

Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

Country Mapping of Known Context, Legislation, Reporting and Referral Pathways — Solomon Islands

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Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) – Solomon Islands

This document has been prepared to assist your organisation to better understand a) the general Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) context b) relevant PSEA legislation and c) available reporting and referral pathways for SEA in a particular country. **This document is not intended to be a definitive analysis of a country's PSEA system and should not be read as such. The information may have been updated at the source since its publication and the reader should follow links provided to fact check before they quote or share this information. It is recommended that you test contact details provided prior to sharing these referral pathways.**

Your organisation must refer to and follow your PSEA Policy when responding to SEA. If a victim/survivor of SEA is under the age of 18 years, consult your organisation's Child Protection Policy.

OVERVIEW OF PSEA ISSUES

Demographics & Population	Solomon Islands is a Pacific nation encompassing over 900 islands spread across 1,500 kilometres of ocean. It is ranked 152 out of 189 on the United Nation's Human Development Index. According to the Solomon Island Government's Statistic Office, the projected population in 2020 is 694,619 ¹ , and 70% of the population is under the age of 30. The country is characterised by a rich linguistic diversity: the 1999 census distinguished 91 different vernacular languages. English is the country's official language, but Pidgin is widely used as the lingua franca. ²
Disability	Solomon Islands Government signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in September 2008. Non-communicable diseases including heart disease, diabetes, strokes are the leading cause of disability in Solomon Islands.
Gender and sexuality ³	While diverse, Solomon Island cultures are predominantly patriarchal. Implicit within these cultures are a complex array of gender norms that maintain strict social hierarchies dominated by men. As a result, Solomon Island women experience vast and persistent gender inequality, which is also reflected in extremely high rates of physical and sexual violence against women and girls. Sex between men is illegal under the Solomon Islands Penal Code and is punishable with imprisonment of up to 14 years, however the fact that these laws exist does not mean that they are strictly enforced: sex workers, women or men engaging in transactional sex, MSM or transgender people are not systematically prosecuted in Solomon Islands.

1 Solomon National Statistics Office, 2020. [Projected Population by Province 2010 – 2025](#)
 2 SPC, 2015. [Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey](#)
 3 The Equality Institute, Monash University, and Oxfam Australia, 2019. [Transforming Harmful Gender Norms in Solomon Islands](#)

Health Child stunting, which can lead to severe short and long-term health, developmental (cognitive), and economic consequences⁴ impact one third of the population (32%).⁵ Under-5 mortality rate is 20 per 1,000 live births; life expectancy at birth is 72 years with the probability of dying between 15 and 60 years (per 1,000) being 164 for males and 126 for females. Total expenditure on health per capita is \$108, or 5% of GDP.⁶

Solomon Islands has one of the highest rates of malaria infection in the Pacific region, and this continues to be a major health concern for pregnant women and children under five. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of mortality, with 60% of all deaths caused by cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respiratory disease, diabetes and other NCDs. Although health services in the country are technically free, both the quality of these services and geographic accessibility is poor – which disproportionately impacts women who may require permission from their husband or partner to attend a health clinic and are less able to afford costs associated with the travel.

Secondary impacts of COVID-19 impacts women and girls greatest in countries with pre-existing high rates of GBV and a lack of social and economic support services. Impacts on women and girls include being confined with abusers, school closures, loss of income, disproportionate caregiving and domestic responsibilities, and frontline care for the sick.

Poverty⁷ The Gross National Income per capita is \$1,810 (USD) and nearly 18% of all employed earn less than \$1.90 per day. The poverty rate has reached nearly 85%, with an estimated 80% of the poor living in rural areas, and 46% of all youth unemployed. 12% of those living under the food poverty line.

Public Attitudes Violence against women is normalized, with 73% of men and 73% of women believing violence against women is justifiable, especially for infidelity, disobedience, and when women don't live up to gender roles that society imposes. Almost all men who cite hitting female partners as a form of 'discipline' suggested that women could improve the situation by 'learning to obey them'. Gender norms of masculinity tend to encourage men to 'control' their wives, often through violence, while women felt that bride prices (considered similar to a property title) gives men ownership over women. Despite continued efforts by INGOs, faith-based organizations, and international influence, political leaders have continued to trivialise and deny the existence of violence against women.⁸

Religion⁹ Christianity has a large influence on Solomon Islands society and is represented by a large range of Christian denominations. According to the 2009 Census, 96% of the population identifies itself as Christian, and the majority of the population identify as practicing Christians. Less than 1% of the population identified Custom Beliefs as their key religious affiliation. Many Christian denominations are well-established, well equipped civil society organisations staffed with local faith actors who implement long-term development and humanitarian responses.

Societal Structures Solomon Islands is a patriarchal society and men hold the majority of leadership positions in state, customary and faith-based institutions. Just 7% of girls complete high school, and only three women have ever been elected to the 50-seat parliament since independence in 1978.

Solomon Islands is culturally and ethnically diverse country. Ethnic identities are associated first with the island from which a person is from and then by which of the more-than 70 language groups they belong.

4 WHO, 2013. [Childhood Stunting: Context, Causes and Consequences](#)
 5 DFAT, 2012. [Poverty, Vulnerability and Social Protection in the Pacific: The Role of Social Transfers](#)
 6 WHO, 2020. [Country: Solomon Islands](#)
 7 ADB, 2020. [Poverty Data: Solomon Islands](#)
 8 WHO, 2013. [Violence Against Women in Solomon Islands: Translating Research Into Policy and Action on The Social Determinants of Health](#)
 9 SPC, 2015. [Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey](#)

Until the arrival of missions and colonial government agencies, disputes were addressed variously by direct action such as warfare and revenge attacks, the sanction of sorcery, headmen or big men interventions, and compensation payments. Colonial authorities introduced formal law in the late nineteenth century, administered through colonial district officers, assisted by police and some 'native' officials, although customary practices - secular and sometimes violent responses to perceived wrongdoing - were still preferred by most Solomon Islanders. At independence (1978), chiefs and customary law were recognized constitutionally.¹⁰

Missions (Churches) have undoubtedly altered custom and local leadership over a long period of time. Custom and tradition in Solomon Islands cannot be taken to be historically unchanging and should not be assumed to be completely distinguishable from Western systems of thought or behaviour, as they might once have been. Missions installed local leaders and affected the role and function of headmen and introduced systems of punishment and reconciliation that were absorbed into local conflict-management strategies and have become part of what Solomon Islanders think of as now as traditional processes.¹¹

Trafficking The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) operates in a fragmented and informal manner influenced by social practices wherein children are at risk.¹² Key factors contributing to CSEC include gender inequalities and stereotypes, the absence of protective legislation, and harmful cultural practices such as forced (child) marriages and bride price.¹³ While there are low rates of prosecution, the government has increased efforts to prevent trafficking including for the purposes of CSEC which has resulted in the first convictions, and the establishment of The Anti-Human Trafficking Advisory Committee (AHTAC) which includes members of the government and civil society. The government created a revised version of its National Action Plan (NAP) against Human Trafficking and People Smuggling 2020-2025.¹⁴

Violence Family violence is an epidemic. The Solomon Islands have one of the highest rates of family and sexual violence in the world – more than double that of the global average. Two thirds (64%) of women aged 15-49 have reported physical and/or sexual abuse by a partner in the past year alone.¹⁵ This rate soars, when taking into account assault experienced either as a child (more than one third have been sexually abused/raped before age 15), or as an adult by perpetrators whom are not a partner (including family members, male friends of the family, and strangers). More than one third said their first sexual encounter was forced.

Alarming, 73% of Solomon Island men and women believe gender-based violence is acceptable.¹⁶ The Family Protection Act 2014 is a step toward addressing family and sexual violence however access to specialist support and justice mechanisms for survivors of violence remains poor. Almost 80% of the population live in rural and remote communities, with very few technical support networks and services available. Consolidated and verifiable data on convictions as a result of the implementation of the act is not yet available.

Women and the Economy Women's economic empowerment is the ability of women to bring about positive changes in their lives and that of their families and societies as a result of their participation in economic activities. Unfortunately, Solomon Islands ranks 124 among 128 countries in terms of women's economic opportunity. Up to 50% of employees experienced domestic or sexual violence in the last 12 months, and for many, violence occurs repeatedly and regularly. 34% feel unsafe at work at least sometimes, and 20% work with somebody who is or has been abusive.¹⁷ There is a large gender gap between paid and unpaid work - women make up more than half (56%) of unpaid workers, and only one third (33%) of paid workers, There is evidence that some women do not have autonomy over their earnings, nor are they able to contribute to household decisions regarding how money is spent.

10 World Bank, 2010. *Justice Delivered Locally: Solomon Islands*

11 World Bank, 2010. *Justice Delivered Locally: Solomon Islands*

12 Save the Children, 2015. *Dynamics of Child Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Solomon Islands*

13 Save the Children, 2017. *Evaluation: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Solomon Islands*

14 USA Department of State, 2020. *Trafficking in Persons Report*

15 Ming, Stewart, Tiller, Rice, Crowley and Williams, 2016. *Domestic Violence in the Solomon Islands*

16 Ming, Stewart, Tiller, Rice, Crowley and Williams, 2016. *Domestic Violence in the Solomon Islands*

17 IFRC, 2019. *The Impact of Domestic and Sexual Violence on the Workplace in Solomon Islands*

RELEVANT PSEA LEGISLATION

International Instruments The Solomon Islands have ratified a number of relevant international frameworks, including the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** which is described as a bill of rights for women, and the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children.

At a regional level, the **Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women**¹⁸ (2018-2022) (Pacific Partnership) brings together governments, civil society organisations, communities and other partners to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG), and increase access to quality response services for survivors.

Legal Framework The **Age of Consent** is 15 years old, and activity with a person aged 14 or younger may result in prosecution for statutory rape. While the age of consent is 15, it is illegal to take a minor out of the care of her parents for the purpose of sexual contact and prohibits "procuring" a girl under age 18 for the purpose of sexual contact.

The **Child and Family Welfare Act (2017)**¹⁹ seeks to provide protection for a 'child in need of care and protection' which includes a child who has been, or is at risk of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation.

The **Family Protection Act (2014)** criminalises domestic violence and provides increased protection, and promotes the safety, health and well-being of victims of domestic violence. It defines the types of violence, and relationships in which domestic violence can occur. The objectives of this act are to offer support and protection to victims/ survivors of domestic violence through police safety notices and protection orders and programs for recovery. The Act outlines punitive measures (including increased sentencing) for those convicted of domestic violence offences where aggravating factors are present.

The **Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act (2016)**²⁰ Includes provisions relevant to sexual exploitation and abuse in relation to rape, including marital rape and compelled sexual intercourse. There are specific provisions for victims of an indecent act or rape who have 'significant disability'. The Act criminalises commercial sexual exploitation of children, and domestic people trafficking. While the definition of exploitation is not clear it is stated that it includes 'all kinds of sexual exploitation'. Sex work is criminalised and presents barriers to sex workers reporting instances of SEAH and accessing services and support for victims/ survivors of SEAH.

The **Immigration Act (2012)**²¹ prohibits and punishes all forms of trafficking in persons and provides specific legal protections against the trafficking of children. The Act outlines criminal liability for the act of trafficking and/or engaging and/or profiting from the exploitation of a trafficked persons; stating that consent of the trafficked person is not a defence.

Government Policies and Institutions The **National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy 2016-2020**²² is the overarching policy framework for achieving gender equality and women's human rights in Solomon Islands. The Policy is premised on the vision that gender equality contributes substantially to improving the wellbeing of all—and the promotion of gender equality must be at the heart of the government's mission. It recognizes that continuing to invest in women's empowerment is vital to achieving gender equality and recognises the need for women and men to work together to address attitudinal and institutional barriers to gender equality.

The **National Policy to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls 2016 - 2020**²³ provides a framework to implement the national, international and regional commitments to eliminate violence against women and girls. The Policy corresponds to Outcome 4: Preventing and responding to violence against women and girls, of the Gender Equality and Women's Development (GEWD) Policy.

18 Pacific Partnership, 2018. *Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls 2018-2020*

19 *Child and Family Welfare Act (2017)*

20 *Penal Code (2016)*

21 *Immigration Act (2011)*

22 Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, 2016. *National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy 2016-2020*

23 Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, 2016. *National Policy to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls 2016-2020*

The **National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls**²⁴ is seeks to enhance gender equality and improve the economic status women. Financial inclusion is a key mechanism of the strategy; the MWYCFA conducts training on financial literacy, saving schemes and access to affordable financial services for rural women and girls.

The **Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2017-2020**²⁵ recognises women were specific targets of gender-based violence including rape, forced marriage and domestic violence during the Tensions. The consequences of sexual violence and rape, including pregnancy, birth and bearing of children, contraction of sexually transmitted infections, shame, stigmatisation and psychological trauma, have had an enduring impact on women's lives, health, safety, well-being and security. The National Action Plan (NAP) consolidates action from a range of recommendations and directives, and sets out how Solomon Islands will promote and implement the objectives of the UNSC Resolutions and CEDAW (Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women). It is a practical tool and organising framework designed to address gender inequalities in security and peace initiatives, budgets, and results, and to ensure women and girls are protected and equitably benefiting from ongoing development and recovery efforts.

In addition to the national policies above, various government bodies are tasked with mandatory reporting requirements. For example, the Director of the Social Welfare Division may request information from any person or organisation relating to any child for the purposes of determining whether the child is in need of care and protection, or for any proceeding under the Child and Family Welfare Act. Failure to comply with an information request is an offence punishable by 50,000 penalty units and/or 5 years imprisonment. The provision applies despite any law imposing obligations of secrecy or non-disclosure. The Director may also take a range of actions including application for appropriate care and protection orders. Moreover, under the Family Protection Act 2014 'health care providers' who are notified by a child patient that they have been a victim of domestic violence must refer the patient to appropriate support services, give the patient the opportunity for medical examination and further treatment or counselling as required, and report to a social welfare officer or police officer.

At a regional level, the **Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat** (PIFS) have established a Reference Group on SGBV to foster multi-sectoral coordination between other Pacific Regional organisations (PROs), governments and non-government actors. With a dedicated gender advisor, PIFS also monitors political commitments around national legislation.

Pacific Community (SPC) are a regional technical organisation providing advice and services and seeking to empower Pacific communities and address cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, youth and human rights. SPC works directly with governments and CSOs to support EAW work, including in gender statistics and gender mainstreaming. SPC's Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) specifically supports training in gender and legal literacy, human rights advocacy, and legislative lobbying. RRRT tracks progress on international conventions and domestic legislation, and engages with Parliaments, judges, police, legal agencies, government departments, communities and civil society on issues related to EAW.

²⁴ Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs. *A National Strategy for Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls*
²⁵ Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, 2017. *Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2017-2020*

REPORTING AND REFERRAL PATHWAYS FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OR ABUSE

Service Name	Description	Coverage/ Location	Contact
Law Enforcement Agencies			
Police (RSIPF)		National	Emergencies 999
Community Policing Team		Central	T 239999
Family Violence Unit		Central	T 20023
Sexual Assault Unit		Police HQ Rove	T 21226
Police Stations		White River	T 21363
		Central/ China Town	T 22999
		Kukum	T 22336
		Naha	T 39647
		Henderson	T 36201
Statutory Protection Agencies/Unit			
Police Family Violence Office			T 20023
Local Health and Medical Services			
National Referral Hospital (MHMS)		Honiara	T 24452
Gizo Hospital		Gizo	T 60224
Kirakira Hospital		Makira	Kirakira Station Rd, Nakumwe 677
Mental Health Division (MHMS)		NRH	T 20690
Gender Based Violence Unit (MHMS)		Honiara	T 20686
Support Agencies			
SafeNet Coordinator			T 23544 SafeNet Direct Response Directory
Family Support Centre	Counselling and legal support		T 20619 or 26999
Christian Care Centre	Psychological first aid, referrals, temporary shelter for women and children		T 36319 or 7418842 or 7562749
Social Welfare Division (MHMS)	Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS)		T 20569 or 20686

Seif Ples Hotline	24 Hour Hotline offering comprehensive first response services to survivors of SGBV	T 132 or 24677
MWYFCA – EAWG Policy Coordinator		T 23544
Legal		
Public Solicitors Office		T 28406 or 22348
Australian Federal Police and Embassy or Consular (if any person involved is an Australian National)		
Medical	DFAT Safe Traveller	T 713600
Australian High Commission in Solomon Islands		T 21561 T 1300 555 135 in Australia T (+61) 2 6261 3305 from overseas E consular.honiara@dfat.gov.au W solomonislands.highcommission.gov.au Corner Hibiscus Ave and Mud Alley, Honiara





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Authors: ACFID

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Kate Bensen

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 <https://acfid.asn.au>

 main@acfid.asn.au

 +61 2 6285 1816

 twitter.com/ACFID

 www.facebook.com/ACFID

 ACFID, 14 Napier Close, Deakin, ACT 2600