International Labour Organization

UNDP

unicef

Solomon Islands

Social protection diagnostic assessment

Solomon Islands: Social protection diagnostic review
ISBN: 9789220418611 (print)
9789220418628 (web PDF)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.54394/BJZH8275

Contents

List of tables

List of figures

List of boxes

Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CAUSE	community access and urban services enhancement
CBSI	Central Bank of Solomon Islands
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease of 2019
CVA	cash and voucher assistance
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DP	Development Pathways Ltd.
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DWSPWG	Decent Work and Social Protection Working Group
FBO	faith based organisation
FGD	focus group discussion
FIES	food insecurity experience scale
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITCILO	International Training Centre of the ILO
KII	key informant interview
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand)
MICS	multiple indicator cluster survey
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MWCYFA	Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs
NCD	non-communicable diseases
NER	net enrolment ratio
NGO	non-governmental organization
NPBS	National Peace Building Strategy
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PALM	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility
PRC	People’s Republic of China
PWD	persons with disabilities
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
RCDF	Rural Constituency Development Fund
REP	Rapid Employment Project
RSE	Recognized Seasonal Employer
SBD	Solomon Island dollars
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

SINPF	Solomon Islands National Provident Fund
SP	social protection
SPIACB	Social Protection Inter-Agency Coordination Board
SWP	Seasonal Worker Programme
ToR	Terms of Reference
TVET	technical vocational education and training
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
VUP	Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme

Acknowledgements

This report is the outcome of a joint collaboration of ILO, UNDP and UNICEF. The production of this report was coordinated by Christian Viegelahn, Specialist for Decent Work and Employment ILO Office for Pacific Island Countries. The lead author of the report was Stephen Barrett (Independent Social Protection Specialist). Josephine Kama (Independent Public Policy Specialist) provided valuable inputs and research support in the Solomon Islands. Nayha Mansoor (Development Pathways) conducted the analysis of the household income and expenditure survey (HIES) data and supported policy costing simulations; while Marguerite Bennett (Independent Public Policy Specialist) provided background research support. The authors are grateful to Christian Viegelahn (ILO), Markus Ruck (ILO), Kinan Bahnassi (ILO), Patrick Tuimalealiifano (UNDP) and Ronesh Prasad (UNICEF) for their guidance, technical inputs and support throughout.

The ILO, UNDP and UNICEF would like to extend their appreciation to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration for their collaboration over the years and to all of those who provided their valuable time and insights to support the implementation of this study. We hope that the analysis contained within this report, and the dialogue conducted as part of its preparation, makes a meaningful contribution to the pursuit of the establishment of a national social protection floor in the Solomon Islands.

Executive Summary

"...a cohesive society is one where people are protected against life risks, trust their neighbours, leadership structures and the institutions of the state and can work towards a better future for themselves and their families. Fostering social cohesion is about striving for greater inclusiveness, more civic participation and creating opportunities for upward mobility."

Solomon Islands National Peace Building Strategy (2016-20)

Background

The government of Solomon Islands has committed, through its ratification of several United Nations conventions, to pursuing the realization of the right to social protection for its people. At the same time, the Solomon Islands National Development Strategy 2020-30 aims to achieve a range of challenging socio-economic development objectives including the eradication of extreme poverty and reducing the proportion of the population living below the national basic needs poverty line and food poverty line to less than five and three per cent respectively. More broadly, the National Development Strategy's goal is for the Solomon Islands to join the Human Development Index's "medium human development" group of nations by 2030. Implementation of the commitments related to social protection that are contained within various international conventions will be critical to the attainment of these national development objectives. This report was therefore commissioned on behalf of the government of Solomon Islands by the ILO, UNDP and UNICEF to promote dialogue among key stakeholders on the development of a nationally determined social protection floor for the country.

Findings

Despite Solomon Islands' international commitments, the domestic legal and policy framework for social protection remains largely limited to employer-liability benefits for workers in formal employment. The main notable exception is the Child and Family Welfare Act of 2017 which provides a rather limited legal basis for public support for families who are unable to meet their children's basic needs. This legislation led to the establishment of a social welfare assistance scheme managed by the Department of Social Welfare and Gender Based Violence at the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, although this has since been defunded in recent years. Meanwhile, the existing employment-related benefits (such as maternity benefits, employment injury) tend to be poorly aligned with international labour standards and bests practices, and significant compliance challenges persist. No comprehensive social protection policy yet exists to guide the development of the social protection system in Solomon Islands.

Although social protection is a relatively new concept in Solomon Islands, there appears to be considerable consensus that reliance on a combination of traditional and family support mechanisms, private savings and employer-liability protection, is no longer sustainable or equitable. Although family and community-based social support will always remain critically important, traditional social support mechanisms are generally understood to be insufficient to support an equitable national development process. Indeed, excessive reliance on traditional social support mechanisms in the face of rapid environmental, socio-economic, technological and demographic change appears to risk overwhelming traditional social support systems and degrading the solidarity principles and values that underpin them. Meanwhile, Solomon Islands' social protection is extremely underdeveloped compared to regional and economic peers and is weakly aligned with international standards.

This situation has wide-ranging social, economic and political implications including:

- Weak employment-based social protection limits the attractiveness of formal, long-term and domestic employment, leading to a high incidence of informality, employment disruption and the high labour costs faced by employers.
- The absence of social protection for vulnerable sections of society leads to the distortion of economic development programmes and their reorientation towards meeting immediate needs.
- Absence of income protection for the working age population, and overburdening of those in formal employment with the care and support for extended families, has led to a re-orientation of the National Provident Fund towards meeting pre-retirement contingencies, thereby undermining its role in promoting financial security in old age.
- Over-reliance on employer-liability benefits is likely to be contributing to labour market informalisation and discrimination against women in the job market and workplace.
- Absence of support for families with children, particularly single parents, is generating high levels of child poverty which undermines long-term health and productivity and threatens to generate unsustainable levels of inequality.
- Inadequate social protection in cases of serious illness and disability are resulting in catastrophic financial losses for affected families, with intergenerational human capital consequences. Meanwhile the failure to alleviate the burden of caring for persons with disabilities perpetuates poverty among affected households and contributes to exclusion, stigmatisation and neglect of persons with disabilities.
- The absence of core social protection systems impedes the delivery of timely assistance to the population, and to vulnerable groups in particular, when disasters strike. This undermines the recovery process, limits capacity for adaptation and generates greater dependence on humanitarian assistance.

Poverty, hardship and widening socio-economic disparities are exerting a considerable negative toll on Solomon Islands' society and socio-economic development. With rapid social, economic, demographic and technological change, rising environmental hazards and significant external economic volatility further threatening societal welfare, wellbeing and prospects for social mobility, it is increasingly clear that Solomon Islands cannot afford not to invest in stronger social protection. Key concerns include:

- Socio-economic inequalities and persistent hardship are undermining social cohesion and have the potential to contribute to a breakdown in social fabric, law and order.
- Income insecurity contributes to Solomon Islands' high rates of child malnutrition and lowers educational attainment, with serious implications for the country's long-term development.
- Household financial insecurity is a key driver of gender-based violence and family breakdown, which further fuels adolescent delinquency, anti-social behaviour and criminality.
- Widespread poverty and rising costs of living are eroding solidarity and commitment to traditional cultural values and practices.

There appears considerable consensus in favour of the gradual development of an inclusive, lifecycle-based social protection system. The COVID-19 pandemic, the recent global economic crisis and recent social conflict have all demonstrated the inadequacy of current arrangements. Key priorities for the development of such a system include children, single parent households, persons with disabilities and older people, as well as stronger employment-based social security. Such schemes also have the potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of disaster response and to support the recovery of vulnerable groups after disasters occur. Costings analysis prepared as part of this assessment demonstrates that affordable options exist for pursuing the gradual establishment of a nationally determined social protection floor in Solomon Islands. Considering the nature of the reforms required, social dialogue needs to be at the core of the process, with strong participation by social partners. Meaningful and effective participation by workers, employers and other stakeholders not only helps ensure that social protection policies respond to people's needs; it is also key to building trust, public support and a sense of ownership, thereby facilitating the successful implementation of policies.

Conclusion

The process of strengthening the Solomon Islands' social protection system faces undeniable fiscal, capacity and operational headwinds. Expanded social protection must not, however, come at the expense of investment in critical services, nor should expectations related to the multidimensional welfare impacts of social protection programmes be raised unrealistically while wider basic services remain compromised. This calls for a gradual approach to social protection system development, enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in public financial management within the social sector and improved strategic coordination among development partners. The age-based targeting criteria for child benefits and old age pensions make these particularly amenable to an incrementalist, but rights-based, approach. However, there is also the potential to start with smaller scale programmes targeted at highly vulnerable groups such as survivors of domestic violence whose livelihoods have been severely disrupted; single parents with young children; persons with most severe disabilities and/or people who are hospitalised for protracted periods of time. This could include building on Solomon Islands' previous experience with social protection for some of these groups. Solomon Islands' various development partners could play critical supporting roles in the early stages of social protection system development.

It will be important that early social protection initiatives are well understood and owned by Solomon Islanders, are seen to reflect Solomon Islands' culture and values and promote social cohesion, solidarity and peacebuilding. Universal, or at least broadly inclusive, lifecycle-based social protection schemes that address widely accepted sources of vulnerability such as old age, disability and childhood are likely to gain most traction in the short-term. However, it may also be appropriate to proactively include the promotion of positive cultural values and practices that have traditionally supported community resilience within Solomon Islands' emerging social protection framework, thereby demonstrating continued commitment to these important socio-cultural institutions. High quality public and social behavioural change communications around new social protection interventions will also be critical to managing social conflict risks and other harmful behavioural changes.

It may also be important to ensure that any new social protection interventions are integrated with relevant complementary interventions and are not positioned as

stand-alone programmes. This could be important not only for maximising the positive impacts of social protection programmes but also for reducing the risk of adverse social impact (such as social conflict, domestic violence or dependency), public misunderstanding of the programme's purpose and objectives or negative politicisation of social protection programmes, particularly at local levels. For example, a disability benefit would ideally be implemented in coordination with community-based rehabilitation (CBR) programming, employment support and assistance for carers. Social protection interventions targeting families with children could also be complemented by interventions on positive parenting, nutrition, financial literacy or skills training. Measures could also be considered to further incentivise positive behavioural change such as the use of top-ups on basic benefit levels for families participating in value-added activities such as parenting programmes or skills training sessions. Overall, strengthened social protection should be positioned as part of a comprehensive strategy for enhancing societal resilience with continued efforts to promote employment, resilient smallholder and fisheries production, traditional community support mechanisms and proactive disaster risk reduction.

With rapid social, economic, demographic and technological change, rising environmental hazards and significant external economic volatility, social protection must no longer be seen as an unaffordable luxury in Solomon Islands. Instead, social protection needs to be understood as integral to the development of a modern, open economy and society as well as an investment in people, social justice and social cohesion that delivers high social, economic and environmental returns. Indeed, as is implicitly recognised in the National Peace Building Strategy (2016-20), an effective national social protection floor is foundational to the sustainable and peaceful development for all. It is therefore increasingly clear that Solomon Islands can no longer afford continued underinvestment in social protection if the vicious circle of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment is to be broken. Considering the nature of the reforms required, social dialogue needs to be at the core of the process, with strong participation by social partners. Meaningful and effective participation by workers, employers and other stakeholders not only helps ensure that social protection policies respond to people's needs; it is also key to building trust, public support and a sense of ownership, thereby facilitating the successful implementation of policies.

Recommendations

Social protection is at an embryonic stage in Solomon Islands and priorities, sequencing and timing of reforms and new investments will need to be determined through dialogue among stakeholders, and with due consideration to wider social development priorities. The priority at this stage, therefore, is to strengthen capacity for policy leadership and to put in place an effective institutional framework to allow participatory deliberation of policy options. Our recommendations are therefore as follows:

1. **Establish a decent work and social protection working group (DWSPWG) or similar structure at the national level.** A DWSPWG could promote stakeholder dialogue, capacity building and the cultivation of leadership. Such a working group could include dedicated sub-committees on (i) decent work and social security (including employment-based social protection); and (ii) tax-financed social protection (perhaps to be called the 'basic income' sub-committee). The Department of Labour could lead the decent work sub-committee while the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWCYFA) could lead the 'basic income' sub-committee. Provision should be made for the participation of workers' representatives, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society

organizations (CSOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs) and development partners.

2. **Strengthen the position of the Department of Social Welfare and review the Social Welfare Assistance (SWA) programme.** The location of the Department of Social Welfare within the Ministry of Health appears inappropriate. Meanwhile consultations revealed that inadequate funding of the Social Welfare Assistance programme means that not only is it unable to play its expected role in implementation of the Child and Family Welfare Act of 2017 but also that women and children who seek refuge from perpetrators of gender-based violence are not receiving adequate material support. A thorough review of the SWA should be conducted to establish needs. Consideration should also be given to transferring the Department of Social Welfare to the Ministry of Women, Youth and Family Affairs and expanding the scope of the scheme (for example to vulnerable single mothers affected by crises, persons with severe disabilities and people subjected to protracted hospitalisation) as an interim measure while a national social protection policy is developed. Consideration could also be given to using the Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF) to strengthen the SWA programme.

3. **Establish a Parliamentary Special Select Committee on Decent Work and Social Protection**, while Parliament considers options for the integration of social protection and social services into the existing Standing Select Committee structure.

4. **Deliver a programme of training on social protection for various policy actors** including civil servants, traditional leaders, Parliamentarians, academics, workers' representatives, the private sector and CSOs. The International Training Centre of the ILO (ITCILO) and the DFAT-funded Partnerships for Social Protection (P4SP) programme are two potential sources of high-quality training.

5. **Develop a long-term vision and roadmap for social protection in Solomon Islands.** Once a DWSPWG (or similar structure) has been established and foundational training provided, a clear vision and roadmap for the long-term development of the social protection system could be developed for submission to the Cabinet. The vision should confirm a strategic orientation towards life-cycle contingencies and set-out how Solomon Islands' social protection system will gradually move towards greater compliance with international standards. Development of such a roadmap would need to be supported by several detailed studies and would need to be implemented over a two-to-three-year period.

6. **Significantly improve the availability of data that is critical to the effective development, monitoring and evaluation of social and economic policies.** Key priorities include conducting regular Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and ensuring the timely production of analytical reports; improving the quality of labour statistics; fully aligning disability questions in the census with the international standards such as WHO International Classification of Function and the Washington Group on Disability Statistics question sets.

7. **Leverage NGO-implemented cash and voucher assistance (CVA) programming to better support the development of disaster response and social protection systems.** NGO-implemented cash and voucher assistance schemes offer opportunities to pilot a range of social protection interventions including core lifecycle-based schemes, shock-responsive adaptations of traditional lifecycle interventions as well as short-term disaster response. However, to-date, NGO-implemented pilots have tended to focus primarily on the issue of

overcoming delivery challenges rather than social protection and disaster response policy and systems building. Going forward, NGOs should consider incorporating government stakeholders into CVA design, implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation processes and aim specifically to develop models that could inform policy development.

1. Introduction

1.1 Study rationale and objectives

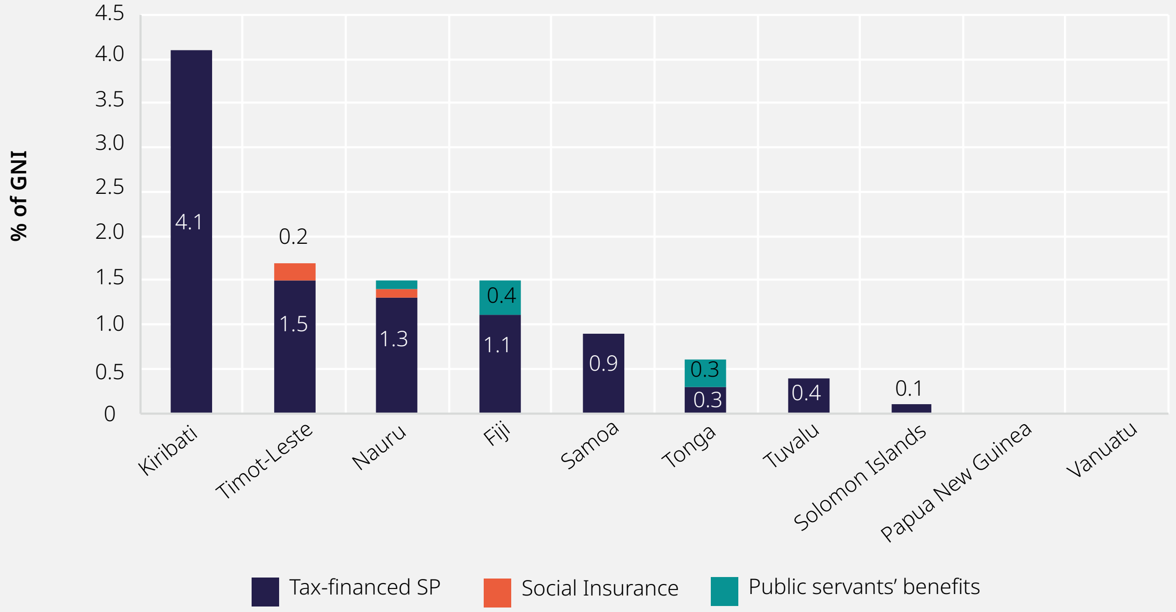
Access to social protection is not only a human right in and of itself but is also recognized to be critical to the fulfilment of a wide range of other human rights. Effective social protection systems are also essential for: the eradication of extreme poverty; the reduction of inequality; human capital development; effective functioning of labour markets; the empowerment of women; and the creation of a conducive environment for the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development of children. Finally, the strength of national social protection systems has been shown to be a critical factor in determining societal resilience to economic shocks.

The government of Solomon Islands has committed, through its ratification of a number of relevant United Nations conventions, to pursuing realization of the right to social protection for its people. At the same time, Solomon Islands' National Development Strategy 2020-30 aims to achieve a range of challenging socio-economic development objectives by 2030 including: (i) eradicating extreme poverty; (ii) reducing the proportion of the population living below the national basic needs poverty line to less than five per cent, and; (iii) reducing the proportion of the population living below the national food poverty line to below three per cent by 2025. More broadly, the National Development Strategy objective is for Solomon Islands to join the Human Development Index's "medium human development" group of nations by 2030. However, the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, global political and economic volatility and the impacts of climate change are putting attainment of these objectives in jeopardy.

However, to-date, social protection in Solomon Islands has remained under-developed by both regional and international standards. In 2016, the Social Protection Indicator for Solomon Islands was 1.3, which stood significantly below the Pacific regional average of 1.9.[1] Meanwhile, a recent Pacific-wide stocktaking exercise on social protection financing was only able to identify the most minute public expenditure on social protection in Solomon Islands (see figure 1).

[1] ADB, 2016, 16

▸ Figure 1. Social protection expenditure by type of scheme as a percentage of GNI, latest year



Source: C. Knox-Vydmanov et al., 2023.

To start to address this significant gap in Solomon Islands' economic and social policy framework, the Government of Solomon Islands, through the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration (MCILI) requested technical assistance from the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to conduct a diagnostic assessment of social protection in the country. The assessment was expected to review the core functions of a social protection system in country, clarify legal and policy issues related to social protection and to determine the readiness of the country to develop social protection strategies. It also assesses gaps in coverage for the purpose of achieving improvements in the effectiveness (coverage and adequacy), efficiency and sustainability of the social protection system and identifies options to extend coverage to the most vulnerable, based on international standards and recognised good practices. The overall ambition is to support Solomon Islands to move towards creating nationally determined social protection floors.

1.2 Methodology and limitations

This social protection diagnostic assessment was developed through a combination of a review of the available literature, national survey data and administrative data supplemented by a limited set of online consultations (see Annex I) with officials from government ministries, departments and statutory bodies, representatives of workers and the private sector, non-governmental, civil society and faith-based organizations and development partners. The report was presented at a series of workshops with relevant stakeholders and adjusted in response to comments and clarifications received.

It is important to note that this study faced significant limitations arising from limited data availability: the last census was in 2009; the last household income and expenditure survey (HIES) was conducted in 2012-13 (and the consumption data from the aged survey was not available to the authors); and the last Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) was conducted in 2015. Solomon Islands also does not conduct a routine labour force survey. As a result, there is considerable scope for further analysis should more up to date data become available.

1.3 Guiding concepts and principles

1.3.1 Social protection rights and minimum standards

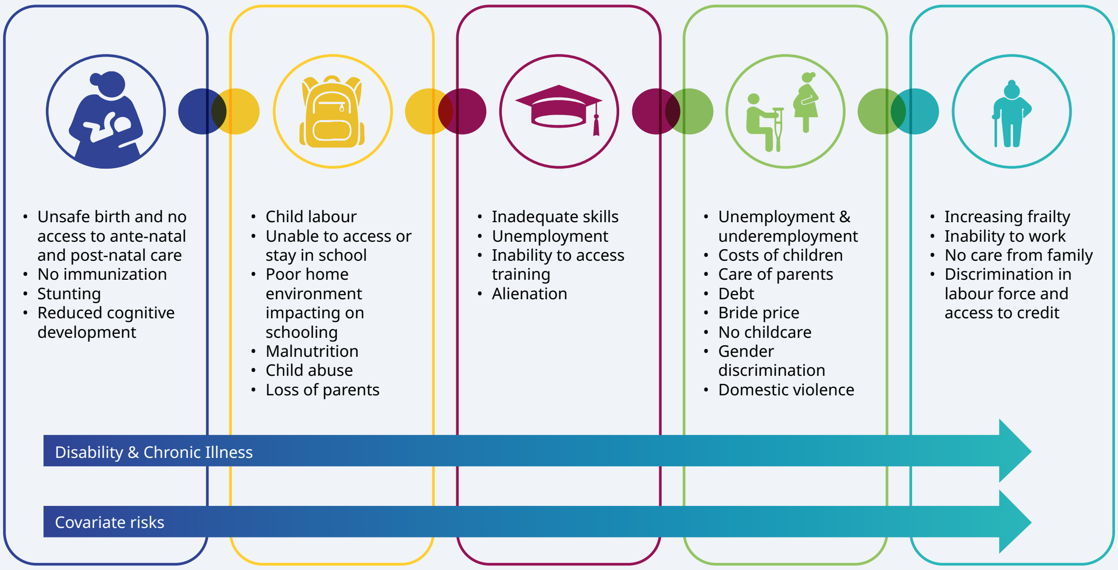
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 establishes access to social protection as a fundamental human right: "Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security" (Article 22). Article 25 of the UDHR goes on to assert that: "(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection."

Detailed minimum standards for the design of nine critical social protection benefits and two financing arrangements (tax-financing and social insurance) have since been elaborated in the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102). With regards to the financing of these benefits, Article 71 of Convention No. 102 states that "the cost of the administration of such benefits shall be borne collectively by way of insurance contributions or taxation or both in a manner which avoids hardship to persons of small means and takes into account the economic situation of the Member and of the classes of persons protected." Importantly, employer-liability benefits are generally not compliant with international labour standards.

These nine social protection benefits are also reflected in the definition of social protection adopted by the ILO in the World Social Protection Report (2024-26):

> "Social protection, or social security, is a fundamental human right, not a charity, and an essential instrument to reduce vulnerability and promote people's rights and dignity. Social protection guarantees access to healthcare and income security over a person's life course through the provision of benefits in cash or in kind – particularly in relation to sickness, maternity, disability, unemployment, old age or loss of an income earner – and support for families with children, among other needs. Human rights instruments and international social security standards guide social protection policies and their implementation."[2]

▸ Figure 2: Risks across the lifecycle



Source: Development Pathways, 2024.

The definition proposed by the Social Protection Interagency Cooperation Board (SPIACB) is similar but is notable for its reference to (a) specific forms of social assistance that fall outside of the nine mentioned in the Convention No. 102; (b) the role of social protection in guaranteeing basic income security, and; (c) the complementarity of social protection to other essential services.

"Social protection is a set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing and protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion, throughout their lifecycle placing a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups. This means ensuring adequate protection for all who need it, including children; people of working age in case of maternity, sickness, work injury or for those without jobs; persons with disability and older persons. This protection can be provided through social insurance, tax-funded social benefits, social assistance services, public works programs and other schemes guaranteeing basic income security and access to essential services." [3]

[2] ILO, 2024.
[3] SPIACB, Undated.

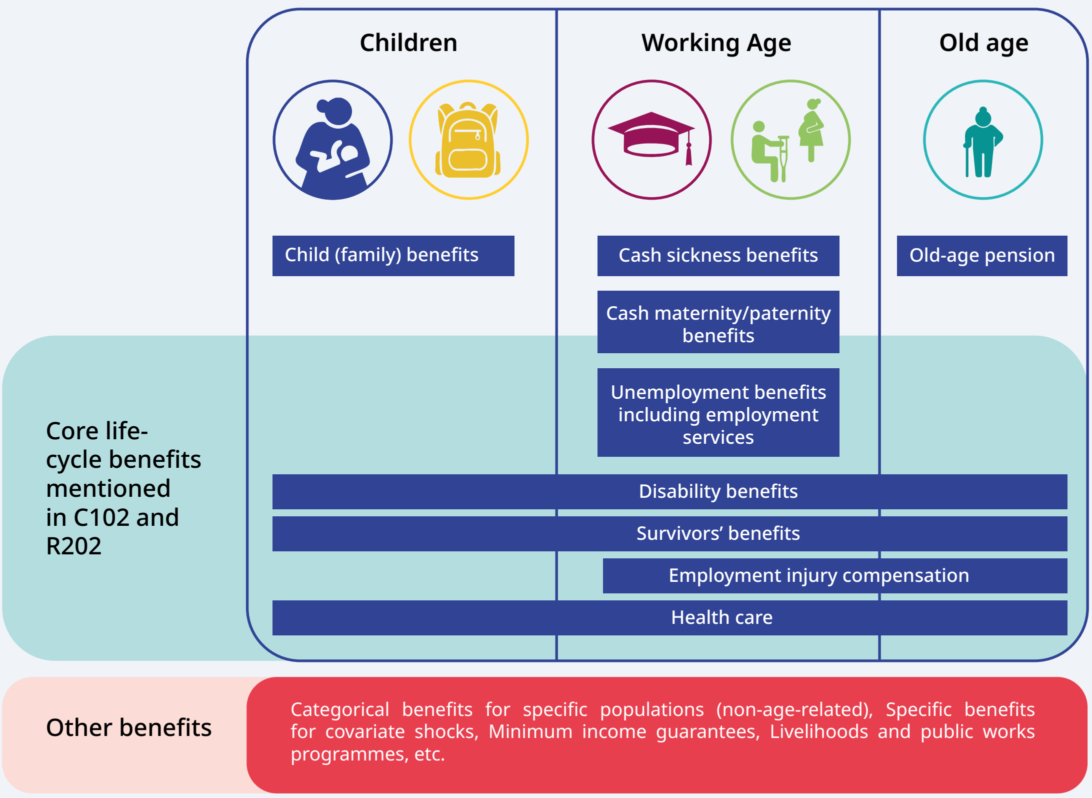
Subsequently, at the 101st Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization on 30 May 2012, the members of the ILO adopted the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) which called on members to:

"...establish as quickly as possible and maintain their social protection floors comprising basic social security guarantees. The guarantees should ensure at a minimum that, over the life cycle, all in need have access to essential health care and to basic income security which together secure effective access to goods and services defined as necessary at the national level."

Recommendation No. 202 went on to identify the following basic social security guarantees:

a. Access to a nationally defined set of goods and services, constituting essential health care, including maternity care, that meets the criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality.
b. Basic income security for children, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services.
c. (Basic income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability.
d. Basic income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for older persons.

Figure 3: Social protection benefits across the lifecycle



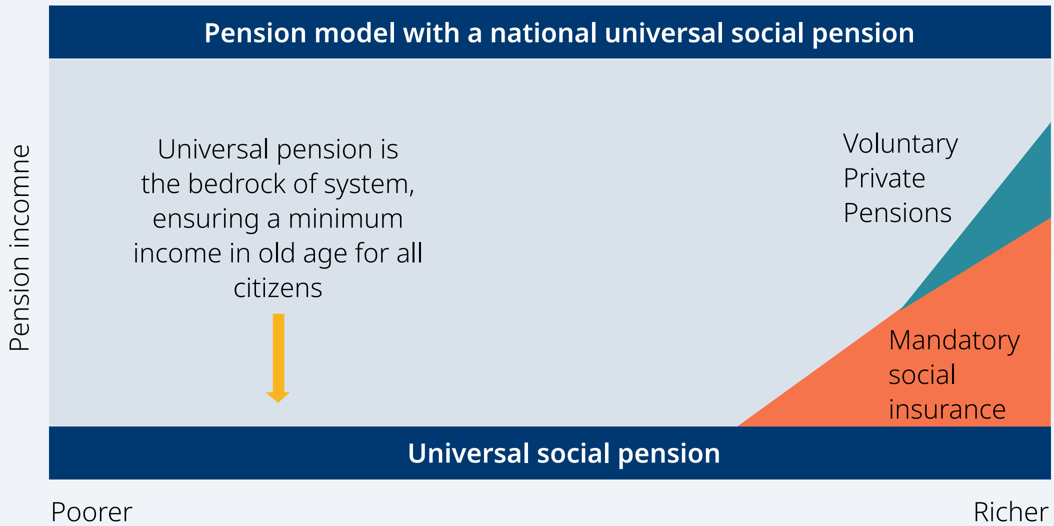
Source: Development Pathways.

1.3.2 The general role of social protection

The objective of social protection systems is to provide adequate, regular and predictable income security throughout the lifecycle. This can be achieved through two mechanisms: (1) provision of a minimum guaranteed income that ensures that individuals do not fall below a given nationally defined minimum standard of living – a social protection "floor"; and (2) mechanisms that 'smooth' incomes over individuals' lifetimes if they experience defined contingencies, thereby ensuring that they can maintain a comparable standard of living throughout their lifetime. Whereas the first core function is generally achieved through schemes financed from general tax revenues, the second core function is typically only achievable through mandatory, insurance-based arrangements (known as social insurance) which allow groups of different income levels and risk profiles to pool their resources on the basis of solidarity.[4]

Since tax-finance benefits are designed to guarantee a minimum acceptable standard of living, while social insurance benefits allow individuals to smooth income earnt over their lifetime through a contributions and draw-down mechanism, social insurance benefits tend to be somewhat higher than tax-financed benefits on average. This results in a so-called 'multi-tiered' social protection system as depicted for the example of old age pensions in figures 4 and 5. Tax-financed tiers can either be designed on a fully universal basis (figure 4), or benefit "tapers" can be introduced such that income from tax-financed benefits decrease as income from social insurance-financed benefits increases (figure 5).

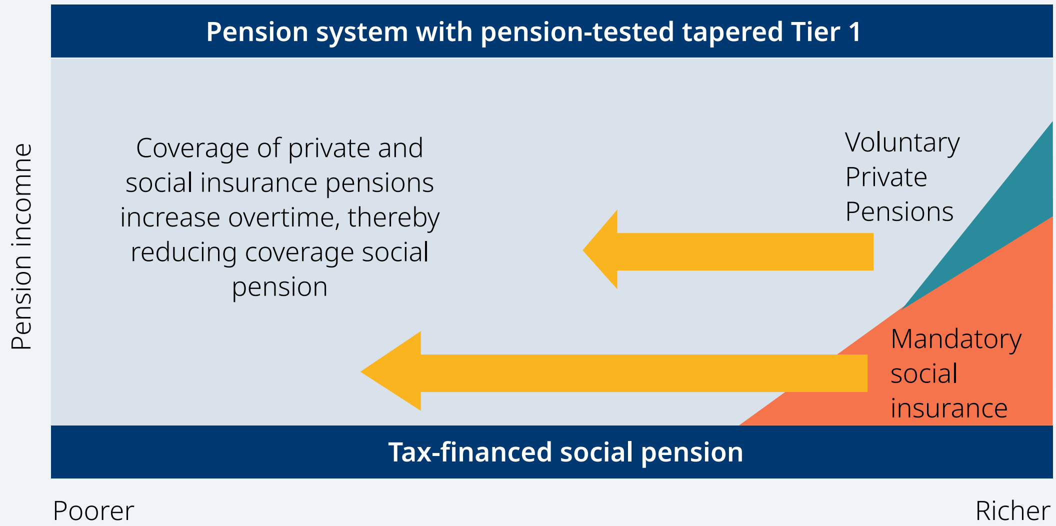
Figure 4: A multi-tiered pension system with a universal tax-financed social pension



Source: Development Pathways.

[4] Although a small number of countries rely on tax-financed benefits alone

▶ **Figure 5. A multi-tiered pension system with a tapered or pension-tested social pension**



Source: Development Pathways.

1.3.3 The role of social protection in national socio-economic development

Although social protection is in large part intended to support realization of the human right to an adequate standard of living, in practice social protection also makes a range of other critical contributions to national social and economic development processes.

These include:
- Enabling access to essential social services.
- Enabling productive economic risk-taking at the household level.
- Facilitating adjustments of labour markets, for example in response to new technologies or the effects of climate change.
- Acting as an automatic social and economic stabilizer, sustaining demand in times of crisis.
- Supporting the transition from formal to informal employment.
- Creating incentives for registration with tax and civil registration authorities.
- Reducing inequality (which not only undermines social cohesion but can directly reduce economic growth) through redistribution.
- Promoting women's empowerment and autonomy.
- Minimizing the need to resort to anti-social or unsustainable livelihood strategies.
- Enabling implementation of public health-related restrictions on economic activity.

The critical role of social protection in supporting the development of inclusive and cohesive societies and the effective functioning of market economies is reflected in the inclusion of a number of targets relating to social protection system development in global and regional planning frameworks including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and subsequently within the Regional Road Map for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia[5] and the Pacific and Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific.[6]

[5] UNESCAP, 2017.
[6] UNESCAP

1.3.4 Relationship between social protection and informal social support mechanisms

Social protection systems are often perceived to undermine, or "crowd-out" traditional, community-based social support mechanisms and/or family-based care and support, thereby leaving vulnerable members of society exposed should social protection provision be withdrawn in the future. Concerns for the maintenance of traditional values and forms of social support often also appear to reflect perceptions of rising individualism, profligacy, anti-social behaviour, social disorder and declining psychosocial wellbeing, particularly among the youth.

The impact of social protection on traditional and family-based care and social support systems has been the subject of extensive academic research over the past two decades. Although detailed discussion of the evidence-base is beyond the scope of this report, the following general points should be emphasized: [7]

- **Informal, community-based social support is essential to the functioning of all societies.** However traditional social support also frequently excludes certain groups of people or includes them on unequal terms, while those with the fewest resources often have least recourse to informal social support in times of need. Finally, traditional social support tends to be incapable of achieving adequate levels of resilience to frequent covariate shocks.[8]
- **The specific impact of social protection on traditional social support depends very much on the design of social protection interventions**. Where the design of social protection mechanisms is well-aligned with pre-existing societal norms and values (such as is often the case with inclusive life-cycle programmes that address widely accepted sources of vulnerability), social protection has been shown to strengthen family-based care and support. Indeed, certain social protection schemes such as carers' benefits and foster carers' allowances, are specifically designed to crowd-in family-based care. Social protection has also been shown to allow marginalised members of society to gain access to traditional social support networks, either through enhancement of social status or by enabling participation in systems of reciprocity. Finally, even where social protection has had an adverse impact on traditional social support, this is less of a concern where this has served to loosen the dependence of vulnerable members of society on systems of patronage and other systems of exploitation that perpetuate poverty and extreme inequality.
- **On the other hand, where social protection programmes have been designed without due regard for the maintenance of social relations and social cohesion** – as is often the case with poverty-targeted social assistance programmes – or have been heavily affected by corruption, there is a risk that solidarity, trust and mutual support are undermined.
- **Even in high income societies with extensive welfare states, the available evidence does not support the hypothesis that government-funded social welfare and social services crowd-out family-based care.** For example, the Old Age and Autonomy: The Role of Service Systems and Inter-generational Family Solidarity (OASIS) research project conducted in Norway, U.K., Germany, Spain and Israel found "no evidence of a substantial 'crowding out' of family help" while family opportunity structures, norms and preferences

[7] Stavropoulou et al., N., 2017.
[8] R. Calder and T. Tanhchareun, 2014.

were shown to have a greater impact. In some cases, higher social services provision for the elderly was shown to "crowd-in" family support.[9]

- **Finally, governments in various developing countries have sometimes deliberately leveraged traditional social support initiatives as part of formal poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes.** Incorporation of traditional social support initiatives, alongside social protection interventions, is often thought to increase community ownership and understanding of social protection interventions, with potential benefits in terms of enhanced accountability and sustainability.

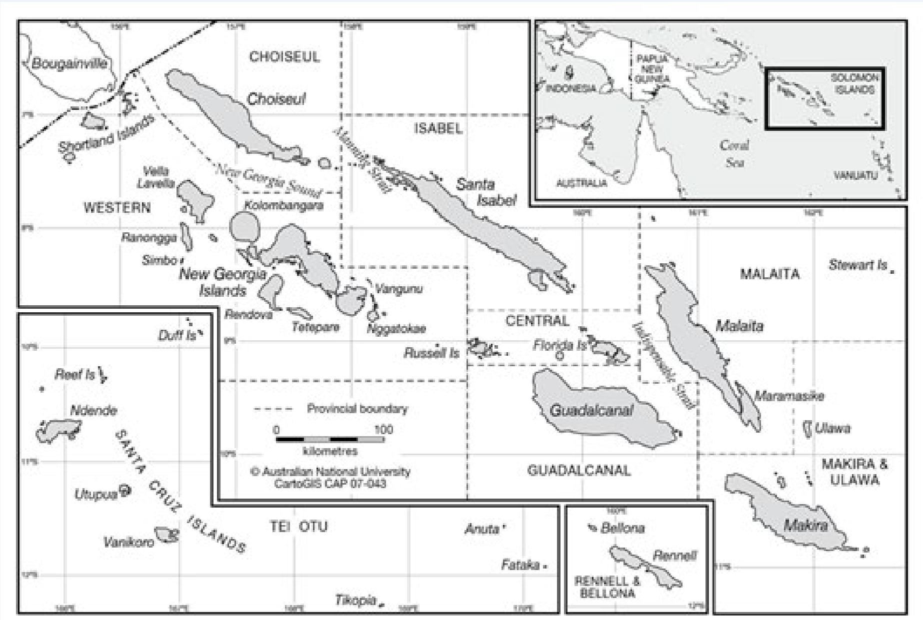
[9] A. Motel-Klingebiel et al., 2005.

2. Country context

2.1 Geographic and environmental context

Located in the south-western region of the Pacific Ocean, Solomon Islands consist of 992 islands of which 147 are inhabited. Diverse island environments range from mountainous, densely forested islands to low-lying sand and coral atolls covering an area of 461,000 square kilometres and stretching 1,448 kilometres from the Shortland Islands bordering Papua New Guinea to the Santa Cruz Islands, which border Vanuatu.[10] In Solomon Islands around 87 per cent of all land is customarily owned, nine per cent is owned by the government, two per cent belongs to individual Solomon Islanders and the remaining two per cent is leased to foreigners.

▸ Figure 6. Map of Solomon Islands



Source: CartoGIS Services, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University.

[10] Solomon Islands Government, Undated(a).

The geographic location of Solomon Islands in the Pacific "Ring of Fire" and cyclone zone makes the country extremely vulnerable to natural disasters and extreme events. Solomon Islands experienced five major cyclones from 2011 to 2020 in addition to tsunamis, earthquakes and a major flood. The nation also has significant vulnerability to extreme rainfall. 17 per cent of the population live within thirty kilometres of a volcano[11] while 80 per cent of the population reside in low-lying coastal villages that are susceptible to flooding and contamination of groundwater which affects access to freshwater and constrains agricultural productivity.[12] The projected average annual loss is US$79 million United States dollars (8.69 per cent of GDP) and estimated adaptation costs of between US$ 97~347 million per year (representing 3 to 11 per cent of GDP by 2040).[13] For instance, the World Bank (2021) has estimated that fishing catch volumes may fall by as much as 50 per cent by 2030.[14] The biggest drivers of disaster risk are fundamental social issues of poverty, inequality, and poorly planned development.[15]

Environmental hazards associated with the Solomon Islands' geographic location are being greatly exacerbated by the impacts of climate change and weaknesses in environmental management. With faster sea level rises than the global average, the submergence of low-lying islands has already commenced. Climate change will exacerbate challenges across a wide range of sectors including agriculture, fisheries, biodiversity, water, education and health. For example, the WHO have warned that climate-induced changes to vector lifecycles are likely to increase the incidence of certain diseases - particularly in parts of the Solomon Islands where access to clean water, healthcare and food security is compromised.[16] Projections also suggest significant freshwater stress by 2030, with significant implications for food security and incomes. Finally weak regulation of forestry, over-fishing, ineffective waste management and poor urban infrastructure all further reduce resilience to environmental shocks across multiple dimensions.

2.2 Political and governance context

Solomon Islands is a young democracy where the authority of various political actors, including parliament, the executive, provincial governments and traditional authorities remain subject to continued negotiation. The islands of New Georgia, Guadalcanal, Makira and Malaita operated as a British protectorate from 1893 until the independent state of Solomon Islands was formed on 7 July 1978. The written constitution of the newly independent nation retained the British monarch as head of state, imported a Westminster-style unicameral parliamentary system and common law tradition but also recognized the continued role of traditional authorities and customary law (known as *Kastom*). A draft traditional governance bill has been under consideration for some time.

Solomon Islands is divided into nine provinces with elected provincial governments plus the city of Honiara which is administered by a city council and headed by a mayor. However, a diverse range of traditional authorities play a major role in local governance, with justice primarily administered through Kastom courts. Meanwhile faith-based organizations (FBOs) deliver the majority of primary, secondary and vocational education services (although

[11] DFAT, 2021
[12] UNEP, 2019.
[13] DFAT, 2021.
[14] World Bank, 2021.
[15] World Bank, 2021
[16] World Bank, 2021

with government funding) and play a key role in peacebuilding. Contact between the institutions of the state and much of the population is largely limited to primary health services and constituency MPs who manage the Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF) – a flagship government intervention.

Solomon Islands has experienced considerable political instability since independence, grounded in unresolved historical grievances and persistent socio-economic disparities. There was an outbreak of ethnic conflict from 1998 to 2003 – commonly referred to as "the tensions" - between the Guales from the island of Guadalcanal and Malaitans who had settled in Guadalcanal. A request for external assistance was made by the Solomon Islands Government in 2003, resulting in the deployment of police and troops from Australia and other Pacific Island States as part of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Security during the RAMSI years (2003-17) was largely maintained, except for unrest in 2006, 2010 and 2014. However, riots and looting – particularly targeting ethnically Chinese-owned businesses — broke out again in November 2021, reflecting deep resentment over extreme wealth inequalities, widespread poverty, and a lack of opportunities.

Social protection responses to the social cohesion risks facing the Solomon Islands have been rather limited to date. The Rapid Employment Project (REP) was implemented from 2015 to 2018 and was specifically intended to promote societal stability through the provision of temporary employment to low-income youth living in Honiara City. Although research suggested that impacts of the programme were rather muted, the programme has since been extended to other provinces in the form of the Community Access and Urban Services Enhancement (CAUSE) project (see section 3.3.4 for further discussion).

2.3 Demographic context

Solomon Islands' young and growing population is spread across a total of 147 islands, with 80 per cent located in rural, and often coastal areas.[17] The population growth rate is one of the highest in the region (2.5 per cent) and the total population is projected to have risen to 722,392 by mid-2022. With 41 per cent of the population under 15 years of age,[18] Solomon Islands will be subject to considerable population 'momentum' in the future. Depending on the pace of fertility decline, the total population is expected to reach somewhere between 1 and 1.2 million people by 2045.[19] The percentage of older people remains relatively low, with only 2.7 per cent aged 60 years and above.

The urban population growth rate (4.7 per cent) stands at almost double the national rate. Should this situation persist, the urban population was estimated to double in size between 2016 and 2025, with projections from UN Habitat suggesting that 40 per cent of the population will live in urban areas by 2050.[22] Migration of young people to urban areas and neighbouring countries is already generating elevated dependency ratios in rural areas, with significant implications for rural incomes and food security:[21] For every 100 persons of the working age population (aged 15 to 64 inclusive), there are 83 non-working age dependents in rural areas, compared to only 56 dependents in urban areas.

[17] Only Honiara town council and provincial administrative centres (except Rennell-Bellona) are classified as urban in the HIES.
[18] Solomon Islands Government, 2013.
[19] Solomon Islands Government, 2016.
[20] UN Habitat, 2012.
[21] Solomon Islands Government, 2013.

▶ Box 1: The National Population Policy 2016-26 and the potential role of social protection

The scale of population growth and urbanization anticipated in Solomon Islands poses significant challenges related to land administration, infrastructure and social service delivery, among other issues. In response to these challenges, the National Population Policy was developed between 2008 and 2017. The policy signals a marked break with earlier population policies which focused on population control and emphasises the right of individuals and couples to choose the number of children that they want, as well as the right to have access to the information and means necessary to achieve their own reproductive goals, free from coercion by any institution. The National Population Policy 2016-2026 combines population responsive actions on the one hand, supporting adaptation to inevitable changes with measures geared towards influencing population trends over time to safeguard future welfare and wellbeing.

The policy therefore includes the following eight goals:

1. Fertility and unintended pregnancy, particularly amongst adolescent girls, significantly reduced.
2. Infant, child and maternal mortality reduced.
3. Employment and other opportunities for rural and urban youths.
4. The negative impacts of rural to urban migration reduced in both sending and receiving areas.
5. Gender inequality and gender-based violence substantially reduced.
6. Environmental impacts and climate change risks considered for all urban and peri-urban development and vulnerable rural communities.
7. Improved quality of official population statistics.
8. Greater integration of population data into national and sector plans.

Strengthened social protection has the potential to make a range of cross-cutting contributions to achieving the above goals. Maternal and child-focused social protection have been shown to reduce infant, child and maternal mortality, while social protection programmes can help keep girls in school and reduce adolescent fertility, address youth-employment and secure the viability of rural livelihoods and economies. If well-coordinated with sexual and reproductive health services, child and family-focused social protection could also support increased access to reproductive health services and be used to incentivise participation in community-based education and communication activities.

2.4 Macro-economic and fiscal context

Solomon Islands is a lower-middle income country with real GDP (PPP) estimated at US$1.78 billion in 2019, or US$2,773 per capita. In 2021, GDP composition by sector was 34.4 per cent agriculture,[22] 7.6 per cent industry and 58.1 per cent services.[23] In the ten years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Solomon Islands' economy grew at an average of around 4.2 per cent per year, although GDP per capita rose much more slowly, at an average of 1.5 per cent per year over the same period.[24] Economic development remains hampered by small domestic markets, long distances to global markets, lack of access to electricity, weak transport infrastructure[25] as well as political instability and frequent natural disasters.[26] More recently Solomon Islands' economy was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The economy contracted by 4.3 per cent in 2020, 0.2 per cent in 2021 and is projected to contract by 4.5 per cent in 2022.[27] By the end of 2021, GDP per capita (PPP) stood marginally lower than its 2017 level.

[22] Agriculture includes farming, fishing, and forestry; industry includes mining, manufacturing, energy production, and construction; services include government activities, communications, transportation, finance, and all other private economic activities that do not produce material goods.
[23] CIA, 2021.
[24] Authors' own calculations using World Bank data.
[25] UNEP, 2019.
[26] World Bank, 2021.
[27] IMF, 2022.

Solomon Islands' tax base remains extremely narrow, while the government's fiscal position has also been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019 revenue derived from taxes on goods and services stood at 70.6 per cent while personal income tax stood and corporate tax accounted for only 19.4 and nine per cent respectively, reflecting the relative underdevelopment of the private sector in Solomon Islands.[28] Over the period 2011 to 2018, government revenue as a percentage of GDP averaged 25.6 per cent before falling rapidly to 20.9 per cent in 2021. Forestry contributes around one sixth of government income but, having reached a sustainability ceiling, is expected to decline in the near future.[29] In 2022, the fiscal deficit widened to six per cent of GDP, rising from 2.4 per cent in 2019. Although the debt-to-GDP ratio (11.7 per cent in December 2020) is considered sustainable, there is limited capacity for further borrowing.[30]

Bilateral and multi-lateral development agencies remain an important contributor to the national budget and remain a major source of funding for public services. However, ODA receipts have declined significantly since a peak in 2010 and have rarely been invested in social protection.[31]

The Solomon Islands Government is taking a range of steps to improve the country's fiscal position, primarily through a broadening of the tax base. The Ministry of Finance and Treasury aims to replace the existing goods and sales tax with a lower, but broader, value-added tax. Corporate and income taxes will also be reviewed in due course. Meanwhile revenue collection is being strengthened and modernised with a view to increasing tax compliance.[32]

2.5 Labour market context

The majority of working age adults in Solomon Islands remain engaged in subsistence agriculture and fishing, with only limited wage employment available in rural areas.[33] Standing at 86 per cent in 2013, and with broadly similar rates for men and women, labour force participation is much higher in Solomon Islands than in the Pacific as a whole.[34] Meanwhile, unemployment was estimated to stand at only 1.029 per cent in 2021- slightly higher than the 0.7 per cent reported in the 2013 HIES report.[35] However, these indicators largely reflect the fact that subsistence fishing and agriculture remain the main occupation for approximately two thirds of the labour force; only around one in three men and one in six women were engaged in wage/salary-paying jobs in 2012-13.[36] The relative underdevelopment of the cash economy in rural areas is reflected in the fact that average cash earnings among urban households are six times higher than for rural households.[37] The few employment opportunities available tend to be concentrated in the informal sector and are therefore insecure, often lowly paid, and do not provide access to employment-based social security or other employment protections. In 2013, more than half of Solomon Island workers were in vulnerable forms of employment, including own-account and contributing family work.[38]

Women's labour market outcomes are considerably lower than for men. Men were not only twice as likely to be in paid employment, but on average earnt 62 per cent more than women in the private sector and 12 per cent more in the public sector.[39] A higher proportion

[28] OECD, Undated.
[29] World Bank, 2021.
[30] Solomon Islands Government, 2021a.
[31] UNICEF, 2017.
[32] T. Strawson and N. Ari, Undated.
[33] ILO, 1993.
[34] ILO, 2020
[35] World Bank, Undated.
[36] Solomon Islands Government, 2013.
[37] Solomon Islands Government.
[38] ILO, 2020. Pacific labour market review 2020.

of females than males are involved in subsistence activities for own consumption (32.2 per cent females; 24.9 per cent males).

Given limited domestic employment opportunities, many Solomon Islanders find work overseas through regional labour mobility schemes. The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme allows eligible Australian businesses to recruit workers from nine Pacific islands, including the Solomon Islands, for seasonal jobs for up to nine months or for longer-term roles for between one and four years in unskilled, low-skilled and semi-skilled positions. The New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme has also operated a similar scheme on a seasonal basis for over a decade. A 2018 review of the Australian Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) impacts found that women's participation remained low at 14.4 per cent. Female SWP workers were also found to earn slightly less than men (despite having a higher mean level of education than the male SWP workers) but also remit more.

2.6 Poverty and inequality

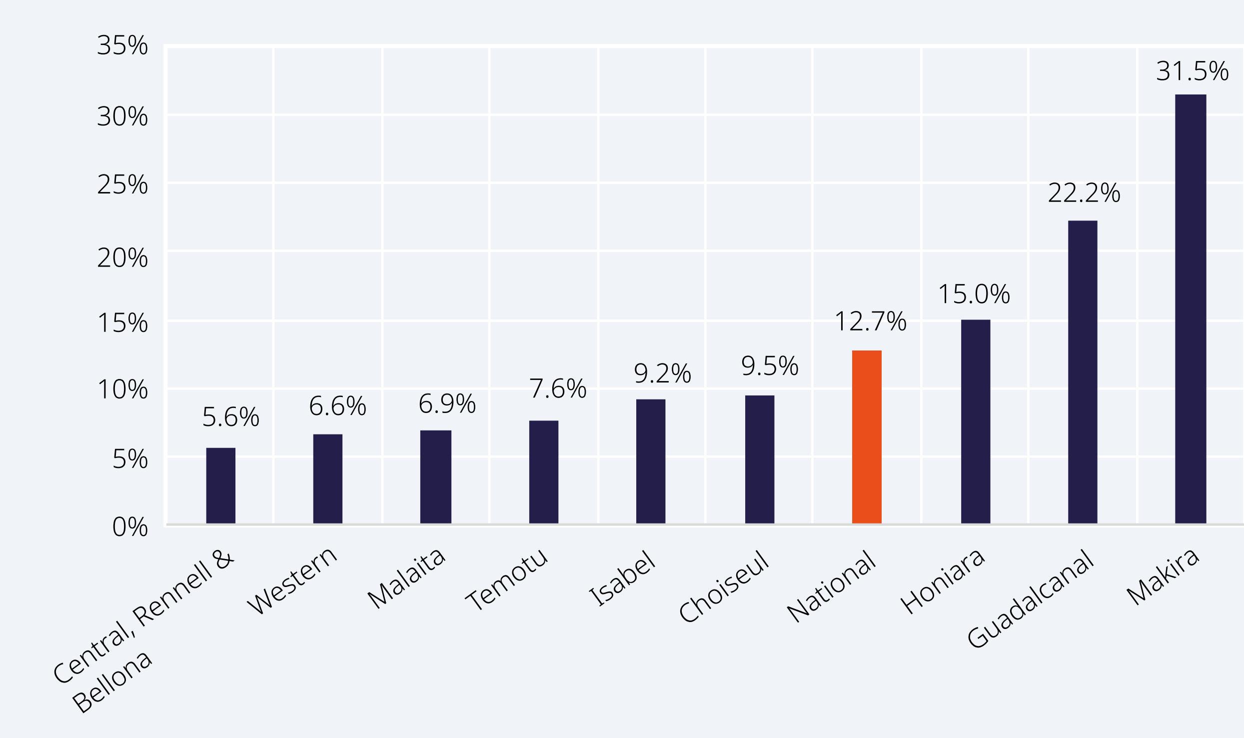
The proportion of the population of Solomon Islands found to be living below the basic needs and food poverty lines stood at 12.7 and 4.4 per cent respectively in 2012-13, while almost six in ten Solomon Islanders were below the international poverty line of US$3.20 per day (PPP).[40] Ten per cent of Solomon Islanders are undernourished, meaning that habitual food consumption is insufficient to provide the amount of dietary energy required for a normal, healthy life. Poverty in Solomon Islands is the result of the interaction of a wide range of factors. In the first instance, economic opportunities are constrained by small local markets, long distances to international markets, low levels of private investment and frequent natural disasters which interrupt economic activity and erode public and private capital. These macro-level factors interact with individual and household level factors including lifecycle-related vulnerabilities, widespread communicable and non-communicable disease, and discriminatory and harmful attitudes towards certain social groups including children, youth, women and persons with disabilities. Although recent disaggregated data is lacking, analysis of the 2004-5 HIES data suggests that children, single parent households and persons with disabilities are disproportionately represented among the poorest.[41]

Poverty is predominantly a rural phenomenon in Solomon Islands, although urban poverty is increasing. In 2012-13, the proportion of all individuals living below the basic needs and food poverty lines who were found to reside in rural areas stood at 87 and 98 per cent respectively. Urban and rural basic needs poverty rates stood at 9.1 per cent and 13.6 per cent respectively while the food poverty rate stood at 9.8 per cent and two per cent in rural and urban areas respectively.[42] However, the poverty rate in Honiara (15 per cent) is also noticeably higher than the national average.

There is considerable variation in poverty rates between provinces. Figure 7 presents the distribution of people living below the poverty line in each province whereas figure 8 presents the proportion of the population in each province living in poverty. Guadalcanal and Makira have noticeably elevated proportions of their populations (one in three and one in five respectively) living in poverty, while Honiara also has a poverty rate higher than the national average.[43]

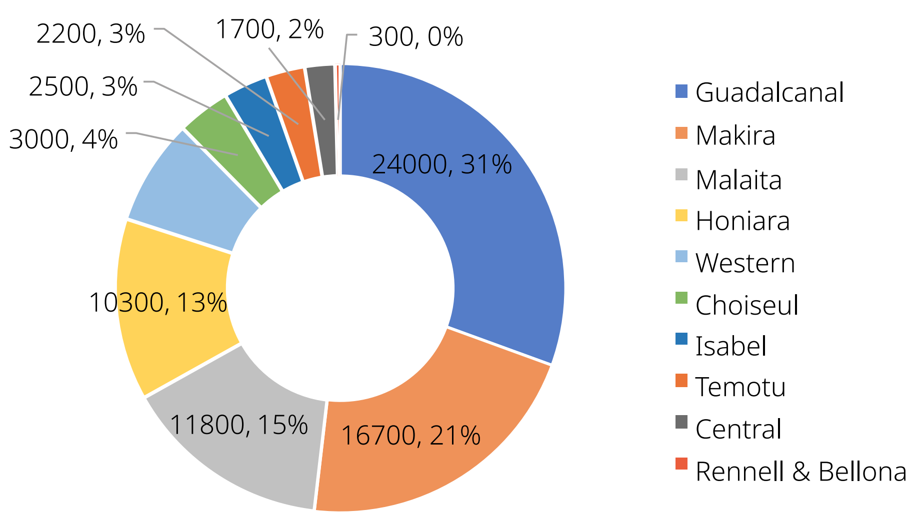
[39] ILO, 2020.
[40] United Nations Pacific, 2021.
[41] Solomon Islands National Statistics Office and UNDP Pacific Center, 2008.
[42] UNICEF, 2017.
[43] World Bank and the Australian High Commission, 2015.

Figure 7. National basic needs poverty rate by province 2012-13



Source: Solomon Islands Government, 2013.

Figure 8. Number and percentage of poor individuals by province 2012-13



Source: Solomon Islands Government, 2013.

With the overall Gini coefficient standing at 0.41 (and 0.54 for cash expenditures) inequality is relatively high. Households in the richest two deciles account for around 40 per cent of all consumption and over 45 per cent of cash expenditures. Meanwhile the poorest 50 per cent of households account for 31 per cent of total consumption and only 26 per cent of cash expenditures.[44]

2.7 Public health context

Solomon Islands is at the early stages of epidemiological transition and faces a double burden of disease including relatively high prevalence of communicable diseases as well as rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Solomon Islands has been classified by the WHO as in the upper moderate category for tuberculosis prevalence[45] and syphilis prevalence was estimated at ten per cent in 2016.[46] Meanwhile NCDs make up six out of the ten leading causes of death in Solomon Islands, with ischemic heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, and diabetes the three most important causes of death in 2015. This shift in the burden of disease has been attributed to changing diets, the increased use of tobacco and alcohol, and limited public understanding of the associated health risks.[47]

The high burden of disease reflects limited access to clean water, sanitation and health care services, as well as a range of harmful social norms and practices. Only 35–40 per cent of rural communities have access to basic drinking water;[48] ten per cent of both urban and rural households report the need to travel more than 30 minutes to reach their primary source of water, and 50 per cent of these households have to make two to three trips per day to the water source. Only 31 per cent of households have access to improved sanitation facilities while, at 54 per cent, the open defecation rate in Solomon Islands is the highest among all Pacific island countries.[49] Meanwhile, physical access to health care services is constrained by the challenging geographic context, limited distribution of facilities, poor transport infrastructure, and a critical shortage of health care workers in rural areas.[50] Widespread smoking, including among children, remains a major public health concern. Certain policies intended to control smoking such as banning the sale of single roll cigarettes have been met with some resistance due to their impact on the livelihoods of low-income cigarette vendors.

Representative data on the prevalence of ill-health and the associated socio-economic impacts of ill-health in Solomon Islands is largely absent. However, condition-specific studies and key informant interviews suggest that ill-health is a key driver of poverty and an obstacle to socio-economic progress. For example, a nationally representative cross-sectional survey of tuberculosis patients carried out between 2017 and 2019 found that patients spent an average of US$716 on diagnosis and care, with 62.1 per cent of expenditures attributable to non-medical costs, while income loss and medical costs comprised 28.5 and 9.4 per cent, respectively. 92.3 per cent of patients experienced catastrophic costs. The study specifically called for social protection measures targeting people with serious health conditions such as tuberculosis and leprosy.[51]

[44] Solomon Islands Government, 2013.
[45] WHO, 2021.
[46] Solomon Islands Government, 2016a, 16.
[47] UNICEF, 2017.
[48] UNEP, 2019.
[49] Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, 2013.
[50] UNICEF, 2017.
[51] Viney et al., 2021.

2.8 Situation of vulnerable groups

2.8.1 Children

The child mortality rate in Solomon Islands has been gradually declining since the early 1990s, and the country is on track to meet international child mortality goals by 2030. Solomon Islands has also achieved near-universal immunization coverage for six out of 12 recommended vaccines, exclusive breastfeeding prevalence is the highest in the Pacific (75 per cent), wasting prevalence is relatively low (four per cent) and child obesity rates are amongst the lowest in the region. 88 per cent of births are registered before the age of five, although only 26 per cent of registered children have a birth certificate.[52]

However, beyond these most fundamental child survival and development indicators, the situation of children in Solomon Islands is deeply concerning. Key challenges include:

- **Child poverty:** Although recent data on poverty levels among different demographic groups is not available, older data suggest that children are disproportionately vulnerable to poverty. The 2005-6 HIES found that 32.9 per cent of all children aged up to 15 years were living in households in the lowest three expenditure deciles, rising to 38.7 per cent in Honiara.[53] With female-headed households facing a combination of inherent labour constraints and limited quality employment opportunities, children living in such households are particularly disadvantaged (39.9 and 41 per cent of children living in female-headed households in urban and rural areas respectively were found to live in the poorest three deciles).[54]
- **Health and nutrition:** Declining rates of vaccination for some diseases (Hepatitis B) and high rates of low birth weight, underweight and stunting (13, 12 and 33 per cent respectively).[55,56] Solomon Islands also records the second-highest rate of suicide attempts amongst school children in the Pacific region. In 2011, 24 per cent of pupils reported using tobacco products during the previous 30 days, with boys being more likely than girls (28 per cent compared to 18 per cent).[57]
- **Education:** The net enrolment ratio for early childhood education appears to have plateaued at 39 per cent; late enrolment in pre-school and school is widespread;[58] and rates of enrolment in junior secondary education are low (42 per cent). Key drivers of low access to education include: school fees and indirect financial barriers; food insecurity and hunger; low prioritisation of education by parents and children;[59] limited physical access to schools; and regular natural disasters.
- **Exposure to violence, neglect and abuse:** The vast majority of Solomon Islands children (86 per cent) had experienced some form of violent discipline in the month prior to the survey, with 22 per cent reporting 'severe physical punishment'. Domestic violence is recognized as a key driver of children running away from home, with lifelong implications such as increased risk of substance abuse and criminality. The rate of sexual abuse of children is the highest in the Pacific, standing at 37 per cent. Customary adoption, and the practice of children being

---

[52] Solomon Islands Government, 2017.
[53] Solomon Islands National Statistics Office and UNDP Pacific Center, 2008, 109
[54] iSolomon Islands National Statistics Office and UNDP Pacific Center, 2008, 110.
[55] N. Troubat et al., 2021.
[56] UNICEF, 2017.
[57] Solomon Islands Government, 2011.
[58] UNICEF, 2017.
[59] Although it is important to understand parents' perspective on the importance of education in the context of high rates of teacher absenteeism, low teaching quality, poor teaching facilities, and inappropriate disciplinary practices in schools.
[60] Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009.

sent to live with relatives, is common in Solomon Islands. A recent survey found that 17 percent[60] of parents had children living with other households. This can happen for a variety of reasons, including to relieve economic hardship faced by low-income families. Although this practice is rooted in a tradition of care for children by extended families, the practice is increasingly recognized as a context where children face a high risk of neglect or abuse.

- **Child labour:** The 2015 Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey found that more than three out of five children aged 5–11 are engaged in child labour activities.[61] Child labour is more common among children aged 5–11 residing in rural areas, and is more common among girls than boys. Children in Solomon Islands are involved in many types of work, with clearly visible exploitation taking place in the agriculture, fishing, forestry, mining, construction, domestic service sectors as well as through their involvement in scavenging and street-level criminality.

Across the spectrum, children living in rural areas and remote islands, where access to basic services is most limited, tend to experience worse outcomes than those in urban areas. However, with rapid unplanned urbanization, children in urban areas represent a growing proportion of children most at risk. An even higher proportion of children in urban areas are living in the poorest three deciles than in rural areas and the family health and safety study notes that, in Honiara, many households need both parents to go out to work and children are therefore frequently left unsupervised.

2.8.2 Persons with disabilities[62]

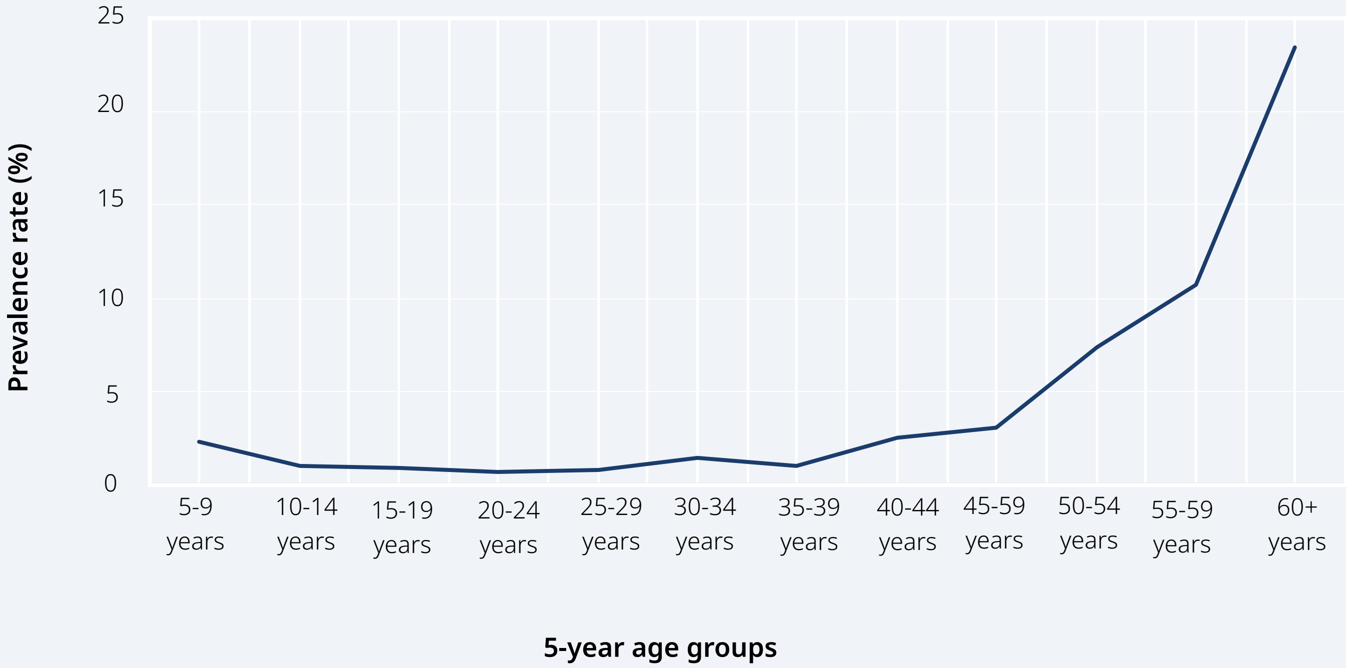
The latest available data (DHS, 2015) suggests that more than one in six people over the age of five years in Solomon Islands experienced difficulties in at least one functional domain. Meanwhile, around 3.5 per cent of the population reported a lot of difficulty in at least one functional domain, and around one per cent reported not being able to perform at least one functional domain at all.[63] The prevalence of functional limitation increases steadily from age 50 years upwards, reaching almost one in four people aged 60 years and above (see figure 9). Functional limitations were found to be broadly similar for both males and females.

Provincial and national registries of persons with disabilities have been established and are reportedly updated annually, although data is not aggregated nationally. These registries are linked to a community-based rehabilitation (CBR) programme managed by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services which provides home-based rehabilitation and disability support services for children including exercise therapy, provision of mobility devices, families counselling and community awareness raising. However, funding for the service remains inadequate and as a result geographic scope is limited to areas covered by the service's eighteen CBR workers.

[61] Child labour is defined as being engaged in some form of economic activity outside the house for 14 hours or more per week or doing household chores for 28 hours per week or more.
[62] Article 1 of the CRPD states that "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which when interacting with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."
[63] The Demographic and Health Survey uses the Washington Group on Disability Statistics questionnaire to assess the degree of difficulty faced by survey respondents in performing several activities of daily living. They do not, however, assess the impact that these limitations have on the respondent's ability to participate in social and economic activities which will depend on the social, physical, political and personal context in which the respondent lives.

Data and consultations suggest that persons with disabilities are among the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised members of Solomon Islands' society. In the first instance there is, with the exception of the limited CBR programme, an acute lack of specialist services for persons with disabilities.[64] Disability is poorly understood in many communities and discrimination is widespread. The perception that having a child with disabilities is a punishment or a curse is still highly prevalent. Children with disabilities are rarely supported to access education or learn independent living skills, and parents of children with disabilities often keep their children out of school to protect them from ridicule and bullying.[65] The 2015 DHS found that 17 per cent of the total population aged five years and above had any functional limitations had never attended school, rising to 45 per cent among those with severe functional limitations.[66] Challenges with bullying of children with disabilities and teachers' inability to cope with their needs have also been acknowledged by the Ministry of Education.[67]

▸ Figure 9: Disability prevalence among the population aged five years old and above



Source: Solomon Islands Government, 2017.

[64] Save the Children, 2017.
[65] UNICEF, 2017.
[66] Solomon Islands National Government, 2017.
[67] H. Tavola, 2011.

2.8.3 Youth

With sluggish economic growth and a rapidly growing population, the youth of Solomon Islands are commonly cited to face "poverty of opportunity." Although only seven per cent of the youth population were not in employment, education or training in 2013, employment options away from subsistence agriculture and fishing tend to be informal and precarious, while access to vocational training is extremely limited.[68] Rising youth unemployment in urban areas is contributing to increasing incidence of alcohol, drug abuse and criminality.[69] Disaffected youth were heavily involved in the tensions of 1998 as well as occasional disorder that has occurred over the two decades since.

2.8.4 Women and girls

Traditional male-dominated systems of governance, combined with patriarchal colonial-era assumptions about women's role in the family, society and economy continue to disadvantage women and girls.[70] This disadvantage is apparent across several domains:

- **Health:** Antenatal care coverage in Solomon Islands stands at 74 per cent (although only 65 per cent of women made at least four visits) while the maternal mortality ratio stands at 114 deaths per 100,000 live births, which is significantly above the SDG target of 70.[71] Collectively, the data indicates significant gaps in healthcare coverage and quality for pregnant women. Disparities also exist between rich and poor women in terms of access to health care. For example, 94 per cent of pregnant women in the richest wealth quintile were found to give birth in the presence of a skilled health professional, compared to only 73 per cent of women in the poorest quintile.[72] Adolescent fertility is more than twice the regional average and, by the age of 19, more than one in five teenage girls have become mothers. There is also wide variation in adolescent fertility rates between rural (69 per 1,000) and urban (40 per 1,000) areas.
- **Education:** At the national level, 12.6 per cent of males and 16.3 per cent of females never attended school.[73] Among contemporary school age children, girls and boys have broadly similar gross enrolment rates for primary, with girls being slightly over-represented at junior secondary level.[74] However, the limited available data suggests that young women are significantly under-represented among TVET students.[75]

[68] Solomon Islands Government 2013.
[69] UN Habitat, 2012
[70] FAO and SPC, 2019.
[71] UNICEF, 2017.
[72] UNICEF, 2017.
[73] Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, 2013.
[74] UNICEF, 2017.
[75] SPC, 2015.

Box 2: Understanding female-headed households in Solomon Islands

The 10.8 per cent of households in Solomon Islands that are female-headed are frequently identified as among the most vulnerable households in the country. However, analysis of the HIES 2012/13 suggests that female-headed households vary significantly in terms of composition, marital status of the household head and household income. These factors require careful consideration when designing social protection policies and interventions that meet the needs of these households:

- Almost eight in ten female-headed households contain children (ranging from 29.5 per cent with children aged 0-2 years old to 77.8 per cent with children aged 0-17 years old).
- 44 per cent of female-headed households with children also contain at least one adult male. In almost half of these cases, the adult male is the son or son-in-law of the female household head, likely often unemployed or underemployed youth.
- 12.3 per cent of female household heads are living with a male spouse/partner who is not considered the household head. It is possible that many of these male spouses are disabled or chronically ill.
- 49 per cent of female heads of household are married but not living with their husband. These male spouses are likely to be in diverse circumstances, ranging from internal migration, long-term or seasonal international migration or even incarceration.
- 44 per cent of female heads of household with children are single (never married) while only three per cent are widowed, divorced or separated.
- Despite the undeniable vulnerability of female-headed households in the lower and middle-income groups, one in five female-headed households with children (1.5 per cent out of the 8.4 per cent of all households who are female-headed with children) are in the richest quintile.

- **Employment and livelihoods:** Rural women have limited participation in both informal and formal businesses (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, 2015). Barriers to women's participation include: time constraints due to reproductive and caregiving responsibilities, subsistence food production, food production for extended family members as part of wantok responsibilities,[76] lower levels of education and literacy, and community expectations that women will provide free labour to prepare and serve food at community and church events. 63 per cent of rural women, compared to 48 per cent of rural men, are subsistence workers. Although only ten per cent of rural households are female headed, these households constitute 46 per cent of all households who are engaged fully in subsistence activities for own consumption and earn no cash income.[77] According to the 2009 census, women were only half as likely to be in paid work compared to men (26 per cent of women and 51 per cent of men). Urban women almost half as likely as urban men to have access to secure employment (41 per cent of urban women are in vulnerable employment compared to 21 per cent of men).[78]
- **Decision-making, autonomy and control of resources:** Both patrilineal and matrilineal inheritance systems exist in different areas of Solomon Islands. In matrilineal systems, women's decision-making power within the home and extended family may be higher but, in general, the public - including commercial - sphere remains men's domain and women often have rather limited control over cash incomes. The 2015 DHS found that women aged 15–19 years and those who are unemployed have the least decision-making power in relation to their health care, major household purchases and visits to their family and relatives.[79] There are also particular concerns about women's participation in wantok

[76] A.B. Andersen et al., 2013.
[77] Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, 2013.
[78] ADB, 2015.
[79] Solomon Islands Government, 2017.

decision-making and the adequacy of protection that wantok provides to vulnerable women since land and property rights usually pass to men.

- **Gender-based violence:** According to the 2009 Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study, 64 per cent of women aged 15–49 who have ever been in a relationship report having experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner. This is higher than the Pacific regional average (48 per cent) and the global average (30 per cent).[80] More than 37 per cent of women report being sexually abused before the age of 15 years.[81] Trained front-line service providers to attend to such cases are lacking. Levels of social acceptance of violence against women and social stigma around seeking support is high, and highest in rural areas. The National Policy to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls for Solomon Islands confirms that violence against women and girls increases during and after conflict, natural disasters and economic downturns, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, male-dominated, kastom-based community-level justice mechanisms remain the primary method of handling gender-based violence and children in conflict with the law and tend to provide inadequate protection of women and children's rights.

2.8.5 Older persons

According to traditional values in the Solomon Islands, older people can expect to receive considerable care and support from their adult children and younger members of their extended families. Older people have also, historically, constituted a rather small proportion of the population. As a result, older people have not tended to be prioritised in public policy; Solomon Islands has not, for example, developed a national policy or plan of action on ageing.

However, the situation of older people in Solomon Islands is changing rapidly and traditional family support mechanisms seem unlikely to be sufficient to guarantee the wellbeing of older people in the near future. In the first instance, the share of older people in the population is expected to rise from 7.5 per cent in 1990 to almost 12 per cent by 2030 while the old age support ratio is expected to fall by a third between 2020 and 2030 alone, from 15.5 to 10.8.[82] Thus the burden of care for older people in Solomon Islands will fall on a declining number of working-age people. This situation is likely to be further exacerbated by outward migration of the working age population and the cost-of-living challenges faced by workers living in urban areas. Indeed, many low-income urban households are already dependent on food remittances from rural areas.[83] Finally, although older age is naturally associated with rising risk of disability and reduced capacity for self-care, the rising rates of NCDs among the working-age population today suggests that older people of the future are likely to face higher rates of disability than previous generations.

[80] UNICEF, 2017.
[81] Pacific Community, 2009.
[82] The number of people aged 20 to 64 years per individual aged 65 years and above is set to fall from 15.5 to 10.8..
[83] UNICEF, 2017.

2.8.6 Urban low-income families

Limited access to opportunities and services in rural areas, as well as the insecurity associated with 'the tensions' has led to rapid migration of large numbers of Solomon islanders to Honiara and a small number of other urban centres. However, because of the limited availability of affordable housing, an estimated 35 per cent of all Honiara residents live in informal settlements with poor quality, overcrowded housing with extremely limited access to electricity, clean water, sanitation or waste collection services.[84] Poor housing and environmental conditions have particularly negative impacts on child health and educational outcomes and can therefore generate life-long disadvantage.

[84] UN Habitat, 2012.

3. Social protection system assessment

3.1 Legal and policy framework

3.1.1 International and national legal commitments

Solomon Islands has ratified several key UN conventions that include specific commitments on social protection. These include the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (succession on 17 March 1982)[85], the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the CEDAW optional protocol (ratified 6 May 2002) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (10 April 1995). Solomon Islands also signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2008, but has not yet ratified it. Solomon Islands has not yet ratified the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No.102) which sets out detailed minimum standards for the design of social protection across nine key contingencies.

Despite these commitments, the domestic legal framework for social protection remains largely limited to employment-related benefits for workers in standard, salaried, formal sector jobs. Provisions relating to maternity benefits, paid sick leave, workers injury compensation and the National Provident Fund are included within the Labour Act (amended 1996), the Workers Compensation Act of 1982 and the National Provident Fund Act of 1973, (amended 1988 and 2018) respectively.

The Child and Family Welfare Act of *2017 also provides a limited legal basis for child-focused* social protection in that it states that "where a parent of a child is having difficulty meeting his or her responsibilities under section ten, the parent or child may request assistance from a social welfare officer." There is no domestic legislation in place establishing the rights of persons with disabilities to social protection.

[85] Although Solomon Islands has not accepted the optional protocol on complaints procedures for the ESCR, CRPD or CRC.

3.1.2 National and international policy commitments

The Solomon Islands National Development Strategy 2016-35[86] aims to deliver five core objectives: (i) sustained and inclusive economic growth; (ii) poverty alleviated across the whole of Solomon Islands, basic needs addressed and food security improved; benefits of development more equitably distributed; (iii) universal access to quality health and education; (iv) resilient and environmentally sustainable development with effective disaster risk management, response and recovery; and (v) a unified nation with stable and effective governance and public order. Social protection would seem to be instrumental to the achievement of all these objectives, and indeed this is recognized with the inclusion of a range of social protection related indicators in the NDS's monitoring and evaluation framework (see table 1). However, the strategy does not include any specific proposals relating to the development of the social protection system.

The critical importance for social cohesion of protecting people from lifecycle risks, promoting social inclusion and equality of opportunity is specifically recognised in the National Peace Building Strategy (2016-20), which states that:

"...a cohesive society is one where people are protected against life risks, trust their neighbours, leadership structures and the institutions of the state and can work towards a better future for themselves and their families. Fostering social cohesion is about striving for greater inclusiveness, more civic participation and creating opportunities for upward mobility."

The NPBS goes further to argue that social cohesion is built on three key values: (i) social inclusion: meaning "the degree to which all citizens can participate on equal footing in the economic, social and political life, including whether people are protected in times of need"; (ii) social capital, meaning "the level of trust between people and institutions"; and (iii) social mobility, meaning "the degree of equality of opportunity to get ahead."

Despite the implicit recognition of the role that social protection could play in supporting the achievement of Solomon Islands' national development vision and objectives, no national policy or strategic framework yet exists to guide the development of the social protection system. Similarly, although several policy and strategy documents acknowledge that poverty and financial insecurity underpin a wide range of deprivations, specific commitments on social protection to address these underlying challenges are often absent. For example, although the National Policy to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls 2016-20[87] acknowledges that economic inequalities are a key driver of violence against women and girls, the strategy fails to identify policy options for reducing poverty, financial insecurity as a whole and the promoting the economic autonomy of women. A similar situation applies in the case of the National Development Strategy's recognition of the need to address financial barriers to education to achieve universal access.

[86] Solomon Islands Government, 2016b.
[87] MWYCFA, Undated.

▶ Table 1. Overview of indicators relevant to social protection under the NDS 2016-35

NDS Objectives and Stratergies	NDS performance indicators and targets
NDS Objective 2: Poverty alleviated across the whole of the Solomon Islands, basic needs addressed and food security improved; benefits of development more equitably distributed.	
Medium Term Strategy 5: Alleviate poverty, improve provision of basic needs and increase food security.	a. Percentage of population below US$1.25 (PPP) per day (MDG 5 indicator). b. Reduced proportion of the population below the poverty line from 22.7 per cent in 2006 to 20.1 per cent by 2020. c. Proportion of the population living below the national poverty line, by urban/rural (modified MDG indicator). d. Percentage of the population covered by social protection programmes. e. Proportion of the population below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption (MDG indicator). f. Percentage of households with incomes below 50 per cent of median income ("relative poverty").
Medium Term Strategy 7: Improve gender equality and support the disadvantaged and the vulnerable	a. By 2030, SI is independently reported to meeting its obligations under core human obligations under core human right treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CEDAW), Committee on the Rights of the Child, and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. b. Rating for social protection and labour increased from 2.5 in 2011 to at least 3.0 before 2020.
NDS Medium Term Strategy 8: Ensure all Solomon Islanders have access to quality health care; combat communicable and non-communicable diseases.	a. Percentage of the population without effective financial protection for health care – to be developed.
NDS Objective 4: Resilient and environmentally sustainable development with effective disaster risk management, response and recovery	
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	a. Improved capacity in Solomon Islands to effectively respond to and manage disaster risks and coordinate disaster emergency responses and rehabilitation.

3.2 Traditional social support

Traditional, yet highly institutionalised mechanisms of reciprocal social support emerged in Melanesia in the pre-colonial period and remain a major feature of Solomon Islands society. Wantok, literally translated as "one talk," is a generic term in Melanesia that refers to practices of group identity and belonging, reciprocal care and support and shared attachment to a particular locality. A wantok consists of a web of social relationships, governed by norms and codes of behaviour (known as *kastom*) that maintain group security and stability and which distinguish one group from another.[88] Membership of a wantok is associated with rights of access to productive resources, such as land and fishing grounds while reciprocal giving of goods and physical labour demonstrates care and unity. Whilst not actively promoted or regulated by the government, the wantok system remains the foundation of rural life and has been described as the invisible hand in livelihoods, governance and development in the Solomon Islands and Melanesia more generally.[89,90]

While still an important feature of rural subsistence society, the wantok system is increasingly understood to be incapable, on its own, of supporting the envisaged national socio-economic development process. Increasingly frequent natural disasters, urbanization, migration and commercialisation all threaten to overwhelm the ability of the Wantok system to guarantee societal resilience and social cohesion. The National Population Policy 2017-26 specifically notes that customary safety nets often do not meet the needs of urban communities and, even in rural areas, is not sufficient to prevent nutritional deprivation in under five-year-olds.[91] During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, prohibitions on (and voluntary withdrawal from) communal practices such as attendance at wakes, funerals and celebrations may have further impacted on the stability of the wantok system. Finally, as the principles of kinship and reciprocal support have come to interact with formal systems of governance, many Solomon Islanders now take the view that the wantok system is increasingly a vehicle for nepotism and corruption.

Traditionally, children in Solomon Islands are raised in an extended family environment, with multiple adults and households sharing responsibility for their wellbeing and development. However, this tradition is experiencing general decline and is no longer inadequate to ensure the welfare and wellbeing of all children. Indeed, children staying with extended family have been found to be particularly vulnerable to neglect and abuse. This is reported to be particularly common in the case of children who have been sent to live with wealthier relatives.

[88] G.L Nanau, 2011.
[89] G.L. Nanau, Undated.
[90] UNICEF, 2017.
[91] Solomon Islands Government, Undated(b).

3.3 Social protection

3.3.1 Solomon Islands National Provident Fund

The Solomon Islands National Provident Fund (SINPF) is the dominant feature of Solomon Islands' social protection landscape and was established through the NPF Act of 1978. The SINPF is governed by a tripartite Board of Directors, composed of two representatives each from government, employers and workers. Although all directors are appointed by the Minister of Finance, following the passage of the Financial Institution Act of 1998 the SINPF now comes under the direct supervision of the Central Bank of Solomon Islands (CBSI).

Membership is mandatory for formal sector employees, including civil servants and voluntary for the self-employed and unemployed. In 2022 the NPF had just over 50,000 actively contributing members, a number which appears not to have changed significantly over the past 20 years.[92] Furthermore, around 15 per cent of active members are already aged 60 years and above. Altogether, this suggests that the NPF coverage of the total labour force remains marginal, and perhaps as low as 10-15 per cent.[93] Public sector employees and retirees make up around one in three active members and account for almost half of all savings held by the fund. Other key sub-groups of NPF members include the self-employed, logging workers and retail workers, who each account for just under one in ten members. Although the self-employed constitute only around 8.5 per cent of NPF members, they account almost 14 per cent of all savings. Women constitute only one in three members. Today, 4,058 employers are registered with NPF, although compliance remains a key challenge.

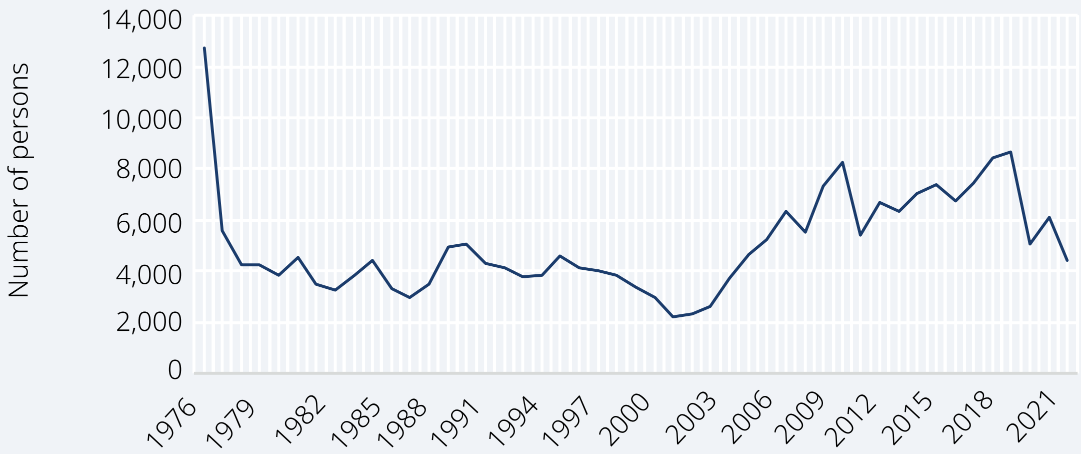
Employers are required to make contributions of 12.5 per cent of salary for each employee and may recover a contribution of up to five per cent of salary from the employee. Benefits are paid to members on attaining the age of 50 years, on death, physical or mental incapacitation, permanent emigration or attainment of 40 years of age and permanently retired. In general, the benefits paid to members are the sum of their accumulated contributions plus interest, minus administrative fees. Over the past five years withdrawals by members aged 50 years and above have accounted for 66.4 per cent of the value of all withdrawals. The other types of withdrawal have each accounted for between four to seven per cent of all withdrawals, with average withdrawal values ranging from SBD14,057 (redundancy withdrawals) to SBD8,569 (emigration-related withdrawals).[94] In 2020, around 20,000 NPF members were also authorised to make a limited drawdown on their savings to help cope with hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The NPF has faced multiple threats to its solvency over the decades, in part due to a shift in focus away from promoting old age income security towards responding to members' short-term financial needs. Key challenges have included: non-performing loans (to a range of debtors including the government, statutory bodies and staff); large-scale withdrawal of funds because of the closure of a number of significant corporations in 2000-

[92] Analysis conducted by the ILO in 2006 found that half of the fund's 110,000 members at that time were inactive. See ILO, 2006.
[93] Author's estimate based on population projections and historical labour force participation data.
[94] Withdrawals by members who are 40 years of age or more and have retired from employment as an employee were noticeably high, standing at an average of SBD208,214 but were few in number and so accounted for only 1.2 per cent of all withdrawals.

01; the non-payment of employer contributions by the government; and the use of members' savings as security guarantees for loans taken out by members with commercial banks. More generally, and in the absence of other key social protection instruments such as unemployment insurance, the focus of the SINPF has generally shifted over time from saving for retirement to meeting shorter-term financial needs, including housing and health care.[95]

▶ Figure 10. Annual member registration figures for SINPF (1976-22)



Source: Data provided by SINPF.

A new voluntary membership scheme known as YouSave was created for informal sector/self-employed workers in 2018. YouSave aims to achieve expanded coverage among informal sector workers such as market vendors, taxi drivers, farmers and women's savings and credit cooperative members. To incentivise long-term saving while also recognizing the shorter-term challenges that informal sector workers face, the scheme offers a ten per cent GST tax rebate incentive to all savers and allows 50 per cent of savings to accessed in emergency, while remaining 50 per cent cannot be withdrawn until the saver reaches 55 years of age. The scheme is soon to be digitised through a YouSave mobile app which, with the impending expansion of mobile networks in the country, will significantly reduce access barriers for informal sector workers. A bolt-on credit scheme is also being designed with technical support from the UNCDF. NPF aims to recruit 50,000 informal sector workers to the scheme by 2023 and expects its typical informal sector customer to be able to save around SBD1,000 year. Although it is too early to evaluate YouSave's success, the NPF recognizes the challenges of maintaining active contributions among informal sector workers after the immediate registration phase and the scheme has reportedly received a lukewarm reception from participants in the Pacific seasonal labour mobility schemes.

[95] ILO, 2006.

Table 2. SINPF withdrawals by category 2017/18 and 2021/22

Withdrawal criteria	Total withdrawals' value 2017-18 to 2021-22 (SBD)	Proportion of all withdrawals	Number of members	Average withdrawal value (SBD)	Average withdrawal value (US$)
a. Withdrawals by members aged more than 50 years	937,314,178.49	66.4%	16,782	55,852	6,811
b. Withdrawals under the ground of redundancy	59,290,527.82	4.2%	4,218	14,057	1,714
c. Emigration withdrawals	64,152,340.49	4.5%	913	70,265	8,569
d. Withdrawals for relatives of a deceased member	62,626,524.81	4.4%	1,513	41,392	5,048
e. Withdrawal for members who are physically/ mentally incapacitated from ever engaging in any further employment	97,520,029.83	6.9%	1,990	49,005	5,976
f. Withdrawals by members who are 40 or more years of age and has retired from employment as an employee	16,657,107.27	1.2%	80	208,214	25,392
g. Emergency withdrawals (COVID)	76,655,062.19	5.4%	1,354	56,614	6,904
h. Gender Equality/ Gender-based Violence programme	98,188,470.27	7.0%	20,379	4,818	588

Source: Data provided by SINPF.

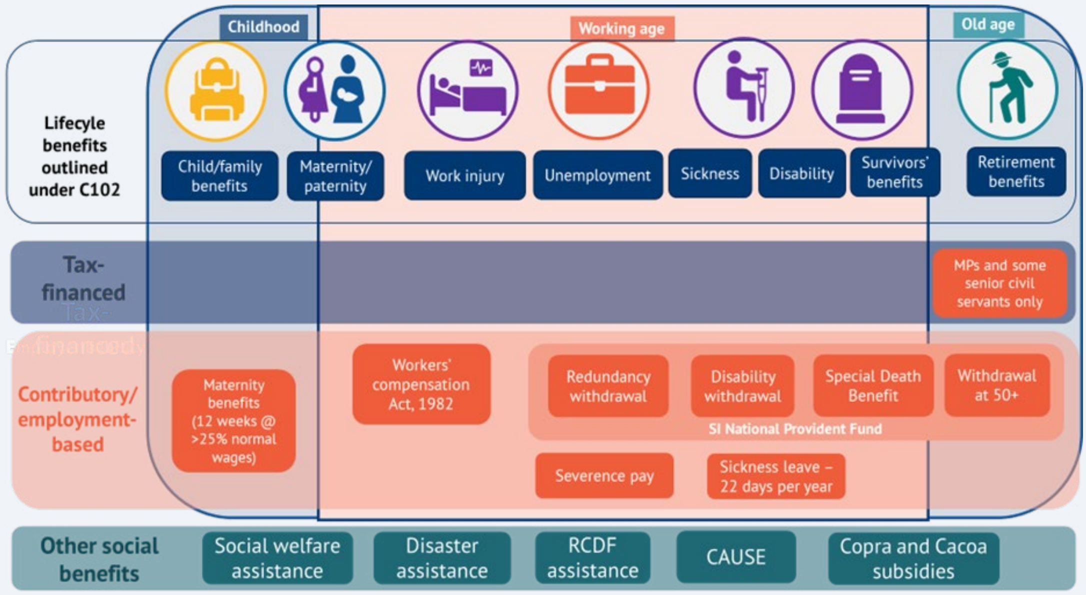
3.3.2 Parental benefits

The provision of maternity benefits in Solomon Islands is limited to those provided by employers of women in standard employment under the Labour Act (amended 1996). No social insurance or tax-financed maternity benefits exist. As a result, only a small minority of women have access to such benefits. There is no legislated provision for paternity leave in Solomon Islands.

Legislation governing maternity benefits falls significantly below the level of protection promoted by international standards. Under the Labour Act (amended 1996) pregnant women are entitled to 12 weeks paid leave at a minimum of 25 per cent of normal wages. This falls significantly below the level of protection promoted by ILO Convention No. 183 (14 weeks and a minimum of two-thirds normal wages), let alone ILO Recommendation No. 191 which advocates for at least eighteen weeks at 100 per cent of normal wages. The reliance on employers to fully fund maternity benefits is not considered good practice as it has the potential to disincentivize employment of women and generate other discriminatory employment practices.

Despite limitations of the legislation, higher standards are reportedly provided by many employers in Solomon Islands. Collective bargaining has proved to be a particularly effective framework for delivering higher levels of protection for pregnant women and newborn children, with many employers providing two-thirds or full income replacement during the period of maternity leave.

▶ **Figure 11. Schematic overview of social protection in the Solomon Islands**



Source: Author's depiction (note that employer-liability sickness and maternity benefits are not compliant with international labour standards)

3.3.3 Child/family benefits

Social protection is essential to ensuring that the rights of children to social security[96] and a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development are realized.[97] According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), States are required to "take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right [to an adequate standard of living] and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing."[98] Although no formal minimum standards for child benefits are provided in Convention No. 102, the ILO and UNICEF have jointly asserted that countries should aim to provide at least ten years' coverage under their child benefit schemes.[99]

The Child and Family Welfare Act of 2017 provides a limited legal basis for public support for families who are unable to meet their children's basic needs. Subsequently the social welfare assistance scheme was established through the Ministry of Health and Medical Services' Department of Social Welfare and Gender Based Violence. In the years prior to 2021, the social welfare department received an annual budget allocation of approximately SBD200,000 to provide crisis support and material goods to children, persons with disabilities, orphans, victims of sexual and gender-based violence residing in shelters and other destitute individuals and families. Social welfare assistance is typically used to cover the costs of essential

[96] UNGA, 1989. Article 26.
[97] UNGA, 1989. Article 27.
[98] UNGA, 1989. Article 27(2).
[99] ILO and UNICEF, 2019.

transport costs, school fees, toiletries, water tanks, babies' nappies, safe accommodation, land transport and other supplies for destitution relief.

However, during COVID-19 outbreak, the DSW budget was reduced to SBD30,000. The reprioritisation of social welfare assistance at this critical time contrasts starkly with the international expansion of social protection responses to COVID-19. It may also reflect the peripheral position of the Department of Social Welfare within the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and suggests that successful implementation of the (recently re-launched) Child and Family Welfare Act of 2017 may necessitate the identification of alternative institutional arrangements for the critical social welfare function.

3.3.4 Unemployment protection

International standards relating to unemployment protection are set out in the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), the Employment Promotion and Protection Against Unemployment Convention, 1988 (No.168) and the Recommendation on Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment, No. 176 (1988). Convention No. 102 requires states to provide unemployment protection if a person, who is available for and capable of work, is unable to obtain suitable employment. According to Article 15 of the Employment Promotion and Protection Against Unemployment Convention, 1988 (No.168), unemployment benefits are expected to provide "partial and transitional wage replacement and, at the same time, [to] avoid creating disincentives either to work or to employment creation." Meanwhile Article 7 of Convention No. 168 also brings employment services, vocational training and vocational guidance within the framework of social security.

No unemployment protection exists in Solomon Islands that complies with the above-mentioned international standards. The limited protection and supports that are available include:

- **Severance pay** equivalent to two weeks of salary per year worked provided under the Employment Act.
- **Redundancy-rated withdrawal of accumulated savings from the NPF**. These accounted for 4.2 per cent of the value of all NPF withdrawals over the past five years, with an average withdrawal value per member of SBD14,057, equivalent to just under one year of fulltime wages at the legal minimum wage. However, as discussed previously, only a small fraction of the workforce is enrolled in the NPF and an even smaller fraction of savers can save sufficient sums such that any redundancy-related withdrawals would not impinge on retirement savings.
- **Various church denominations deliver vocational training to young people through a network of 24 rural training centres.** These training centres serve approximately 1,600 students at any point in time and receive limited government financial support.
- **The Community Access and Urban Services Enhancement (CAUSE) project.** Formerly known as the Rapid Employment Project (2015-18), CAUSE is currently being implemented in Honiara, the Western province and Malaita and aims to contribute to peace building and social stability by increasing the incomes of urban youth through the provision of temporary part-time employment and support to transition into full-time employment. CAUSE provides an average of 30 days' manual part-time work at the legal minimum wage (SBD 8per hour) as well as business training and employment counselling.[100] Although the part-time nature

of employment provided may increase accessibility of the programme among low-income women, such a short duration of employment limits the social protection function of the scheme. Being focused on manual work, CAUSE is also likely to be inaccessible to youth with certain impairments.

3.3.5 Employment injury

Compensation for injuries sustained in the course of employment is one of the oldest and most widespread branches of the social security. Early formulations referred to "workmen's compensation" and tended to provide for employer-liability compensation for manual workers in high-risk industries and agriculture. Three ILO Conventions – the Workmen's Compensation in Agriculture Convention, 1921 (No. 12), the Equality of Treatment (Accident Compensation) Convention, 1925 (No. 19) and the Workmen's Compensation (Occupational Diseases) Convention (Revised), 1934 (No. 42) - guided the development of early domestic legislation in this area.

Over time, however, most countries have chosen to expand the scope of employment injury protection to: (a) include men and women engaged in a wider range of occupations; (b) enhance the benefits available; and (c) move away from employer-liability, no-fault-based insurance towards a broader and more efficient social insurance approach. This more ambitious and inclusive approach to employment injury protection was articulated in the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and the Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 (No.121) which amended the Conventions on workmen's compensation of the 1920s and 1930s. Where employment injury has been integrated into the mandate of comprehensive social insurance funds, many countries have also dispensed with the privileging of death and disability caused by employment-related causes, opting instead to provide protection against these contingencies irrespective of the cause.

Key principles introduced by Convention Nos. 102 and 121 include:

i. At least half of the national workforce, or 20 per cent of all residents, should be covered.
ii. Benefits for longer-term contingencies, such as permanent disability and survivorship, should be in the form of periodical payments payable for as long as the worker experiences total or partial disablement, rather than as lump sums.
iii. Quality medical care to be provided, for as long as is necessary, for the purpose of maintaining, restoring or improving the health of the injured worker and his/her ability to work and attend to personal needs.
iv. Minimum benefits were stipulated as a proportion of lost wages and according to household circumstances.
v. Where necessary, injured workers to be supported to find alternative employment if injury prohibits a return to their original occupation.

The Solomon Islands' Workmen's Compensation (Amendment) Act of 1979. No. 3 makes provision for employer's liability for compensation for death or incapacity resulting from accident as well as compensation for occupational diseases. The Act covers employed persons (including public-sector employees) earning SBD4,000 a year or less, as well as casual workers under certain circumstances. Employers are required to insure their liability with insurance companies, while administration of the scheme is managed by the Department

[100] World Bank, 2020.

of Labour in the Ministry of Commerce, Labour, Employment and Youth Affairs. As such, the present employment injury compensation scheme is reflective of a legacy breed of legislation and falls significantly below contemporary international standards. Key weaknesses include: (a) exclusion of higher-wage workers in lower-risk occupations; (b) reliance on relatively low lumpsum benefits;[101] (c) lack of entitlement to comprehensive medical care and rehabilitation of a specified standard; (d) employers are only made liable for the cost of providing prostheses if prostheses will improve the earnings capacity of the injured worker, in which case compensation is reduced accordingly.

The current legislation is not only outdated but also faces a range of implementation challenges. These include: widespread non-compliance among small and medium-sized enterprises (including the responsibility to take out insurance and report accidents); lengthy delays in the processing and adjudication of claims; and frequent exclusion of wives (particularly customary spouses) from compensation settlements. These weaknesses reflect low levels of awareness among workers of their rights and entitlements.

3.3.6 Sickness and disability benefits

The ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention of 1952, (No. 102) states that sickness benefits shall cover incapacity to work resulting from a morbid condition and involving suspension of earnings. No cash sickness or disability benefits are available in Solomon Islands and available protections are limited to:

- *Paid sick leave for those in formal employment:* The Labour Act (amended 1996) provides for a maximum of 22 days paid sick leave per year for workers in standard employment, provided they have completed at least 26 weeks of employment, although some employers including the government reportedly provide more than this.
- *Access to account balances for SINPF members:* The SINPF allows members to withdraw their savings if they are physically or mentally incapacitated from ever engaging in any further employment. However, as discussed previously, SINPF coverage is currently limited to around 10-15 per cent of the workforce while reliance on a lump sum rather than periodic benefits for long-term contingencies is contrary to international social security standards.
- *Assistive devices:* The Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR) programme provides assistive devices to persons with disabilites. However, coverage is highly constrained due to inadequate funding and only 18 CBR workers are available to cover the entire country.

In the absence of a more inclusive sickness and/or disability benefit regime, ill-health can have catastrophic impacts on families in Solomon Islands. For example, a recent study found that 92 per cent of Tuberculosis patients experienced catastrophic costs because of the direct costs of treatment and loss of earning. The study authors recommended the urgent introduction of Tuberculosis-specific income assistance scheme until such time as broad-based income protection for sickness/disability could be established. The absence of income support for people experiencing serious communicable diseases also has the potential to disincentivise uptake of health care and undermine disease control efforts.

3.3.7 Old age benefits

MPs and a small number of senior civil servants are the only recipients of periodic retirement pensions in Solomon Islands. MPs, who are not eligible to contribute to the

[101] Permanent total incapacity is payable as a lump sum of 48 months earnings up to maximum of SBD80,000, whichever is less, and where a requirement for constant attendance is certified, another 25 per cent is added for this purpose. Permanent partial incapacity benefits are proportionate to the benefits for permanent total incapacity. Survivors receive death benefits of a lump sum of 36 months earnings up to a maximum of SBD80,000.

SINPF, are entitled to a defined benefit lifetime pension fixed as a proportion of the base salary for MPs and which rises from 35 to 95 per cent depending on the number of terms served in parliament. With the base annual salary of an ordinary MP standing at SBD112,320 in 2021, a MP who served a single term would be entitled to SBD39,312 a year in pension.[102]

With no social insurance scheme or social pension in place in Solomon Islands, the SINPF is the only formal institution available to promote income security in old age. However, the SINPF faces several limitations in this regard. In the first instance, only around 10-15 per cent of the work force are actively contributing, since the vast majority of Solomon Island workers are engaged in subsistence activities or low-wage informal sector work. Although contemporary data is not available, previous analysis has shown that many members are low-income workers and unable to save sufficient funds in their working lives to provide a minimum level of income security in old age.[103] This situation is exacerbated by a low minimum age of withdrawal (50 years). Indeed, over the past five years, withdrawals by those aged 50 years and above had an average value of only SBD55,852 (around US$7,000) per member. This is the equivalent of less than four years' wages at the legal minimum wage. The NFP's lump sum retirement benefits therefore, provide weak income protection over the longer-term. Furthermore, small business activities in which these funds are invested frequently fail, while retirees often also face demands for support from extended families and wantok members that are hard to ignore, often leading to rapid depletion of savings post-retirement.

▶ Box 3. On the feasibility of income support in Solomon Islands' rural areas and outer islands

With over 300 inhabited islands and poor transport infrastructure, delivering social protection benefits in Solomon Islands in an accessible, cost-effective, regular and reliable manner is a considerable challenge. Although social protection benefits are commonly delivered directly by governments around the world in a range of logistically challenging contexts, such approaches are often problematic from both the perspective of government and recipients alike. Key issues include: high cost of delivery; diversion of large numbers of government staff into payment disbursement activities; irregular and unreliable payments; and high risk of corruption. Partnerships with financial service providers such as banks and mobile money providers are therefore often seen as a better long-term alternative, including as a result of the potential for such partnerships to support financial inclusion for both programme beneficiaries and wider community members.

However, access to financial services remains constrained in Solomon Islands. In 2016 only 26 per cent of adults had a bank account, while travel times and associated costs to access banking services were among the highest in the region. Commercial activity is also extremely limited in many rural areas, thereby posing significant challenges to the expansion of agency banking, mobile money and other newer models of financial services. In 2016 only 26 per cent of the total population owned a mobile phone while 38 per cent of the population used mobile phones.

On the other hand, adoption of mobile banking services is among the highest in the region (40.1 per cent in 2016) and, with the recent announcement of a major expansion of mobile telephone network infrastructure, mobile banking or mobile money services may soon become a realistic option outside of major urban centres. There is strong government commitment to the financial inclusion agenda and CBSI's Financial Inclusion Strategy specifically recognizes the potential to promote digital payment channels for bulk Government transactions, including pensions and social transfers.

[102] Solomon Star, 2021.
[103] ILO, 2006.

3.4 Overview of other relevant interventions

3.4.1 Disaster assistance

Disaster management provisions in Solomon Islands are governed by the National Disaster Council Act of 1989 and supported by periodic National Disaster Risk Management Plans (NDMPs). The Act establishes the National Disaster Council with the National Disaster Management Office (under the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology) as its secretariat. The 2018 Disaster Management Plan identifies self-help and avoidance of dependency as the foundational principles for disaster management in Solomon Islands and establishes a sector-based response structured around six clusters: livelihoods, protection, health, education, infrastructure and camp management. Non-governmental organizations play a major role in disaster management, working under the coordination of the NDMO.

Following a request from the health sector, the national disaster management system was activated in response to COVID-19. With economic activities severely disrupted by a lockdown in Honiara, the livelihoods cluster was prominent in the response distributing food aid (Ministry of Agriculture) and establishing mobile markets. The Solomon Islands Government also allocated additional funds to MPs to support unemployed people to return to rural areas.

Current disaster assistance is understood to face a range of challenges. In the first instance, only modest annual allocations are currently made to the national contingency budget, resulting in delays to the mobilisation of funding to respond to disasters. Secondly, assistance (typically rice rations) can take weeks, if not months, to reach affected communities in the most remote parts of Solomon Islands. There is also recognition that short-term assistance is often inadequate to support the recovery of key vulnerable groups, and that a more systematic approach is needed to protect pregnant women, the elderly, persons with disabilities and single-parent households. Finally, food relief has the potential to impede the resumption of local agricultural activities and is also perceived as stigmatising and patronising by some. These challenges are reflected in the World Risk's assessment of Solomon Islands' "lack of coping capacity" and "lack of adaptive capacity" as being 2nd highest among Melanesian countries, reflecting the relative fragility of local disaster management and social protection mechanisms.[104]

[104] R. Diekjobst. et al., 2020.

▶ Box 4. Save the Children in the Solomon Islands' cash and voucher assistance (CVA) pilot

Save the Children in the Solomon Islands' (SCSI) implemented a CVA intervention for the first time from April to June 2022 to support 3,010 vulnerable households which had been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Target communities were situated within the eastern and western parts of Honiara town on Guadalcanal. Each household received a SBD600 voucher to be cashed at Bulk Shop – a local vendor - to assist in meeting basic needs. Participant households were identified either at community level (12 communities) or were referred by the post-natal ward at the National Referral Hospital, the Christian Care Centre (which provides care for women and children who have been victims of violence), or People with Disabilities Solomon Islands (PWDSI).

The pilot appears to have been broadly successful in demonstrating the feasibility of cash and voucher-based responses in urban areas and was generally positively received by participants. However, SCSI and partners also experienced a range of challenges. Chief among these were: (a) challenges with the timely and accurate identification of eligible households; (b) the inability of Bulk Shop's voucher system to issue voucher values that could vary according to household size; (c) dealing with cohabitation of multiple families in terms of benefit value; (d) general misunderstanding of the intervention among participating communities.

Source: Save the Children, 2024.

The Solomon Islands Government and its partners are seeking to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of disaster assistance through the development of new delivery modalities. Recent examples include cash and voucher assistance (CVA) targeted to new mothers, persons with disabilities (Save the Children/Oxfam) and mobile markets for rural areas (led by Ministry of Agriculture). Future CVA interventions are planned under the multi-agency-implemented, DFAT-funded Disaster Ready programme. The NDMO envisages greater use of cash assistance over time, assuming that accessible services are available to receive money and local supply chains are strengthened. The National Financial Inclusion Strategy also specifically notes that digital financial services could be leveraged for the delivery of social protection programmes. However, the limited CVA interventions that have been implemented by INGOs to-date appear not to have fully explored options for linking INGO CVA to the social protection system strengthening agenda, or for overcoming financial inclusion barriers in harder-to-reach areas (see box 4 for discussion of an example). A cash working group has been established by leading INGOs to coordinate CVA interventions and learning.

3.4.2 Rural Constituency Development Fund

In the absence of social protection programmes, the Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF) is the primary public intervention in Solomon Islands that specifically aims to alleviate poverty and improve livelihoods.[105] Although constituency-based development financing emerged in the Solomon Islands as early as 1989 (in the form of Solomon Islands Communities and Special Provincial Assistance Fund), from 2007 onwards budgetary allocations to the RCDF, as it was known by then, grew rapidly. By 2017 over SBD10 million was allocated per constituency and the CDF accounted for around one third of the national development

[105] Solomon Islands Government, 2022.

budget, and five to ten per cent of overall public expenditures.[106] Although budget allocations have reduced somewhat since then, by 2022 the RCDF still accounted for nearly a quarter of the national development budget.[107] Between 2015 and 2022, cumulative budgetary allocations to the RCDF had amounted to SBD2.258 billion.[108]

According to Solomon Islands Constituency Development Fund Act of 2013 (s.5), funds may be allocated for development purposes to individuals, group income-generating projects, or community projects. The CDF programme is expected to fund four different types of activity: (i) Cash Grant or Constituency Administration Funding; (ii) income generating projects; (iii) water and sanitation, hygiene projects (WASH); (iv) social infrastructure development. However, the detailed operational regulations that were expected to be developed following the passing of the 2013 CDF Act are yet to be gazetted. A review conducted by the World Bank in 2014 concluded that the RCDF suffered from a range of challenges, including inequitable funding allocations, weak planning and limited accountability for results and resources.[109]

The limited evidence that does exit suggests that a high proportion of RCDF expenditures have been directed to individuals rather than group or community-level projects. Analysis of expenditure data from 2015 conducted by UNDP found that over 40 per cent of the CDF was spent on housing and 14 per cent on transportation, while only 16 per cent and four per cent was spent on income generating activities and water and sanitation projects respectively.[110] Three per cent was reported as spent on general assistance, reflecting the informal social support role that the RCDF likely plays. **In the absence of alternative social support, efforts to better align the RCDF with the national development priorities, as set out in the 2013 RCDF Act, are likely to encounter resistance at local level.**

---

[106] C. Wiltshire and J. Batley, 2018.
[107] Solomon Islands Government, 2021b.
[108] Solomon Star, 2022.
[109] World Bank, 2014.
[110] T. Strawson and A. Nelson, Undated.

4. Strengthening social protection in Solomon Islands: Options and indicative costs

4.1 Preface to policy options analysis

The preceding discussion identified key gaps and deficiencies in Solomon Islands' emerging social protection system.

In summary these include:

1. Non-alignment of existing employment-based social protection legislation with international labour standards.
2. Variable compliance with existing employment-based social protection and employment legislation.
3. Absence of social insurance mechanisms.
4. Absence of social protection provisions addressing key lifecycle contingencies such as maternity, childhood, sickness, disability, unemployment and old age for those without access to standard employment.
5. Limited responsiveness to disasters, including inadequate support for groups experiencing elevated vulnerability (such as single parent families, person with disabilities, older people).

In this chapter we explore options for addressing some of these gaps. However, there are limits to what is appropriate and feasible to explore within the context of this study. In the first instance, assessing the feasibility of establishing social insurance mechanisms is beyond the scope of this report and would, in any case, require access to contemporary labour market and income/expenditure data and extensive engagement with workers and employers. Similarly, assessing the feasibility (including consideration of relative financing from workers and employers) of aligning existing maternity and employment injury protections with international labour standards would be better achieved through dialogue between social partners, and should be cost-neutral to the taxpayer (leaving aside any potential behavioural effects).

Instead, therefore, we focus here on options for strengthening tax-financed social protection schemes, namely child/family benefits (including benefits specifically for single parent families with children), disability benefits and old age benefits. These schemes have been selected in response to feedback received during our consultations with stakeholders as to the highest priority and most appropriate social protection interventions in the Solomon Islands' context. Alternative policy options, such as programmes that target social benefits to poor households only (commonly referred to as "poor relief" or "social assistance"), were commonly perceived by informants to be administratively problematic, socially divisive, stigmatising and culturally inappropriate in the Solomon Islands context. Although exclusion of the wealthiest members of society (sometimes referred to as "affluence-testing") from lifecycle social benefit schemes may be administratively feasible, fiscally prudent and culturally acceptable, it has not been possible to assess this as part of this study and we have therefore largely opted to retain the assumption of universal coverage in the policy simulations presented below.

4.2 Key considerations in estimating the cost of social protection programmes

Given the need to understand the long-term fiscal sustainability of social protection expenditures, costings analysis for social protection typically express expected fiscal outlays as a proportion of GDP rather than in cash terms. Costings analysis for social protection therefore typically involves making assumptions about key programme design parameters on one hand (the size of the eligible population; coverage of the eligible population; benefit level; and administrative costs) and GDP growth rates on the other. Details of the approach used in estimating each of these variables is as follows:

- **Eligible population:** modelling of expected changes in the size of the eligible population for several of the policy options presented has been based on population projections provided in *World Population Prospects 2022,* published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.[111] The medium fertility variant 2022-2100 has been used in each case. Where modelling has required estimation of other socio-demographic indicators (such as disability status), data has been taken from other national or (if necessary) international official sources and details provided in each case.
- **Coverage:** Very few social protection programmes achieve 100 per cent accuracy in the enrolment of eligible individuals or households and schemes may be over- or under-subscribed depending on the institutional context. Inclusion and exclusion errors may also change over time, for example as civil registration systems are strengthened or as programme administration matures. Given the complexity of the Solomon Islands context, it does not seem appropriate to make any non-evidence-based assumptions on the coverage of the eligible population likely to be achieved. All costings analysis has therefore been prepared on the assumption of full coverage of the eligible population. The subsequent projected fiscal outlays are therefore expected to be at the upper end of what might actually transpire, particularly in the short-to-medium term.
- **Transfer levels:** Given that social protection programmes are expected, at least eventually, to guarantee a minimum standard of living and provide effective protection against a range of contingencies, transfer levels for non-contributory (tax-financed) social protection schemes are typically presented either as a "proportion of GDP per capita" or "proportion of

[111] United Nations Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022.

the national poverty line". However, there are no established standards for setting transfer levels for individual programmes according to these benchmarks, and benefit levels tend to vary quite considerably between countries, reflecting variations in political economy, societal norms and values, labour market dynamics and fiscal capacity. Nonetheless, multi-country comparative analysis reveals ranges for benefits awarded by different types of programme such as old age pensions, disability benefits, child benefits. The transfer levels used in the costings analysis presented here have been identified through an iterative approach that has considered international comparative analysis of social transfer values, relationship with the Solomon Islands poverty line, and fiscal capacity.

This process is complicated by the fact that the official poverty line varies according to province in Solomon Islands, reflecting significant geographical variations in employment and costs of living. Indeed the Honiara poverty line is almost twice the value of the poverty lines for the other provinces. Social benefit levels set with reference to the urban poverty line are therefore likely to be excessively high in rural contexts, while benefit levels set with reference to rural poverty lines may be inadequate in urban contexts. However, varying benefit levels according to location is likely to create administrative and political challenges. In a context where 80 per cent of the population reside in rural areas, we have taken the view that the rural poverty line is likely to be considered a more appropriate national benchmark.

- **Administrative costs:** Administrative costs vary enormously according to: (a) type of programme; (b) institutional context; (c) operational context; and (d) as a result of specific design decisions, such as the regularity or payments. Administrative costs – expressed as a proportion of the total programme cost - may also change significantly over time. Accurate estimation of administrative costs is therefore a complex exercise and beyond the scope of this assessment. As a result, administrative costs have not been included in our analysis. Suffice to say that they tend to be modest over the longer-term for simple lifecycle schemes, although more substantial in the early stages of programme establishment and roll-out.
- **Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** Modelled GDP growth rates are as per the IMF World Economic Outlook (WEO) database which provides projections until 2027. The average projected GDP growth rate of the period 2024-2027 is assumed to apply from 2028 onwards.

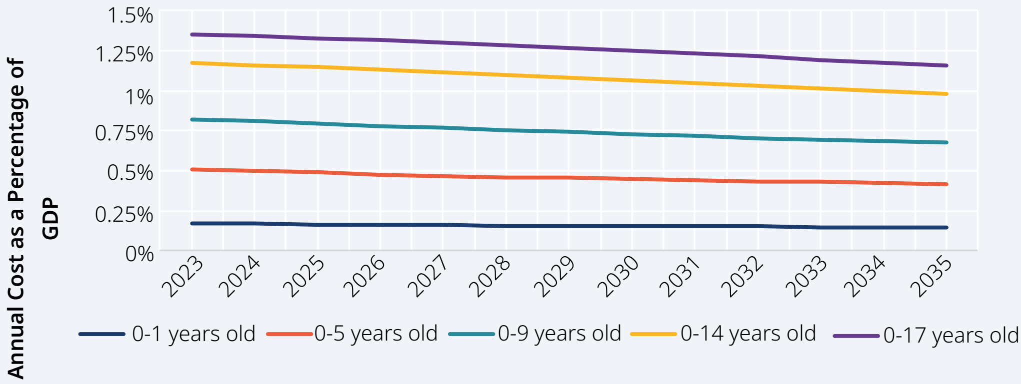
4.3 Estimating the cost of a child/family benefit

4.3.1 Target group

Child benefits can be implemented either with a fixed target group (such as children from birth until their second birthday) such that children exit the programme on the relevant birthday, or the age of eligibility can be increased each year to allow for the gradual roll-out of a child benefit for all children.

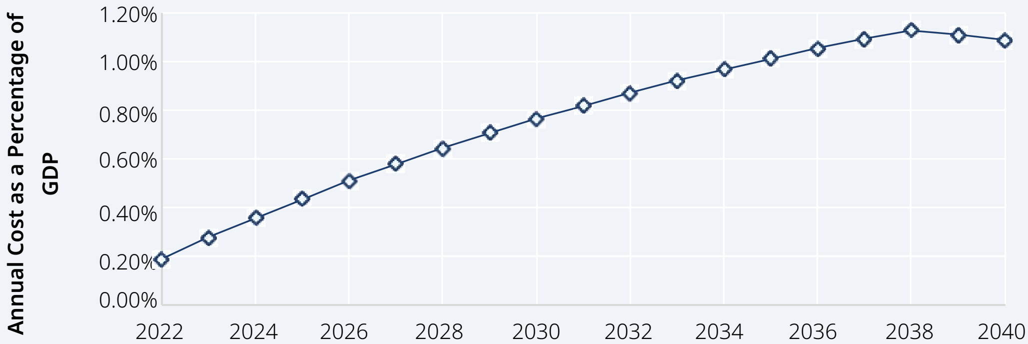
To illustrate this, figure 12 presents the cost of a child benefit for children under a range of fixed age thresholds (<2 years, <6 years, <10 years, <15 years and <18 years). For hypothetical and comparative purposes, a standard benefit level of three per cent of GDP per capita is used, with no adjustment for economies of scale for households with higher numbers of children. Figure 13 presents an alternative arrangement whereby the age of eligibility is increased by one year each year, again using a fixed transfer value of three per cent of GDP for children of all ages.

▶ **Figure 12. Cost of alternative universal child benefit designs over time, as percentage of GDP**



Source: Authors' own calculations using World Bank growth forecasts.

▶ **Figure 13. Cost of progressive roll-out of a UCB to children aged 0-17, as percentage of GDP**



Source: Authors' own calculations using World Bank growth forecasts.

4.3.2 Benefit level

The aim of a child benefit is to provide assistance to families in meeting the costs of raising children, thereby minimizing childhood disadvantage associated with wide disparities in household incomes. Child benefits also seek to optimize societal investment in children, recognizing that it in the public interest that children are healthy and well-educated while, in the absence of child benefits, the costs of achieving this would otherwise fall on individual families. Child benefits – which also include cash or in-kind childcare assistance – may also partially compensate families for the opportunity costs of caring for children.

Child benefit levels therefore vary enormously, reflecting a wide variation in the level of support that governments can afford is appropriate to provide to families. Furthermore, while many countries offer uniform child benefits throughout a child's life, others vary the value of the transfer depending on the age of the child. Some provide higher transfer values for the youngest children, reflecting the importance of providing adequate nutrition and care at this critical stage of child development, while others provide higher transfer values when children reach secondary school with a view to ensuring that children stay in the education system rather than exiting prematurely in search of poor-quality employment. Nonetheless, as explained above, child benefits are not intended to cover the full costs of bringing up a child since this is typically viewed as primarily the responsibility of parents. As such, there are no minimum standards that we can refer to for the setting of child benefits levels. However, reference to a few benchmarks can be instructive.

Benchmark 1: Median consumption-expenditure on children

Analysis of the HIES (2012-13) allows us to estimate the median cost of raising children in the Solomon Islands. As table 3 shows, these costs might reasonably be estimated to stand at around SBD833 per month in 2022 nationwide, and ranging from SBD726 in rural areas to SBD1,333 in urban areas. Table 4 then sets out child benefit levels set as alternative proportions (five per cent and ten per cent) of these monthly expenditures.

▸ **Table 3: Average monthly household expenditures, in SBD (2012-13 data adjusted to 2022 prices)**

Expenditure categories	National		Urban		Rural	
Child related consumption-expenditures						
Food and non-alcoholic beverages	519	46%	615	30%	498	53%
Clothing and footwear	24	2%	42	2%	20	2%
Housing and utilities*	255	23%	605	29%	180	19%
Health	3	0%	4	0%	2	0%
Recreation and culture	15	1%	25	1%	13	1%
Education	18	2%	42	2%	13	1%
Sub-totals	**833**	**74%**	**1 333**	**65%**	**726**	**78%**
Non-child related consumption expenditure						
Communication	34	3%	96	5%	21	2%
Transportation	119	11%	316	15%	77	8%
Alcoholic beverages, tobacco and narcotics	99	9%	213	10%	75	8%
Miscellaneous good and services	9	1%	27	1%	6	1%
Furnishings, equipment and maintenance	29	3%	54	3%	23	3%
Restaurants and hotels	8	1%	22	1%	4	0%
Sub-totals	**298**	**26%**	**727**	**35%**	**207**	**22%**
Total average consumption expenditure	**1131**		**2061**		**932**	

Table 4. Alternative child benefit transfer levels set as defined proportions of monthly expenditures on children, in SBD

Proportion of monthly expenditures	National	Urban	Rural
5%	42	67	36.5
10%	83	133	73

Benchmark 2: Per capita poverty line.

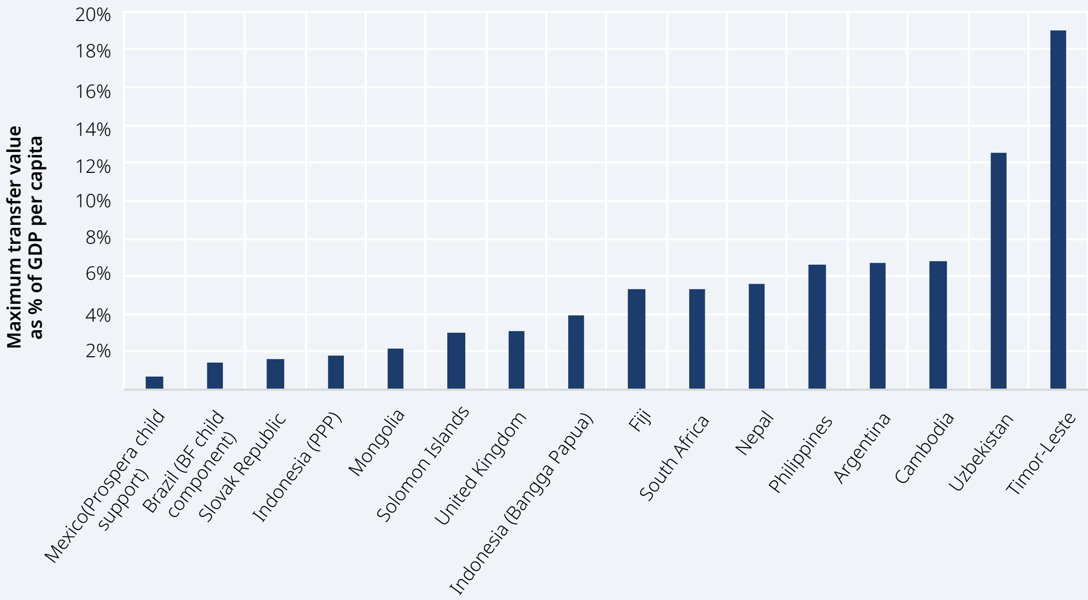
Table 5. Alternative transfer levels at various proportions of alternative poverty lines, in SBD

Poverty line	Value in LCU (in 2022 prices)	10% of poverty line	25% of poverty line	33% of poverty line
50% median per capita consumption-expenditure	362.3	36.2	90.6	119.6
National poverty line (urban): Honiara	723.3	72.3	180.8	238.7
National poverty line (rural): Non-Honiara	421.8	42.2	105.5	139.2

Benchmark 3: Proportion of GDP per capita (international comparisons)

Figure 14 presents child benefit values as a proportion of GDP per capita in a range of countries. Although there is significant variation between countries, the median value stands at just below five per cent of GDP per capita.

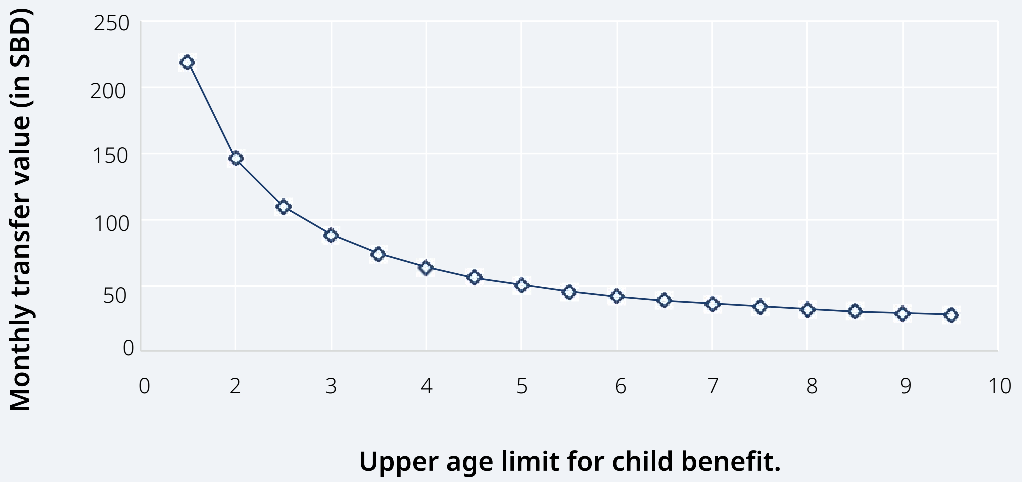
Figure 14. Child benefit transfer levels as a percentage of GDP per capita in a selection of countries



Source: Development Pathways' global social benefits database.

An alternative approach to the setting of child benefit transfer levels is to seek to optimize the poverty reduction impact of the scheme through the optimization of the balance between breadth of coverage (the upper age threshold) and value of benefits within a budget constraint. In many contexts, broader coverage with lower transfer levels may be optimal from a poverty reduction perspective. However, HIES consumption-expenditure data is not available to enable this analysis to be conducted at this stage. Nonetheless, it is possible to demonstrate the trade-off between breadth of coverage and benefit adequacy options by modelling transfer level and coverage options for a fixed one per cent of GDP allocation to the child grant scheme (see figure 15).

Figure 15. Alternative monthly child benefit levels spending one per cent of GDP in 2022, in SBD



Source: Authors' calculations using World Bank growth forecasts.

4.4 Estimating the cost of a single parents' assistance benefits

In the context of limited public resources, a single parents' assistance benefit has the potential not only to target a particularly vulnerable group in Solomon Islands society but also serve as a stepping-stone towards a more comprehensive child benefit programme. A single parent's assistance benefit involves some inevitable design and implementation complexities compared to a simple child benefit scheme but experience in other countries suggests that these could be overcome to a satisfactory degree, perhaps with reference to orphanhood status, GBV survivorship and other socio-political rationale.

4.4.1 Target group

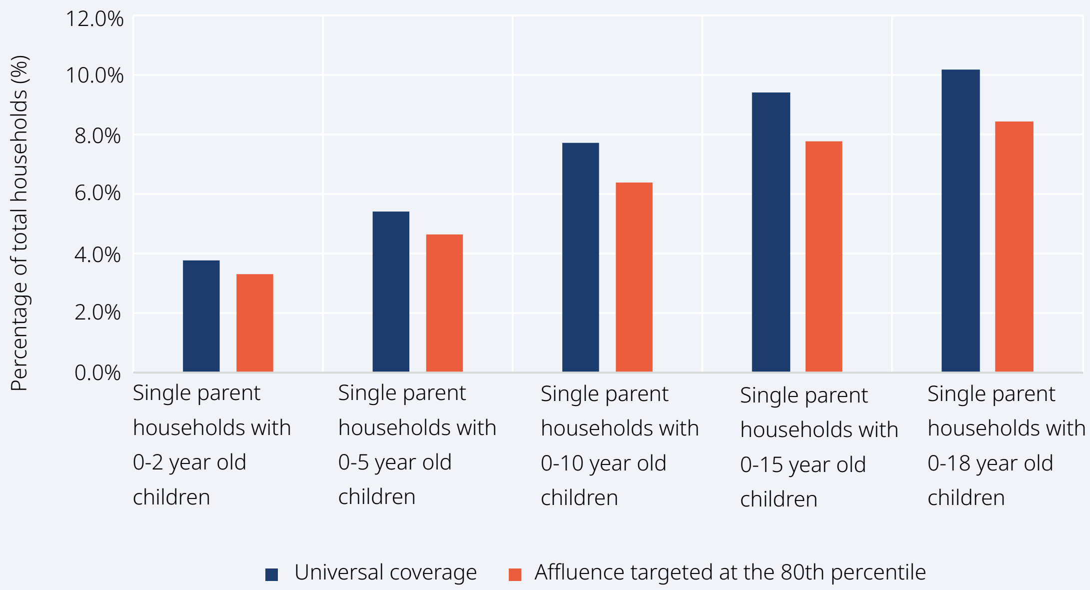
Available data shows that 10.2 per cent of all households in Solomon Islands consist of a single adult with no partner of spouse caring for children and often, other dependents. Eighty three per cent of these cases are female-headed households while 17 per cent are headed by a male. As discussed in the discussion on female-headed households in box 2, the composition, marital status and income levels of single adult worker households vary significantly. Furthermore, although single worker/carer households headed by men are somewhat less likely to be poor (25 per cent of single male parent households are in the poorest three deciles compared with 37 per cent of single female parent households), it is important to recognize that poverty and vulnerability among single parent households is not limited to female-headed households. On the other hand, around one in six households headed by male or female single parents are in the richest quintile.

In this context, the precise target group for a single parents' assistance scheme would therefore need to be considered carefully. Key considerations for social protection targeting could include: (a) whether a spouse/partner exists who is away from the household; (b) the reason for the absence of a spouse/partner (e.g., migration for work versus incarceration; (c) the presence of other adults in the household and their ability to work; (d) overall household income. The most expansive scheme would perhaps cover all single parent households with children aged 0-17, while a more restrictive approach would only cover single, separated and widowed parents with young children, with eligibility further limited to households below a certain income/wealth threshold. Consideration would also need to be given to the treatment of foster children present in such households.

Where other social benefits exist (such as broad-based child benefits), it is common, for single parents' allowance schemes to be considered as supplementary to these benefits and therefore to focus on the poorest families only.[112] However, in the Solomon Islands context, where no broad-based child benefit exists, restricting eligibility to the lowest income single parent households with children would not only be very difficult to implement effectively but would also create disincentives to work, and should therefore probably not be considered. Instead, if universal coverage of single parents is not desired, it may be more appropriate to only exclude the wealthiest single parent households with children through reference to an easily identifiable wealth threshold or proxy indicator.

[112] It is important to distinguish between targeting policy intentions and actual targeting outcomes. Many programmes that aim to cover only the poorest households suffer from high inclusion and exclusion errors.

Figure 16. Percentage of total households covered by alternative single parents' assistance schemes

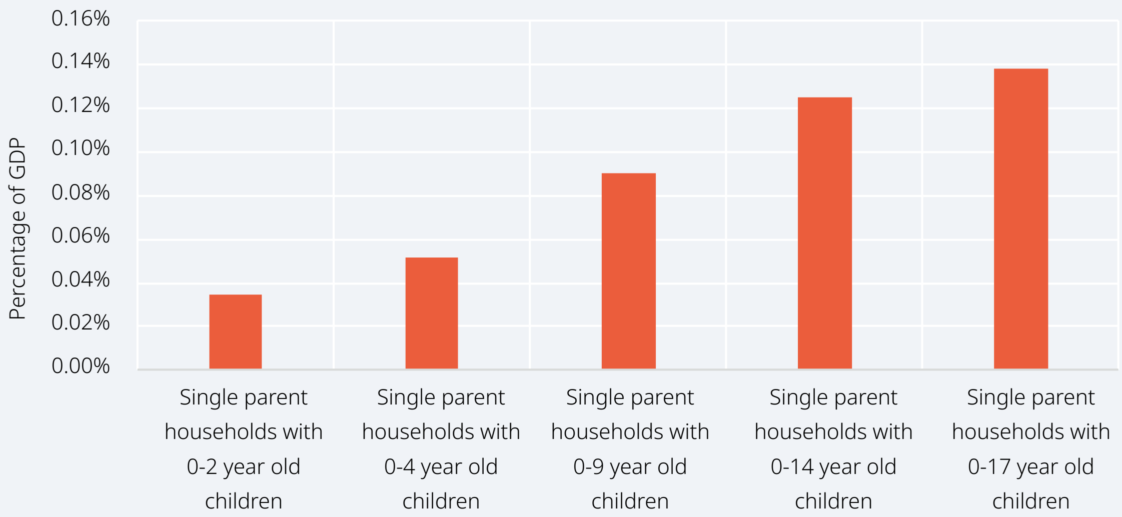


Source: Authors' calculations using HIES 2012/13 data.

4.4.2 Benefit level

Benefit levels for single parent assistance programmes typically depend on the availability and generosity of other child and family benefits. Single parent allowances typically vary according to the number of children in the household and may or may not include a benefit cap/maximum number of children for which payments are made. For the purposes of this study, we present costings based on three per cent of GDP per capita and five per cent of GDP per capita per child, with no limitation on the number of children covered by the scheme.

Figure 17. Estimated cost for a universal single parents' assistance scheme (transfers set at four per cent of GDP/capita)



Source: Authors' calculations using HIES 2012/13 data.

4.5 Estimating the cost of a disability benefit

4.5.1 Target group

According to the 2015 DHS, 1.5 per cent of the population aged five years and above were defined as having severe disabilities, while 3.5 per cent had moderate disabilities. However, little is currently known about the relative social protection needs of these two groups, nor whether social protection needs are similar within these groups. Further research on this issue is required as part of the detailed design of a disability benefit for the Solomon Islands.

4.5.2 Benefit level

Tax-financed disability benefits tend to be designed to protect persons with disabilities from poverty, as well as to help meet the additional costs associated with disability such as medication, transportation and adaptation of homes. Accurate estimation of these costs requires more detailed research than is possible within this initial study. Therefore, for purposes of policy dialogue, table 6 presents the monthly cost of disability benefits set at 50 per cent of the various relevant poverty lines. Such a transfer level would be comparable to that provided by Fiji's Disability Support Allowance, adjusted to the Solomon Islands economic context. Depending on how severe disability was defined, the cost of such a scheme in 2023 would be between 0.1 and 0.2 per cent of GDP. Figure 23 presents the cost of such a scheme within the context of a minimum package of lifecycle benefits.

Table 6. Potential monthly benefit values at different proportions of different poverty lines, in SBD

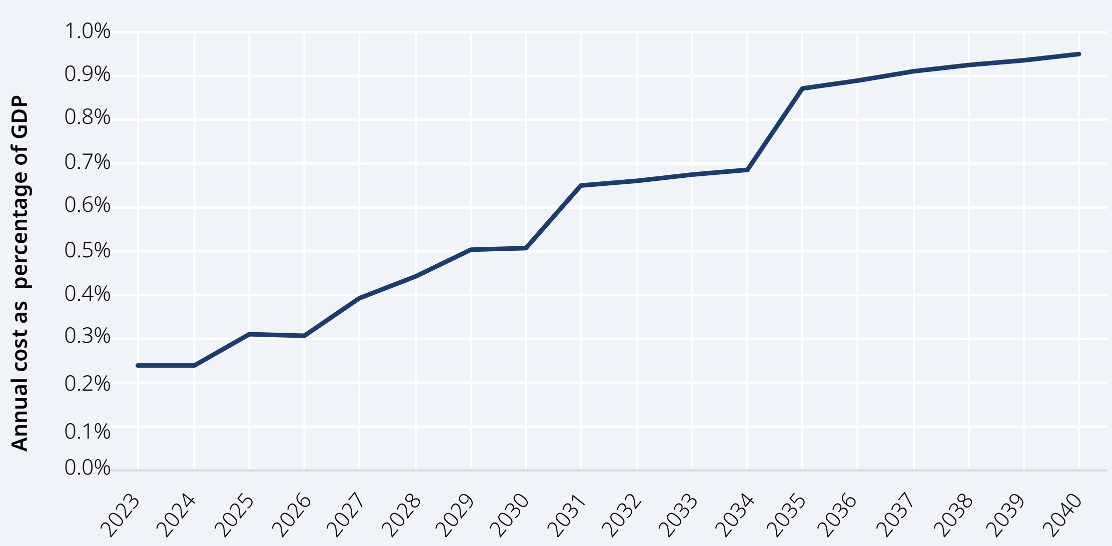
Poverty line	50% of poverty line
50% median per capita consumption-expenditure	181.2
National poverty line (urban): Honiara	361.6
National poverty line (rural): Non-Honiara	210.9

4.6 Estimating the cost of a basic old age pension

4.6.1 Target group

The minimum age of eligibility for tax-financed old age pensions would ideally be set no older than 65 years. However, to overcome fiscal constraints, many developing countries introduce these at higher age thresholds and then progressively reduce the threshold over time. Figure 18 illustrates the cost of a social pension scheme introduced at age 75 with eligibility being gradually reduced over a ten-year period to 65, with an illustrative flat transfer level of 80 per cent of the rural poverty line. No allowance for economies of scale has been made for households where more than one older person is co-habiting.

Figure 18. Illustrative cost of a social pension introduced at age 75, with eligibility reduced to 65 by 2035 (payment set at 80% of the poverty line)

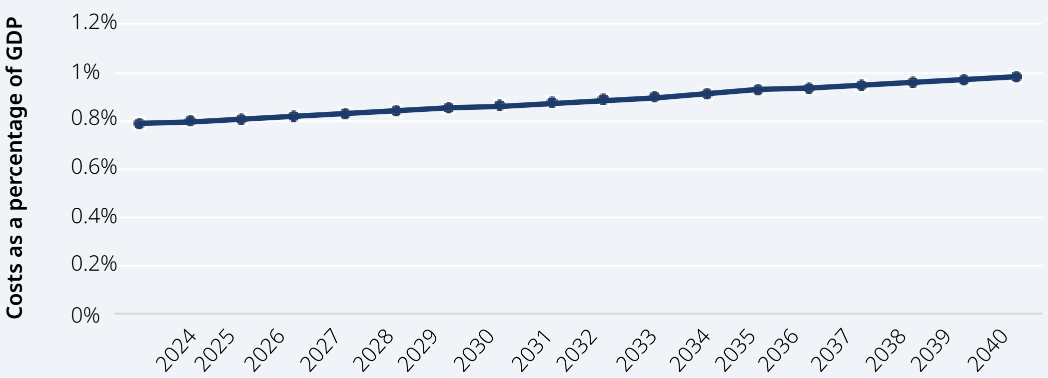


Source: Authors' own calculations using World Bank growth forecasts.

4.6.2 Benefit level

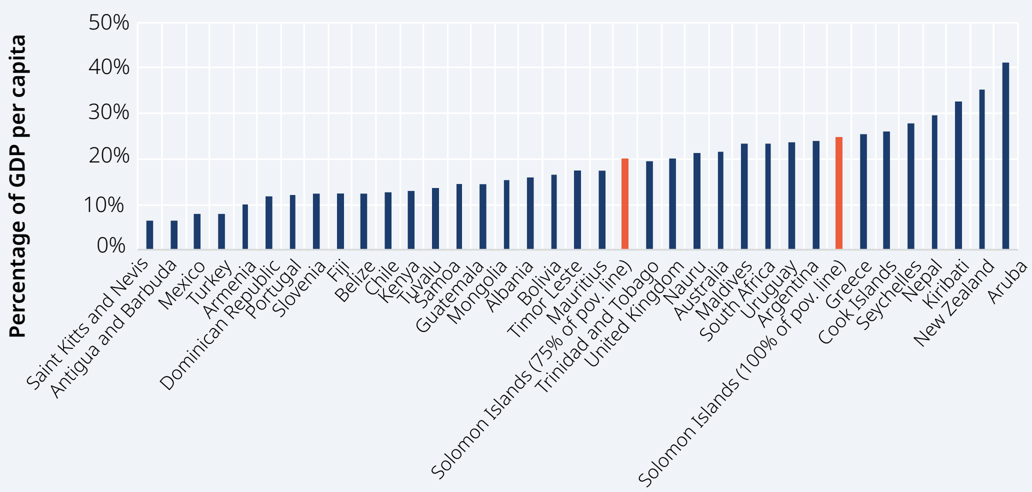
Since a social pension is designed to ensure that all older people are able to maintain a dignified standard of living once their capacity to earn income through work has diminished, benefit levels for a social pension would ideally constitute a high proportion of the national basic needs poverty line. Benefit levels for social pensions may be uniform for all age groups, or higher for the oldest people with the highest care and support needs. Figure 19 illustrates the cost of a social pension with monthly benefits set at 100 per cent of the rural poverty line for people aged 75 years and above and 75 per cent of the rural poverty line for people aged 65 and above. Figure 20 then presents these transfer levels as a proportion of GDP per capita and in international comparative context. Figure 21 presents the spectrum of benefits that could be provided to different age groups within a fixed allocation of 0.25 per cent of GDP.

Figure 19. Cost of a social pension set at 100 per cent of the poverty line for people aged 75+ and 75 per cent of the poverty line for people aged 65+



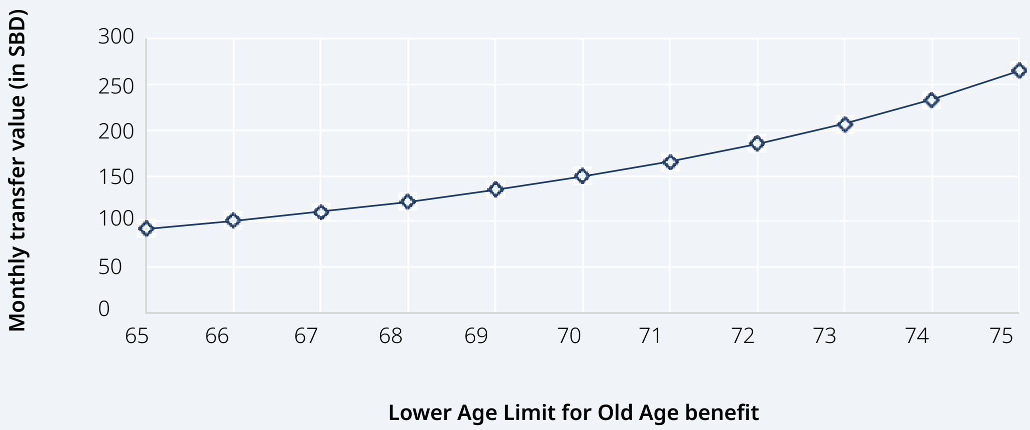
Source: Authors' own calculations using World Bank growth forecasts.

Figure 20. Cost of social pensions around the world as a % of GDP



Source: Development Pathways' global social benefits database.

Figure 21. Alternative monthly pension benefit levels for different age groups within a budget constraint of 0.25 per cent of GDP



Source: Authors' calculations using World Bank GDP data.

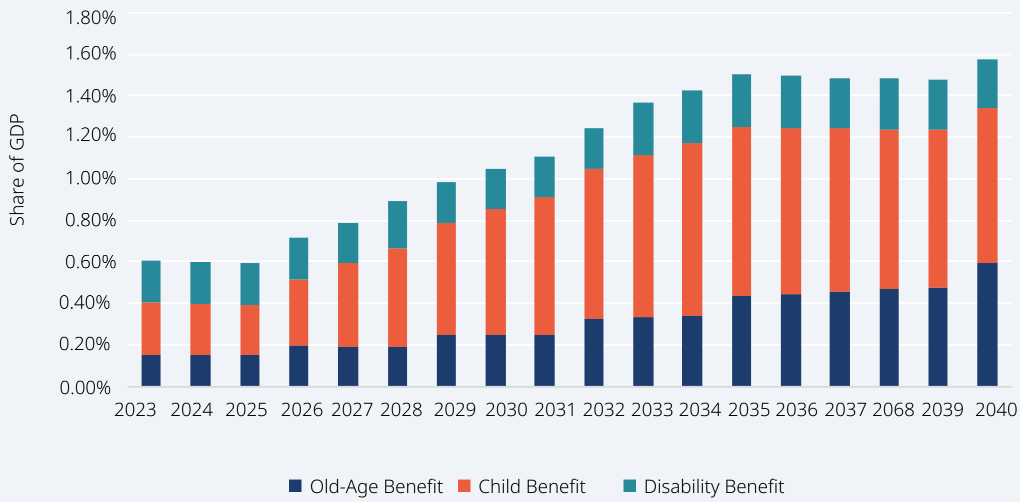
4.7 Costing a minimum package of lifecycle benefits

The scale of potential allocations over time to a national social protection programme comprising a set of core lifecycle benefits would need to be confirmed through the social protection financing study discussed above and through extensive stakeholder dialogue. However, for hypothetical purposes, the following package could be considered as a basis for discussion:

- A maternal and child benefit for pregnant women and infants under 0-1 years of age, with annual transfers equivalent to three per cent of GDP per capita, with the age of eligibility rising incrementally to cover all children aged 0-10 years by 2035.[113]
- A disability benefit for persons experiencing high support needs, with annual transfers equivalent to 50 per cent of the non-Honiara poverty line.
- A social pension for persons aged 75 years and above with an annual transfer value equivalent to 50 per cent of the non-Honiara poverty line, with gradual expansion of eligibility to persons aged 65 years and above by 2040. Persons with disabilities would remain on the disability benefit until they reach the minimum age of eligibility for the pension.

[113] This is proposed to align with recommendations jointly developed by ILO and UNICEF in 2019.

Figure 22. Indicative cost for a minimum package of lifecycle benefits, as share of GDP



Source: Authors' calculations using World Bank economic forecasts.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Poverty, hardship and widening socio-economic disparities are exerting a considerable negative toll on Solomon Islands' society.

Key concerns include:

- Socio-economic inequalities and persistent hardships are undermining social cohesion and have the potential to contribute to a breakdown in social fabric, law and order.
- Income insecurity contributes to Solomon Islands' high rates of child malnutrition and lowers educational attainment, with serious implications for the country's long-term development.
- Household financial insecurity is a key driver of gender-based violence and family breakdown, which further fuels adolescent delinquency, anti-social behaviour and criminality.
- Widespread poverty and rising costs of living are eroding solidarity and commitment to traditional cultural values and practices.

Although family and community-based social support will always remain important, traditional social support mechanisms are no longer sufficient to support an inclusive and cohesive national development process. While there are differences of opinion among Solomon Islanders as to the social utility of the *wantok* system, even those that support it readily accept that it cannot, on its own, provide a suitable foundation for equitable and sustainable national development. However, understanding of social protection is also limited in all quarters of Solomon Islands society and expectations may be shaped by previous public policies and governance practices. This implies that a range of risks will need to be proactively managed if societal consensus on the expansion of social protection is to be achieved and sustained. Sensitive communication and good governance in social protection implementation will also be critical to avoiding an exacerbation of social conflict.

Solomon Islands' social protection system is currently reliant on a range of rather outdated and inefficient social security instruments which can make only limited contributions to the country's development.

Key issues include:

- Weak employment-based social protection limits the attractiveness of formal, long-term and domestic employment, leading to high incidence of informality, employment disruption and the high labour costs faced by employers in the Solomon Islands.
- The absence of core social protection systems leads to the distortion of economic

development programmes and their reorientation towards meeting immediate needs.

- Absence of income protection for the working age population, and overburdening of those in formal employment with the care and support for extended families, has led to a re-orientation of the National Provident Fund towards meeting pre-retirement contingencies, thereby undermining its role in promoting financial security in old age.
- Over-reliance on employer-liability protection and benefits is likely to be contributing to labour market informalisation and discrimination against women in the job market and workplace.
- Absence of support for families with children, particularly single parents, is generating high levels of child poverty which undermines long-term health and productivity and threatens to generate unsustainable levels of inequality.
- Inadequate protection in cases of serious illness and disability are resulting in catastrophic financial losses for affected families, with intergenerational human capital consequences. Meanwhile the failure to alleviate the burden of caring for persons with disabilities perpetuates poverty among affected households and contributes to exclusion, stigmatisation and neglect of persons with disabilities.
- The absence of core social protection systems impedes the delivery of timely and adequate assistance to the population, and to vulnerable groups in particular, when disasters strike. This undermines the recovery process, limits capacity for adaptation and generates greater dependence on assistance.
- The inadequacy of social protection is placing traditional social support mechanisms under intolerable pressure and contributing to the degradation of solidarity and the decline of kin-based social support.

There appears to be considerable consensus among stakeholders that Solomon Islands' historical reliance on a combination of traditional and family support mechanisms, private savings and employer-liability protections, is no longer sustainable. The COVID-19 pandemic, the recent global economic crisis and recent social conflict have all demonstrated the inadequacy of current arrangements and there appears considerable consensus in favour of broad-based social protection programmes for key vulnerable groups including children, single parent households, persons with disability and older people, as well as stronger employment-based social security mechanisms. Such schemes also have the potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of disaster response and to support the recovery of vulnerable groups after disasters occur. As the costings analysis demonstrates, affordable options exist for pursuing the establishment of a nationally determined Social Protection Floor in Solomon Islands.

However, the process of strengthening Solomon Islands' social protection system faces undeniable fiscal, capacity and operational headwinds. A gradual approach could, therefore, potentially start with smaller scale programmes targeted at highly vulnerable groups such as survivors of domestic violence whose livelihoods have been severely disrupted; single parents with young children; the persons with most severe disabilities and/or people who are hospitalised for protracted periods of time. Solomon Islands' various development partners could play critical supporting roles in the early stages of social protection system development. These early stages could also benefit from efforts to integrate traditional values and social protection practices, within a progressive and inclusive traditional governance and peacebuilding agenda.

It will be important that new social protection policies and interventions are well understood and owned by Solomon Islanders, are seen to reflect Solomon Islands' culture and values and promote social cohesion and solidarity. Universal, or at least broadly inclusive, lifecycle-based social protection schemes that address widely accepted sources of vulnerability such as old age, disability and childhood are likely to gain most traction in the short-term. However, it may also be appropriate to proactively include the promotion of positive cultural values and practices that have traditionally supported community resilience within Solomon Islands' emerging social protection framework, thereby demonstrating continued commitment to these important socio-cultural institutions. High quality public and social behavioural change communications around new social protection interventions will also be critical to managing social conflict risks and other harmful behavioural changes.

It may also be important to ensure that any new social protection interventions are integrated with relevant complementary interventions and are not positioned as stand-alone programmes. This could be important not only for maximising the positive impacts of social protection programmes but also for reducing the risk of adverse social impact (e.g., social conflict or dependency), community misunderstanding of programme purpose or objectives or local politicisation. For example, a disability benefit would ideally be implemented in coordination with community-based rehabilitation programming, employment support and assistance for carers. Social protection interventions targeting families with children could also be complemented by interventions on positive parenting, nutrition, financial literacy or skills training. Measures could also be considered to further incentivise positive behavioural change such as the use of top-ups on basic benefit levels for families participating in value-added activities such as parenting programmes or skills training sessions. Overall, strengthened social protection should be positioned as part of a comprehensive strategy for enhancing societal resilience with continued efforts to promote employment, resilient smallholder and fisheries production, traditional community support mechanisms and proactive disaster risk reduction.

Social development outcomes in Solomon Islands are not only compromised by weaknesses in social protection but also by critical deficiencies in the availability and quality of basic services. Expanded social protection must not, therefore, come at the expense of investment in these critical services, nor should expectations related to the multidimensional welfare impacts of social protection programme be raised unrealistically while wider basic services remain compromised. This calls for a gradual approach to social protection system development, enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in public financial management within the social sectors and improved strategic coordination among development partners. The progressive removal of school fees (particularly for primary education) should be prioritised while demand side interventions such as transport subsidies for school children could also be implemented more systematically. In each case, communities affected by disasters could be prioritised.

With rapid social, economic, demographic and technological change, rising environmental hazards and significant external economic volatility, social protection must no longer be seen as an unaffordable luxury. Instead, social protection needs to be understood as integral to the development of a modern, open economy and society, as well as an investment in people, social justice and social cohesion that delivers high social, economic and environmental returns. Indeed, as is implicitly recognized in the National Peace Building Strategy (2016-20), an effective national social protection floor is foundational to the sustainable and peaceful development for all. Considering the nature of the reforms required, social dialogue needs to be at the core of the process, with strong participation by social partners. Meaningful and effective participation by workers, employers and other stakeholders not only helps ensure that social protection policies respond to people's needs; it is also key to building trust, public support and a sense of ownership, thereby facilitating the successful

5.2 Recommendations

Social protection is at an embryonic stage in Solomon Islands and the sequencing and timing of reforms and new investments will need to be determined through dialogue among stakeholders, with due consideration to wider social development priorities. The priority at this stage, therefore, is to strengthen capacity for policy leadership and put in place an effective institutional framework to allow participatory deliberation of policy options.

Our recommendations are therefore as follows:

1. **Establish a Decent Work and Social Protection Working Group (DWSPWG)** or similar structure at the national level. A working group could promote stakeholder dialogue, capacity building and the cultivation of leadership. Such a working group could include dedicated sub-committees on (i) decent work and social security (including employment-based social protection); and (ii) tax-financed social protection (perhaps to be called the 'basic income' sub-committee). The Department of Labour could lead the decent work sub-committee while the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWCYFA) could lead the 'basic income' sub-committee. Provision should be made for participation of workers' representatives, the private sector, NGOs, CSOs and FBOs and interested development partners.
2. **Strengthen the position of the Department of Social Welfare and review the Social Welfare Assistance (SWA) programme.** The location of the Department of Social Welfare within the Ministry of Health appears inappropriate. Meanwhile consultations revealed that inadequate funding of the Social Welfare Assistance programme means that not only is the programme unable to play its expected role in implementation of the Child and Family Welfare Act of 2017 but also that women and children who seek refuge from perpetrators of gender-based violence are not receiving adequate material support. A thorough review of the SWA should be conducted to establish needs. Consideration should also be given to transferring the Department of Social Welfare to the Ministry of Women, Youth and Family Affairs and expanding the scope of the scheme (for example to vulnerable single mothers affected by crises, persons with severe disabilities and people subjected to protracted hospitalization, and others) as an interim measure while a national social protection policy is developed. Consideration could also be given to the Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF) to co-finance a strengthened SWA programme.
3. **Establish a Parliamentary Special Select Committee on Decent Work and Social Protection**, while Parliament considers options for the integration of social protection and social services into the existing Standing Select Committee structure.
4. **Deliver a programme of training on social protection for various policy actors** including civil servants, traditional leaders, Parliamentarians, academics, workers' representatives, the private sector and civil society-based organizations. The International Training Centre of the ILO (ITCILO) and the DFAT-funded Partnerships for Social Protection (P4SP) programme are two potential sources of high-quality training.
5. **Develop a long-term vision and roadmap for social protection in Solomon Islands.** Once a DWSPWG (or similar structure) has been established and foundational training provided, a clear vision and roadmap for the long-term development of the social protection system could be developed for submission to Cabinet. The vision should confirm a strategic orientation towards life-cycle contingencies and set-out how Solomon Islands' social protection system will gradually move towards greater compliance with international

standards. It will be important to retain a clear focus on income security in such a vision statement and avoid 'drift' into matters better led by other sectors (such as agriculture, TVET, and so on), although potential linkages with these policy areas should certainly be identified. The roadmap should set out high-level milestones for reform and be aligned with the National Development Strategy 2016-35.

Development of such a roadmap would be based a number of feasibility studies and assessments including:

i. Feasibility studies for non-contributory maternal and child benefits, disability benefits and a social pension.
ii. Assessment of the feasibility of establishing a social insurance system.
iii. Assessment of options for strengthening social protection for youth.
iv. Assessment of options for strengthening traditional social protection systems and practices.

Clearly such a wide-ranging research agenda would need to be implemented over a two-to-three-year period.

6. **Significantly improve the availability of data** that is critical to the effective development, monitoring and evaluation of social and economic policies. Key priorities include: conducting regular HIES and DHS surveys and ensuring timely production of analytical reports; improving the quality of labour statistics; fully aligning disability questions in the census with the international standards such as WHO International Classification of Function and the Washington Group on Disability Statistics question sets.
7. **Leverage NGO-implemented cash and voucher assistance programming** to better support the development of disaster response and social protection systems. NGO-implemented cash and voucher assistance schemes offer opportunities to pilot a range of social protection interventions including core lifecycle-based schemes, shock-responsive adaptations of traditional lifecycle interventions as well as short-term disaster response. However, to-date, NGO-implemented pilots have tended to focus primarily on the issue of overcoming delivery challenges rather than social protection and disaster response policy and systems building. Insufficient attention has also been paid to ensuring adequate government participation in programme design, implementation and learning processes.

   Going forward, NGOs should consider incorporating government stakeholders into CVA design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation processes and aim specifically to develop models that could inform policy development. The recent cash transfer to persons with disabilities is perhaps the most obvious case in point. A potential alternative approach to that which has been taken to-date might be to strengthen the national and provincial disability registries and to support the government to put in place a standing disability benefit for those with the highest support needs, with the potential for vertical (and perhaps horizontal) expansion in times of crisis. Other options include supporting new delivery modalities for the Social Welfare Assistance scheme and the introduction of social protection support for cases of long-term hospitalization such as in the cases of Tuberculosis treatment and children born prematurely.

▶ Box 5. Integrating traditional social support concepts and practices into social protection systems: The case of Rwanda

Rwanda, like Solomon Islands, has a long history of civil conflict that culminated in the *Genocide Against the Tutsi* in 1994 and civil war. However, with a return to peace, stability and effective governance, Rwanda has made remarkable progress over the past 20 years. A multi-sectoral assault on extreme poverty, including a combination of internationally-inspired and home-grown social protection and economic empowerment interventions, has delivered rapid improvements in welfare: Poverty, as measured by the international poverty line, fell from 77.2 per cent in 2001 to 55.5 per cent in 2017, while poverty measured by the national poverty line declined from 58.9 per cent to 38.2 per cent (Chronic Poverty Advisory Network, 2020). The Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) is the flagship national social protection programme providing cash transfers and public works employment to extreme poor households throughout the country. Meanwhile, key home-grown solutions include *Girinka* (a government livestock transfer programme which builds on traditional practices), *Ubudehe* (a community driven development-type initiative as well as a traditional system of assessing household vulnerability which has been used to select households to benefit from the government's flagship social protection scheme (the Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme), and *Umuganda* (traditional, and now mandatory, community work undertaken nationwide once per month).

Although many of these initiatives have experienced a range of challenges - for example VUP public works have been shown to provide inadequate income transfers to support sustained poverty reduction, while *Girinka* is recognized to have been moderately adversely affected by corruption, the integration of home-grown solutions grounded in principles of solidarity and collective endeavor within Rwanda's social protection framework remains critical to sustaining and enhancing social cohesion in the country. Although Rwanda's latest National Social Protection Policy indicates a desire to adopt a lifecycle-based social protection framework going forward, traditional home-grown solutions are likely to remain important counterpart measures.

Source: ILO, 2024.

References

Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2016. The Social Protection Indicator: Assessing Results for the Pacific.

____. 2015. Solomon Islands: Country Gender Assessment.

Andersen, A.B., S.H. Thilsted, and A.M. Schwarz. 2013. Food and Nutrition Security in Solomon Islands.

Calder, R., and T. Tanhchareun. 2014. Informal Social Protection: Social Relations and Cash Transfers.

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). 2021. The World Factbook.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). 2021. Pacific Risk Profile Solomon Islands.

Diekjobst, R., C. Felgentreff, T. Manandhar, P. Mucke, B. Entwicklung, L. Pries, K. Radtke, and D. Weller. 2020. World Risk Report 2020.

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). 2019. Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector in Solomon Islands.

International Labour Organization (ILO). 2024. World Social Protection Report 2024-26: Universal Social Protection for Climate Action and a Just Transition.

____. 2020. Pacific Labour Market Review 2020: Pre-COVID-19 Baseline Labour Market Information for Post-Disaster Recovery.

____. 2006. Social Protection for All Men and Women: A Sourcebook for Extending Social Security Coverage in Solomon Islands – Options and Plans.

____. 1993. Resolution Concerning the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE), Adopted by the Fifteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians.

____ and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2019. Towards Universal Social Protection for Children: Achieving SDG 1.3.

International Monetary Fund (IMF). 2022. Press Release No. 22/233: IMF Staff Concludes Visit to Solomon Islands.

Knox-Vydmanov, C., N. Soni, S. Satriana, and J. Attenborough. 2023. From Historical Trends to Investment Pathways: Social Protection Expenditure in Pacific Island Countries and Timor-Leste. Partnerships for Social Protection (P4SP).

Ministry of Women Youth Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA). Undated. National Policy to Eliminate Violence.

Motel-Klingebiel, A., C. Tesch-Roemer, and H. Von Kondratowitz. 2005. "Welfare States do Not Crowd Out the Family: Evidence for Mixed Responsibility from Comparative Analyses". Ageing and Society 25, 863–882.

Nanau, G. L. 2011.The Wantok System as a Socio-economic and Political Network in Melanesia. OMNES: The Journal of Multicultural Society 2(1): 31-55.

Nanau, G. L. Undated. Wantoks and Kastom (Solomon Islands and Melanesia).

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Undated. Revenue Statistics in Asia and the Pacific 2022: The Solomon Islands.

Save the Children. 2017. Solomon Islands Non-Government Organization's Alternative Report on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Solomon Islands to the United Nation Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). 2015. Solomon Islands Performance Assessment Report 2010-2014.

____. 2009. Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study: A Study on Violence Against Women and Children.

Solomon Islands Government. 2022. Information about Constituency Development Fund.

____. 2021a. The 2021 Budget Speech. Towards a Path to Economic Recovery: Advancing Growth and Service Delivery Through Better Partnerships.

____. 2021b. MRD Undergo Fundamental Reforms.

____. 2017. Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey 2015.

____. 2016a. Solomon Islands Global Aids Response Progress Report 2016.

____. 2016b. National Development Strategy 2016 to 2035: Improving the Social and Economic Livelihoods of all Solomon Islanders.

____. 2013. Solomon Islands 2012/13 Household Income and Expenditure Survey National Analytical Report (Volume I). Ministry of Finance and Treasury. Honiara, Solomon Islands.

____. 2011. Global School-based Health Survey, Solomon Islands 2011 Factsheet.

____. Undated(a). About Solomon Islands.

____. Undated(b). National Population Policy 2017-26. Ministry of National Planning and Aid Coordination.

Solomon Islands National Statistics Office and UNDP Pacific Center. 2008. Analysis of the 2005/6 Household Income and Expenditure Survey: Final Report on the Estimation of Basic Needs Poverty Lines, and the Incidence and Characteristics of Poverty in Solomon Islands.

Solomon Star. 2022. "$3Bn Paid, No Progress". 28 July 2022.

____. 2021. "New Awards to MPs". 12 July 2021.

Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIACB). Undated. Collaboration for Policy Coherence and Development Impact.

Stavropoulou, M., R. Holmes, and N. Jones. 2017. "Harnessing Informal Institutions to Strengthen Social Protection for the Rural Poor". Global Food Security 12: 73-79.

Strawson, T., and N. Ari. Undated. Solomon Islands Development Financing Assessment.

Tavola, H. 2011. Barriers to Education in Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resources of Development (MEHRD).

Troubat, N., M.K. Sharp, and N.L. Andrew. 2021. Food Consumption in Solomon Islands – Based on the Analysis of the 2012/13 Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). 2019. Solomon Islands State of Environment Report 2019.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). 2020. Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific.

____. 2017. Regional Road Map for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia.

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). 1989. Convention on the Rights of the Child, Treaty Series. Vol. 1577.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat). 2012. Solomon Islands: Honiara Urban Profile.

United Nations Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2022. World Population Prospects 2022.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2017. Situation Analysis of Children in Solomon Islands.

United Nations Pacific. 2021. Pacific Common Multi-Country Assessment.

Viney K., N. Itogo, T. Yamanaka, R. Jebeniani, A. Hazarika, F. Morishita, N. Nishikiori, and S. Vaz. 2021. "Economic Evaluation of Patient Costs Associated with Tuberculosis Diagnosis and Care in Solomon Islands". BMC Public Health 21:1928.

World Health Organization (WHO). 2021. WHO Global Lists of High Burden Countries for Tuberculosis (TB), TB/HIV and Multidrug/Rifampicin-resistant TB (MDR/RR-TB),2021–2025: Background Document.

Wiltshire C., and J. Batley. 2018. In-brief 2018/4. Research into Constituency Development Funds in Solomon Islands.

World Bank. 2021. Climate Risk Country Profile: Solomon Islands.

____. 2020. Results Briefs: Community Access and Urban Services Enhancement Project (CAUSE).

____. 2014. Solomon Islands: Towards Better Investment in Rural Communities.

____. Undated. World Bank Data.

____ and the Australian High Commission. 2018. Poverty in Solomon Islands – A Snapshot.

Annex I: List of key informants

Name/ Position	Institution/ Organization
Glins Clay, Deputy Director	Ministry of Traditional Governance and Ecclesiastical Affairs
Daisy Kariamae, Deputy Director	Ministry of Traditional Governance, Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs
Charles Kafa, Director	Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development
Jonathan Tafiariki, Director	National Disaster Management Office
Alenge Hotoravu, Chief of Operations	National Disaster Management Office
George Baragamu, Deputy Director	National Disaster Management Office
Zalalem Taffesse, Country Director	UNICEF
Nemia Bainivalu, Deputy Secretary for Health Improvement	Ministry of Health and Medical Services
Riley Mesepitu, Permanent Secretary	Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration
Aaron Pitaque, Deputy Secretary	Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs
Vincenzo Vinci, Social Protection Specialist	World Bank
Dung Don, Social Protection Officer	
Bekeri Zonga, CAUSE Project Manager	Honiara City Council
Franco Rodie, Permanent Secretary	Honiara City Council Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development
Lavinia Sitai, Country Director	Oxfam, Solomon Islands

Raynold Moveni, Deputy Governor	Central Bank of Solomon Islands (CBSI)
John Ila, Richard Kalikoqu, Vatina Devesi Humanitarian Programme Team	Save the Children, Solomon Islands
Wilson Hano, Manager, Employee and Member Services	Solomon Islands National Provident Fund
Jairus Hiele, Assistant Manager, Operations	Solomon Islands National Provident Fund
Samson Viulu, Permanent Secretary	Solomon Islands National Provident Fund
Hugo Hebala, Deputy Secretary	Ministry of Rural Development
Mckinnie Dentana, Permanent Secretary	Ministry of Finance and Treasury
Natalie Hong, Chief Executive Officer	Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce
Tony Kagovai, President	General Workers Union of Solomon Islands
David Tuhanuku, General Secretary	Workers Union of Solomon Islands
Samuel Aruhi, Director,	Ministry of National Planning and Aid Coordination, Social Development and Governance Division
Lisa Hannigan, Social Protection Manager	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)