



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

**Combined fourth and fifth periodic reports submitted by
Solomon Islands under article 18 of the Convention, due
in 2024^{*,**,**}**

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*** The annexes to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



Acronym

AAS	Affirmative Action Strategy
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AHTAC	Anti-Human Trafficking Advisory Committee
CBR	Community-based Rehabilitation
CBSI	Central Bank of Solomon Islands
CCC	Christian Care Centre
CCD	Climate Change Division
CFWA	Child and Family Welfare Act
CRC	Convention on the Rights of a Child
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey 2015
EVAWG	Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
FPA	Family Protection Act
FSC	Family Support Centre
FVU	Family Violence Unit
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GEWD	Gender Equality and Women's Development
GFP	Gender Focal Point
HCC	Honiara City Council
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPAM	Institute of Public Administration and Management
IRWD	International Rural Women's Day
IWD	International Women's Day
LRC	Law Reform Commission
MAL	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
MCILI	Ministry of Commerce Industry Labour and Immigration
MECDM	Ministry of Environment Climate Change Disaster Management and Meteorology
MEHRD	Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development
MFMR	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources
MHMS	Ministry of Health and Medical Services
MJLA	Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs
MMERE	Ministry of Mines Energy and Rural Electrification
MPNSCS	Ministry of Police National Security and Corrective Services

MPS	Ministry of Public Service
MSME	Micro Small Medium Enterprise
MTGPEA	Ministry of Traditional Governance Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs
MWYCFA	Ministry of Women Youth Children and Family Affairs
NCCP	National Climate Change Policy
NCW	National Council of Women
NDC	National Disaster Council
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NDMP	National Disaster Management Plan
NDS	National Development Strategy
NHSP	National Health Strategic Plan
NPC	National Protection Committee
NSEEWG	National Strategy on the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls
NSO	National Statistics Office
NST	National Stakeholder's Taskforce
ODPP	Office of the Public Prosecutions
PSDI	Private Sector Development Initiative
PSO	Public Solicitors Office
PWD	People with Disability
RSIPF	Royal Solomon Islands Police Force
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SICCI	Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce
SIG	Solomon Islands Government
SINU	Solomon Islands National University
SIPNET	Solomon Islands Professional Women's Network
SIPPA	Solomon Islands Planned Parenthood Association
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health Rights
STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics
TFGBV	Technology Facilitated Gender Based violence
TGCFB	Traditional Governance and Customs Facilitation Bill
TIP	Trafficking in Person
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USP	University of the South Pacific

RWASH	Rural Water and Sanitation Hygiene
WDD	Women's Development Division
WIL	Women in Leadership
WITSI	Women in IT Solomon Islands
WPS NAP	Women Peace and Security National Action Plan

I. General

Situation of women in the Solomon Islands

1. The key sources of information for providing disaggregated data and statistics on the situations of women in Solomon Islands is from the *2019 National Population and Housing Census (Census)*, the *Demographic Health Survey (DHS) 2015* and the increasing sectoral and development partners' researches, surveys and reports including those specifically on women. In the absence of a standalone monitoring framework for the CEDAW for Solomon Islands, these has become valuable sources of information on the situation of women in Solomon Islands.

2. According to the *2019 Census*, women of Solomon Islands make up almost half of the population (351,560 females and 369,396 males), where the majority (72.4%) lives in rural areas compared to 27.6% in urban areas.

3. The *DHS 2015*, the *2019 Census* and the *Equality Insights Rapid Survey 2022* provides strong evidence related to women's overrepresentation in the unpaid care and domestic work. Unpaid care work is the biggest barrier to women's economic empowerment, having repercussions for women's financial security and economic opportunities more broadly.^{1,2}

4. Women continue to be underrepresented in all levels of decision making in Solomon Islands making it one of the least progressed areas in advancing gender equality in Solomon Islands. Only 8 women has ever been elected into Parliament since Solomon Islands gained Independence in 1978 and 17 women into Provincial Assemblies since the establishments of Provincial Assemblies in 1981. Out of the current 50 Members of Parliament only three are females and out of the current 172 Members of Provincial Assemblies, only three are females. Only 23% of women are business owners and are largely in the sector of entertainment and catering (63%); more than half of Solomon Islands boards have no women directors with only two boards with more than 30% women directors; 1 out of 15 or only 7% of women are in senior management particularly as CEOs; women are underrepresented on boards in all organization types in Solomon Islands; and women are more represented in leadership in media and communications, agriculture and fisheries, and utilities than in other sectors in Solomon Islands.³

5. While gender gaps in education has narrowed over the decades, female enrolment generally and secondary and tertiary school attainments continue to be slightly lower than males. The number of females not attending school has increased (14.5%) compared to males (10.9%) since the *2009 Census*. However, there is almost equal numbers of females and males who have completed primary education, 47% and 46%, respectively. Language proficiency in English, pidgin, local languages and other languages were generally higher for men (75%) than women (70.7%).

6. Gender Based Violence is very costly for Solomon Islands with an estimated direct out of pocket expenditures amounting to USD\$536,801 by adult women accessing intimate partner violence (IPV) services, per year; an annual productivity loss of women in the formal sector⁴ due to IPV, is estimated to be USD\$1509 million

¹ *Oxfam and Strongim Bisnis, Community Perception of Gender Norms and Economic Opportunity in Rural Solomon Islands study*, 2018.

² *MWYCFEA National Strategy on the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls*.

³ *'Leadership Matters Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in The Pacific'* report by PSDI, 2021.

⁴ These figures do not take into consideration the informal sector, whose composition is disproportionately female. It can be assumed that the annual productivity loss is higher.

and the equivalent of 1,415,997 lost workdays amounting to almost 1% of the country's GDP.⁵

7. Trafficking in person (TIP) situations is prevalent near communities where there is operation of an extractive industry.⁶ Between 2015 and 2018, there has been a steady increase of victims of labour trafficking reported: 12 victims in 2015; 15 in 2016; and in 2018, 31 victims. In 2017, 2 local female victims of child trafficking were also reported.

8. There is still data gap on the prevalence rate of Technology-facilitated Gender Based Violence (TFGBV) however, the high prevalence rate of IPV and the digital state of Solomon Islands has prompted increased focus on this issue. At the start of 2023, internet penetration stood at 36.1 percent, there were 124.0 thousand social media users equating to 16.9 percent of the total population and a total of 523.2 thousand cellular mobile connections were active equivalent to 71.4 percent of the total population.

9. There are mixed progresses in achieving women's health outcomes in the Solomon Islands. The average number of births per woman in Solomon Islands had declined from 4.7 to 3.8, since the 2009 Census where the average age of mothers giving birth was 32 yrs. Life expectancies at birth has also improved for both females (73.1 to 74.2 years) and males (66.2 to 70 years) since the last Census. Women marry at a younger age than men, where average age at marriage was 26.5 and 22.8 years for males and females, respectively.

10. While there is almost universal knowledge of contraception in Solomon Islands, with 94% of women and 98% of men knowing at least one method, the contraceptive prevalence rate of married women has declined from 35% in 2006/2007 to 29% in 2015.⁷ About 7 out of 10 women (69%) made four or more antenatal care visits during their entire pregnancy. Antenatal care attendance was slightly lower in 2015 than it was in 2007. 94% of women who had a live birth in the five years preceding the *DHS 2015* received antenatal care from a skilled healthcare professional for their last birth. Females make up 55% of the health workforce in Solomon Islands.

11. Approximately 11% of the population reported at least a functional form of disability where seeing difficulties is the most prevalent (10.6%), of which it was more prevalent in females, 51%. There was higher prevalence of disability for females especially those residing in rural area and within the elderly population.

12. According to the *Solomon Islands Equality Insights Rapid 2022* survey, an individual-level, multidimensional poverty measure in relation to fifteen dimensions of life, women are likely to be more severely deprived than men in the following dimensions: relationships, safety, sanitation and time use. People with disability were also more likely to experience severe deprivation in time use, water and work.

13. There has been increasing government sectoral policies and legislation that underpins gender equality and social inclusion as its guiding principle or strategy for implementation and standalone sectoral gender policies. This will enable improved gender statistics from various sectors.

⁵ *Costing the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence and the Resources Required to Address it Study* coordinated by MWYCFA, UN Women and SAFENET, 2022.

⁶ 2019 Community Health and Mobility in the Pacific – Solomon Islands Case Study.

⁷ *DHS 2006-2007* and *DHS 2015*.

Improving data collection and analysis

14. There has been significant progress to improve the collection and analysis of gender statistics by government.

15. Key efforts by the National Statistics Office (NSO) includes:

(a) The development of the *National Statistics Development Strategy 2015–2035* providing the guiding strategy for all key stakeholders in the production, dissemination and use of statistics for policy, development planning, and decision making, aligned to international agreements such as the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* and Human Rights Conventions including *CEDAW*. Key surveys provided by the NSO includes the *Solomon Islands Population and Housing Census* and the *DHS*. Refer to Annex 1 for SDG 5 indicators captured in the *National Census* and the *DHS*;

(b) The launching of the most recent *2019 Census*, in 2023, providing important updated sex and disaggregated data to inform policy making and programming;

(c) Development of a gender monograph based on the *2009 Census*. Planning is underway to update the gender monograph based on the *2019 Census*;

(d) There is more frequent and consistent dissemination of national statistics on International Trade, Honiara Consumer Price Index and Visitors Arrivals through Bulletins via the Solomon Islands Governments (SIG) email network. A digital billboard located in Honiara also displays findings of national surveys;

(e) Commitment to the *2020 Pacific Roadmap for Gender Statistics* and is a member of the regional gender statistics coordination group. The group held their 6th Meeting in 2023; and

(f) Together with the Ministry of Women Youth Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) supported by International Women's Development Association conducted a pilot *Equality Insights Study* (formerly known as the *Individual Deprivation Measure Study*) in 2020 and a nation-wide *Equality Insights Rapid Study* in 2022 to strengthen the availability of gender statistics and poverty data in Solomon Islands and support action on the *SDGs*.

16. Key efforts by the Ministry of National Planning and Development Coordination includes:

(a) The development of the *National Development Strategy 2016–2035 (NDS)*, the overall national framework that outlines Solomon Islands national socioeconomic priorities and its overall planning and implementation procedures and processes. The *NDS* is Solomon Islands translation of the *SDGs* to country-level;

(b) The *NDS* outlines five long term development objectives with corresponding fifteen (15) Medium Strategies and a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Performance Framework outlining 109 *SDGs* performance indicators and targets and reporting agencies. Of the 109 *SDG* indicators, only 34 are gender specific;⁸ and

(c) Development of a M&E System Analysis to strengthen the monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the performance of the *NDS*.

17. Key efforts and initiatives by the MWYCFA supported by development partners include:

⁸ Refer to Annex 2.

(a) The development of the *Solomon Islands Country Gender Assessment Report* in 2015, a first of its kind, providing a baseline for monitoring progress towards gender equality in line with the five key priority outcomes of the *National Gender Equality and Women's Development (GEWD) Policy 2010*;

(b) The development of the *Gender Equality: Where do we stand? Solomon Islands Report* launched in 2017, providing a statistical analysis of the implementation progress of the *GEWD Policy 2010*. The report drew on statistics provided by national surveys particularly the *2009 Census* and the *DHS 2007*. The report informed the development of the *GEWD 2016–2020 Policy*;

(c) A study '*Costing the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence and the Resources Required to Address it*' was coordinated together with SAFENET and UN Women, to contribute to gender-responsive budgeting efforts in Solomon Islands;

(d) Development of a *GEWD Database* launched in 2023 to support the collection, availability and use of gender statistics aligned to the *GEWD 2016–2020 Policy*; and

(e) Introduction of a gender-based violence (GBV) administrative data collection and monitoring system for the SAFENET⁹ in 2020 to enable measurement of GBV multi-sector service delivery and trends throughout the country and better monitoring of the network as a whole. Evaluation and review of the current data collection tool and data sharing processes is underway. The evaluation will also consider introduction of a new, online database for SAFENET data collection.

18. The 2021 Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative's *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific (PSDI)* was launched establishing a baseline for women's representation in senior business leadership, and comparing these findings to global averages.

19. Capacity building have been a key focus to improving the production and use of gender data and statistics in the Solomon Islands.¹⁰

II. Women's rights and gender equality in COVID-19 in relation to the pandemic, recovery efforts and global crises

Efforts and mechanisms for addressing COVID-19 and its long-term impact

20. The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for the government to strengthen its preparation, response and recovery from not only the pandemic but for any future national and global crises. This was through relevant policy and legislative development and reforms and by strengthening existing structures, systems and protocols.

21. In the absence of a Public Health and Emergency legislation, Solomon Islands relied on the State of Public Emergency for its COVID-19 preparedness and responses. This gap was addressed through the development of a *Public Health and Emergency Bill (PHEB) 2021* which seeks to ensure effective and well-coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic and any similar events. The Bill is pending

⁹ A network of government and non-government organizations to strengthen response, referral and coordination of Sexual and Gender Based Violence services (SGBV) at the national and provincial level.

¹⁰ Refer to Annex 3.

tabling in Parliament. A legislative Committee was established to provide oversight of the development of the *PHEB*.

22. The Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology (MECDM), amalgamated in 2007 and expanded in 2010, has the core function of ensuring necessary safeguards to socio-economic development of the Solomon Islands including in the use of natural resources, addressing impact of climate change and other hazards and managing disaster preparedness and their consequences. The MECDM has 5 core divisions including the Climate Change Division (CCD) and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO).

23. The overall disaster management operation arrangement of the NDMO was the main national mechanism to addressing the effects of COVID 19 in Solomon Islands. The arrangement is also mirrored at the Provincial and Village levels. The NDMO mandate is outlined in the *National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) 2018*.¹¹

24. The *NDMP 2018* established two committees of the National Disaster Council (NDC) – the National Disaster Operations Committee (N-DOC) and the Recovery Coordination Committee (RCC). The core function of the N-DOC is to coordinate the preparedness and response to disasters and the transition into recovery and rehabilitation. The RCC is responsible for the coordination of recovery and rehabilitation from disasters through overseeing policy development and implementation, arrangements and procedures. Both Committees have duties for preparedness when there is no disaster and during and following a disaster.

25. To ensure a holistic response to disasters and emergencies situation, the N-DOC established six Sector Committees for the following Sectors: Health, Infrastructure, Protection, Livelihood, Camp Management and Education. Key functions of the Sector Committees include coordination; preparing for and delivering sector responses to disaster events and contributing to assessments of impacts of disasters. Each Committees follows a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for activation, operation and coordination.

26. The *NDMP 2018* also established the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC), responsible for the management of disaster information including SIG consolidated Situational Report (SITREP) and national level disaster planning and operations to support sector and provincial response to disaster events including managing donations, funds and external support. NEOC was the key driver who ensured NDC's COVID-19 Response Intent. Attached to the NEOC is the National Emergency Response Team (NERT) responsible for the coordination of the management of all Institutional Quarantine Facilities. The NERT is a nationally deployable team to emergency areas.

27. A COVID-19 Oversight Committee was also established under the Office of the Prime Minister to oversee its response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

28. To ensure safe and timely management and care of COVID-19 patients at different levels such as peripheral clinics and provincial and national hospitals, a comprehensive National COVID-19 Clinical Management Guidelines was developed by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS) for clinicians and health care workers.

29. COVID-19 Response Emergency Zone lockdown plans were also developed and implemented to prevent and mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 to communities.

30. Communication partners of the MHMS Health Promotion Unit, consisting mostly of NGOs, were mobilised and conducted comprehensive nation-wide

¹¹ Refer to Annex 4 for the Disaster Management Operational Arrangement.

dissemination of COVID-19 information and its preventative measures. The NGOs included World Vision, Oxfam, People with Disability Solomon Islands, Young Women Christian Association, Solomon Islands Deaf Association, Save the Children and Solomon Islands Planned Parenthood Association (SIPPA). Mediums used to spread the messages were through church announcements, Our Telekom and Bmobile SMSs, radio spots and talk shows on radio stations, billboards and distribution of Information, Communication and Education materials. The Solomon Islands Red Cross reached over 32,000 people with COVID-19 messages and World Vision an estimated number of around 25, 000 beneficiaries. A key lesson learnt was messages were more effective when disseminated together with hygiene kits.

Gender equality and women's empowerment

31. The *NDMP 2018* have strong and explicit provisions for the involvement of women and community inclusiveness particularly marginalised groups, those in remote areas, those with disabilities and the elderly, in all disaster management operations arrangements including in recovery and rehabilitation. The Plan states that every effort must be made to have at least two women included in each Committees, working group or teams established under the disaster operations arrangements and is mandatory for arrangements addressing welfare and protection, relief distribution and shelter. The Plan also emphasises the need to pay attention to the first line protection and needs of women, children and vulnerable groups particularly at the village level.

32. The *GEWD Policy 2021–2027*, the National Policy to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girl (*EVAWG*) *Policy 2021–2027* and the *National Youth Policy 2017–2030* brings attention to the need for gender, women and girl's perspectives and considerations to be incorporated into emergencies, pandemics and disasters management and recovery plans. Also discussed in Article 14.

33. The NDMO National Protection Sector Committee (NPC) established in 2017, played a key role in ensuring protection perspectives of those most vulnerable were incorporated into the two years of preparedness for COVID 19 in 2020 to 2021 and response in 2022. Of significance was the establishment of 3 Sub-Committees on Child Protection in Emergencies; Disability in Emergencies; and Gender Based Violence in Emergencies (GBViE), in March 2020. NPC is also responsible for mainstreaming Protection across the other Sectoral Committees.

34. The GBViE Subcommittee, made up of SAFENET members and other GBV stakeholders, ensured a coordinated and strong response to ending violence against women and girls during the pandemic. Please refer to Annex 5 and 6 for an overview of the work carried out by the GBViE Subcommittee in preparing and responding to COVID-19 and the GBV COVID-19 Referral Pathway, respectively.

35. Between 2018 and 2022, the NPC established Protection Sector Committees in all the 9 Provinces ensuring the engagement of women in all preparedness and response arrangements including in decision making levels.

36. Women made up more than half of frontline responders to COVID-19. They were nurses, police, camp management etc. Community and Church Women Groups were also instrumental in ensuring the timely distribution of food to communities during COVID-19.

III. Visibility of the Convention, the Optional Protocol thereto and the Committee's general recommendations

Dissemination

37. The dissemination of the Convention and the optional protocol is on-going both at the national and provincial level, by both government and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). However, dissemination is on an ad hoc basis and based on request.

38. There is need for clear communication and dissemination strategies especially the use of new information and communication technologies of the Convention and Optional Protocol to ensure its reach to all government ministries and sectors both at the National and Provincial Level and therefore women living in remote areas.

39. Efforts to ensure the dissemination of CEDAW to the provinces and rural areas includes:

(a) The MWYCFA Women's Development Division's (WDD) on-going Gender-related awareness and training programs and coordination workshops that incorporates CEDAW, for government and CSOs including targeted trainings for Provincial Women Desk Officers. The WDD provides various gender related trainings including on gender and human rights; life skills; savings clubs establishment; financial inclusion; in partnership with various stakeholders, business and entrepreneurship trainings; women in leadership; eliminating gender-based violence; and on the *Family Protection Act (FPA) 2014*. These trainings are on-going and are based on requests. Training mediums used includes power point presentations, short video clips on Human Rights and CEDAW and leaflets summarising the 16 substantive articles of CEDAW;

(b) Various gender forums and dialogues held by stakeholders including development partners i.e. a National Gender Equality forum in January 2015 by the Pacific Community (SPC) for CSOs including the Solomon Islands National Council of Women (NCW). The NCW has an established reach to the rural communities through its Provincial Council of Women and Ward Council of women setups;

(c) Through platforms provided by rural-based women's organisation's programs and activities i.e. West AreAre Rokotanikeni Association annual general meetings;

(d) International Annual events such as the International Women's Day (IWD) and International Rural Women's Day (IRWD).

40. A milestone impact of WDD's awareness and advocacy on gender and CEDAW is the establishment of provincial gender and women's policies in seven of the ten provinces of Solomon Islands, namely Western, Malaita, Guadalcanal, Choiseul, Temotu, Central and Honiara City Council (HCC), all aligned to CEDAW and the Concluding Observations.

41. The Solomon Island National Advisory Committee on CEDAW (SINACC) and the CEDAW NGO Committee are the oversight and coordination mechanism for CEDAW in the Solomon Islands. While the SINACC membership and Terms of Reference (TOR) has been revised and endorsed this mechanism needs to be revived.

42. The MWYCFA launched its website in 2015 but has not been able to fully utilise the website for dissemination of information, programs and activities in line with its mandate, due largely to the lack of technical capacity on website development and design.

43. In February 2024 an Inception and Preparatory workshop to review and update Solomon Islands legislative compliance with CEDAW was held with SIG Officials and CSO representatives providing an opportunity for the participants to be made aware of CEDAW obligations. The workshop was the first of stakeholder engagements required for the review process. The outcome will be a final report on Translating CEDAW into Law: CEDAW Legislative Compliance in Solomon Islands which will also be accompanied by an updated compliance matrix. Review is expected to be completed by July 2024.

Trainings on CEDAW

44. There is no clear guideline for the application of CEDAW by judges in their judicial decision-making and constitutional interpretation. It is solely the discretion of the judge whether to adopt CEDAW or not in their judgements.

45. The *Family Protection Act (FPA) 2014* makes reference to CEDAW and *Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC)* as a key object, ensuring that the enforcement of the Act must be administered within the standards and principles of the CEDAW.

46. Judges attends trainings by SPC and Commonwealth from time to time on the application of international law including CEDAW. There is also Professional Development Training for Judges and Magistrates held biannually that incorporates Gender and human rights. Annual retreats for all magistrates include discussion on the application of international laws including CEDAW.

47. Training for lawyers in the SI, includes being trained on CEDAW and the optional protocol and procedures for taking gender discrimination matters to the CEDAW Committee.

48. The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) National Community Policing and Family Violence Unit (FVU) conducts trainings on police duties under the FPA which includes principles of CRC and CEDAW. Their trainings are conducted in Honiara and rural provinces. Police trainings are guided by a training manual developed by the RSIPF Learning Development and National Community Policing and FVU.¹²

49. Progress has been made to formally institutionalise Gender Trainings including CEDAW into the Public Service through the government's training arm, the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM). In 2019, IPAM developed a Gender Training Manual to be incorporated into the '*Knowing your Public Service course*'. While the manual is yet to be formally socialised and operational, in 2021, it was used to conduct a gender mainstreaming training for the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL). 12 females and 18 males from the government Ministries of MWYCFA, Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR) and MAL attended the training.

50. In October 2022, a week-long training was held on how to produce and use gender statistics to promote equality which included CEDAW. The training participants were gender data users and producers including gender focal points (GFPs) in various government ministries, women's rights organizations and CSO representatives.

¹² Please refer to Annex 7 for number of Police trained on the *FPA 2014*.

51. Trainings of the SIG GFPs on gender and gender related topics including CEDAW are on-going. A two-day refresher training was conducted for GFPs and Assistant GFPs in June 2019 by the Ministry of Public Service (MPS).

52. A partnership between the MPS (IPAM), MWYCFA and Australian Government saw for the first time a Post Graduate Certificate in Gender Studies by University of the South Pacific (USP) offered in-country to Public officers in 2018. Approximately 30 public officers were enrolled in the course. The Post Graduate Certificate in Gender Studies includes CEDAW.

53. The Solomon Islands National Parliament Office (NPO) is committed to ensuring that a gender perspective is incorporated into their programs and activities in line with their mandate. One of the strategic priorities of the NPO Strategic Plan 2022–2026 is to strengthen its engagement with the public including its interaction with civil society, and engagement with youth, women and marginalised groups.

54. In 2017, an Outrigger Workshop was held for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff which included specific objectives on establishing common understanding on gender and gender biases in modern Pacific Parliaments; and raising awareness on the role of Parliament in advancing gender equality through laws and policies.

55. In planning for the Induction of the newly elected Members of Parliament (MPs), in 2023, consultations were held with MPs and relevant government ministries to inform the Induction Program. The MWYCFA was also consulted recommending adequate session-time during the Induction for the opportunity for gender-sensitising of the new MPs.

The national gender equality and women’s development policy

56. The *National Gender Equality and Women’s Development Policy 2021–2027 (GEWD Policy)* is the 3rd iteration of the *GEWD Policy*, building on the *GEWD Policy 2016–2020*. The *GEWD Policy* is the overarching framework for achieving gender equality and women’s rights in Solomon Islands strongly reflecting Solomon Islands commitment to the implementation of *CEDAW* and the *SDGs*. The *GEWD Policy* seeks the following priority outcome areas:

- (a) Gender-responsive government programmes and services;
- (b) Improved economic status of women;
- (c) Equal participation of women and men at all levels of decision-making, governance and leadership;
- (d) Preventing and responding to violence against women and girls;
- (e) Women and girls are fully engaged in peace and security efforts, including in crisis, post-crisis and disaster situations;
- (f) Gender equality and equity in education, training, and out-of-school programmes;
- (g) Advancement of Women’s Sexual and Reproductive health and rights.

57. A preliminary Results Framework is also attached to the *GEWD Policy*, that can be adapted based on ongoing Monitoring Evaluation and Learning of the *GEWD Policy* implementation.

IV. Constitutional framework and discriminatory laws

Definition of discrimination

58. The Constitution Section 15 (1) Subject to the provisions of subsections (5), (6) and (9) of this section, no law shall make any provision that is discriminatory either of itself or in its effect. (5) Subsection (1) of this section shall not apply to any law so far as that law makes provision-(f) for the advancement of the more disadvantaged members of the community; or Section 15 (2) of the Constitution prohibits discrimination by any written law or performance of the function of any public office or public authority. Section 15(4) defines discrimination and one of the prohibited grounds is sex. The definition also includes discrimination experienced by persons who miss out on privileges and are subjected to disadvantages.

59. The preamble of the Constitution as amended to 2018 (b); We the people of Solomon Islands, AGREE AND PLEDGE that (b) we shall uphold the principles of equality, social justice and the equitable distribution of incomes.

Draft federal constitution

60. The Draft Federal Constitution provides for equality and non-discrimination. Chapter 3. Clause 19 (1) articulates that *'everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefits of the law.'* Clause 19 (2) provides that *'equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms recognised in this Chapter or elsewhere in the law.'* Clause 19(3) prohibits discrimination including intersectional discrimination. Prohibited grounds of discrimination are birth, age, ethnicity, social origin, race, colour, language, religion, conscience, belief or opinion, culture, sex, pregnancy, marital status, disability, social status or economic status.

61. Clause 19(3) and (4) provide for direct and indirect discrimination, and Clause 19(6) gives government the obligation to take measures including legislative measures for the protection and fulfilment of rights.

62. However, the Federal Constitution largely upholds the current customary practises of the people. Section 16 *'Reasonable limits of rights and freedoms'* connotes that *'The rights and freedoms in Chapter 3 are subjected to necessary limitation or qualification to accommodate a custom or customary practise that is – (a) traditionally observed and practised in a particular locality of the republic.'*

63. See Chapter 3 of the Draft constitution and (Customary Law), Chapter 27 section 271, s271. Repeal of Laws – The following Acts are repealed, subject to Clause 270 and Schedule Eight:

- (a) No. 783 of 1978 The Solomon Islands Independence Order 1978;
- (b) No.2 of 2001 the Constitutional (Amendment) Act 2001);
- (c) No.8 of 2000 the Amnesty Act 2000;
- (d) The facilitation of International Assistance Act 2003.

64. In August 2023, the commencement of a Constitutional Amendment Bill to amend Section 61 of the Constitution was announced. The Proposed Amendment will provide for the creation of a Constitutional Assembly to be responsible for the thorough scrutiny of the Draft Federal Constitution. The recommendation for the amendment was made by the Imminent Persons Group and People's Congress.

65. The Draft Federal Constitution is finalised and there is on-going work towards its ratification and adoption.

Law reform commission

66. There is no standard timeframe for the Law Reform process. Law reform work depends entirely on funding and Government Priorities. Limited human, financial and equipment resources continues to be the biggest challenges for the Law Reform Commission (LRC) in progressing legislative reforms in the Solomon Islands.

67. Legislative reviews by LRC on the Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code is on-going under various offences-specific projects. Completed legislative reviews are for Sexual Offences where recommendations are reflected in the *Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act 2016*; the Corruption Offences Parts X and XXXVIII of the Penal Code, the recommendations forming part of the corruption offences under the *Anti-Corruption Act 2018*.

68. The *Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act 2016* has strengthened the legal response to sexual offences by redefining key elements of sexual offences comprehensively, taking into account the experiences of women and girls; and redefining the elements of rape by removing prejudicial assumptions that consent is obtained only by force, threats, intimidation and fear of bodily harm. Rape also includes marital rape.

69. In 2018, the LRC submitted to the Minister of Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs (MJLA) the Administration of Justice Offences Report with recommendations for legislative reform. The report contains recommendations to change parts of the Penal Code that deal with obstruction of justice including through perjury, interfering with witnesses and protection of witnesses and others, perversion of the course of justice and related offences, proceedings other than judicial proceedings, felonies and misdemeanours.¹³ It also contains revised penalties for offences within these areas.

70. Provincial consultations for Homicide Offences & Personal Harm Offences were completed and their reporting is in-progress. Report writing for other criminal law areas such as the Public Order Offences has commenced and for Property Offences and Sorcery Offences, is near completion. Consultation papers on Genocide and Abortion are currently being developed.

71. The LRC has received a TOR for a review of both the *Islanders' Marriage Act* and the *Islanders' Divorce Act (Cap 170)*. Work on the review started in 2019 and a Consultation Paper on the review was launched in 2022. Consultation on this project is ongoing.

72. The courts continue to use the *Affiliation, Separation and Maintenance Act [Cap 1]* for remedies for women and children within and outside of marriage.

73. In January 2024, Ministry of Commerce Industries Labour and Immigration (MCILI) with the support of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has begun consultations to review Solomon Islands existing Labour and Employment related Laws including the *Labour Act (CAP 73) 1982* and their compliance with ILO Conventions ratified by Solomon Islands. The promotion of inclusive social dialogue was a critical component of the review process.

74. The *Citizenship Act of 1978* was repealed and replaced with the *Citizenship Act of 2018*. Section 14 of the Act has broadened the eligibility for citizenship enabling women to choose their nationality including women who have lost their birth citizenship through marriage to a non-national; and allows for non-nationals marrying

¹³ The Solomon Islands Law Reform Commission (2017). Administration of Justice: Forth Interim Report. Available at: <http://www.lawreform.gov.sb/publications/other-reports/reports-and-recommendations/19-administration-of-justice-offences-report-2018/file.html> (accessed 2 May 2019).

a birth citizen to apply for citizenship if they are over 18; intend to reside or maintain close relationship with Solomon Islands; and have been married for 5 years. This requirement applies equally for both men and women.

75. The Act also allows for both women and men to have equal rights in determining the nationality of their child. Section 14 (5) allows for eligibility for citizenship, if at least one of the person's parents, grandparents and great grandparents is or was a birth citizen of SI. Section 15 (1) allows for a primary applicant who can be either parent to include children under the age of 18 in the application.

76. The *Constitution (Amendment) (Dual Citizenship) Act 2018* allows Solomon Islands nationals to have a dual citizenship with another country and vice versa, making it possible for women married to foreigners to maintain their citizenship and foreign women marrying nationals to do the same. This constitutional amendment also allows for people with Dual Citizenship to stand for Parliament (Section 49(1) (a)).

V. Access to justice

Women victims of the social unrest

77. Impacts of the 'ethnic tension' in the period from 1999 to 2003 was quite significant for women and girls in Solomon Islands. More than 5700 human violations were documented, including sexual harassment and rape cases where majority of victims were women. Following the ethnic tension, the Townsville Peace Agreement was signed obligating government to offer adequate reparations to victims of the social unrest. Only 9% of the claimants who received payments were women and only two of the documented claims were for sexual harassment. Compensations for violations of women's rights is still outstanding.

78. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) report recommended reparations for victims of the ethnic tensions through the development and passage of a Reparation Bill into an Act of Parliament and a Reparation Policy Framework. It is also recommended that the Act establish a Reparation Commission. The Reparation Commission will have the key duty of developing a comprehensive reparation plan for implementation of the TRC recommendations. Provincial Consultations to inform the drafting of the Bill and Policy Framework commenced in July 2018. Women were also consulted.

79. In April 2020, the Ministry of Traditional Governance Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs (MTGPEA) endorsed the National Policy on Conflict Prevention and Victims' Rights to form the policy basis for a proposed Bill that would establish a Conflict Prevention and Victims' Rights Commission. A key role of the proposed Commission would be to investigate compensation claims.

80. In May 2017, the *Women Peace and Security National Action Plan (WPS NAP) 2017–2021* was launched providing a first of its kind roadmap to assessing and addressing women and girl's specific peace and security needs and capacities including the need to establish protocols and provide funds to respond to VAWG in natural disasters and/ or humanitarian emergencies and in recovery, rehabilitation and reconciliation situations, aligned to the UN SCR 1325. The NAP is currently under review and expected to be completed in 2025.

81. The National Peace Building Policy by the MTGPEA and their Corporate Plan 2016–2019, targets policing, courts and correction systems to implement better and more accountable justice service delivery.

82. In 2017, the MTGPEA implemented programs on trauma healing, positive mindset, restorative justice, peace building and conflict resolution.

83. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) has prosecuted all tension matters except 4 matters by 2023.

The TRC report

84. While the TRC report is yet to be adopted in Parliament, the MTGPEA has been working on an update report of the TRC recommendations outlined in a TRC Recommendations Action Plan developed in 2016. The update report was informed through consultations by MTGPEA with stakeholders, an awareness workshop on the report in November 2021 and a Pre-Parliament TRC Report Updates workshop in February 2023.

Free and quality legal aid

85. The Public Solicitors Office (PSO) in Honiara and in the four provinces where it is established, provides free legal clinics including for women survivors of GBV. In 2014, there were 350 civil clinic appointments and 309 family clinic appointments (a reduction from 2013 that had a total of 979 people who made appointments for legal clinic). This was attributed to several factors including the reduced number of clinics conducted in 2014; the increase in the number of self-represented defendants; and the appointment of a lawyer to provide legal representation in family matters in an NGO, the Family Support Centre (FSC). In 2015, a total of 597 persons made bookings for legal clinic of which 326 were for civil matters and 271 were for family matters.

86. In 2017, a legal clinic was also established at a location accessible by People with Disability (PWD) including women with disability. Maintaining the operation of the Legal Clinic continues to be a challenge.

87. Court Circuit tours with PSO and ODPP are ongoing to provinces where there is an absence of courthouse. Free legal aid is also conducted through these provincial court circuits.

Victim protection program

88. The largest victim protection program in the Solomon Islands is through its SAFENET response and referral network of government and non-government organisations providing essential services for GBV victims and survivors including referrals.

89. Key components of SAFENET that has strengthened the protection of GBV victims and survivors include: the development of a SAFENET Orientation – Handbook for Practitioners; all SAFENET members are bound together through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlines clearly their roles and responsibilities; each members have clear SOPs; clear referral pathway that incorporate safety planning with the survivor; SAFENET follows minimum practise standards including a survivor centered approach and informed consent standards to delivering their services; a Data Management protocol for sharing, collecting and storing of information that is confidential and protects the victim and survivor at all times; established a registry of Domestic Violence registered counsellors; case conferencing mechanism for dealing with difficult cases; a dedicated SAFENET Coordinator; and a SAFENET Data Officer from 2022 and 2023. All SAFENET

members including the Police are required to go through a GBV Survivor-Centered Approach training. The trainings are on-going and are conducted by the MWYCFA Staff supported by SAFENET members.

90. To address child protection issues the Children’s Development Division of the MWYCFA in partnership with the Social Welfare Division of the MHMS has developed a referral pathway for child welfare and protection matters.

91. Police Safety Notices issued and served by the Police and Protections Orders by the Magistrates Courts are protection mechanisms established under the *FPA 2014*. There is no formal online complaints mechanism, however, SAFENET has a Facebook page administered by the MWYCFA for information sharing purposes only.

Sensitising the criminal justice system

92. Significant efforts to gender-sensitise the criminal justice sector includes:

(a) The development of the Justice Sector Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy (GESI): Step by Step – A 3-year strategy for building GESI in Solomon Islands Justice Sector (2020–2022);

(b) In May 2024, a three-day inaugural TrackGBV Training of Trainers was conducted targeting CARECOM¹⁴ and SAFENET members including the Police. TrackGBV is a program by the International Center for Advocates against Discrimination (ICAAD), that has been reviewing GBV sentencing decisions in the Pacific from 2000–2021 including in Solomon Islands and the analysis shared publicly on a TrackGBV Dashboard. The goal of the program is to increase transparency, consistency, and accountability in judiciaries by uncovering gender bias and discrimination in sentencing, through data and technology, to support judicial policy reform. The workshop was delivered through an MOU between ICAAD, MJLA and MWYCFA;

(c) The establishment of the PSO FVU as a separate unit from the civil and criminal units in 2016, with its own SOPs for dealing with survivors of GBV;

(d) The addition of the ODPP to the SAFENET response and referral network. Refer to Annex 8 for the SAFENET members, the type of GBV services they provide and the Provinces they operate in;

(e) The development of the Pacific Island Law Officer’s Network DPP Regional Guidelines for Prosecutors and Witness Support Officers to support Vulnerable Witnesses through the Prosecution of Sexual Offences;

(f) In 2021 through a partnership with SAFENET, ODPP and Hope Trust provided trainings on how to review files and ensure records are accurate to avoid double victimization. They also implemented trauma-informed approach in handling cases involving women and girl, ensuring that law enforcement officers, prosecutors and Judicial Officials are trained to understand the impact of trauma and respond with sensitivity and empathy.

VI. National human rights institution

93. Clause 49 of the Draft Federal Constitution establishes a Human Rights Commission to promote, protect and facilitate observance of human rights, education about rights and freedoms, monitoring, investigation, making recommendation to

¹⁴ CARECOM is the advisory body to SAFENET.

government, receiving and investigating complaints, research, and monitoring compliance by government in every sphere.

94. In 2019, a study report provided two model options for the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) – expanding the mandate of the existing Office of the Ombudsman or to establish a new specific agency or Human Rights Commission. Both options would require amendment to the Solomon Islands constitution. The study report findings were validated and endorsed in 2019. In May 2023, a Taskforce with a TOR was set up to provide direction for the establishment of the NHRI however, it is yet to convene its first meeting.

VII. National machinery for the advancement of women

Women’s development division

95. National and Provincial Women’s Development Divisions (WDD) continue to be ill resourced despite increasing policy mandate. The National WDD has seen declined budget allocation within the reporting period however, benefits from substantial funding by development partners, notably the Australian Government. Provincial WDD’s receives very limited budgets, even most times the smallest, from their respective Provincial Governments.

96. Provincial WDD’s are supported through the National WDD Assistance Grants. The National WDD also facilitates direct outsourcing of donor funding to Provincial WDDs.

97. The National WDD established positions¹⁵ has increased in the reporting timeframe however is still a mismatch with the Division’s policy mandate. Recruitment of its six vacant established positions are underway in 2024. Sustaining some of the externally funded positions at the end of the funding period is still a challenge however, successful transitions to SIG establishment includes the SAFENET Coordinator and EVAWG Policy Coordinator positions. WDD is looking to also transition the current three externally-funded position by 2025 - the SAFENET Data Officer, Women in Leadership (WIL) and Women’s Economic Empowerment Technical Assistants (TA).

98. The National WDD derives its mandate from the overarching *GEWD Policy 2021–2022* and its gender-specific subsidiary policies: the *EVAWG Policy 2021–2027*; the *Affirmative Action Strategy (AAS) 2022–2027: Accelerating Women’s Prospects and Paths to Leadership, Decision-Making, and Governance*; the *National Strategy on the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls (NSEEWG) 2020–2023*;¹⁶ and the *WPS NAP 2017–2021*. The WDD also has statutory obligation under the *FPA 2014*.

Strengthening coordination and engaging CSOs

99. The *GEWD Policy* establishes a National Stakeholder Taskforce (NST) and National Taskforces with TORs for each of its five thematic areas¹⁷ as the overall institutional arrangement for the coordination, reporting and monitoring of the implementation of the GEWD and its subsidiary policies. The national WDD is the secretariat to this institutional arrangement. The TORs provide for clear strategies for

¹⁵ Refer to Annex 9 for the National WDD’s established positions.

¹⁶ The review of the *NSEEWG* has begun in 2024.

¹⁷ The Education and Health thematic areas do not have their specific National Taskforces.

coordination and input from SIG GFPs, provincial WDDs, NCW, Provincial Councils of Women, CSOs including Faith-based Organisations, the private sector and development partners. The NCW have ten provincial affiliates, the Provincial, Ward and Honiara Councils of Women providing the structure for inputs from women across all Provinces including from rural and remote areas.

100. Key agendas in the NST meetings include updates on policy implementation progress and developing joint workplans. Data collected through the NST also informs international gender-related reports. Between 2017 and 2022, only three (3) NST were being held despite the intention to have annual and or a bi-annual meeting. Availability of adequate funding to convene the NST will continue to be a challenge. A NST meeting is planned for the 4th quarter of 2024.

101. Provincial WDDs consists of a Provincial Women's Development Officer (PWDO) who heads the Division and, in some Provinces, might have Assistant Officers. Currently, two Provinces do not have any PWDO, three with both a PWDO and an Assistant and four with only a PWDO.

102. Provincial gender and women policies¹⁸ are the blueprints for strategies, projects and programs to advance gender equality and rural women's empowerment including providing clear mandates for provincial women officers, and areas for collaboration and partnerships mirroring the GEWD NST at Provincial level.

103. The *Guadalcanal Province Gender Equality and Equal Participation in Development Policy 2021–2024* proposes that a cadre of GFPs be appointed within the existing Ward Development Committees¹⁹ to ensure gender mainstreaming and reporting into all ward development activities and in turn strengthening the gender coordination at the rural and community levels.

104. The National and Provincial GBV (SAFENET) response and referral networks has also strengthened coordination among government and non-government organisations who provide essential GBV services.

105. There have been key efforts by MWYCFA and the MPS to strengthen the role of the SIG GFPs to strengthen coordination between the government ministries and their provincial counterparts particularly through relevant capacity-building trainings.

Overall M&E framework

106. The *NDS 2016–2035* provides the overall national M&E Performance Framework for Solomon Islands national socioeconomic priorities which is inclusive of gender equality targets.²⁰

107. The *'Gender Equality Where Do We Stand Report'* and the *Solomon Islands Country Gender Assessment Report* have both been launched.²¹

VIII. Women, peace and security

108. The review of the *WPS NAP 2017–2021* will provide an opportunity to ensure the needs and challenges of women and girls in terms of their effective participation in peace and security procedures and processes remain relevant; draws increased

¹⁸ Seven of the ten Provinces (including Honiara) has specific gender and women's policies.

¹⁹ Responsible for the planning, budgeting, implementation and managing of Ward Development Grants of their respective Wards.

²⁰ More details on the *NDS* is discussed in the 'General' Section of this report.

²¹ Also discussed in the 'General' section of this report.

attention to the impact of natural hazards, climate change, and humanitarian crises on societies, especially on those most vulnerable, including women, girls, and children; strengthens the policy environment needed to address different forms of violence including conflicts related to natural resources management and extractive industry operations and their negative impact on communities; and encourage engagements in the Pacific Regional Processes on WPS. The revised NAP will complement other government policies on peace and security, such as the Ministry of Police National Security and Correctional Service (MPNSCS) *National Security Strategy (2020)* and the MTGPEA *National Peacebuilding Policy*.²² The full engagement of women in high-level track 1 and 2 dialogues on conflict resolution and in climate change and foreign policy negotiations needs increased focus and strengthening.

IX. Temporary special measures (TSM)

109. A smaller TSM taskforce was established in 2017 from the overall TSM Working Group (TSMWG) established in 2016. The TSM taskforce's role was limited to promoting women's political participation in Provincial Assembly and City Council Level through TSM. The role of the TSM Taskforce to drive TSM for women's political participation has been strengthened through trainings and mentoring and now has a collective legal, advocacy/lobbying and policy development technical capacity. The role of the TSMWG and TSM Taskforce to expand their mandate to include the acceleration of substantive equality of women and men in all areas where women are underrepresented or disadvantaged will still need support. Budget support for the TSM taskforce work is largely by development partners.

110. The *Affirmative Action Strategy (AAS): Accelerating Women's Prospects and Pathway to Leadership, Decision Making and Governance 2022–2027* is a first of its kind for SI. The AAS aims to accelerate the substantive equality between man and women in SI focusing on legislative reforms to enhance women's rights and opportunity to political participation; gender parity in recruitment, promotions and safe workplace, education and training opportunities for women in employment, promoting women in business and financial inclusion, building women's movement and resource mobilisation, research and gender data. The Strategy is applicable to all women in Solomon Islands; women in rural and urban areas, women living in remote and vulnerable areas, young women, older women, women with disability and special needs, women in business and women business owners, female politicians and public servants, women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and women in productive and resource sector, professional women, and women in the informal sector. The AAS is accompanied by a Plan of Action and a M&E framework. It is anticipated that the TSMWG and TSM Taskforce will form the governance body of the AAS to strengthen their mandate to progress substantive equality of women and men in all areas of life. The AAS governance body will be established in 2025.²³

111. A TSM information package was developed by the TSM Taskforce in 2020, containing information related to the nature and scope of TSM and its importance. The TSM package was disseminated, between 2018 and October 2022 by the Taskforce, to a total of 454 people (203 males and 251 females): Provincial Assembly Members; Provincial Senior Government Officers; Provincial Councils of Women; and women leaders in all the 9 Provinces. Between 2022 and 2023, TSM was also disseminated to rural and remote communities across all nine Provinces reaching a total of 17,042 people (10,560 females and 6,482 males),²⁴ these included

²² The National Peacebuilding Policy is currently in the final stages of its review.

²³ The *AAS 2022–2027* is also discussed in other parts of the report.

²⁴ Refer to Annex 10 for number of people reached per Province.

tribal/paramount chiefs, community leaders including church and youth leaders, women, men, youths, teachers, health workers, students, almost whole communities. In August 2022, TSM was disseminated to 175 (53 males and 122 females) representatives of the 12 wards of HCC including community and church leaders, women leaders, youths (18+ yrs.), students and people with disabilities. Majority of the people supported the need to adopt and apply TSM for women, once they understood the concept.

112. In December 2023, Caucus and Cabinet members were presented with the TSM nature and scope through a Caucus and Cabinet paper, respectively, on the proposed TSM amendment to the Provincial Government Act 1997 to increase women's representation and participation in Provincial Assemblies. Accompanying both papers is the report of the TSM Campaign journey highlighting the definition of TSM, its examples and the importance of its adoption and application.

X. Stereotypes

Strategies for combating stereotypes

113. Changing discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes underpins all the gender equality and women's empowerment programs and activities by the MWYCFA and its stakeholders. The *GEWD Policy 2021–2027* calls for the integration of awareness of social norms across all gender programs and work, to replace discriminatory norms and stereotypes with those that advance equality and advance national development for all citizens, as a key policy implementation strategy. The MWYCFA is prioritising the development of a proposed EVAWG Prevention Strategy that will provide clear strategies and actions for addressing gender stereotypes and to monitor their impacts.

114. Activities that aimed to combat gender stereotypes, harmful practices and discriminatory social attitudes within the reporting period are:

(a) The annual celebrations of the IWD, IRWD and the 16 Days of Activism Campaign against GBV. These remains the largest platforms at both the national and provincial levels for raising awareness on the need to combat gender stereotypes;

(b) In 2021, as part of the 16 Days of Activism campaign against GBV, a group of young filmmakers collaborated with the MWYCFA and the Dreamcast Theatre and created a film focusing on the role of men in ending violence against women. The project collaborated with 15 prominent Solomon Islander men, including the Governor General of Solomon Islands and a Parliament member. The video was launched online on the final day of the 16 days and received widespread traction including being screened on TTV and Pasifika TV;

(c) Between 2021 and 2022, the MWYCFA in collaboration with the Anglican Church of Melanesia Evangelical Gender Coordinator, held two GBV awareness and training sessions for male Correctional Services Solomon Islands (CSSI) officers with the goal of eventually targeting male inmates. A total of 55 CSSI male officers attended the trainings;

(d) The local print medias featured profiles of women in non-traditional employment in 2018 and women in Information Communication and Technology (ICT) in 2023;

(e) The establishment of Women's Associations and Networks has also helped support the combat of stereotyping and amplified women's value and capabilities. Example of these Associations are: the Solomon Islands Women in Maritime

Association, the Institute of Solomon Islands Accountants; Women in the Justice Sector; CSSI Women's Network; Women in IT Solomon Islands; Disability Women's Empowerment Association; and Solomon Islands Professional Women's Network (SIPNET);

(f) An Outstanding Women's Essay and Poster Competition held for Students and Teachers of Secondary Schools throughout Solomon Islands in 2021. The Students and Teachers were invited to write an essay or draw a poster to answer the following question: "*Who is an outstanding woman leader in your community?*" bringing visibility to women's contributions to their local communities and to combat stereotypes regarding leaders and leadership positions. The competition was a partnership between United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Ministry of Education Human Resources Development (MEHRD).²⁵

Non-discrimination and equality education

115. The *Education Act 2023* sets a very strong legal basis for the principle of non-discrimination and equality to be applied across the whole education sector and integrated into education policies, curriculums and related documents. The commitment to non-discrimination and equality has been translated to core Educational policies including into the *Administrative Instructions 4: Schools*; the *Education Strategic Framework 2016–2030*; the *National Curriculum Statement and Policy* that advocates for content of curriculum materials not to be gender biased; and the *Professional Standards for Teachers and Code of Rules* that prohibit teachers to discriminate in the school compound or while teaching. The MEHRD has integrated non-discrimination and equality into the high school health curriculum beginning in Form 4 or Year 10.

116. Non-discrimination and equality between women and men has been integrated into teacher's school-based trainings in Solomon Islands National University (SINU) and USP and in teachers' course in USP.

117. Non-discrimination and equality between women and men is a core principle that underlines different trainings of the National and Provincial SAFENET members including PSO and ODPP and is integrated into guidelines, protocols and training manuals including the Domestic Violence Counselling Guideline training manual and in survivor-centered trainings. The survivor centered training is mandatory for all SAFENET members. The MHMS including nurses of HCC and teachers in the Provinces are members of SAFENET.²⁶ Gender based violence is interlinked with harmful practices.

Justice sector mechanism for harmful practices

118. The *Justice Sector GESI 2020–2022* is a 3-year strategy providing guidance for all within the justice sector on how to improve accessibility and fairness of the justice services. This includes how the justice sector could contribute to the national goals on gender equality and social inclusion; identify and propose reforms to discriminatory laws; and how to address the different barriers to accessing the justice services with a particular focus on barriers by women, young people and people with disabilities.

²⁵ Combating stereotypes through Education is also discussed under 'Education'.

²⁶ Schools in the Provinces are members of Provincial SAFENETs. The National SAFENET does not include schools in Honiara.

XI. Harmful practices

119. See ‘Marriage and Family Relation’ on Marriage age and bride price and ‘Education’ on Education Policies and Programs.

XII. Gender-based violence against women

Addressing sexual abuse and domestic violence including in extractive industries

120. Addressing sexual abuse and domestic violence has strengthened through the passage and enforcement of the following key legislations: the *Family Protection Act (2014)*, the *Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act 2016* and the *Child and Family Welfare Act (CFWA) 2017*. Significant progresses have also been made to address other forms of GBV including TFGBV and TIP.

121. The establishment of the SAFENET across the whole country with the exception of only one Province, provides improved access for women and girls especially in rural and remote areas who are victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence to access essential GBV services including legal services. This also includes women and girls from communities near an extractive industry. The incorporation of TIP into SAFENET in 2023 through the membership of the Immigration Division seeks to strengthen the address of abuses related to extractive industries. Strengthening responses to sexual abuse included specialized training on clinical management of rape for clinicians, nurses and midwives of the National Referral Hospital, HCC Clinics and SIPPA.

GBV data collection

122. GBV Admin data collection is discussed throughout the report.

Holding extractive industries accountable

123. Key policy and legislative reforms that seeks to ensure improved accountability of logging, mining and fisheries industries for the human rights impact of their activities, includes the: *Environment Act 1998*; *Minerals Resource Bill 2023*; *Mineral Policy 2017–2021*; *GESI Strategy for Sustainable Mining in the Solomon Islands 2023–2033*; *Ministry of Mines Energy and Rural Electrification (MMERE) Community Development Agreements*; the *National Forestry Policy 2020*; the *National Forest Policy Strategies 2020*; and *MFMR GESI Strategy 2024–2029*.

Dissemination of the FPA 2014

124. Section 56 of the *FPA 2014* places responsibility on government to collaborate with civil society for public awareness programs on the prevention of domestic violence.

125. Since the passage of the *FPA 2014*, the National SAFENET members have been disseminating information on the Act across the whole country including in rural communities as part of the awareness and advocacy component of their work, using various mediums including contextualised booklets designed separately for women and men. Information on the *FPA 2014* has also been adapted for people with disabilities including women and girls. Dissemination of the FPA is ongoing and

peaks particularly during international human rights events such as the 16 Days of Activism Campaign.

126. The MWYCFA has established a National EVAWG Prevention Committee to strengthen its communication on GBV including on the *FPA 2014*. This Committee will provide oversight on the development of a EVAWG Prevention Strategy.

Monitoring of police response

127. The *FPA 2014* mandates the RSIPF to respond to Domestic Violence guided by a SOP aligned to the *FPA 2014*. The establishment of FVUs and GBV Coordinators within Police Stations across the country has strengthened response to VAWG and monitoring of Police's implementation of their duties under the Act.

128. The *FPA 2014* establishes the Minister for MWYCFA to develop and table annual reports on the implementation of the Act, and the MJLA to review the Act within three years after enforcement, providing a monitoring tool including for monitoring Police performance. The MWYCFA has produced reports for 2016 to 2018 and MJLA has completed the *FPA 2014* review in 2020. The review recommendations include the need for significant increase of trainings for Police and the need for enhanced accountability for Police.

129. To inform the review of the *FPA 2014*, a Women's Experiences of Family Violence Services in Solomon Islands survey was conducted in 2019. Key findings include that the RSIPF is the most commonly used service under the Act and around half of service users were satisfied with the services and felt safe after using services under the Act.

130. The SAFENET GBV administrative data collection and analysis tool has strengthened the monitoring of GBV service delivery including of the RSIPF.

Addressing mandatory mediation, compensation and settlements

131. The *Magistrates' Court Act Ch 20* promotes reconciliation in section 35 for both criminal and civil cases. The reconciliation in Solomon Islands is done on the basis of custom and Christianity values. On the basis of customary law, compensation is paid to the victim or the victim's family members.

132. The review of the *FPA 2014* has recommended the repeal of Section 28 of the *FPA 2014* that establishes the court to provide information on voluntary mediation. Section 58 (3) states that customary compensation for committing DV is not a defense.

133. The RSIPF and the ODPP applies a no-drop policy when dealing with sexual offences cases. The RSIPF has been working with communities in developing their community bylaws which provides opportunities to establish guidelines and criteria's for ensuring law and order in the communities including dealing with compensations and settlements.

134. The review of the *WPS NAP 2017–2021* will seek to strengthen strategies to engage with men and community 'gate-keepers' in the address of harmful customary practices to ensure the protection of the rights of women and girls.

Strengthening SAFENET address of GBV

135. The SAFENET continues to strive to ensure timely and a high quality of GBV service delivery for women and girls who are victims of GBV. SAFENETs achievements and how it has been strengthened since its inception in 2013 is discussed in various parts of this report.

Accessible shelters

136. A key gap in the SAFENET GBV services is the lack of formal safe shelters across the country. There is currently on two formal long-term safe shelters, the Christian Care Centre (CCC) in Honiara and the Malaita CCC in Malaita Province. The only formal temporary safe accommodation is by the MPNSCS Seif Ples GBV Crisis and Referral Centre in Honiara. There are also informal temporary safe accommodations across the country including the Provincial Women's Resource Centres. The review of the *FPA 2014* recommends the need to build safe shelters across the country of which the MWYCFA is in the progress of implementation. Accessibility of safe shelters for women and girls with disabilities continues to be a challenge.

Support to victims of online and offline violence including psychosocial support

137. Offering psychosocial support services is a key mandatory service by all SAFENET members stipulated in their response and referral pathway as key first response actions when dealing with a victim assessing the SAFENET services.

138. The Ministry of Communications and Aviation and the MPNSCS has begun significant work on cybersecurity and privacy including the development of a Cyber Security Policy, providing an opportunity to recognize and incorporate the gendered nature of online harms into digital regulations.

139. Through the RSIPF National Crime and Community Policing Program, RSIPF has received cybercrime trainings from across the region including from the Cyber Safety Pasifika Program, a collaboration between the Australian Federal Police and the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police.

140. An inaugural TFGBV training, the first not only in the Solomon Islands but also in the Pacific Region, was held to help frontline GBV workers including SAFENET members, build their knowledge and skills to address TFGBV. The MWYCFA is committed to formally incorporating TFGBV into SAFENET's response and referral pathways, SOPs, databases, and so on.

Strengthening of CSO's address of GBV (Finance and technical)

141. Funding support by government to CSOs who provide GBV services are limited and is on an ad hoc and on a request basis. The MWYCFA provides a subvention grant to CCC, FSC and MCCC annually²⁷ and to CSOs upon request, funding support that can range from SBD 4000 to SBD 15,000.

142. Substantial financial and technical support to CSOs has been by donors and development partners including the Australian and New Zealand (NZ) Government and EU through the Pacific Partnership to EVAWG (initially the Essential Services Package); UN Women including through the UN Peace Building Fund; UNFPA; SPC;

²⁷ Refer to Annex 11 for details on the Grant.

and IOM. Sustaining these supports after funding periods has ended still remains a challenge for CSOs.

XIII. Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

Progress on ratifying the UNTOC and the protocols

143. A working committee was established in 2018 to support the process for ratification of the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) including a nationwide survey to estimate the prevalence of TIPs in Solomon Islands in 2021 in preparation for accession to the UNTOC. The ascension to UNTOC is pending cabinet endorsement.

144. Solomon Islands on 5 May 2022 ratified *CRC Optional Protocol 1* – on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and is in the process of submitting the Instrument of Ratification for *CRC Optional Protocol 2* on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Strengthening AHTAC

145. The mandate and work of the MCILI Anti-Human Trafficking Advisory Committee (AHTAC) has been significantly strengthened through the establishment of their *National Action Plan Against Human Trafficking and People Smuggling 2020–2025* and a clear TOR.

146. The following significant researches and surveys has also supported the increased attention and action to Human trafficking policy development and programming: the *2019 Community Health and Mobility in the Pacific – Solomon Islands Case Study*; the *2022 A situational analysis of the nexus between Gender-Based Violence, TIPs and the logging industry in Solomon Islands*; a *2021 baseline and 2023 Endline Survey on GBV and TIP in Choiseul and Isabel Provinces, Solomon Islands*; and *2023 Solomon Islands' Country Capacity Assessment on TIPs*.

Legislations for combating TIP

147. Key legislative reforms that has strengthened the enabling environment for combating trafficking in Solomon Islands is the *Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act 2016* that criminalises internal trafficking, those who receive profits from internal trafficking and trafficking of a child including sexual commercial exploitation of a child; the *CFWA 2017* that defines sexual exploitation of a child; and the *Immigration Act 2012*. The current review of the Immigration Act 2012 will further strengthen the legal mandate of the AHTAC.

148. MCILI is in the process of developing comprehensive legislative framework covering all aspects of anti-trafficking action, including legislation that will regulate the inflow of migrants that may fall victim in trafficking, as well as availability of legislation to regulate the internal trafficking that is occurring in extractive industries across the country.

149. There are no provisions which prohibit sex tourism. Any offences arising out of this practice are dealt with under existing sexual offences such as rape, defilement and others contained in the *Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act 2016*.

Supporting victims of trafficking

150. Significant progresses have been made to strengthen the support and referral services for victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation, these includes:

(a) In 2022, the mandated Immigration Division of the MCILI for addressing trafficking, became a member of the National SAFENET GBV referral network;

(b) Since 2019, there has been ongoing TIP awareness programs conducted in the Provinces by various TIP stakeholders – governments, CSOs and INGOs supported by development partners;

(c) In 2020 and 2021, MWYCFA in partnership with Immigration and IOM provided four comprehensive standalone trainings to Honiara based SAFENET service providers in recognising and responding to human trafficking;

(d) In 2023, an Annex to the SAFENET Referral Pathway was developed to integrate the referral of victims of trafficking into the existing SAFENET Referral Pathway. Referral information cards and posters, with province-specific information, for Isabel, Choiseul, Makira, Malaita and Guadalcanal provinces were also developed;

(e) A pocketbook on case management for TIP cases for service providers has been developed and service providers trained on it in March 2024;

(f) The SAFENET is currently reviewing its data collection system, and looks to integrate questions to enable reporting on human trafficking;

(g) In 2023, AHTAC endorsed the National Communication Strategy for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons;

(h) In 2023, an introductory TIP and GBV contextualised training materials was developed for communities and rolled out to five communities in Isabel and five communities in Choiseul. A Training of Trainers (TOT) for Makira, Malaita and Guadalcanal PCWs were conducted for further roll out to the communities. PCWs are members of Provincial SAFENETs;

(i) In 2023 and 2024, TIP and GBV sensitization of workers in logging camps was conducted by IOM;

(j) Ongoing joint monitoring, surveillance and inspection of logging and mining operations by the Combined Law Agency Group. Between 2015 and 2018, 54 logging operations were monitored resulting in the closure of seven operations and between 2017 and 2018, two foreigners were charged for child trafficking under the *Immigration Act*.

Prosecution of perpetrators of trafficking

151. Current arrangements to facilitate prosecution of perpetrators in trafficking have been through the following bilateral arrangements: the MOU signed in 2023 between Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands on Immigration Border Security to strengthen and enhance border security; and the multi-lateral arrangements by the Interpol which works through the National Central Bureau based in Honiara (capital of Solomon Islands). The proposed legislative framework by MCILI provides an opportunity to strengthen the mandate for these Bilateral or regional agreements to facilitate prosecution of perpetrators of trafficking.

XIV. Participation in political and public life

Measures for increasing women in political and public life

152. Significant measures have been taken to increase women in politics, public life, foreign service and in the private sector.

153. There has been increasing legislative reforms that establishes quotas for women on sectoral governance bodies, these includes the: *Constitution (Amendment) (Electoral Reform Act) Act 2018*; *Political Parties Integrity Act 2014*; *Solomon Islands Tertiary and Skills Act 2017*; and *Land and Titles (Amendment) Act 2014*.

154. There has also been a significant increase in sectoral policy frameworks that promotes women in leadership, decision making and governance, these include the: *NDS 2016–2035*; *Solomon Islands Public Service Code of Conduct*; *MPS GESI Policy 2023–2027* (pending cabinet submission); *MCILI National Employment Policy 2023–2027* (yet to be finalized); *GEWD Policy 2021–2027*; *Affirmative Action Strategy 2022–2027*; *PSO Strategic Plan 2020–2025*; *Justice Sector GESI: “Step by Step – A 3-year strategy for building GESI in Solomon Islands Justice Sector (2020–2022)”*; *Solomon Islands Electoral Commission GESI Policy 2022–2024*; *NDMP 2018*; *Provincial Gender and Women’s Policies*.

155. The following initiatives were undertaken withing the reporting period to promote women in politics:

(a) In 2017, an Outrigger Workshop was held for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff which included specific objectives on establishing common understanding on gender and gender biases in modern Pacific Parliaments; and raising awareness on the role of Parliament in advancing gender equality through laws and policies. A similar workshop was held again in 2019 for Parliament staff;

(b) Between 2014 and 2018 four practice parliament for women were held. The practice parliament provided an opportunity for women with political aspirations and women community leaders to develop their leadership, advocacy and policy skills. 50 women attended the 2018 practice Parliament;

(c) In 2019, an ‘Outstanding Women’ (OW) initiative by the UNDP Strengthening the Electoral Cycle in Solomon Islands Project, was launched. The initiative aimed to highlight and bring visibility to women leaders and the activities they conduct in their communities and wards, so they are acknowledged, respected, and accepted by people in communities. A key result of the OW initiative was the election of one of the OW into Provincial Assembly. There are 11 OW representing all the Provinces;

(d) In 2022, a Provincial Women’s Candidate Training School and TSM training workshop was held with the overall goal of equipping females with political aspirations on campaigning and constituency building including knowledge on TSM. Participants were seven intending female candidates contesting for Provincial Assembly seats and nine (9) representatives of the government and CSOs including women councils and community groups.

156. Through the RSIPF Gender Strategy, awareness has been conducted at all leadership levels within the Force resulting in an increased number of female officers at the executive level.

157. Significant efforts to increase women's leadership in the private sector includes:

(a) Ensuring a baseline for women's representation in senior business leadership in 2021²⁸ which informed the development of a four-day Solomon Islands Senior Executive Women in Leadership training program to help support a pool of businesswomen and professional women to effectively participate in decision-making levels whether it be in business, organisations or on boards or committees. A total of 54 women have been trained under this program;

(b) The establishment of the SIPNET to ensure investments in gender equality in the private sector by the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI) Gender Program. There has been 3 female CEOs within the reporting period;

(c) The Young Entrepreneurs Council Solomon Islands (YECSI) Constitution requiring at least three men and three women among its seven trustees and the facilitation of Directorship trainings for their Directors by the NZ Institute of Directors. YECSI also facilitates trainings for its entrepreneurs including mentoring, coaching, networking, branding, developing business plans, and bookkeeping;

(d) The *Media Association Solomon Islands Constitution* that acknowledges that gender equality is a human right and has expanded their Board to include a representative from the Women in Media Solomon Islands.

158. 45% of the staff within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade are females. 30% are in the mid-senior management positions. 15 female staff have been recruited in the past 8 years. The recent intake of females below mid-management level increases the possibility of women rising in higher ranks in the Foreign Service and a higher cadre of women for selection for Head of Missions roles. There are currently 9 female staff posted in different overseas Posts and Missions.

159. In regional and international bodies there is one female Solomon Islander each in the FAO, and the Pacific Islands Forum; five in the SPC and more than ten in the Forum Fisheries Agency.

Progressing reserved seats for women in provincial assemblies

160. Solomon Islands priority within the reporting period has been to progress the guarantee of additional seats for women in Provincial Assemblies through legislative reform. In December 2023, endorsement for the proposed legislative amendment that will provide the enabling environment to guarantee seats for women in Provincial Assemblies was granted by Caucus and Cabinet.

161. A submission to the Clerk of Parliament for the establishment of a Special Parliamentary Committee on the equality of women and men has been made by the Women's Rights Action Movement.

162. In May 2016, recommendations were made to the review of the Political Parties Integrity Act 2014. The recommendations included, *(iii) and, providing a penalty of 'suspension from taking part in a campaign during any general elections.'* for political party that does not comply with the 30% quota for women.

²⁸ 'Leadership Matters Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in The Pacific' report by the PSDI.

Leadership trainings for women for positions in public administrations

163. The training arm of the SIG IPAM, offers a Leadership and Development Program (LDP) and a Supervisor Development Training (SDT). Between the period of 2014 and 2017, 205 female officers attended the Supervisor Development Training compared to 325 male officers. No SDT's were scheduled between 2018 and 2020. The only LDP data available was for 2015, where 16 females and 15 males were trained.

164. In 2021, IPAM with the support of the Australian Solomon Island's Governance Program offered a locally developed 12-month virtual Leadership Coaching Program which led to the building of leadership networks and coalitions in Solomon Islands.

165. The IPAM through the support of the NZ Public Service is proposing a mentoring program for women in Public Service who aspires to move up in senior positions within the Public Service.

166. Leadership, political campaigning and constituency-building trainings are on-going trainings mostly provided by the National Council of Women supported by development partners especially in the years leading up to elections.

Incentive for women running for Office

167. There are no established campaign financing and mentoring programs. Most candidates including women has to finance their own campaigns, and this is usually done through fundraisings.

Awareness-raising activities on women in leadership

168. Awareness-raising activities on the value of equal participation of women in leadership and decision making is integral to all of WDD's gender related trainings and awareness programs and is on-going. Awareness by various government ministries particularly those who has GESI related policies, NGOs and CSOs is also on-going. Some of the biggest platforms used to raise awareness on WIL is the annual celebration of the IWD, the IRWD and the 16 Days of Activism Campaign against GBV.

Male allyship programs

169. While there are no formal Male Allyship Programs in the Solomon Islands there are various programs that promotes the concept of male allyship for WIL. An example is the 'Male advocacy' approach by the MWYCFA where it involves men 'talking' to men as a strategy for addressing and ending violence against women and girls through positive behavioural change.

Women in logging and mining decision making

170. The *MMERE Corporate Plan* and the *National Mineral Policy 2017–2021* have shaped the integration of gender considerations in the mining sector. These includes that women must be substantively included in all negotiations and decision-making regarding mining activities including by being signatories to all mining related agreements, to have clear voting rights and responsibilities for financial management.

171. The *MMERE GESI Strategy for Sustainable Mining in the Solomon Islands 2023–2033* aims to ensure that all mining activities, at all stages of mining, from planning and exploration to operation and closure are carried out in a manner that promotes gender equality, inclusivity, and addresses the specific needs and concerns of women, marginalized groups and local communities.

172. The *National Forestry Policy 2020* Goal 6 aimed to achieve gender equity and community empowerment through the promotion of gender inclusive technical capacity for local people; gender inclusive finance and business capacity building for forestry and rural Micro Small Medium Enterprise (MSME) management; and gender inclusive capacity building in forest and environmental legislation and land use rights.

XV. Nationality

173. The *Citizenship Act of 1978* was repealed and replaced with the *Citizenship Act of 2018* broadening the eligibility for citizenship including: enabling women to choose their nationality; allows for the resumption of birth citizenship even if it has been previously renounced; allows for a non-national (both male or female) marrying a birth citizen to apply for citizenship if they are over 18, intend to reside or maintain close relationship with Solomon Islands and have been married for 5 years; and both women and men have equal rights in determining the nationality of their child.

174. The *Constitution (Amendment) (Dual Citizenship) Act 2018* allows Solomon Islands nationals to have a dual citizenship.²⁹

175. The *Passport Act 2012* provides equal rights for both men and women to apply for a passport. However, the passport application forms places requirement for women wanting to apply for a separate passport from their husband that does not apply for men.

XVI. Education

Increasing budget allocation

176. The budget allocation³⁰ for education makes up approximately between 30 to 35% of the overall SIG budget in the last five years, showing that a good education system remains a high priority of government. In 2019 the allocated SIG recurrent budget for education was \$1,198,107,911. SIG expenditure on education in 2019 increased by 1% from 2018.

177. Significant projects have been implemented by the MEHRD to improve school sanitation facilities and dormitories for girls and HCC to provide affordable school transport. These include: launching a National Standards for Water and Sanitation Hygiene (WASH) in School (WinS) in June 2018; a WinS Digitized Portal use by 1,200 plus schools to report WASH issues to MEHRD; establishment of 15 Student’s WASH clubs in 15 schools in Guadalcanal; implementing 88 dormitory projects of which 14 were for girls dormitories and ablution blocks; HCC establishing a memorandum of agreement with selected bus operators to provide bus services to students and teachers in Honiara; and tax exemption for purchasing of School Vehicles.

²⁹ Refer to Annex 12 for applications for Dual Citizenship.

³⁰ This includes donor funding.

Security on school premises

178. The *Administrative Instructions 4: Schools (Division 4 on Child Protection)* established under the *Education Act 2023* has strengthened the security and protection for students by establishing a very comprehensive definition of what constitutes harm to a child and when a child is at risk, including rape, sexual exploitation, forced early marriage and child labor; and instructions for educating students about these harms and risks including reporting these harms and protection for those who report.

179. The *Education Act 2023* defines misconduct to include offence against a child and a serious offence to include sexual, violence and child pornography offences. Grounds for termination of a teacher is if misconduct constitutes an offence. Section 88 provides for the protection of any student or other vulnerable witness giving evidence during an inquiry into a teacher or leader engaged in misconduct.

180. The *MEHRD Child Protection Policy* spells out specific provisions for the safety of students (including girls) in schools, addresses child abuse/rape and the process for prosecuting perpetrators and child (victims) referral process. A Child Protection Manual and Guideline has also been developed.

181. MEHRD is committed to erecting fences for girls' dormitories and having lockable toilet and bathroom facilities.

Compulsory school education

182. The *Education Act 2023 Section 61* establishes that a child within the compulsory school age, 6 to 14 years old or Year 1 to 9, must be enrolled in school. A parent of a compulsory school age student commits an offence if their child is not enrolled and attending school.

183. The *Education Regulations 2024 section 53 (2)* sets the maximum allowable school fees for a student in a year, with different limits for urban and rural, refer to Annex 13. The Regulation also states that no other fees may be charged on students for enrolling, waiting to be enrolled, transferring from schools, sitting an exam, registering etc and establishes an offence to charge fees without the approval of the MEHRD through the Education Board of each Education Provider.

184. The MEHRD has implemented the following strategies to support the burden of school fees for students and parents: payment of school grants by the government to all schools in the country to subsidize fees for students attending compulsory years of education;³¹ through the School Grants Policy³² schools are allowed to purchase supplementary textbooks, school consumables, and sanitary products to maintain hygiene, especially for female students; and the termination of Year 6 Exam to allow for more students to progress from Primary to Secondary school level.

Non-traditional career pathways

185. The MEHRD and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has signed a Memorandum of Agreement to implement a Secondary Education Improvement Project which includes the aim to review the Senior Secondary Curriculum to promote science technology engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and girl's engagement in them.

³¹ Basic Education Policy (reviewed 2016).

³² Implemented since 2016.

186. Women in IT Solomon Islands (WITSI) advocates for girls to pursue careers in IT. From 2016 to 2024, WITSI has celebrated and coordinated the annual International Girls in ICT Day (April 25th), with a focus on encouraging girls in secondary schools to engage with ICT. The 2024 celebrations were themed “Leadership,” emphasising the critical need for strong female role models in STEM careers.

187. There is a higher allocation of scholarships for women teachers to pursue further tertiary education in STEM.

Adaptive information technologies and closing the gender digital divide

188. Solomon Islands was among one of first four countries to pilot the UN Inclusive Digital Economy Scorecard (IDES) – a tool to help countries understand their digital status and monitor better their access to digital economy and technology. The Solomon Islands IDES score has continuously improved from 39% in 2020, 41% in 2021 to 43% in 2022.

189. Key initiatives by the MEHRD to establish adaptive learning and information technologies and to bridge the gender digital divide includes: the launching of the ICT Master Plan 2019–2023 which saw more than twenty secondary schools supported between 2019–2022 with computers; development of iResources for teachers and students as an alternative learning platform and to ensure learning continuity for boys and girls particularly during COVID-19 period, accessible on the MEHRD website and through internet-enabled smartphones, laptops, and computers; the continuing implementation of the Pacific eLearning Program; implementation of the Olgeta project together with United Nations Capital Development Fund, Anglican Church of Melanesia, supported by the Australian Government in 2020 – an e-learning program that provided 55 female students and 6 teachers at 2 rural training centres with access to ‘future-ready’ skills and expanding their opportunities to seek meaningful work and careers.

190. The Australian Pacific Training Coalition offers the following two micro-credential courses in its efforts to bridge the digital divide: Digital Literacy Essentials; and Communication Technologies for Business Success, in response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Girls are particularly targeted to take up these courses.

191. In February 2024, the Solomon Islands Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni Associations conducted a two-day STEM Awareness Basic ICT and Digital Skills workshop in a rural Community High School in North East Guadalcanal for 20 Teachers and Students including girls. The workshop introduced students and teachers to STEM education and the importance of basic IT and digital skills in pursuing STEM studies including STEM career paths.

Retaining girls in schools

192. The Education *Act 2023* Administrative Instructions 4: Schools Division 3 clearly states that pregnancy and parenthood is not a ground to end a girl or a boy’s education and that suitable arrangements must be made to ensure they continue to participate in education, including following the birth of the baby.

193. In 2018, MEHRD entered into a MOU with SINU to provide access to education for women and girls who were unable to return to mainstream schooling due to pregnancy or has dropped out while still of school age and wanted to return to study.

194. There are no child-care facilities established in the Solomon Islands.

Age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health education

195. MEHRD has developed a curriculum/syllabus under health and science subjects that is relevant for students from year 4 to year 9 to help them understand sexual and reproductive health and the importance of healthy living.

Eliminating gender stereotypes

196. Solomon Islands has been working towards eliminating stereotyped concepts of gender roles in education. These efforts include gender-sensitive training for teachers to recognize gender biases in the classroom, promote girl's participation and support for students facing gender-based violence or discrimination; gender-sensitive curriculum development which ensures that educational materials and textbooks promote gender equality, challenge stereotypes, and include diverse perspectives.

WIL programs in schools

197. While there is no context-specific women's and girls' leadership programmes and curricula from kindergarten to university, the current school curriculums incorporate leadership programs, activities and topics. The *Education Act 2023 Section 63* has established that learning frameworks and alternative learning framework with the approval of the Minister, can be developed and could differ from one level of education to the other and consists of a framework within which activities for teaching, curriculum of subjects, courses and supporting materials may be delivered.

XVII. Employment

Addressing forced labour and the high burden of care work

198. The *SI Constitution Section 15 (6)* provides for protection from slavery and forced labour. Current key measures to address forced labour is through the work done to combat Human trafficking in Solomon Islands, discussed in 'Trafficking and Exploitation of Prostitution'.

199. Significant researches has been conducted providing important recommendations and evidences for programming to address women's unpaid care work, these include the: *Solomon Islands Equality Insights Rapid Study 2022*; *the Double Burden - The Impact of Economic Empowerment Initiatives On Women's Workload December 2016*; *the Community Perceptions of Gender Norms and Economic Opportunity in Rural Solomon Islands 2018*; *Gender Analysis Prepared for the Cash and Voucher Assistance Feasibility Study 2019* (addressing the burden of care by women in humanitarian settings).

200. The following policy and legislative developments and reforms provides significant opportunities to ensure the enabling environment for addressing women's unpaid care and domestic work: the *draft MPS GESI Policy 2023–2027* that aims to establish flexible working hours and paternity leave; the *draft MCILI National Employment Policy 2023–2027* that aims to be gender responsive in its strategies and actions; the proposed review of legislations related to labour and employment that has begun in 2024; the review of the *NSEEWG 2020–2023*; and the enforcement of

the *CFWA 2017* that aims to support families in the care of their children including the development and implementation of the Child Protection Community Facilitation Manual.

201. Challenging gender roles within the household is integral to various gender related awareness programs and trainings by stakeholders in the gender space.

Strengthening collaboration with ILO

202. ILO works in collaboration with the MCILI, the Workers Union of Solomon Islands, the Solomon Islands Council of Trade Unions and SICCI. Key supports by ILO includes: providing technical support and training for MCILI on the reporting and the application of the International Labour Standards (ILS); providing ILS resources to its core partners; established an ILS Unit within the MCILI; Entrepreneurship trainings as a job creation tool targeting youth, women and persons with disabilities; and the development of the National Employment Policy.

203. Other significant efforts to promote women's access to employment opportunities includes the MPS and the MWYCFA's ongoing work to promote women in senior positions and through the implementation of the *AAS 2022–2027*, discussed in other parts of this report.

Review of employment legislations

204. The following legislation has been identified and prioritised by the Government of Solomon Islands for legislative review:

- (a) The Employment Act (CAP 72) 1981;
- (b) The Labour Act (CAP 73) 1982;
- (c) Safety At Work Act (CAP 74) 1982;
- (d) Trade Disputes Act (CAP 75) 1981;
- (e) Trade Unions Act (CAP 76) 1970;
- (f) Unfair Dismissal Act (CAP 77) 1982; and
- (g) Workers' Compensation Act (CAP 78) 1982

205. Technical Cooperation has been sought from ILO to review these legislations in line with the International Labour Standards SI has ratified to date.

Increasing women's participation in labour market and financial inclusion

206. The MWYCFA through the *GEWD Policy*, the *NSEEWG* and the *AAS* will continue to prioritize and implement its women's economic empowerment program which includes business and financial literacy trainings and the establishment and support to Savings Clubs. Advocating for policy and legislative reforms that will support women's participation in the labour market and financial inclusion will continue to be a priority of the MWYCFA.

207. Other programs targeting women's participation in the labour market and financial literacy includes programs by Strongim Business; Live and Learn; UN Women Markets for Change; and International Finance Cooperation and SICCI's 'Waka Mere Programme'.

208. The Central Bank of Solomon Islands (CBSI) *National Women Financial Policy 2022–2026* provided the mandate to develop women-specific products, services and delivery channels to support rural women’s participation in labour market and to accelerate their financial inclusion including access to digital financial services. Current digital financial products and services initiatives include YouSave loMobile, e-money providers like M-Selen and Ezi Pei.

XVIII. Health

Obstetric health services

209. Universal Health Coverage 2021–2031 has been adopted as the guiding principle for the provision of health services in Solomon Islands. There was 50% coverage in 2019, an increase from 48% in 2015.

210. Review of the *Health Services Act 1978* will provide an opportunity to strengthen the provision of equitable primary health care services.

211. The *NDS 2016–2035* and the *National Health and Strategic Plan (NHSP) 2021–2031* provides strong policy basis and clear targets for ensuring improved health services coverage and outcomes including improved maternal health, with a focus on high-risk mothers and those in most remote areas; and adequate health-care infrastructures and health workforce. Annexed to the NHSP is the Health Infrastructure and Medical Equipment Roadmap.

212. The MHMS has taken a significant step towards improving and strengthening maternal health care in the Solomon Islands by signing a Record of Discussions with the Korea International Cooperation Agency on the subject. The four-year project began in 2023 worth USD \$5 million USD.

213. There are approximately 353 facilities health facilities across Solomon Islands, providing for at least two levels of health facilities, based on their population size and distribution, most are in need of upgrade, repair, renovation or replacement.

214. All health facilities in Solomon Islands provide standard antenatal screening and post-natal services, although the range of services varies by level of facility.

Accessing contraceptives

215. The *National Reproductive and Child Health Strategic Plan 2016–2020* recognises the right of everyone to information about, and access to, contraceptives of their choice.

Safe water and sanitation

216. Accessing drinking water from improved drinking water sources has improved from 69% in 2009 to 78.3% in 2019. However, there has been a decline from 43% in 2009 to 35% in 2019 on households who usually use sanitation facilities and close to half (49.5%) of all households had no access to an improved toilet facility.³³

217. The *NHSP 2022–2031* and the *RWASH Strategic Plan 2021–2025* continues to aim to increase safe drinking water and sanitation in all rural communities of Solomon Islands.

³³ 2019 National Housing and Population Census.

218. The MHMS RWASH program have begun to produce a *Rural Water Supply Sanitation and Hygiene Sector Performance Review (SPR)* every 5 years to ensure consistent monitoring and evidence-based policy programming. The SPR (2015-2020) recorded 655 RWASH projects were completed and 84 villages declared No Open Defecation. 21 organisations implemented RWASH Programs between 2015 and 2020.³⁴

219. The *Solomon Islands Water Authority Act 4 (a)* sets out the provisions for the proper management, allocation and distribution of urban water resources.

220. The Solomon Islands Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project ensured better access to safe water and sanitation in urban areas in SI. This included improving and increasing piped water supply and sanitation services among poor households and reducing their use of well and rain water harvest. The project is on-going and is a partnership between the SIG, ADB, World Bank and Solomon Water.

Information campaigns on sexual and reproductive health

221. Key gaps identified in addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) include: the lack of a standalone SRHR policy and strategy; related policies and strategies that are outdated; and limited consideration of people with disability (PWD) in SRHR frameworks.³⁵

222. The *National Population Policy 2016–2026*, the *Role Delineation Policy 2014* (plans are underway for its review) and the *National GEWD Policy 2021–2027* establishes strong commitments to address SRHR in the absence of a standalone policy framework.

223. Women and girls have access to free information and services on sexual and reproductive health through MHMS services and clinics including modern contraceptive methods.

224. The MHMS partnered with the SIPPA to deliver a 5-year population education and Youth Family Life Campaign aiming to increase knowledge and awareness of sexual and reproductive health services and family planning in communities across the country. This included the training of 68 Peer Educators to become SRH focal points in their respective communities.

225. The SIPPA is the leading NGO that provides sexual and reproductive health and family planning information and services. SIPPA has 5 permanent clinics, 3 mobile outreach clinics for rural areas and vulnerable populations and 60 community-based distributors of free contraceptives across 6 Provinces. Their programs include Radio Health Programmes on SRH, prevention of early pregnancies and STI. The mobile clinics offer a free cervical cancer screening program as well as SRH education as a strong preventative strategy to address the rising cases of cervical cancer in women and girls. This service is provided for both girls and boys. By 2020, SIPPA had reached and served over 70,000 people across the country, primarily women and girls.

226. SIPPA also allocates 20% of its annual budget for youths to share SRH information's during Youth Week Programs, SIPPA Open Day and Youth International Day including awareness programs in schools.

³⁴ NEWSLETTER Rural Water Supply, Sanitation & Hygiene June 2021.

³⁵ A review of policy and legislation on Sexual and Reproductive Health and GBV in Solomon Islands in 2022.

Monitoring mental health

227. The *MHMS Mental Health Policy 2020* set out a vision and broad objectives for mental health in the Solomon Islands. The policy identifies women as a special/vulnerable population whose needs must be taken into account. A key priority area of the policy is to strengthen the National data collection, quality, monitoring and use of systems for mental health care and treatment through the national District Health Information Software II. Data is to be collected monthly and the updating of core mental health indicators to be continuous.

228. The *Mental Health Policy* has formed the basis for the development of a Mental Health Bill, which is currently in the final stages of drafting Attorney General's Chamber.

229. The MWYCFA has statutory obligation to produce annual reports on the implementation of the FPA 2014. Reporting on Mental Health services through these annual reports still needs improvement.

230. The Integrated Mental Health Unit is a member of the SAFENET Referral Network with an obligation to report its services to the SAFENET GBV Admin Data collection tool. The GBV Admin Data tool collects information on psychological abuses, however, the link between these abuses and mental health in Solomon Islands is a data gap.

Promoting women's leadership in health

231. In 2017, to enhance the leadership and management capacity of its health professionals including clinicians, doctors and nurses and long serving senior staff, the MHMS pursued the establishment of a Post Graduate Diploma in Health Leadership and Management Course at the Solomon Islands National University. Between 2018-2021, there were two cohorts who attended the course.

Decriminalising abortion and data on unsafe abortion

232. Preparatory work is underway to review provisions criminalising and limiting legal abortion in the Penal Code. The review will provide the opportunity to decriminalise abortion in cases of rape, incest and severe foetal impairment. Finalisation of abortion paper is anticipated to take place in 2024.

233. In October 2022, the SIPPA launched a women's health report that highlighted the determinants, practices and consequences of unsafe abortion in the Solomon Islands, documenting a serious public health issue. Recommendations from the report is intended to inform the review of the Penal Code.

234. Disaggregated data on incidence of unsafe abortion and its impact on women's health in the Solomon Islands is limited. Data provided, refer to Annex 14, is by the SIPPA and is limited to locations where they operate. Data is specific only to post-abortion counselling service.

XIX. Rural women

Indicators for monitoring

235. The *NDS 2016–2035 (NDS)* is the overall national framework that outlines Solomon Islands national socioeconomic priorities and has a M&E Performance

Framework that includes SDG gender-specific indicators.³⁶ Some Sectoral Policies also has their M & E Framework attached to them. Examples include the *NHSP 2021–2031* that provides for health-related indicators; the *National Financial Inclusion Strategy 3 2021–2025* that provides indicators related to financial access, services and literacy; the *GEWD Policy* and its subsidiary policies with their results framework outlining gender specific indicators.

Income-generating and entrepreneurial opportunities

236. The *MWYCFA GEWD Policy 2021–2027* and the *NSEEWG 2020–2023* provides for the policy framework for income-generating and entrepreneurial opportunities for women. Key initiatives and support by the MWYCFA in providing income-generating and entrepreneurial opportunities for women includes the establishment of Women’s Savings Clubs across Solomon Islands;³⁷ a Women’s Development Assistance Grant that supports requests from women groups for income-generating projects and economic related trainings such as life skills and savings club’s establishment including financial literacy; and a Small Business and Financial Literacy TOT in 2023 targeting rural women’s savings clubs in six Provinces. The TOT is estimated to indirectly benefit 5291 women and girls in the country. The TOT was implemented through a partnership agreement between MWYCFA and Strongim Bisnis.

237. The Government through CBSI has established financial credit schemes and facilities to support financial service providers offer low-interest rate loans and collateral support, making it easier for small businesses to secure credit including women-owned businesses. These include a: SME Credit Guarantee Scheme; a MSME Credit Line Facility; Export Finance Facility; and the government-owned bank, *Development Bank of Solomon Islands (DBSI)* established by the *DBSI Act 2018*.

Women in rural development

238. There have been significant progresses to ensure the impact of rural development on women. These include: the endorsement of the *Solomon Islands Constituency Development Policy 2023–2032* in 2023, a ten-year cross-sectoral overarching roadmap to guide implementation of tangible and sustainable development in the rural constituencies; the *Constituency Development Fund (CDF) Act 2023* that establishes that 20% of the utilisation of the funds must be for cross-sectoral including inclusivity and gender equality; and the Constituency Development Committees established to assist with the disbursement of the CDF, must comprise of at least two females out of the five members.

239. The Solomon Islands *National Provident Fund Amendment Act 2018* established the National Provident Fund YouSave program, a long-term savings scheme and retirement fund aimed at workers in the informal economy. A total of 43,566 people have joined the YouSave of which 23,565 (54.09%) are females and 20,001 (45.91%) are males.

Rural women in decision-making

240. Key efforts to promote the participation of rural women in decision-making processes includes: development Provincial gender and women’s policies that has

³⁶ Also discussed in the ‘General’ Section.

³⁷ There are approximately 800+ women savings clubs in Solomon Islands, of which about 300 is established by the MWYCFA.

specific outcome on promoting women in leadership, decision making and governance; celebrating the IRWD in Honiara and in the provinces since 2014; the establishment of Provincial Women Caucus's, a network of provincial and rural women leaders, to support and engage in policy discussions and dialogues with Provincial Government, traditional and religious leaders; Outstanding Women Initiatives; and ongoing leadership trainings including advocacy skills trainings.

Women's access to land ownership

241. Approximately 83% of land in Solomon Islands is customary land. Significant efforts to facilitate rural women's access to land ownership includes: the *Land and Titles (Amendment) Act 2014* establishing that for every Land Board, one member must be a female, implemented since 2014; the customary land recording process established under the *Customary Land Records Act*, that has been facilitating the recognition of the rights and interests of women including the benefits from income and profit generated from the use of the land. Customary Landholding Groups are inclusive of women; the submission of rural women's³⁸ recommendations³⁹ to the Traditional Governance and Customs Facilitation Bill (TGCFB) 2018, in October 2021; the conduct of Empowerment Leadership and Decision-making Trainings for women representatives of customary land holding groups from three selected Provinces in 2021; a Customary Land Forum held in 2021 that brought relevant stakeholders to consider common understanding, general principles and guidelines and standards including gender perspectives for making recorded customary land available and accessible; and women and youth's engagement in a Land Summit held in November 2018.

Legal protections from negative social impact of large-scale development project

242. There are key legal and policy developments and reforms that seeks to protect and promote the rights of women within large-scale development projects including their rights to benefit from these projects.

243. One of the long-term objectives of the *NDS* is for poverty alleviation across whole of SI including through the equitable distribution of the benefits of development.

244. The Environment Act 1998 provides for a development consent process requiring developers to produce an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA must take into account the environmental, economic, culture and social considerations and how they can reduce any adverse impacts among other things. This takes into the account the economic, cultural and social considerations of rural women. The current review of the Act provides an opportunity to strengthen safeguards for women and girls.

245. The *Minerals Resource Bill 2023* has the potential to authorise and regulate all mineral extraction processes in a manner that recognizes, respects and safeguards the natural, social and cultural environment of the communities of Solomon Islands

³⁸ 223 women from across the whole country.

³⁹ The women's recommendations can be found in '*The Final gender assessment report on the draft Traditional Governance Bill of the Solomon Islands: Fostering women's equal participation in decision-making in traditional governance and the recognition of women's rights under customary law and dispute resolution practices*' report.

including women's rights to customary ownership, customary use and occupation of land, water and sea, their role in land care management; and the sharing of benefits.

246. Key policy measures are the *National Forestry Policy 2020* and the policies by the MMERE - the *Minerals Policy 2017–2021*⁴⁰ and the *MMERE GESI Strategy for Sustainable Mining in the Solomon Islands 2023–2033*, also discussed in 'Participation in Political and Public Life'. The MMERE commitment has been translated into the MMERE Model Community Development Agreement between Landowners and Affected Communities and the Mining Company – a key strategy for developing community engagement strategies and guidelines to address all matters relating to mining and to devise recommendations that will strengthen regulatory institutional structures, functions and capacity on community interests relating to mining. The MWYCFA has been a member of mining agreement negotiation teams set up by the MMERE to ensure the engagement and promotion of rural women in mining related matters including benefit-sharing.

247. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) recognises the role that women play in subsistence and commercial agriculture. The *National Agriculture and Livestock Policy (NALP) (2015–2019)* recognises women as vulnerable groups and advocates for women extension officers. MAL is working towards incorporating an integrated gendered perspective into future, policies, strategies and programme implementation.

XX. Disaster risk reduction and climate change

248. Solomon Islands is a State Party to the United Nations Framework the Convention on Climate Change and to the Paris Agreement in 2016.

249. In seeking to achieve *NDS* long term Objective 4 on promoting resilient and environmentally sustainable development, two medium term strategies⁴¹ has been adopted that includes the need for community risk management plans and capacity buildings that includes those most vulnerable in the communities.

National disaster and climate change policies

250. The MECDM CCD *National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) 2023–2032*,⁴² is the overarching policy to addressing climate change in Solomon Islands. It is based on the pillars of inclusion, equity, good governance, and local ownership, with a strong emphasis on prioritizing the needs and respecting the rights of the most vulnerable, women, youths, children, people with disabilities, and the elderly, as well as facilitating their effective participation in intervention planning and implementation as a key guiding principle for policy implementation. Key policy directives and strategies for achieving the policy's objectives include developing climate change legislation and implementing a national climate change vulnerability, risk, and adaptation assessment program that incorporates gender, equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI); and the NDMO *NDMP 2018* highlights the importance of women's participation and decision making in disaster management arrangement at all levels.

⁴⁰ Its revision is pending the passage of the *Mineral Resource Bill 2023*.

⁴¹ Medium Term Strategy 10: Improve disaster and climate risk management, including prevention, risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery as well as adaptation as part of resilient development; and Medium-term Strategy 11: Manage the environment in a sustainable resilient way and contribute to climate change mitigation management, response and recovery.

⁴² Is a result of the review of the *National Climate Change Policy 2012–2017*.

251. Key efforts by the MECDM to integrate gender and social inclusion in its programs include the establishment of an active GFP committee consisting of three technical staff members from various divisions in the MECDM; the establishment of the National and Provincial Protection Sector Committees; working closely with communities including rural women and people with disabilities to establish committees to develop Climate Vulnerability and Risk Management Plans through the Community Resilience to Climate and Disaster Risk in Solomon Islands Project (CRISP). CRISP employs a participatory planning approach that ensures the involvement of women at preparatory and implementation phase of community-level activities including resilience projects, this ensures women's direct involvement in community decision-making. The participatory approach involves extensive dialogue and consultations. The CRISP project ran from 2014 to 2019.

Sectoral policies

252. There has been increasing sectoral policies that recognises and seeks to address the disproportionate impact of disasters and climate change on vulnerable populations including women. These include:

(a) The development of the *MHMS Health National Adaptation Plan (H-NAP)* which began in March 2024, aimed at addressing the urgent need to enhance resilience against the impacts of climate change on health and wellbeing in Solomon. The MWYCFA was consulted to ensure children, youth and women's perspectives will inform the Plan. The MHMS has also established important tools to meet this outcome and they are the Health and Climate Change Country Profile 2020, the Solomon Island Integrated Vulnerability Assessment (SIIVA) tool and the Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) Tool;

(b) The *National Population Policy 2017–2026* key principle to respect human rights and the need to be inclusive across all of its goals including Goal 6 which is to ensure environmental impacts and climate change risks are considered for all urban and peri-urban development and vulnerable rural communities;

(c) The *National Youth Policy 2017–2030* includes a policy objective to engage youths in climate change aligned to SDG 14;

(d) The *GEWD 2021–2027 Policy Priority Outcome Five on Women and Girls are Fully Engaged in Peace and Security Efforts, including in Crisis, Post-Crisis and Disaster Situations* highlights the following key policy directions for WDD, through National and Provincial Protection Committees: to engage women in decision making at all levels of disaster management, risk reduction and climate change adaptation; conduct risk assessment for persons with disabilities and marginalised or otherwise vulnerable groups of women; promote women's roles as peace-builders in emergencies and conflicts; integrate EAWG prevention and response into disaster management planning;⁴³ support to policy and legislative reforms for sustainable resource management and equitable community benefits; and

(e) The *WPS NAP 2017–2021*.

253. The Solomon Islands Climate Action Network (SICAN) was established in 2019 to promote advocacy, collaboration, influence, networking, research, empowerment, gender inclusivity, and policy dialogue. A strategic plan is being developed to ensure gender equity and social inclusion when addressing gender issues.

⁴³ Reemphasized in the National EAWG Policy 2021–2017.

XXI. Women with disabilities

Ratification of CRPD and comprehensive disability policies

254. In 2023, the SIG ratified the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*.

255. In December 2022, the MHMS launched the *Solomon Islands National Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2022–2031* and the *Rehabilitation Strategic Plan 2022–2031*, marking a milestone and providing a comprehensive framework for improving disability inclusion in Solomon Islands across different sectors including in education, employment, health and the rehabilitation of persons with disability. The MHMS Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Unit is responsible for the administration of the CRPD and the Disability Policies.

Sectoral Policies and Programs on Disability

256. The *AAS 2022–2027* aims to accelerate the substantive equality between man and women including women with disabilities in the area of political participation, employment, education, business, resource mobilisation, research and gender data. The *AAS 2022–2027* is also discussed in ‘Temporary Special Measures’.

257. The *MPS GESI Policy 2023–2027 – Advancing Good Governance in the Public Service* seeks to address gender disparities in leadership positions in the public service with a strong focus on persons with disability. Actions to achieve this includes the need to establish human resources management disability support services; use of new technology to ensure accessible advertisements and recruitment processes; Adopt flexible working hours; and enhanced access to training to fast track higher qualification.

258. The *Education Act 2023 Section 63(8)(b)(ii)* establishes that a school or ECE centre may design alternative learning programs to cater for students with special educational needs.

259. The *National Disability Inclusive Education Policy 2016–2020* aims to ensure an education system that values and is responsive to the learning needs and aspirations for children, youth and adults with disabilities. The Policy has been revised and a manual to support its implementation developed.

260. There are established specialised schools for people with disabilities including for women and girls - the Bethesda and San Isidoro rehabilitation & disability schools. Bethesda currently enrolls 21 students, 8 females and 13 males; and San Isidro, 16 students, 4 females and 12 males.

261. Women with disability’s access to SRHR is discussed in ‘Health’.

262. The *FPA 2014* provides for additional protection for PWD through the inclusion of an aggravated offence for domestic violence against PWD.

263. The *Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act 2016* strengthened the legal response to sexual offences taking into account the Rape or indecent act of a person with significant disability.

264. The SAFENET response and referral network continues to be the key mechanism for receiving women and girls with disabilities who have experienced GBV including isolation and confinement. Cases involving women and girls with disability are often reported by communities through the Police or crisis centres. Case conferencing is often activated in dealing with cases with women and girls with

disabilities. The SAFENET provides GBV services for women and girls with disabilities including counselling services by FSC and CCC and legal services by FSC and PSO. Strengthening GBV Disability-Inclusive services by SAFENET will continue to be a priority.

265. The *NCCP 2023–2032* calls for the integration of GEDSI in national climate change vulnerability, risk and adaptation assessment programs.

266. The *GEWD Policy 2021–2027* and the *EVAWG Policy 2021–2027* brings stronger focus on the principle of ‘leave no one behind’ as a key strategy for implementing the policies outcomes specifically for women and girls with disability. These outcomes include EVAWG programs and services that are extended to reach women and girls with disability; their engagement in peace and security efforts including in crisis and post crisis situations; and tailored health services to their needs.

267. The National Provident Fund youSave program is accessible to all people in the informal sector including those with disability.

268. There is increasing efforts to improve PWD accessibility to buildings. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Development now considers disability in its building designs, transport infrastructure and services with regards to accessibility and connectivity. To support this, consultants have undertaken disability infrastructure audit trainings. The MEHRD has a Policy Statement and Guidelines on school’s infrastructure design standards that requires all building are friendly for children with disability and girls. The High Court is also accessible now with an access ramp.

269. The CBR Unit conducts on-going awareness and advocacy programs on PWD at the national level and through their coordination teams at the provincial levels. This is also supported by provincial health authorities and field workers. CSOs also conduct awareness and advocacy on PWD, including FSC and the CCC. Other programs promoting the rights of women and girls with disabilities in the Solomon Islands include participation of women and girls with disabilities in the 16 days of activism campaign against violence against women and girls, and the Paralympic Games at national and international level.

270. The Disability Women Empowerment Association of Solomon Islands (DWEASI) was registered as a legal entity in 2022 comprising of women and girls with disabilities in the Solomon Islands. The Association was setup to promote and protect the rights of women and girls with disabilities in all areas of life and to advocate for inclusive-base approaches. The DWEASI activities include raising awareness on GBV against women and girls with disability and income-generating projects such as honey production.

271. The Media Association Solomon Islands has had capacity building training on how to write appropriately and sensitively on issues of gender and disability.

Data on women with disabilities

272. The *DHS 2015* and the 2019 *Census* provides important data on women with disabilities.

273. The SAFENET GBV administrative data includes victim information and whether they have a disability to support and inform GBV service delivery.

274. The *Solomon Islands Equality Insights Rapid Survey 2022* study also provides insights into the levels of deprivation of people with disabilities to help support disability-inclusive policy development and programming.

275. The CBR Unit conducts trainings on disability data collection to inform strategies to address the needs of PWD in the various provinces.

XXII. Marriage and family relations

Raising the minimum age of marriage

276. There have been developments to increase the age of marriage including customary marriages to 18 years through an amendment to the *Islanders Marriage Act Section 10*. The current review seeks to ensure explicit language that the age increase will also apply to customary marriage and establish a referral pathway for reporting of a breach of the age limit.

277. The National Children's Policy 2023–2028 seeks the outcome that 'All children in the Solomon Islands are safeguarded from physical harm, emotional stress and exploitation' and one target action is to increase the age of marriage from 15 to 18.

Registration of marriages

278. Customary marriages are exempt from registration however, they may be registered voluntarily under Section 18 of the *Islanders Marriage Act*. The issue with non-registration of customary marriages are the exclusion of the crime of bigamy.

279. The need for mandatory registration for all marriages including customary marriages has been identified as an issue for consideration in the review of the *Islanders Marriage Act*.

Free and full consent to marriage

280. The *Islanders Marriage Act* has implied provisions (Section 10(3) and (4)) that women can only enter into marriage of their own free will. The *Islanders Divorce Act* sets out that duress is a ground for nullity of marriage. Girls and boys between the ages of 15 and 18 years must get written consent from their guardians or parents unless he or she is a widow or widower then parental consent is not necessary.

281. The *FPA 2014* criminalises domestic violence (DV) and defines DV as four forms of abuses including psychological abuse that is conducted or the threats to do so within the context of a domestic relationship. Psychological abuse includes intimidation. The offence of DV draws a penalty fine of 30,000 penalty units or imprisonment for 3 years, or both.

Addressing the harmful effects of bride price

282. Under custom in Solomon Islands, marriage includes a ceremonial process at which there is exchange of gifts between families to show and affirm commitments by families to strengthen relationships. This process has been misused and has developed into bride price being connoted with commercial exchange with women being reduced to be part of an exchange for money and expensive goods. Not all Provinces in Solomon Islands abuse this process and there is a need for sanctions for abuse of the bride price process.

283. The Women's recommendations to the *TGCFB 2018* includes the need to promote and preserve traditional norms, protocols, values and practices in line with

international human rights standards and therefore provides an opportunity to prohibit any customary practices that discriminate against women.

284. Bride price is not regulated at the national level, however, has been regulated by one rural community in the Guadalcanal Province through a Provincial Ordinance. The Moli Ward Council of Chiefs Ordinance 2010 enacted by the Guadalcanal Provincial Assembly pursuant to s30 of the *Provincial Government Act 1998*, provides that, the council of chiefs will oversee all matters relating to marriage under custom and will determine the bride price for giving and receiving. The ordinance further provides for categories on how bride prices are paid and the traditional ceremonies that will be performed. This is one of the ways to prohibit the abuse of bride price and uphold the traditional importance of the exchange of gifts by families. This ordinance has set a benchmark for addressing bride price across Solomon Islands.

Right to inheritance and access to property

285. The Solomon Islands *Will Probate and Administration Act (Cap 33) 1987* grants men and women equal rights to inheritance. As land in Solomon Islands is mostly customarily owned, land inheritance is regulated by customary law, which is unwritten and often, through interpretation, discriminates against women. As customary law has constitutional status, even if it discriminates against women, it is accepted and enforced. Refer to ‘Rural Women’ on efforts to promote women’s access to land ownership.

286. Solomon Islands legislation does not guarantee equality to both spouses in ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property. Solomon Islands legislation does not provide for a division of matrimonial property after a divorce. Property rights are largely determined by custom which has legal status under the Constitution. Consequently, in custom where women are discriminated against in relation to property, the law does not guarantee protection and equality. However, women can draw protection related to disposition of joint property through the application of the *FPA 2014* that defines DV as including economic abuse as ‘*unreasonably controlling behaviour which denies the person financial autonomy or prevents them from taking part in decisions over household expenditures or the disposition of joint property;*’.

Equality before the Law

287. *Section 3 of the Constitution* sets out that every person in the Constitution is entitled to human rights and freedoms regardless of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour and creed or sex. *Section 10 of the Constitution* provides for due diligence in court proceedings including fair hearing.

288. The *Family Protection Act (2014)* and the *Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act 2016* take into account the real experiences of women and girls and integrate the victim centred approach. The laws define forms of violence against women including domestic violence, sexual violence, trafficking and pornography and establish these as civil wrongs and criminal offences.

289. The *National Development Strategy*, the *National Gender Equality and Women’s Development Policy* and the *National Policy to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls* establishes the need to focus on improving gender equality before the law.

290. The *3-year (2020–2022) strategy for advancing GESI in the Solomon Islands Justice System* focuses on 6 priorities areas, and its 4th and 5th Priorities covers,

ensuring that Justice premises are accessible and fit for purpose and ensuring equality within our Laws.

291. Solomon Islands is in varying stages of progressing significant legislative reforms including for the *Islanders Marriage Act* and *Islanders Divorce Act* providing an opportunity to address the current discriminatory provisions within these Acts.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Also refer to discussions in ‘Constitutional Framework and Discriminatory Laws’.