukraine - Energy Monitor

34 The Ukraine crisis and diverted aid: What we know so far - World | ReliefWeb

35 Global temperatures set to reach new records in next five years (wmo.int)

36 Federated States of Micronesia: Drought Imminent 2023 - DREF Operation (MDRFM002) - Micronesia (Federated States of) | ReliefWeb

37 https://niwa.co.nz/sites/niwa.co.nz/files/tc_outlook_2023-24.pdf

38 Rough years ahead | Nature Climate Change

39 <https://optimizeias.com/el-nino-southern-oscillation-can-affect-tuna-fish-in-the-indian-ocean-says-fao-report/>



Opportunities

- Accelerate engagement and advocacy with considered firmness appropriate to address the impending catastrophic impacts of climate change, at all levels, through all channels available, with as many partners as possible, to be able to meet global emission goals, Pacific NDCs and fund mitigation and adaptation activities.
- Strengthen advocacy and engagement with like-minded regional organisations and countries at the UN and other international and multilateral bodies to progress support of relevant Leader's declarations on climate induced sea-level rise, statehood and persons affected by climate induced sea-level rise with a view to recognising these approaches as customary international law.
- Implement existing regional frameworks, such as the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific and accelerate other existing climate and disaster efforts.
- Implement the recently endorsed Pacific Climate Security Assessment Framework to assist Pacific countries to identify, assess and mitigate climate security driven risks.
- Progress new and innovative financing streams to support NDCs, mitigation and adaptation, including a concerted, unified effort to capitalise the Forums' Pacific Resilience Facility, with tailored climate and disaster risk financing products for the Pacific's needs.
- Develop innovative financing and investment pathways to safeguard revenues and livelihoods from our most important resources, in particular, tuna⁴⁰ from on-going climate change impacts and periodical climate variability caused by El Niño and La Niña.

⁴⁰ <https://www.ffa.int/2023/10/jobs-infrastructure-revenue-new-initiative-looks-to-maximise-benefits-of-tuna-fisheries-for-ffa-member-countries/>



HUMAN SECURITY

The wellbeing of Pacific peoples will continue to be impacted by disasters, and food, water, and health security challenges, amongst other enduring issues outlined below. Nuclear legacy issues will continue to be an issue of concern for countries across the Pacific. The affected islands and communities continue to face a variety of deleterious health, environmental and social legacy issues from those nuclear tests. The issue of fairer and more appropriate remediation and compensation is particularly sensitive for RMI, vis a vis the US Government. The continued deterioration of the Runit Dome, that stores contaminated earth and material from the US tests there, also poses serious environmental, financial and political equity implications for RMI.⁴¹ Failure of the Runit Dome would also have serious environmental health implications for a broad swathe of Pacific Island Countries and Pacific Ocean resources.⁴² This has the potential to heighten Pacific sensitivity to the release of ALPS water from the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan given the risk of increasing cumulation of nuclear contaminants in the Pacific ocean and the cross cutting risks to human, economic, environmental and resource security.

Digital Technology

Greater access to digital technologies has the potential to boost human security by fostering economic growth and increasing education and employment opportunities, however it also provides space for the perpetration of harm. Ensuring that increased technological and cyber capabilities are accompanied by an enabling environment that is safe and secure will remain a critical challenge for the region to address. With the proliferation of digital technology, the risks posed by misinformation and disinformation will continue to grow and remain a complex problem for governments to address (see Preserving the Rule of Law section).

Violence Against Women and Girls

An enduring human security concern across the Pacific is violence against women and girls. This has taken the form of physical, sexual and psychological violence.⁴³ With up to 68% of Pacific women (in surveyed countries) having reported violence by a partner in their lifetime, the prevalence of violence against women is amongst the highest in the world and twice the global average.⁴⁴ The 2023 report on the progress of the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED)⁴⁵ and a Pacific Women Lead brief⁴⁶, highlighted that although there has been progress and legal frameworks are in place, women and girls continue to be at risk of violence, particularly, during disasters or other crises. There is a rising societal and economic cost to violence against women and girls, particularly, when there is community acceptance.⁴⁷ UN Women report that ending violence against women and girls is a priority as its immediate and long-term impacts are devastating and can include death.⁴⁸

The revitalised Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, endorsed in 2023, aims to strengthen national commitment to address violence against women and girls amongst other priorities including economic empowerment, political representation and inclusive and participatory decision making.

41 Endless fallout: the Pacific idyll still facing nuclear blight 77 years on | Nuclear weapons | The Guardian

42 A blast from the past: the Pacific's nuclear legacy – Foreign Brief 43 <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/2019%20FINAL.pdf>

44 Ending Violence Against Women and Girls | UN Women – Asia-Pacific

45 Microsoft Word - PLGED Review Report_Final_31 Oct 2021 (forumsec.org)

46 spc-pwl_thematicbrief_evawg.pdf (pacificdata.org)

47 Ibid.

48 What we do: Ending violence against women | UN Women – Headquarters



DISASTERS AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Current Situation

The Pacific Islands are among the most vulnerable in the world to natural hazards, including cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions, often with limited means to prepare and respond to them.⁴⁹ For many of these countries, sea level rise as a result of climate change poses an existential challenge.⁵⁰

In September 2022, ministers responsible for disaster risk management from across the Forum membership endorsed the Nadi Declaration; a commitment to accelerate action to reduce disaster risks and strengthen responses to build resilience in the face of increasing severity of disasters as a result of climate change.⁵¹ A key element is the commitment to develop humanitarian and disaster response mechanisms that facilitate faster, coordinated and more efficient transboundary response between countries, alongside international partners. In addition, disaster risk financing mechanisms including the Disaster Risk Finance Strategy Guideline for Pacific Island Countries continue to be developed to reduce and address associated economic and social losses.⁵²

As the Pacific has continued to strengthen financing strategies to enhance humanitarian assistance and disaster responses, effective implementation of these responses in affected areas remains a challenge. These challenges could be further exacerbated if resources are diverted to address other crises at the global level.

Horizon 2025

Extreme weather events will inevitably continue to pose security risks to Pacific people and their communities. The current El Niño phenomenon will likely increase the prevalence of disasters in the Pacific, with an estimated 9 to 14 cyclones expected in 2024.⁵³ There is also potential for droughts as exemplified by the declaration of a state of drought in two large islands in Tonga.⁵⁴ The resultant economic shocks and human security impacts will continue to test Pacific Islands Countries' capacity to respond and recover, and demand for humanitarian aid and assistance will continue. Response efforts remain challenging because of insufficient financing, data constraints and varied effectiveness of monitoring systems to inform policy and decision making.

A recent study by the UN Environment Programme found that the climate adaptation and disaster risk financing needs for East Asia and the Pacific are the highest of any region, currently estimated at US\$158 billion.⁵⁵ For the Pacific, climate adaptation goals which include disaster risk reduction will require US\$1 billion every year and US\$5.2 billion by 2030.⁵⁶ Not meeting these needs will continue to exacerbate existing limitations on regional economies to cover climate and disaster related costs, and may dampen efforts to strengthen resilience building, response and recovery efforts.

49 Disaster risk reduction and emergencies | UNICEF Pacific Islands

50 The existential threat climate change poses to Pacific nations presented at International Tribunal | The Pacific Community (spc.int)

51 First ever Pacific disaster reduction declaration to drive political leadership and build a safer region endorsed by Ministers | The Pacific Community (spc.int)

52 Disaster Risk Finance Strategy: Guideline for Pacific Island Countries - UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF)

53 https://niwa.co.nz/sites/niwa.co.nz/files/tc_outlook_2023-24.pdf

54 Tonga: Drought - Sep 2023 | ReliefWeb

55 Adaptation Gap Report 2023 | UNEP - UN Environment Programme

56 Pacific Islands: Climate Finance Action a Priority at COP 27 | The Pacific Community (spc.int)



Opportunities

- Advocate for innovative climate and disaster risk financing including the Pacific Resilience Facility and insurance products such as the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company, which are geared to ease accessibility issues and transaction costs.
- Integrate climate change and disaster risk considerations into their Public Finance Management (PFM) reforms to ensure that central agencies apply risk-based approaches for financing risk reduction, response, and recovery.⁵⁷
- Strengthen network and transport connectivity, early warning systems and post disaster recovery data and information collection to strengthen and inform national response and recovery efforts.
- Support the development of a regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief mechanism to effectively respond to emergencies and improve human security outcomes, including for women and vulnerable groups.
- Establish legal and operational frameworks that support national prioritisation and the efficient, effective, and coordinated delivery of external resources for disaster response and assistance, such as through the Joint Heads of Pacific Security (JHOPS).



FOOD SECURITY

Current Situation

Most people in the Pacific live in rural areas, with between 50% to 70% of Pacific people depending on agriculture and fishing activities for their livelihoods.⁵⁸ As most Pacific countries gradually recover from the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, compounding global shocks continue to challenge the resilience of Pacific food systems and food security. Disasters and the effects of climate change continue to disrupt Pacific people's ability to access safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for an active healthy life. Traditional food systems are also at risk. The influence of changing weather patterns on food production in larger economies has had a domino effect in the Pacific, particularly as most Pacific countries have narrow resource bases and are economically dependent on imports.⁵⁹

Compounding global conflicts, such as the ongoing war in Ukraine, continue to have a disproportionate impact on Pacific economies.⁶⁰ Higher inflation may increase dependency on cheap ultra-processed food.

Horizon 2025

The onset of El Niño and its impacts will be varied across the Pacific and may challenge the resilience of traditional food systems and disrupt seasonal crop production. El Niño related impacts are also expected to be felt on migratory fish populations, coastal fisheries and may undermine local marine biodiversity due to coral bleaching and coral mortality due to higher-than-normal ocean temperatures.⁶¹

Staple foods and livestock may be affected as changing weather patterns will continue to challenge farmers' efforts to maintain production and healthy livestock populations to meet local demand. This may increase the region's reliance on food imports. Prolonged war in Ukraine, coupled with global humanitarian efforts directed towards the Israel-Gaza conflict, may continue to increase inflationary pressures across the region. This could limit access to nutritious foods and increase dependency on cheap high density imported foods, potentially exacerbating non-communicable diseases (NCDs). These trends may aggravate enduring health issues already prevalent across Pacific countries.

Opportunities

- Support existing and new data collection methods and monitoring systems to identify existing and emerging risks to food security and inform policy development and responses.
- Develop strategies and programs that target community engagement and build awareness of healthy lifestyle and nutritional choices.

57 Disaster Resilient and Responsive Public Financial Management: An Assessment Tool | GFDRR

58 Food systems in the Pacific: Addressing challenges in cooperation with Europe | The Pacific Community (spc.int)

59 Chapter 7. Major Economic Shocks and Pacific Island Countries during the Global Economic Crisis in: Resilience and Growth in the Small States of the Pacific (imf.org)

60 The war in Ukraine: impacts, exposure and policy issues in Asia and the Pacific | ESCAP (unescap.org)

61 Fisheries story: Climate change and Pacific coastal fisheries | FAME (spc.int)



- Prioritise implementation of targeted capacity building programs in sciences related to ensuring climate resilient agriculture and fisheries may assist.
- Support rural livelihoods and quality of life through the identification of opportunities for commercial cropping and improved production, value addition and marketing strategies in place for domestic markets as well as export- oriented channels.



HEALTH SECURITY

Current Situation

The region continues to be faced with unique health challenges shaped by a high prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and high vulnerability to systemic shocks as shown by COVID-19, climate change and natural disasters.⁶² Post COVID-19, childhood and adult obesity and NCDs remain threats to health security in the Pacific.⁶³ NCDs (cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases) continue to be the biggest killer in the region, with three of every four deaths attributed to NCDs.⁶⁴ The Pacific health sector continues to focus on strengthening approaches to human capabilities for health, combating the root causes of NCDs, digital transformation and building resilient health systems.⁶⁵ Despite instances of vaccine hesitance during the measles outbreak in 2019 and during COVID, vaccination efforts across the region continue to roll out with partners like Rotary and UNICEF providing three new life-saving vaccines, pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV), rotavirus vaccine (RV), and the human papillomavirus vaccine (HPV), to children across 9 Pacific Island Countries.⁶⁶

Sexual and reproductive health outcomes have been improved in some Pacific countries through joint programs between national governments, external countries, and non-government organisations, with strengthened access and quality of care to key target groups (i.e., women, adolescents and youths).⁶⁷

Safe and potable water remains an issue across the Pacific. A 2021 report by UNICEF states that many people in the region are not able to access services for clean water, hygiene and treated waste disposal systems which exposes them to dangerous diseases that can be prevented.⁶⁸

Horizon 2025

WHO data indicates that six of the top ten leading countries in the world for premature death as a result of NCDs are in the Pacific.⁶⁹ Economic conditions across the region and related commercial activities are likely to continue to determine the capacity of Pacific peoples to make healthy lifestyle choices. Macro-level decisions around specific fiscal policy choices, including debt servicing, disaster preparedness or investment in nutrition, health systems and services are choices that may determine the continuing prevalence of NCDs. Notwithstanding on-going multisectoral efforts, NCDs are likely to continue to have disproportionate impacts on the health of Pacific peoples over the next 24 months.

The onset of El Niño will likely affect health security in the region.⁷⁰ With a higher probability for tropical cyclones and heavy rainfall in the Eastern Pacific, drought in the Western Pacific and

62 WHO Conference Draft Discussion Paper - Economic and commercial determinants of health in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), mental health conditions, injuries and violence.docx

63 phmm-outcomes-prior-to-professional-editing.pdf (who.int)

64 Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) | The Pacific Community

65 Pacific Health Ministers Meetings (who.int)

66 Pacific Island children to access three new life-saving vaccines through Rotary-UNICEF partnership - Cook Islands | ReliefWeb

67 UNFPA Pacific Island Countries | Sexual and Reproductive Health

68 In the Pacific, thousands of people will still lack access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene in 2030 unless progress increases - warn WHO, UNICEF

69 NCDs in Asia and the Pacific: recent findings and key challenges - Devpolicy Blog from the Development Policy Centre

70 El Niño and health in the Pacific (who.int)



hotter than normal temperatures across the region,⁷¹ vector borne, and food and water borne diseases may increase over the next 12-24 months.⁷²

The Pacific in conjunction with Partners like WHO continue to prepare for unprecedented shocks like COVID-19 by strengthening health systems resilience through actions like developing a package of core essential health service delivery, strengthening regional supply chains for pre-positioning lifesaving equipment and supplies and ensuring the readiness of health workers to respond to health shocks when they occur.⁷³ Strategies to retain health workers across the Pacific are being developed to ensure that health worker-to-population ratios are stabilised.⁷⁴ These approaches, coupled with intensive routine vaccination programmes, greater investments in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, and accelerated public awareness on healthy living and nutrition may result in a more positive shift in addressing health security across the region.

Opportunities

- Prioritise nutrition and healthy living through targeted education and awareness programs.
- Support for improving access to quality, safe and sustainable Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities across the region, in particular for the most vulnerable.
- Continue to strengthen resilience across national health systems through building capacity in specialist areas and digital transformation.
- Accelerate ongoing vaccination programs across the Pacific in conjunction with relevant partners.
- Ongoing engagement and information sharing between Pacific countries, and with external organisations and countries, will continue to assist the region in making strides towards meeting sustainable development goals on reproductive health.⁷⁵

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Strengthening health system resilience in the Pacific: A call to action (who.int)

74 2023 PHoH14 Agenda 4.3 Rethinking human resources for health 25 April2023_0.pdf (spc.int)

75 SDG Target 3.7 | Sexual and reproductive health: By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information & education, & the integration of reproductive health into national strategies (who.int)



ENVIRONMENTAL AND RESOURCE SECURITY

Current Situation

Nuclear related issues have been the focus of much of regional environmental security concerns over the last 12 months. The contentious discharge of treated nuclear wastewater from the Fukushima power plant into the Pacific Ocean by Japan; the unresolved issue over the deterioration of the Runit Dome nuclear contamination storage facility in the Republic of Marshall Islands; and the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines by Australia. The issue of deep seabed mining remains contentious given the diversity of positions across the region on the issue. In 2023, at the second session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution (INC2), Pacific representatives highlighted the immense impact of plastic pollution on the Pacific Ocean, despite the region contributing less than 1.3% to global plastic use.⁷⁶ Marine pollution from the remnants of World War II wrecks, unexploded ordnance, and marine spills as a result of shipping accidents are ongoing security risks to the environment in the region that remain mostly unaddressed.

Horizon 2025

Across the Pacific, El Niño conditions over the next 12 months will likely impact key maritime based resources, tuna fisheries and coastal fisheries, and – depending on the extent of rainfall patterns and drought conditions – key agricultural commodities. These effects will vary across the region.

This year, several global key environmental policy focused mechanisms have been agreed. The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions Treaty (BBNJ) was agreed in March, and will shape efforts towards the conservation of marine resources and access and use of marine genetic material moving forward.⁷⁷ The Global Framework on Chemicals, to be implemented in 2024, will reduce chemical pollution and promote safer alternatives for chemicals and pesticides.⁷⁸ A global treaty to end plastic pollution continues in its development, with the objective of significantly reducing the amount of marine plastic litter in oceans.⁷⁹ Subsequent to this work, the Waigani Convention (1995) was, for the first time, amended to align with the global Plastic treaty work.⁸⁰ These treaties and conventions may result in strengthened responses and actions to safeguard our regional and global environment in the medium to long term.

Notwithstanding the above activities, plastics, marine litter, and marine pollution will continue to be an issue of significant concern across the Pacific with crosscutting impacts on environmental, economic, human and food security. Nuclear contamination and nuclear legacy issues will remain politically sensitive in the foreseeable future and will require nuanced approaches to be resolved. The issue of deep seabed mining may become prominent over the next 24 months, given ongoing developments at the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and within certain PICs.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Impact of plastic pollution on Pacific highlighted as France draws global attention to “ticking time bomb” | Pacific Environment (sprep.org)

⁷⁷ UN delegates reach historic agreement on protecting marine biodiversity in international waters | UN News

⁷⁸ UNEP welcomes new Global Framework on Chemicals

⁷⁹ A UN treaty to end plastic pollution (ellenmacarthurfoundation.org)

⁸⁰ Pacific delegates adopt the first ever amendment to the Waigani convention | Pacific Environment (sprep.org)

⁸¹ Deep seabed mining lacks social legitimacy | npj Ocean Sustainability (nature.com)



The Pacific's tuna fishery (skipjack, yellowfin, bigeye, and South Pacific albacore) is already being impacted by climate change.⁸² The conservation and management of regional tuna stocks in the Western and Central Pacific remains robust, but, climate variability, temperature in particular, affects distribution and local availability of tuna species.⁸³ El Niño has the potential to accelerate climate change related impacts on regional distribution of tuna fisheries which will affect the relative distribution of fisheries revenues. Generally, in past El Niño periods, the valuable tuna purse seine fishery shifts eastwards and southwards, with lower levels of fishing in PNG and FSM and increased fishing in Kiribati and Tuvalu. This will have implications for budgets and fiscal policy, livelihoods, and food security across the region. At the policy level, ongoing efforts to fully implement global frameworks such as the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and more appropriate focusing of international and regional frameworks and interventions to combat Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) Fishing will likely have positive implications, including strengthening monitoring, compliance, and surveillance.

Pacific coastal and reef fisheries strengthen food security and livelihoods across the region. In addition to reef damage, ocean warming and the effects of coastal erosion and siltation, El Niño, in the past, has demonstrably affected the distribution and productivity of exploited coastal and reef fish populations and will likely test management practices and measures across the region to ensure continued viability of these important domestic fish stocks.⁸⁴

On land, El Niño increases the potential for drought, particularly in the Western Pacific. Already, Tonga's main island and several smaller islands are being affected by drought conditions.⁸⁵ For many Pacific countries, primary industries are a source of food security and livelihoods. Several Pacific countries export agricultural commodities; thus, revenues may be affected. Historically, El Niño conditions have had a significant impact on Australian wheat production that has not only affected domestic farmers and supply, but also global market prices and global supply.⁸⁶

Ongoing inflationary pressures on grain prices, as a result of the war in Ukraine, may be further exacerbated given the possible El Niño effects on Australian wheat production.⁸⁷

These trends could have broader impacts that may affect Pacific economies, livelihoods, and human security in the next 12 to 24 months, in the face of even a moderate El Niño.⁸⁸

Opportunities

- Continue to advocate for political resolution of contentious nuclear and environmental issues supported by transparent, independent, verifiable, scientific assessments. Develop mechanisms for transparent monitoring of key environmental scientific parameters, including around DSM and nuclear radiation, to better inform science-based policy making in the region.

82 Study: Warming Waters Threaten Tuna-Dependent Economies in the Pacific | The Pacific Community (spc.int)

83 Ibid.

84 FINAL_Front-end.pdf (spc.int)

85 El Niño effect: Drought declared for Tonga's main island | RNZ News

86 How will El Niño impact the world's wheat and global food supply - The University of Sydney

87 Australia set for lower wheat output as El Niño curbs yields | Reuters

88 How will El Niño impact the world's wheat and global food supply - The University of Sydney



- Strengthen regional advocacy at the global level to address marine litter, plastics pollution and dangerous chemicals and pesticides.
- Strengthened monitoring and compliance of regional and international environmental frameworks.
- Strengthen efforts to work together as a region to combat IUU fishing and to ensure the continued sustainability of the Pacific's tuna fisheries, while also increasing economic returns.
- Advocate for the early entry into force of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies which is vital for livelihoods, food security and ocean health by reducing unsustainable levels of harvesting whilst providing the policy space to develop their national fishing industries and technical assistance to build capacity to implement the agreement.



CYBERSECURITY

Current Situation

The Pacific region is home to a rapidly growing and changing cyber environment. Undersea cables and emerging technologies – like Starlink – continue to bring faster and higher quality internet services to the region, while simultaneously opening the Pacific up to a broader range of cyber threats, some of which the region is not currently well-placed to address. Pacific countries continue to have varying levels of cybersecurity maturity, with many poorly postured to mitigate or respond to cyber threats. Most regional countries lack effective cybersecurity policies or legal frameworks. Operational capacity constraints, a lack of infrastructure, and inconsistent budgets have made it difficult for many countries to upskill their cybersecurity capabilities.

The activity of cybercriminals and state-sponsored threat actors has increased globally, and the direct and indirect targeting of Pacific individuals, businesses, e-commerce systems and government systems remains a threat. According to the PaCSON Annual Reports for 2020, 2021 and 2022, phishing remains the most prevalent form of cyber threat amongst PaCSON member countries, with ransomware and malware attacks being the second and third most reported.⁸⁹ There also continues to be a growing trend of online financial fraud (e.g. the recent Fiji m-paisa scam and the EbayShop Online recruitment scam).^{90,91} The success rate for cyber-attacks in the Pacific remains high due to the readily available tools and services to conduct them, as well as a relatively low level of cyber threat awareness throughout the Pacific.

As highlighted in several products by the Pacific Fusion Centre⁹², cyber incidents on Pacific government systems and critical infrastructure continues to be a significant threat.⁹³ In 2022, bad actors undermined parts of the telecommunications sectors in the Marshall Islands and critical government infrastructure in Vanuatu, as well as several other national services, with highly disruptive effects.^{94,95} Private sector attacks, such as in Australia, have also demonstrated the far-reaching impacts – including to supporting infrastructure – of a successful cyber incident on business. Data breaches and business email compromise remain commonplace.

Regional cooperation and awareness raising has continued to support national and regional efforts to improve cybersecurity. Dedicated campaigns on cyber literacy and awareness, such as those undertaken by the Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network (PaCSON) and Cyber Safety Pasifika, are good regional examples of how this can be done.^{96,97} Targeting these dedicated campaigns specifically for Pacific communities has aided their success. The inaugural Pacific Cyber Capacity Building and Coordination Conference (P4C) provided an opportunity for key regional stakeholders to discuss the status of cybersecurity capacity building in the Pacific and inform future strategies, approaches and policies in line with the regions cyber priorities.⁹⁸ The 2023 Pacific ICT Ministerial Meeting has also adopted the Lagatoi Declaration, which

89 Publications | Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network (PaCSON)

90 Rise in M-PAiSA scams – FBC News

91 EbayShop Online Recruitment scam (fijivillage.com)

92 Cyber Security in the Pacific – Challenges of COVID-19; What is Ransomware; and Cybersecurity Threats to Pacific Financial Systems – Accessible on www.pacificfusioncentre.org

93 COVID-19 and Cybercrime in the Pacific - Cybercrime (coe.int)

94 Marshall Islands telecom service hit by cyber attack | RNZ News

95 Vanuatu officials turn to phone books and typewriters, one month after cyber attack | Vanuatu | The Guardian

96 Cyber Smart Pacific 2023 | Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network (PaCSON)

97 Stay safe online | Cyber Safety Pasifika

98 Pacific nations unite to address cybersecurity challenges – Global Forum on Cyber Expertise (thegfce.org)



reaffirms the region's collective aspiration for a well-connected, prosperous, and secure digital landscape.⁹⁹

Horizon 2025

Over the next 12-24 months, there will likely be a net increase in the instances of cybercrime and cyber incidents across the Pacific, as efforts to mitigate cyber threats will continue to be outstripped by the incentives for cybercriminals and other threat actors to conduct malicious acts. Approaches to addressing cybersecurity challenges will remain inconsistent across the region, with some countries likely to take steps towards improving their national capacity, while others will continue to experience difficulties due to budget pressures, limited national capacity, legislative barriers and insufficient infrastructure. At the global level, work is ongoing at the UN to develop a treaty on Cybercrime that commenced in 2022 and is envisaged to be concluded in early February 2024.¹⁰⁰ The new treaty is envisaged to provide a global legal framework for cooperating, preventing, investigating and prosecuting cybercriminals.¹⁰¹ This may result in a strengthened approach at national and regional level for addressing cybercrime. Notwithstanding, support from across the region and from external partners will remain crucial to addressing the cybersecurity needs of the Pacific.

A significant development that will impact the Pacific over the coming 12-24 months is the mainstreaming of artificial intelligence (AI).¹⁰² The increasing availability of AI platforms being used as search engines and interactive platforms that are able to synthesise and provide information based on queries is projected to increase and have broader applications.¹⁰³

Opportunities

- Australia has announced the establishment of deployable, roving cyber experts to quickly support Pacific countries in responding to cyber incidents.
- Increase information sharing through relevant cybersecurity networks such as PaCSO and other regional security networks to assist in improving data collection, producing strategic threat assessments, and informing decision making.
- Consider greater investment in cybersecurity legislation, policies and strategies which adhere to international standards, such as the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime.¹⁰⁴ This could assist in establishing comprehensive national cybersecurity architecture which balances human rights and privacy concerns.
- Deliver consistent budget and maintain ongoing efforts to uplift capability to address cyber threats to the Pacific.
- Learn lessons from other countries' successful strategies – such as the Australian Cyber Security Centre's Essential Eight – as an efficient way to quickly upskill the region.
- Develop the necessary collective capability and capacity to harness the developments in AI for Pacific Island Countries

99 Lagatoti Declaration – Pacific ICT Dialogue (wanpasifik.org)

100 Ad Hoc Committee - Home (unodc.org)

101 What is the UN cybercrime treaty and why does it matter? | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank

102 Exploring The Future: 5 Cutting-Edge Generative AI Trends In 2024 (forbes.com)

103 Ibid.

104 Budapest Convention - Cybercrime (coe.int)



TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Current Situation

Similar to last year's report, available reporting indicates that transnational criminal networks continue to adaptively exploit vulnerabilities and place pressure on Pacific operational agencies. However, as flagged in last year's report and from the Pacific Transnational Crime Network's (PTCN) 2022 Transnational Crime Assessment, underreporting or a lack of reporting of specific crime types, and limited information sharing, have meant that the scope and scale of transnational crime in the region remains a critical intelligence gap.

Criminal deportations to Pacific Island Countries have risen significantly in the last decade.¹⁰⁵ Experts have noted that deportees have a causal link to the growth of transnational crime in the region, including drug trafficking from Asia, Mexico and South America towards Australia and New Zealand.¹⁰⁶

Illicit drug crime remains a significant transnational crime threat within the region, with criminal networks increasingly active in the region¹⁰⁷ and the Pacific serving as both a transit point and destination for illicit substances.¹⁰⁸ Reporting indicates that consumption of drugs is increasing in some countries in the region.¹⁰⁹ The proliferation of small arms trafficking in some parts of the Pacific also remains an issue of concern,¹¹⁰ and one which has long been understood by Pacific countries through the adoption of the Nadi Framework,¹¹¹ and its related Forum Model Weapons Control Bill. Cybercrime actors (see Cybersecurity section) have continued to target the Pacific, particularly as the region becomes more interconnected with the world through the internet.¹¹²

Reports by the UNODC, working with national governments in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea,¹¹³ highlight that environmental crimes are taking place throughout the Pacific, often involving illegal fishing, illegal logging and mining, and flora/fauna trafficking.

Pacific countries often have limited capacity to effectively mitigate or undertake enforcement actions, and in some cases have little hard data to support greater policy action.¹¹⁴ Financial crimes and money laundering, the illegal movement and exploitation of people (see Human Security section), and child sexual exploitation continue to be reported as issues of concern for Forum Members.¹¹⁵ Improved data collection and sharing could support prioritisation and targeting in these areas.

Horizon 2025

Noting the vast maritime expanse of the Pacific, combined with stretched national capacities and limited information sharing, there is a very strong likelihood that transnational criminal networks will seek to increasingly take advantage of porous borders across the region where their activities

105 COVID-19 may create a flood of criminal deportees to the Pacific | PINA

106 <https://www.newstalkzb.co.nz/news/politics/new-zealand-deported-400-criminals-to-pacific-countries-over>

107 Tackling drug trafficking in the Pacific | East Asia Forum

108 Drug trafficking in the Pacific Islands: The impact of transnational crime | Lowy Institute

109 <https://www.unodc.org/roseap/en/pacific/2022/12/synthetic-drugs-workshop/story.html>

110 Tonga citizens take a United States approach to guns, as police push back against illegal firearms trade - ABC News

111 Microsoft Word - Nadi framework.rtf (gunpolicy.org)

112 Cyber crime risk in the Pacific will get worse - experts (1news.co.nz)

113 Microsoft Word - Vanuatu rapid assessment v.3_FINAL SEPT 2022.docx (unodc.org)

114 Microsoft Word - PNG rapid assessment - Final_Cover Page_28-02-2023NG.docx (unodc.org)

115 Pacific news in brief for September 25 | RNZ News



can occur undetected or uninterrupted. High market demand for drugs in Australia and New Zealand will remain a driving force.

Looking towards 2025, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, in conjunction with Regional Law Enforcement Secretariats, has developed a draft Regional Transnational Organised Crime Disruption Strategy which, once endorsed, could positively impact regional and national efforts to dismantle transnational crime networks operating in and through the region.

Child sexual exploitation will highly likely continue to be an underreported issue in the region. As other regions seek to improve their enforcement efforts in this space, predators – including those connected to international networks – may seek to take advantage.

With ongoing partial compliance with international standards set by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), it is likely that the Pacific banking sector may become attractive for those looking to undertake complex money laundering activities.

Reporting by the UNODC and PTCN, scheduled to be delivered by the end of 2023, may provide additional insights into the future trajectory of transnational crime trends in the Pacific

Opportunities

- Strengthened data collection and reporting remains a critical element to understanding the size and scale of transnational crime in the Pacific.
- Increased awareness and utilisation of mechanisms for information sharing such as the PTCN may assist law enforcement agencies in mitigating and addressing a range of transnational crime types, whether it be drug, human or small-arms trafficking.
- Education and training (community and public awareness) for law enforcement agencies will remain critical elements to addressing cyber and financial crimes, particularly as the Pacific becomes more connected to the rest of the world through the internet.
- As child safety enforcement is strengthened globally, there is potential for predators to shift their attention to unprepared regions. Implementing online safety education programs and uplifting regional online safety capability and measures will be crucial steps to reducing the incidence and availability of this material.
- For money laundering, partial compliance with international standards set by the FATF can increase the attractiveness of countries for illicit activity.¹¹⁶ Prioritising compliance with updated FATF recommendations will remain critical to addressing this issue.
- Strengthening multi-sectoral national transnational crime units (TCUs) and engaging with bodies like the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), the PTCN and the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre (PTCCC), can assist with breaking down information barriers and more effectively address issues, both operationally and at the regional strategic level.
- Active incorporation of multi-sectoral approaches with other law enforcement sectors, especially Customs and Immigration, can strengthen efforts against transnational crime, including having necessary structures for criminal deportees in place to reduce recidivism.

¹¹⁶ The FATF Recommendations (fatf-gafi.org)



TRADITIONAL SECURITY

Current Situation

Since 2022, the global security environment has deteriorated further. Although the Pacific remains relatively peaceful, the actions of others continue to pose challenges for the region. The spillover effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine continued to drive up prices on key commodities, although there are now signs that inflation is easing, and prices are beginning to stabilise or drop for some commodities.¹¹⁷ The conflict between Hamas and Israel also caused an unexpected consular emergency for many Forum Members, but coordination amongst individual PIF members saw the successful evacuation of many citizens from across the region.¹¹⁸

Political instability and social unrest remain problematic in some parts of the Pacific. Tribal conflict in the Papua New Guinea (PNG) highlands, and ongoing tensions regarding West Papua and Bougainville demonstrate that although the objective of the Pacific region is for peace, challenges remain.¹¹⁹

Discussions on the best means to harness support from internal and external partners for surge capacity and operational emergencies in the region are ongoing.

The Joint Heads of Pacific Security (JHOPS) 2023 Meeting agreed to focus on areas of cross agency cooperation and coordination to address multidimensional security challenges.¹²⁰

Horizon 2025

Traditional security threats will continue to impact the Pacific over the next two years. The war in Ukraine is showing no indication of abating in the near term, with further sanctions, blockades and impacts on global commodity prices a real possibility into the future. The impact that the Hamas-Israel conflict will have on the region and the globe is yet to be determined, but, regardless, the human cost will likely be high. Although simmering tensions in the South China Sea, on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait will likely not boil over, all have the capacity to intensify dynamic geopolitics and competition. The risk of miscalculation remains heightened in this environment.

Significant for the region in this period will be the issue of Bougainville. Under the Era Kone Covenant, the tabling of the referendum results in the PNG National Parliament by 2023, and implementation of the decision commencing between 2025 and 2027,¹²¹¹²² will likely result in a continued degree of uncertainty that may have significant implications for PNG and the broader region.

Ongoing developments in New Caledonia may have the potential to escalate as pro-independence parties, anti-independence parties and the French Government continue to hold discussions on a suitable process to move forward following the result of the third and final 2021 Referendum.¹²³ The Forum, on the invitation of the New Caledonian Government, sent a Ministerial level

117 1. Outlook for Asia and the Pacific: Challenges to Sustaining Growth and Disinflation1 in: Regional Economic Outlook, Asia and Pacific, October 2023 (imf.org)

118 AUSTRALIA ASSISTS 65 SOLOMON ISLANDERS TO DEPART ISRAEL – Solomon Star News

119 Where is Bougainville on the Path to Independence? – The Diplomat

120 Joint Communique of the Fifth Annual Joint Heads of Pacific Security | Defence

121 abg.gov.pg/index.php/news/read/special-jsb-meeting-endorses-era-kone-covenant

122 Bougainville – What's next? | Lowy Institute

123 French Ministers Visit New Caledonia, With Nickel and the Future on the Agenda – The Diplomat



delegation to observe the 2021 referendum. The Ministerial Committee noted the importance of civil participation given the low voter turnout with only 43.87% of registered voters exercising their right to vote, A significant proportion of Kanak and pro-independence supporters did not vote.¹²⁴¹²⁵¹²⁶

With highly competitive national elections to be held across some parts of the region over the course of the next 12-24 months, social unrest and political instability remain possible in several countries. There also remains the possibility for ongoing domestic unrest to escalate into wider violence given the interplay between several security challenges such as socio-economic pressure, public finances and human security. Cross sectoral security vigilance at national level is vital. Security support between member countries may also be requested to provide necessary support to ensure domestic security concerns are managed effectively.

Opportunities

- The Forum Membership has a strong history of supporting one another in times of need and Pacific regionalism continues to force-multiply national efforts. Working together on new cooperative mechanisms can build on past successes.
- A renewed commitment to regionalism through the 2050 Strategy may provide impetus for the Forum to practically support peaceful and orderly developments in Bougainville, New Caledonia and West Papua.
- The region continues to consider ways that formalise Forum security arrangements, including binding agreements, which can strengthen regional cooperation and promote interoperability on shared security challenges. These mechanisms can strengthen shared responses currently requested through the Biketawa Declaration. They offer the opportunity to clarify the way the region works together as a collective.

¹²⁴ Pacific Islands Forum Ministerial Committee preliminary statement on the conduct of the 2021 New Caledonia Referendum on Independence – Pacific Islands Forum (forumsec.org)

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ FINAL-52nd-PIF-Communique-9-November-2023-1.pdf (forumsec.org)



ECONOMIC SECURITY

Current Situation

The pandemic gave rise to a significant increase in government debt in Pacific economies, with reduced revenue and increased spending through fiscal support packages, primarily financed through loans from multilateral development banks¹²⁷ notwithstanding grants from other development partners. Tourism-dependent economies bore the brunt of this given the drastic fall in revenue. The collective fiscal position of commodity exporters in the region varied as a result of uneven commodity prices.¹²⁸

Despite the growth in debt across the region, growth in the region for 2023 has been revised upward by both the Asian Development Bank¹²⁹ and the International Monetary Fund¹³⁰, largely reflecting the higher than anticipated rebound in tourism activity. The progressive normalisation of supply chains in some sectors and relative gains in the fisheries and construction sectors have also contributed. Notwithstanding, air and sea transport connectivity across the region remains an issue for several Pacific Island Countries not only with other countries in the region and internationally, but also at the national level given their large maritime spaces and limited resources.

Overall growth for the region has seen an upward adjustment, however several countries in the region, such as Papua New Guinea and Nauru, are expected to see subdued growth in 2023.¹³¹ Inflation forecasts have been revised downward for 2023,¹³² however several smaller economies continue to grapple with soaring prices on account of local developments such as the impact of disasters on local foods, tax changes, increased utility charges and other externally driven inflationary pressures.¹³³

Horizon 2025

The regional growth forecast for 2024 has been revised upward from 2.8% to 2.9% by ADB while the IMF in its recent October World Economic Outlook projected an even bigger rebound for the Pacific region of 3.8% from a much lower 0.2%.¹³⁴¹³⁵ The upward revision reflects expectations of a continued strong performance in the tourism industry (with forecasts that tourism is set to return to between 80% and 95% of pre-pandemic levels) and increased public spending and construction activity.¹³⁶ For 2024, inflation expectations are slightly higher than initially forecast with the ADB forecasting an inflation rate of 4.5% (from 4.4%).

However, increased geopolitical tension and geoeconomic fragmentation will continue to impact the global and regional economy.¹³⁷ The ongoing war in Ukraine and the economic and

127 Economic Developments in the South Pacific | Bulletin – June 2023 | RBA

128 Ibid.

129 Asian Development Outlook September 2023 - The Pacific (adb.org)

130 Regional Economic Outlook for Asia and Pacific, October 2023 (imf.org)

131 Asian Development Outlook September 2023 - The Pacific (adb.org)

132 World Economic Outlook, October 2023: Navigating Global Divergences (imf.org)

133 Regional Economic Outlook for Asia and Pacific, October 2023 (imf.org)

134 Regional Economic Outlook for Asia and Pacific, October 2023 (imf.org)

135 Asian Development Outlook September 2023 - The Pacific (adb.org)

136 Tourism Set to Return to Pre-Pandemic Levels in Some Regions in 2023 (unwto.org)

137 Geoeconomic Fragmentation Threatens Food Security and Clean Energy Transition (imf.org)



trade competition between the US and China may result in growing pressures on regional economies.¹³⁸ The implications of an expansion of the Gaza war affecting Persian Gulf and Red Sea maritime trade in particular, remain uncertain.

Moreover, the region's vulnerability to climate events will continue to impact both growth and inflation, with efforts to accelerate climate adaptation and resilience remaining a key policy focus for the Pacific. Given the onset of El Niño in the Pacific,¹³⁹ outputs in the fisheries and agriculture sectors will be impacted to varying degrees across the region.¹⁴⁰

Given these developments, national economies may face further capacity constraints and a tighter revenue stream over the next 24 months. Additional fiscal challenges will be posed by the impact of El Niño, likely exacerbating the impacts of climate change and related weather-induced hazards such as tropical cyclones, flooding, bushfires, and droughts. This will likely increase fiscal pressure on affected countries, some of whom are caught in a continued process of response and recovery. Given the onset of El-Niño and the potential for an increase in significant climate hazards, coupled with global economic pressures, several Pacific Island economies may continue to face debt servicing pressures, supply chain issues.¹⁴¹

Labour mobility programs will continue to have a positive impact on economic growth in the region, from the household level to addressing national concerns such as unemployment, skilling and re-skilling as well as revenue.¹⁴² However, concerns have also been raised related to the pressures of workers being away from their families for long periods, worker exploitation, 'brain drain', and unfair recruitment processes.¹⁴³ These may have the potential to negatively impact labour mobility programs. There remain threats to the effective operation of the Pacific's banking and financial sectors. De-risking by banks external to the region has continued to reduce the number of correspondent banking relationships across the Pacific. Although this de-risking is a global trend, it is being experienced most severely in the South Pacific.¹⁴⁴ This will continue without greater intervention by national governments and regional bodies, particularly in terms of addressing real or perceived shortcomings in FATF compliance, sanctions or tax transparency.¹⁴⁵ Withdrawal of services from the region by banks is also a significant risk, as demonstrated through Bendigo and Adelaide Bank (Nauru's only bank) announcing their intention to withdraw services from Nauru by December 2024.¹⁴⁶

Opportunities

- Progress the development of the Forum's Pacific Roadmap for Economic Development¹⁴⁷ and continue to develop policies to strengthen the fiscal positions of Member countries by rebuilding economic buffers that may have been depleted because of COVID-19.
- Fast track climate adaptation plans and engagement and advocacy to secure climate and

138 Ibid.

139 World Meteorological Organization declares onset of El Niño conditions | World Meteorological Organization (wmo.int)

140 Risks to global food commodity prices from El Niño (europa.eu)

141 PowerPoint Presentation (bsp.com.pg)

142 WEB-WB-PLM-Booklet-15Nov23.pdf (worldbank.org)

143 Ibid.

144 Correspondent Banking in the South Pacific | Bulletin – June 2023 | RBA

145 Ibid.

146 Joint statement from Bendigo Bank and the Government of Nauru

147 The Pacific Roadmap for Economic Development is a policy document that will be aligned to the 2050 Strategy and will outline the critical economic strategies and pathways to develop a robust, inclusive and responsive economic and financial strategy for the sustainable economic prosperity of the Pacific to achieve Leaders aspirations under the Resource and Economic Development thematic area of the 2050 Strategy (Blue-Pacific-Economic-Strategy-2022.pdf (forumsec.org).



disaster risk financing including the capitalisation of the Pacific Resilience Facility, and other relevant financing mechanisms.

- Promote high value niche agricultural and craft exports, showcasing the region's competitive advantage to generate new export income opportunities to help offset increased import prices.
- Private sector led growth will be key for economic growth across the region and may be bolstered by removing trade barriers and improving the ease of doing business, as well as inclusive of partnerships to strengthen sea and air connectivity.
- Forum Leaders have called for the development of principles to guide and coordinate Labour Mobility in the region that may provide an opportunity to strengthen the positive aspects as well as address the unintended consequences of labour mobility for both sending and recipient countries.
- On-going national and regional efforts to improve perceived or real shortcomings in banking and financial sectors will remain critical to ensuring sufficient correspondent banking relationships across the region.



PRESERVING THE RULE OF LAW

Current Situation

Political uncertainty, governance issues and limited access to resources continue to test the health of some democratic systems across the region. As outlined at the 2023 Pre-UN Convention Against Corruption Conference of States Parties meeting in Suva, corruption continues to slow progress, growth and economic development, undermine democracy and the rule of law, and create permissive environments for criminal networks.¹⁴⁸ The Economist Intelligence Unit's 2022 Democracy Index highlighted shortcomings in several electoral systems across the region.¹⁴⁹ Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index also highlighted that although some gains have been made in the region, more is needed to address corruption and achieve the Teieniwa Vision.¹⁵⁰¹⁵¹ Although not a comprehensive description of the democratic health of the whole region, these indexes, coupled with ongoing media reporting and legal proceedings,¹⁵² give a sense of the scale of the issues still facing the Pacific.

Misinformation and disinformation in the Pacific continue to negatively impact Pacific Island Countries' sovereignty and social cohesion. These issues have become increasingly acute through greater internet connectivity and use of social media. Noting the growing reliance across the region on social media for news and information,¹⁵³ the Pacific has almost certainly experienced unattributed misinformation and disinformation campaigns over the last 18 months, primarily connected to national elections and COVID-19.¹⁵⁴¹⁵⁵ Foreign interference also remains an insidious threat and continues to be called out in some parts of the region,¹⁵⁶ however guarding against this threat continues to be challenging for Forum members, particularly those still building critical capabilities to address foreign interference and cybersecurity.

Horizon 2025

Over the next 24 months, and as the region becomes more connected via the internet, misinformation and disinformation will continue to proliferate, particularly in the lead up to national elections or in relation to the passage or implementation of key pieces of legislation or policy.¹⁵⁷ The scale and intent of misinformation and disinformation may shift as global geopolitical dynamics are increasingly felt in the region. Differentiating what is real and what is engineered will also become more difficult with increasingly sophisticated technology used to spread misinformation and disinformation (i.e., deep fakes and the weaponisation of data).¹⁵⁸

Pacific Island Countries will remain vulnerable to foreign interference, particularly as geopolitical dynamics continue to heat up globally. Corruption will remain an ongoing threat

148 REMARKS: SG Puna to Pre-UNCAC COSP Conference – Pacific Islands Forum (forumsec.org)

149 Democracy Index 2022 final (eiu.com)

150 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index: Explore the... - Transparency.org

151 Teieniwa_Vision_PUAC_post_LEADERS.FINAL_.pdf (forumsec.org)

152 Every "NO" to Corruption Counts | News | dailypost.vu

153 How the Pacific Islands became a hotbed of online misinformation | The Spinoff

154 PNG election misinformation 'worse than ever' | RNZ News

155 Pacific nations worried over 'disinformation' on carbon levy plan | RNZ News

156 New Zealand intelligence report accuses China of 'foreign interference' | New Zealand | The Guardian

157 Issue Brief: How Disinformation Impacts Politics and Publics - NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY (ned.org)

158 Data misuse and disinformation: Technology and the 2022 elections | Brookings



to the democratic health of the Pacific, and many countries in the region lack effective anti-corruption review mechanisms, which could help in identifying opportunities to strengthen anti-corruption regimes. Although these trends are not unique to the Pacific, limited institutional capability will curb countries' abilities to address these issues.

Opportunities

- Effective collaboration and information sharing with other Forum members and external actors on corruption, and aligning with key international conventions, will continue to be a key element to upskilling Pacific countries on identifying and addressing this threat. The outcomes of the 10th Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption convened in late 2023, coupled with the ongoing work through the establishment of a Taskforce to oversee the implementation of the Teieniwa Vision will provide a valuable opportunity for countries to review their national settings, share information on effective strategies and chart a way forward.¹⁵⁹
- National strategies raising awareness on misinformation and disinformation have proven their effectiveness in addressing this increasingly pervasive issue,¹⁶⁰ and is an area Forum members may wish to explore further, particularly as internet connectivity and social media use continues to increase. Fact checking institutions – such as RMIT's FactLab¹⁶¹ – can also provide a useful external reference point to verify the veracity of claims made online or in the media.
- Adaptive legislation to address foreign influence and interference may assist Forum members in managing external influences seeking to guide or shape political or social outcomes. With numerous examples to draw from globally, such legislation can provide greater transparency to decision making and implementation.

159 United States Hosts the 10th Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption - United States Department of State

160 Singapore's battle against disinformation and foreign influence bids | The Straits Times

161 RMIT FactLab - RMIT University



IMPLICATIONS OF DYNAMIC GEOPOLITICS

Current Situation

Continuing the trends outlined in last year's report, the strategic significance and value of the Pacific has been increasingly recognised by external actors, and interest in the Pacific has continued to intensify bilateral, regional and international engagements.¹⁶² The region also continues to operate within an increasingly fractured multipolar system, with oppositional use of the multilateral system straining consensus-based multilateralism, and hindering progress on key Pacific priorities like climate change.¹⁶³

Greater strategic attention offers opportunities for the region, but also poses several risks. The region is increasingly contested as external actors seek greater influence and access, with new embassies announced and opened,¹⁶⁴¹⁶⁵ continued attention on establishing security cooperation agreements, and ongoing engagements and training in the defence, law enforcement and security space.¹⁶⁶¹⁶⁷ Beyond major powers, engagements with middle powers from outside the region have continued at pace, providing greater options for the region. However, despite the region's ongoing calls for external actors to utilise existing regional mechanisms for cooperation, approaches have remained divergent, and competition has continued to sharpen. The inconsistent application of regional positions and policies may also contribute to duplication of effort and lack of coordination.

Horizon 2025

Geopolitics and strategic competition will continue to sharpen over the course of the next 12-24 months, and it is likely that engagement with the Pacific will remain a priority for many external partners, particularly in defence, law enforcement and security, and maritime domain activities. However, Pacific development and security choices may create undue long-term dependencies on specific partners, especially as countries retain high levels of national debt and technologies bifurcate.¹⁶⁸ The Pacific will continue to face difficulties in building the technical skills required to make assessments of the risks and benefits associated with particular industries and technologies. Finding trusted technical support to inform regional countries' views on complex emerging issues will remain difficult.

There is also a possibility that the interest by external actors in the Pacific – primarily the US and China – may reduce or alter due to domestic challenges, political shifts, or priorities in other regions. With substantial pressures facing China's economy, an uncertain election result in the US, and several current and potential flashpoints around the globe, where the Pacific sits amongst other competing priorities – many of which are closer to home – is unclear.

Within the context of geopolitics, multilateral systems and international fora will continue to come under increasing strain over the course of the next 12-24 months.

162 REMARKS: PIF SG, Henry Puna at the 2023 Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting – Pacific Islands Forum (forumsec.org)

163 The UN and the multilateral system are in crisis – what the Global South must do (theconversation.com)

164 Intent to Open U.S. Embassy Port Vila, Republic of Vanuatu - United States Department of State

165 Opening of the U.S. Embassy in Honiara, Solomon Islands - United States Department of State

166 Naval ship Qi Jiguang to visit Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Fiji - China Military

167 U.S. Coast Guard stands up two new marine environmental response units Honolulu > United States Coast Guard News > Press Releases (uscg.mil)

168 The Pacific has a spiralling debt problem – and this is what governments can do about it - ABC News

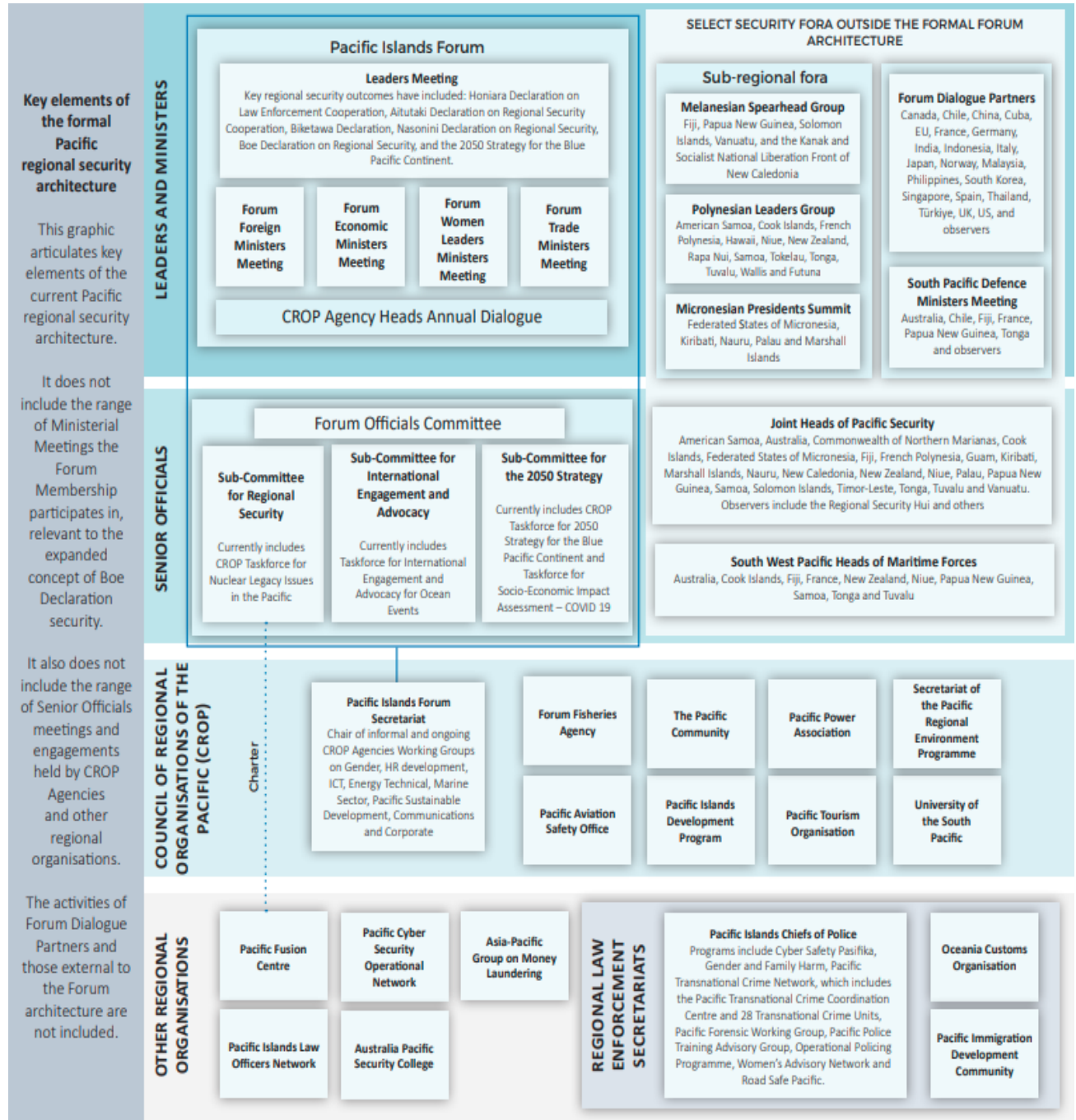


Opportunities

- Pacific nations will likely need to increasingly balance external interests with safeguarding their own sovereignty, as well as national and regional security interests. Risks can be managed through comprehensive analysis of the long-term opportunities and risks associated with offers and projects, while also remaining cognisant of transparency, quality, efficiencies, and interoperability.
- Once regional political consensus and formal agreement is reached, regional cohesion and confidence can be enhanced through consistent alignment in bilateral arrangements, and by consultation and clarification with other Pacific members where divergence is considered warranted by particular national sovereign interest.
- When calibrated to Forum security priorities, opportunities have the potential to advance shared objectives under the Boe Declaration and the 2050 Strategy. Strategic manoeuvrability can provide countries with greater flexibility and enable them to fully realise the benefits of geostrategic competition. Regional approaches to external engagement on certain issues and information sharing with other Forum Members on lessons learnt may also assist.
- Negotiating as a coordinated Pacific bloc has been critical to achieving outcomes on important priorities such as climate change and strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime. As the multilateral system and rules-based order come under increasing strain, coordination amongst Forum Members to make headway on Pacific priorities may be an effective solution.



ANNEX A - VISUALISING THE CURRENT PACIFIC REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE







PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM



PACIFIC
FUSION
CENTRE