



► Kiribati: Country Factsheet

[Working Draft]

2024

Key Points

- Kiribati has a labour force participation rate of 48.1 per cent.
- Almost two thirds of employment is in the services sector.
- Priority labour rights challenges in Kiribati include improving labour rights and conditions in migration and the fishing sector; addressing child labour; and addressing gender discriminatory norms.
- Kiribati's tripartite constituents are the Ministry of Employment and Human Resource, the Kiribati Trade Union Congress, the Kiribati Major Employers' Organisation, and the Kiribati Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- Kiribati has ratified 11 in-force ILO conventions; future ratification priorities include the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, and key occupational safety and health conventions (including C155 and C166).

► Country overview

Kiribati is a nation of 33 atolls and reef islands with a population in 2020 of 119,438.ⁱ Kiribati is classified as a lower-middle income country and has one of the smallest economies of Pacific Island Countries.ⁱⁱ In 2020, the GDP per capita was US\$1,404.ⁱⁱⁱ Economically,^{iv} Kiribati faces significant constraints including limited natural resources; susceptibility to climate change; widely scattered, physically remote and sparsely populated islands; limited cash opportunities outside government employment; and irregular transport by sea and air to outer islands and international markets.

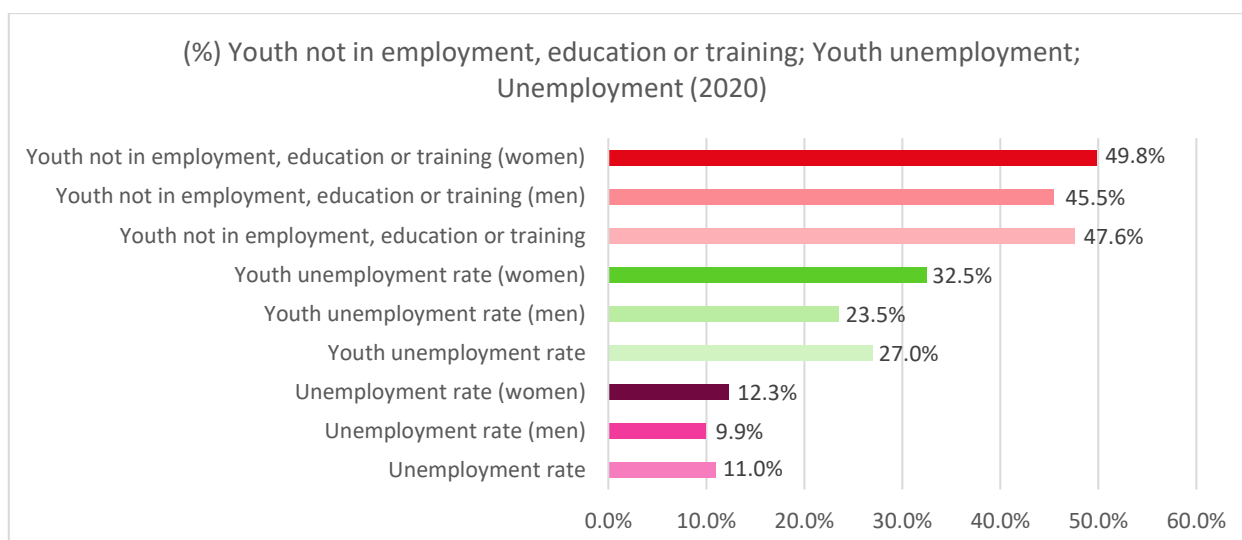
Key Data

- **Population:** 119,438
- **Working-age population:** 72,300
- **Labour force participation rate:** 48.1%
 - Women: 40.6%
 - Men: 56.3%

Source: ILO, "ILO modelled estimates database", ILOSTAT, accessed 12 April 2024.

► The labour market and the labour force

The most recent labour force information can be drawn from Kiribati Population Census from 2020.^v At this time the working-age population was 72,300. The labour force participation rate was 48.1 per cent, and was higher for men (56.3 per cent) than women (40.6 per cent). Unemployment is a predominant feature in Kiribati, with an unemployment rate of 11 per cent, 27 per cent for youth. Almost half of all youth are not in employment, education or training (47.6 per cent). This is one of the highest rates found among Pacific Island Countries. Increasing urbanization has drawn more and more people from the outer islands to the capital Tarawa but this has not translated into employment. Just over half (53.2 per cent) of employment is in waged or salaried employment, with 46.8 per cent classified as self-employed (including employers, own account workers and contributing family workers). 69.1 per cent of employment is in the services sector, which also employs the majority of women (84.6 per cent). 25 per cent of employment is in agriculture, and 5.9 per cent are in industry. Informal employment makes up 56.1 per cent of employment; 94 per cent of employment in agriculture is informal employment. The majority of workers are in medium-skill occupations, such as skilled agricultural workers, craft and related trades workers, services and sales workers, and clerical workers.



Source: ILO, "ILO modelled estimates database", ILOSTAT, accessed 12 April 2024.

► Labour rights challenges

A key labour issue in Kiribati relates to improving labour rights and labour conditions for Kiribati's fishers. This includes improving occupational, safety and health; ensuring access to minimum wage; and introducing adequate social security. Child labour is also a concern, with the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations requesting the Government to strengthen its measures to prevent the engagement of children in commercial sexual exploitation, and to remove them from this worst form of child labour; and to ensure that labour inspectors and law enforcement have the capacity and resources to effectively monitor the worst forms of child labour, including in the informal economy.^{vi} The Social Development Indicator Survey carried out in 2018–19 indicated that 14.9 per cent of children performed work under hazardous conditions (19.7 per cent for boys and 9.9 per cent for girls).^{vii} In relation to gender equality, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in their 2020 Concluding Observations noted with concern concentration of women in the informal sector; the gender pay gap in the private sector; the de facto exclusion of women from working in the fishing industry and the disproportionate burden of community work borne by women.^{viii}

Labour Administration System

- **Labour policy, wages policy:** Ministry of Employment and Human Relations: Work Relations Unit.
- **Employment promotion (at home and overseas):** Ministry of Employment and Human Relations: Labour Market Information and Marketing Unit; Overseas Employment Unit.
- **Worker welfare:** Ministry of Employment and Human Resource: Work Relations Unit; Occupational Health and Safety Unit.
- **Public employment services:** Ministry of Employment and Human Resource, Labour Marketing and Information Market Unit.
- **Labour and OSH Inspection:** Ministry of Employment and Human Relations: Work Relations Unit; and Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Unit.
- **Dispute resolution:** Ministry of Employment and Human Relations: Work Relations Unit.
- **Social Protection:** Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports and Social Affairs; and Kiribati Provident Fund is a statutory national compulsory saving scheme.
- **Tripartite Boards:** The tripartite Decent Work Advisory Board is established under the Employment and Industrial Relations Code 2015 (Part IV).

Source: ILO, "Baseline Study of the labour administration systems in eleven Pacific Island Countries that are members of the International Labour Organization", (unpublished); ILO, "Mapping of labour administration systems in Pacific Island Countries: Tripartite bodies and social dialogue", (unpublished).

► Legal and policy framework

Kiribati's overriding development strategy is found in the Kiribati 20-Year Vision 2016-2036 (KV20).^{ix} The employment strategy for Kiribati is contained in the 20-Year Vision, in particular under Pillar 1, Wealth, which addresses human capital. The key approaches to improving employment include focusing on education, developing a highly skilled, qualified and efficient workforce, and increasing employment opportunities, primarily through labour migration. Reflecting the importance of labour migration, Kiribati's first Labour Migration Policy was developed in 2015.^x The government of Kiribati is also in the process of developing the first national employment policy.

The key law governing labour in Kiribati is the Employment and Industrial Relations Code of 2015. The law contains provisions on equal pay for work of equal value and prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace; it also provides for the contents of written contracts, payment of wages, maximum hours of work and paid maternity leave. The law includes provisions on trade unions and employers' organizations, prohibiting employers from discouraging the exercise of an employee's freedom of association and setting out the rights of trade unions and employers' organizations.

Migration dynamics

Labour migration has played a longstanding role in addressing lack of employment opportunities in Kiribati. In 2020, remittances accounted for 8.4 per cent of GDP. Migration is generally into seafaring and the maritime and fisheries sector, alongside key labour mobility schemes. These include the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme and New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme. Both of these schemes are designed to fill seasonal labour shortages, largely in agriculture and horticulture industries. The PALM scheme generally allows workers to work for nine months and also has long-term deployment options; the RSE scheme allows seasonal workers to stay in New Zealand up to 9 months in any 11-month period. In the 2022-2023 period, 633 Kiribatisians joined the RSE scheme and 1,027 joined the PALM scheme.

Source: The World Bank, "Personal remittances, received (% of GDP) – Kiribati", World Bank staff estimates based on IMF balance of payments data, and World Bank and OECD GDP estimates, accessed 13 April 2024; Charlotte Bedford, "Pacific labour mobility over the last year: continued growth", *DevPolicyBlog*, 8 August 2023.

Ratification

Kiribati has ratified 11 ILO conventions that are currently in force. In addition, Kiribati has ratified a number of international treaties including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Fundamental

- C029 – Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)
- C087 – Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)
- C098 – Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)
- C100 – Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)
- C105 – Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)
- C111 – Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)
- C138 – Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)
- C182 – Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)

Governance

- C144 – Tripartite Consultation (ILS) Convention, 1976 (No. 144)

Technical

- C185 – Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185)
- Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006)

Tripartism in action

The Kiribati Trade Union Congress has five member unions. The Kiribati Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the key employers' organization. Kiribati provides for the registration of trade unions and employer organizations through the Work Relations Unit in the Ministry of Employment and Human Resource. Kiribati has had accredited tripartite delegations for the three most recent International Labour Conferences (109, 110 and 111). The tripartite Decent Work Advisory Board is empowered to make recommendations and proposals to the Minister on a range of specified matters including matters relating to work, working conditions and labour relations (s.43). The Board may nominate conciliators and arbitrators available to be appointed by the Registrar of Industrial Relations. The Board is required to meet at least four times per year.

► ILO's support to Kiribati centres around the following priorities:

1. Promotion of decent employment opportunities, including for young women and men through the development of a National Employment Policy;
2. Application of the International Labour Standards and Kiribati's labour laws; and
3. Capacity building of tripartite partners, including on provisions of business development support to small medium enterprises.

The ILO is also committed to supporting Kiribati to ratify a number of conventions, including the following:

- Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930
- C081 – Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81)
- C122 – Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122)
- C129 – Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129)
- C155 – Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155)
- C160 – Labour Statistics Convention, 1985 (No. 160)
- C161 – Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161)
- C187 – Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187)

ⁱ National Statistics Office, *2020 Kiribati Census Atlas*, 2022.

ⁱⁱ OECD, "DAC List of ODAW Recipients".

ⁱⁱⁱ The World Bank, "GDP per capita (current US\$) – Kiribati, 2020", World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files, accessed 13 April 2024.

^{iv} ILO, "ILO modelled estimates database", ILOSTAT, accessed 12 April 2024.

^v National Statistics Office. *2020 Kiribati Census Atlas*, 2022.

^{vi} ILO, "Observation (CEACR) – adopted 2023, published 112nd ILC session (2024)", NORMLEX, accessed 14 April 2024.

^{vii} National Statistics Office. *Social Development Indicator Survey 2018-2019, MICS6*, 2020.

^{viii} Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Concluding observations on the combined initial, second and third periodic reports of Kiribati, (2020).

^{ix} Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, *Kiribati 20-Year Vision 2016-2036*, 2016.

^x Ministry of Labour and Human Resource Development, *Kiribati National Labour Migration Policy*, 2015.

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