



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

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

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

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Acronym

BpA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW NCC	CEDAW National Coordination Committee
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
EKT	Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu
FPDV	Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act
FFEKT	Fakapotopotoga a Fafine a te Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu
GAD	Gender Affairs Department
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
ISP	Island Sustainable Plan
MEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
MICS	Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey
NCD	Non-Communicable Diseases
NDC	Updated National Determined Contribution
NHSP	National Health Strategic Plan
OAG	Office of the Attorney General
SPC	Pacific Community
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STD	Sexual Transmitted Diseases
TAPQE	Tuvalu Australia Partnership for Quality Education
TASTTI	Tuvalu Atoll Science Technology Training Institute
TCAP	Tuvalu Coastal Adaptation Project
TESP	Tuvalu Education Sector Plan
THSSP	Tuvalu Health System Strengthening Project
TISSI	Tuvalu Inclusive Safe School
TNCF	Tuvalu National Curriculum Policy Framework
TNCW	Tuvalu National Council of Women
TOMRS	Tuvalu Overseas Medical Referral Scheme
TNPF	Tuvalu National Provident Funds
TRCS	Tuvalu Red Cross Society
TuFHA	Tuvalu Family Health Association

TuLeP	Tuvalu Learning Project
Te Kakeega III:	Strategic National Plan for Sustainable Development 2016–2020
Te Kete:	Tuvalu National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2021–2030
Te Paagatasi a Tuvalu	Tuvalu National Gender Equity Policy
Te Vaka Fenua o Tuvalu:	National Climate Change Policy 2021–2030

I. General

Situation of women in Tuvalu

1. The main sources of information for providing disaggregated data and statistics on the situations of women in Tuvalu is from the Social Statistics Report 2023, the Tuvalu Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey 2019–2020, the 2024 Household Incomes and Expenditures Survey, and the Tuvalu Beijing +30 Report.
2. The estimated population resident in 2024 is 9,853 and women composed 49 per cent of the population (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2024). 60 per cent of the population reside in the capital islands of Funafuti (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2017).
3. While Tuvalu has made progress in education, health, and women's economic empowerment, challenges persist in addressing GBV, increasing women's leadership, and supporting women with disabilities. Continued efforts, robust data collection, and community-driven approaches are essential for advancing gender equality in Tuvalu.
4. Girls in Tuvalu consistently outperform boys in enrolment and academic achievement across all levels of education. In primary schools, the net enrolment rate for girls reached 101.4 per cent in 2022, compared to 99.5 per cent for boys. Girls also excelled in the national Year 8 examination, with a pass rate of 94 per cent compared to boys' 77 per cent in the same year. However, participation in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) remains low for girls.
5. Health outcomes for women and girls in Tuvalu are shaped by challenges such as high rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and limited healthcare infrastructure. NCDs, including obesity and hypertension, are a significant concern, with 71 per cent of women classified as obese. Efforts to improve health services include expanding vaccination programs, providing HPV vaccines, and conducting cervical cancer screenings.
6. The Fertility rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15–44) is 23. (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2024) Reproductive health services are accessible, but misconceptions about contraception and resistance from male partners limit utilization. Mental health awareness is growing, supported by psychosocial programs in Funafuti. The government's proactive COVID-19 response achieved a vaccination rate of 90 per cent with no reported deaths, underscoring the importance of community engagement and international partnerships.
7. Women's participation in the Labor force remains limited, with only 40 per cent of the workforce being female. Women are primarily employed in the education and health sectors, and informal activities such as handicrafts provide essential income but lack formal recognition. Women predominantly engage in informal sectors, such as handicraft production, which accounts for 12 per cent of primary economic activities but lacks formal recognition. Unpaid household chores dominate women's activities, with 57 per cent of females aged 15+ listing it as their main task, compared to 42 per cent of males focusing on employment.
8. Female-headed households make up 19 per cent of the total in Tuvalu, with notable differences in income levels compared to male-headed households. Average annual household income for male-headed households is AUD 29,432, significantly higher than AUD 19,318 for female-headed households. This disparity is primarily due to differences in employment income and opportunities.
9. Women's representation in leadership and decision-making remains low, particularly in traditional governance structures. There are currently no women in the

Parliament and women represent only 17 per cent of the members of local government. Only one out of eight Kaupules is led by a woman as President, while three Kaupules still lack any female representation.

10. However, there has been a significant increased number of women in senior leadership, judicial positions and in the government and state's own businesses. Women currently hold 37 per cent of senior government positions in 2024, compared to 34 per cent in 2018, and accounted for 53 per cent of magistrates in 2023, up from 13 per cent in 2020. Women also hold key management roles, such as Attorney General, Senior Magistrate, and General Managers of national corporations.

11. GBV is a significant issue in Tuvalu, with 44 per cent of women experiencing intimate partner violence, while only one victim out of three seeks help.

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

Efforts and mechanism for addressing COVID-19 and its impacts

12. Recognizing the pandemic's socio-economic challenges, the government adopted several gender-responsive strategies to mitigate its impact, particularly on women. A rapid assessment conducted by the Gender Affairs Department highlighted that women were disproportionately affected by income losses due to their reliance on industries like hospitality and handicraft sales, which were disrupted by border closures. In response, the government introduced targeted initiatives, including:

(a) Economic Support:

- A cash allowance of AUD 300 per household for three months to alleviate financial hardships and ensure basic needs were met;
- The establishment of *Tau Maketi*, a monthly market launched in March 2021, which provided a vital sales outlet for local products. Approximately 93 per cent of vendors at *Tau Maketi* are women, with each vendor earning an average of AUD 1,225 per market day. This initiative has since been replicated on other islands, demonstrating its success in supporting women entrepreneurs and sustaining local economies;

(b) Livelihoods and Food Security:

- Encouraging residents to return to their islands of origin or surrounding islets to reduce population density, improve food security, and promote traditional livelihoods such as farming and fishing, which particularly benefited women;

(c) Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Services:

- Establishment of a temporary safe house for survivors of GBV to ensure their safety during the pandemic;

(d) Hygiene and Sanitation:

- In collaboration with CARE Australia and Live and Learn Environmental Education Tuvalu, hygiene promotion measures and improved access to water were prioritized, especially for vulnerable households. Nearly 10,000 individuals benefited from these initiatives, which included installing handwashing facilities in schools and public buildings, with a focus on supporting women, including those with disabilities.

13. Education was also prioritized during the pandemic. Despite logistical challenges due to Tuvalu's geographical dispersion and limited communication

infrastructure, the government ensured the continuation of schooling, with girls maintaining high academic performance and lower dropout rates compared to boys.

14. Women played an essential role in the pandemic response, both at the policy and community levels. They were actively involved in the National COVID-19 Task Force, which included the Gender Affairs Department, and led grassroots awareness campaigns and community mobilization through civil society organizations. Their participation ensured that gender perspectives were integrated into recovery and response strategies, safeguarding progress made in gender equality and women's empowerment.

Women's in decision making for the implementation of SDGs 5 and 13

15. Tuvalu has undertaken measures to ensure the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making processes related to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 13, as well as climate-induced relocations and the preservation of cultural and documentary heritage.

16. The National Climate Change Policy 2021–2030 (Te Vaka Fenua o Tuvalu) places gender equality and social inclusion at its core. It prioritizes addressing the vulnerabilities and contributions of women and marginalized groups in climate actions. The policy mandates the creation of transparent climate finance systems that integrate gender and social inclusion into project management, risk assessment, and environmental safeguards. Women, particularly those in outer islands, are actively involved in these processes to ensure their voices shape climate and disaster strategies.

17. The government has increased women's participation in policy development over the last decade. For example, during consultations for the Updated National Determined Contribution (NDC) in 2022, women constituted 20 per cent of the participants, ensuring their inclusion in national climate policy discussions. Additionally, the Tuvalu Coastal Adaptation Project (TCAP), supported by the Green Climate Fund and UNDP, incorporates a comprehensive gender strategy and action plan. Women's empowerment is embedded in the project, with the Tuvalu National Council of Women playing a key role in the Steering Committee, advocating for women's priorities and contributions to climate adaptation efforts.

18. Tuvalu integrates a gender perspective into disaster risk reduction through the Island Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Plans 2021, developed by local councils (Kaupules). These plans embed gender considerations in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery processes, addressing vulnerabilities specific to women. For example, the Funafuti Plan includes provisions for addressing gender-based violence (GBV) during emergencies, such as establishing accessible shelters, training personnel, and developing clear reporting protocols.

19. Collaboration with civil society organizations further strengthens gender-sensitive disaster responses. The Tuvalu Red Cross Society (TRCS) ensures women and girls have access to resources and support during crises through initiatives that prioritize their needs in disaster risk management.

Women in decision making regarding possible climate-induced relocations and the measures taken towards the preservation of documentary heritage and the conservation of cultural heritage

20. Tuvalu does not support relocation as a solution to climate change, advocating instead for partnerships with countries like Australia and New Zealand to facilitate employment opportunities for Tuvaluans while maintaining their connection to their homeland. Tuvalu also supports regional initiatives such as the Pacific Climate Change Migration and Human Security Programme, delivered through the IOM, ILO, and ESCAP, which addresses climate mobility with a focus on preserving cultural ties and community cohesion.

21. Efforts to preserve Tuvalu's cultural and documentary heritage are spearheaded by the Future Now Project, overseen by the Ministry of Transport, Energy, Communications, and Innovation. This project includes a robust component to digitize Tuvalu's history and cultural practices, ensuring that the nation's heritage is safeguarded for future generations, even in the face of existential climate threats.

22. Women's representation in decision-making is bolstered by their active roles in national and local governance structures. The Tuvalu National Council of Women, as a member of the National Advisory Committee on Climate Change and a board member of TCAP, ensures that women's perspectives are integrated into strategies and projects addressing climate change, disaster risk, and SDG implementation. Additionally, women's leadership in civil society organizations has been pivotal in raising awareness, organizing communities, and shaping inclusive climate and disaster responses.

23. These efforts reflect Tuvalu's commitment to ensuring that women are equal participants in decision-making processes and that their rights and needs are central to climate action, disaster management, and heritage conservation.

Plan of action for women peace and security

24. Tuvalu is not engaged in the development of a national action plan on women and peace and security.

III. Legal status and visibility of the Convention

Dissemination

25. Although the Convention has been fully incorporated into its national legal order, the government continue raising awareness about the human rights principles and CEDAW through various forum in partnership with civil society. In recent years, information about CEDAW has been disseminated through workshops, forum, dialogues and knowledge products to government departments, local governments, magistrates, the Police, faith-based organisations, in the health sector, and in the communities. The text of the Convention has been translated in Tuvaluan language and largely disseminated. However, resistance remain as human rights in general, and women's human rights in particular, are often perceived as going against cultural values and practices. The translation of the National Gender Equity Policy in Tuvaluan is already helping raising awareness and showing that the values of gender equality and human rights are embedded in Tuvaluan's culture, such as the central concept of Paagatasi which means equity.

26. While several actions to raise awareness on CEDAW have been implemented, the Convention has not yet been routinely and fully used as a framework for laws, court decisions and policies. This is not only due to cultural sensitivity but also to organisational culture and the absence of mechanism to operationalize this approach. In addition, the very high rate of staff turnover in all levels and across the government, is a significant obstacle to the institutionalization of this practice.

27. To ensure that information about the Convention and women's human rights is accessible to all, including those in the outer islands, the Gender Affairs Department has adopted a multi-faceted communication approach. Recognizing the importance of social media in Tuvalu, the department regularly shares updates and educational content on its Facebook page, the most widely used social media platform in the country, to promote awareness of women's human rights and gender equality.

28. In 2023, the department enhanced its outreach by launching the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Information Hub (GESI InfoHub) on its official website. This platform provides public access to key human rights conventions, such as CEDAW, CRPD, CRC, and UPR, alongside national reports, gender equality frameworks, policies, and gender assessments. By leveraging both digital platforms and traditional outreach methods, the department aims to ensure that crucial information reaches all areas of the country, including remote outer islands.

Training on CEDAW

29. In the past two years training of the magistrates on the Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act presented opportunities to inform judicial officers about CEDAW, but it worth noting that there is no university in Tuvalu and law degrees are acquired abroad. There have been regular training sessions for the Police force on domestic violence and women's human rights, but here again, a very high staff turnover is a major obstacle to retaining knowledge and experience in this area.

IV. Definition of discrimination and legislative and policy framework

Principles of equality and non-discrimination based on sex

30. Since Tuvalu's last report to the CEDAW Committee, a Constitution Review has taken place. Article 27 of the Constitution of Tuvalu Act 2023 defines discrimination as treating people differently because of their race, or place or of origin, or political opinions, or colours, or religious belief or lack of religious belief, or disability, or sex, resulting in more favourable or less favourable treatment for one person over another (Article 27(1)).

31. However, despite the Constitution's intent to prevent discrimination based on sex, certain exceptions remain. These exceptions include personal matters related to adoption, marriage, divorce, and burial, which are permitted to follow personal beliefs or customs. Additionally, the Constitution allows for discrimination in matters relating to land, as well as in cases where different standards or qualifications apply for positions in government services, disciplined forces, local government services, or public bodies. Furthermore, the Constitution allows for discretion in court proceedings without being affected by non-discriminatory rules.

32. Laws that were in force before the Constitution came into effect, or those that re-enact old provisions, are also exempt from being considered discriminatory. Acts

in line with Tuvaluan custom, as long as they are deemed reasonable under the circumstances, are likewise not considered discriminatory.

33. In this context, Tuvalu acknowledges the Committee's recommendation to amend section 27 of the Constitution and is committed to continuing its efforts to fully incorporate the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination as outlined in CEDAW into its legal framework. However, challenges remain in addressing the specific exceptions permitted under the current Constitution.

Revision of sex-discriminatory provisions in the legislation

34. Although a full legislative review has not yet been completed, Tuvalu has made significant progress in advancing gender equality since its last report to the CEDAW Committee, through key legislative reforms, including the revision of the Falekaupule Act and the adoption of the Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act in 2014.

35. **Falekaupule Act Revision:** The Falekaupule, Tuvalu's traditional decision-making body, plays a vital role in local governance. In 2014, the Act was revised to ensure that both men and women aged 18 and above can participate in voting during assemblies and authorizing annual budgets. Despite this legal change, social barriers continue to limit women's participation in these decision-making processes. While women have voting rights on seven of the eight islands, many do not exercise them. As of 2024, women comprise 17 per cent of the members of the Kaupules, the executive bodies of the Falekaupules. Currently, only one out of eight Kaupules is led by a woman as President, while three Kaupules still lack any female representation.

36. **Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act (2014):** This landmark legislation criminalizes domestic violence and provides comprehensive protection measures, including protection orders, child protection, rehabilitation orders, compensation, and the creation of a family protection fund. The Act addresses various forms of violence, including economic, psychological, sexual, and physical abuse. However, despite these legal protections, domestic violence remains a significant issue in Tuvalu.

37. **Marriage Act Amendment (2015):** In 2015, the minimum age for marriage was raised from 16 to 18 years old, aligning Tuvalu's marriage laws with international standards. Since the amendment, there have been only three cases of attempted underage marriage, all of which were deemed illegal under the revised law.

38. **Labour and Employment Relations Act (2017):** This Act modernized Tuvalu's labour laws, providing protections for workers and promoting gender equality. The Act prohibits discrimination based on sex, ensures equal pay for equal work, and addresses sexual harassment in the workplace. It includes provisions for maternity leave (12 weeks), paternity leave (10 days), and nursing breaks for mothers of children under 12 months. It also provides maternity and paternity leave in the case of adoption.

39. **General Administrative Order (2016):** The 2016 General Administrative Order includes provisions that prohibit sexual harassment within the public service, further reinforcing protections for women in the workplace.

40. **Native Lands Act and Tuvalu Lands Code Review:** Both the Native Lands Act of 1956 and the Tuvalu Lands Code of 1962 are currently under review. These laws differentiated inheritance rights based on age and gender, which have raised concerns under CEDAW. The ongoing legislative review is expected to address these gender-related disparities and ensure equal inheritance rights for women.

V. Optional Protocol

41. Tuvalu is gradually making progress in implementing its CEDAW obligations. However, ratifying the Optional Protocol and additional obligations may take some time. The Government is proceeding cautiously, mindful of its limited resources and the need to ensure that existing commitments are fully met before undertaking further obligations.

VI. National human rights institution

42. The National Human Rights Institution of Tuvalu Act 2017 expands the functions of the Ombudsman, originally established under the Leadership Code Act 2006, to include responsibilities related to the protection and promotion of human rights. The Act's purpose is to uphold the dignity of all individuals as enshrined in the Constitution and international human rights law, fostering the foundation of a fair, just, sustainable, and peaceful society.

43. However, the resignation of the most recent Chief Ombudsman has hindered the institution's effective functioning, with high staff turnover emerging as a significant challenge. The government acknowledges the importance of having a fully operational National Human Rights Institution and is taking steps to progressively strengthen and develop the Office to meet its intended mandate.

VII. Access to justice

Awareness raising about women's human rights

44. Two major events are organized annually to enhance women's awareness of their rights: the 16 Days of Activism Campaign Against Gender-Based Violence and the International Women's Day. International Women's Days highlights women's potential and contributions to Tuvaluan society. In recent years, themes have included women's participation in food security (2021), women's resilience to a changing world (2022), women in ICT (2023), and the benefits of investing in women (2024). The 16 Days of Activism Campaign brings together government departments (Public Health, Police, Judiciary, Ombudsman Office, Office of the Attorney General, Education), civil society organizations and non-governmental organisations to raise awareness about various forms of gender-based violence, including technology-facilitated violence, and encourages authorities and communities to take action while supporting survivors. Those activities are broadcasted across all islands through national radio and television.

45. In addition, the Office of the Judiciary organises open house days for secondary school students to explain how the court system works and raise their awareness about their rights.

46. In 2019, the Gender Affairs Department (GAD) and TuFHA organized the Women and Youth Forum, which included 70 participants from all islands of Tuvalu to discuss development issues and set priorities. In 2020, GAD held a National Forum with Traditional Leaders to inform them about the social and gendered impacts of COVID-19 and address domestic violence; this was the first event of its kind with traditional leaders focused on women's human rights. In 2021, GAD supported a National Women's Forum where women further discussed their priorities which were reflected in the revised National Gender Equity Policy. These events have been instrumental in promoting women's human rights and making gender-based violence a visible public issue.

47. Civil society organizations play a crucial role in raising awareness and empowering women to claim their rights, particularly for women and girls in the outer islands and those with disabilities. The Tuvalu National Council of Women (TNCW) organizes activities to empower women and inform local governments and development programs about women's priorities and rights. The Tuvalu Family Health Association (TuFHA) promotes women's reproductive health and rights. Fatu Lei has been instrumental in raising awareness about women's rights and developing counselling programs for survivors of gender-based violence. Additionally, the organization Fusi Alofa advocates for the rights of persons with disabilities.

Aligning customary legislation with the Convention

48. A comprehensive review of the Native Lands Act and the Tuvalu Lands Code laws is currently underway, with discussions on amending section 20 to protect the rights of children born out of wedlock. However, there remains strong resistance from communities to transforming traditional customs and practices related to land and inheritance rights.

Access to courts across the country

49. Tuvalu continues to strengthen the justice system by increasing the human, financial, and technical resources allocated to the judiciary. While no judges or legal practitioners are permanently stationed on the outer islands, regular court circuits are conducted to hear cases and ensure judicial services are available to all island communities. The Senior Magistrate Court circuit visits the outer islands twice a year, targeting districts with more than 15 pending cases. These regular court circuits ensure that legal proceedings can take place without requiring individuals from outer islands to travel to the capital. On average, during these visits, a range of cases, including domestic violence, are addressed.

50. Women in the outer islands also have access to legal aid through various channels. They can seek assistance via the Court Registrar or the local Police, who can reach out to the People's Lawyer through email or Messenger, ensuring legal support is accessible even from a distance. Additionally, visiting lawyers from the Office of the People's Lawyers regularly conduct outreach trips to selected islands, providing in-person consultations and legal assistance to those in need.

51. These combined measures-regular court circuits, magistrates' authority over domestic violence cases, and accessible legal aid-are critical steps in improving access to justice for women in Tuvalu, especially those living in more remote locations.

Legal aid and people's lawyer office

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54. While there is no singular dedicated women's complaint mechanism as recommended by the CEDAW Committee, several services provide pathways for women to seek justice, including:

- Domestic Violence Unit within the Police Office handles domestic violence complaints;
- Office of the People's Lawyer offers legal advice and representation to the public, including women;
- Office of the Attorney General provides pro bono legal assistance in family law matters, including domestic violence;
- Ombudsman Office handles human rights-related complaints, including an increasing number of complaints from women related to land use;
- Gender Affairs Department acts as the focal point for matters related to gender equality.

55. These services provide free access to justice for women for addressing various human rights violations.

VIII. National machinery for the advancement of women

Gender Affairs Department

56. Originally established in 1999 as the Department of Women's Affairs, the Department was restructured as the Gender Affairs Department (GAD) in 2014 and relocated under the Office of the Prime Minister. In 2024, it returned to this office after being briefly housed under the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and Gender Affairs.

57. Despite its critical role, GAD, composed of five staff, faces challenges related to limited human and financial resources. Its mandate is broad, encompassing gender analysis, monitoring gender equality efforts, and providing technical assistance to other government departments. Nevertheless, GAD has played an important role in responding to crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, during which it established a safe house for domestic violence victims and collaborated in the organisation of the monthly Tau Maketi, a market supporting women's economic activities. The Department is also highly involved in the delivery of services during droughts.

58. Over the next four years, GAD will receive significant support from the Australian High Commission and SPC Pacific Women Lead Program, enabling it to enhance its role in gender mainstreaming, support community mobilisation in the outer island to promote women's leadership, and improve services for survivors of gender-based violence.

Coordination of gender policy

59. A CEDAW National Coordination Committee has been established in 2014 to monitor progress in implementing CEDAW and promoting gender equality. The

Committee is composed of representatives from departments of education, health, social welfare, environment, police, the Attorney General Office, Central Statistics office, Department of Labour, and the Tuvalu National Council of Women. The Committee meets quarterly and offer a space for governmental institutions and civil society organisation to share information and coordinate efforts.

60. A first National Gender Policy was adopted in 2014, outlining the country's priorities which includes ending violence against women, women's economic security, women's participation in decision making, and the implementation of gender-responsive policies and programs by the government. The Policy was reviewed and endorsed in 2024, reaffirming the same priorities, under the name of Tuvalu National Gender Equity Policy – Te Paagatasi a Tuvalu Policy. A plan of action has been formulated, and resources mobilised for its implementation. The Policy also aligns with the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration and the Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human rights as it reflects the same priorities and proposes measures aligned with the PPA strategic objective of knowledge generation, resources mobilisation, partnership, and accountability.

61. The Speaker of the House is currently exploring the mechanism to establish a gender mainstreaming subcommittee within the Parliament with the purpose to examine all new legislation through a gender lens and support the legislation change to modify discriminatory measures and practices. This proposal was discussed at the 2024 Parliamentary Dialogue on Gender Equality held in December.

IX. Temporary special measures

62. Despite gender gaps in sectors such as local governance and politics, Tuvalu has yet to introduce temporary special measures. Although past efforts to promote such measures have not succeeded, the government continues to prioritize gender equity through key policy frameworks. The government has reaffirmed its commitment to mainstream gender equality across various sectors, notably through the National Strategic Development Plan Te Kete 2021–2030, which includes gender mainstreaming as a key outcome.

63. In 2024, the government reiterated its focus on gender mainstreaming within its 21 priorities for development, emphasizing inclusivity in government policies, legislation, and infrastructure development, particularly for youth, women, and people with special needs. That same year, the government endorsed the reviewed National Gender Policy—Te Paagatasi a Tuvalu—which builds on traditional values of equity to strengthen gender integration across sectors. The policy sets specific goals for increasing women's participation in decision-making and leadership, improving their financial security, addressing gender-based violence, and ensuring a gender equity perspective in all government programs and services. Accompanied by a five-year action plan, the policy includes robust mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on its implementation.

64. A discussion on temporary special measures arose during the 2024 Parliamentarians' Dialogue on Gender Equality. Members of Parliaments acknowledge the importance to adopt measures to ensure that women are represented in the next Parliament. Further discussions and knowledge sharing are needed to come up with system that would work in the context of Tuvalu institutional and cultural systems. The upcoming 2025 National Forum on Shared Leadership will provide the opportunities to initiate a national reflection leading to concrete actions before the next round of elections at both national and local levels.

X. Gender stereotypes

65. Since the last report, the government of Tuvalu, in partnership with civil society organizations have continued playing a critical role in raising awareness to address discriminatory practices and stereotypes regarding gender roles and transform discriminatory beliefs and practices.

66. The Government also leads various forums and events that have provided platforms to discuss gender issues, including:

- The 2019 National Women and Youth Forum and the 2022 National Women Forum empowered women to share their experiences and aspirations, amplifying their voices to national leaders;
- The 2021 Traditional Leaders' Forum engaged leaders in discussions on gendered impacts of COVID-19, domestic violence, and human rights, with participation from outer island leaders via online platforms;
- The annual 16 Days of Activism Campaigns Against Gender-Based Violence, organized since 2020, has been instrumental in raising awareness about domestic violence and fostering dialogue across communities;
- The International Women's Day celebrations, held annually, highlight women's contributions in fields such as food security, ICT, and leadership.

67. The Tau Maketi, a monthly market established in 2020 in response to the border closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, provided a vital platform for the community to sell products and generate income. While open to all, women became the primary vendors, highlighting their entrepreneurial skills and challenging the traditional belief that women's roles should be confined to household duties. This initiative has significantly shifted perceptions of women's roles in Tuvalu, showcasing their economic potential and helping to break down long-standing gender stereotypes.

68. Faith-based organizations like the Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu (EKT) and its women's association (FFEKT) have also been pivotal in advancing gender equality. Through the Pacific Churches Initiative, EKT has developed resources to address theological interpretations that limit women's leadership and legitimize violence against women and children. These materials have been translated into the Tuvaluan language and are being used in congregations to promote gender equality and women's leadership.

69. Tuvalu has been monitoring changes in societal attitudes towards domestic violence through surveys such as the 2019–2020 Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS), which revealed a significant shift in opinions compared to the 2007 Demographic and Health Survey. The results indicate a significant reduction in tolerance for domestic violence (from 70 per cent in 2007 to 30 per cent in 2020), suggesting progress in changing gendered norms. The Gender Affairs Department (GAD) is currently developing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to track the implementation of gender equality commitments and assess shifts in societal attitudes.

XI. Gender-based violence against women

Implementation of the Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act

70. No plan of implementation plan and budget were developed to support the implementation of the Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act since its enactment. The Gender Affairs Department currently works with the Attorney General Office to integrate changes in the legislation, and it will include the development of an implementation plan.

71. A Gender Based Violence Task force was established in 2023 with the purpose to support the implementation of the FPDV and, in 2025, GAD will support all islands to establish their own GBV task force in order to provide first response services to survivors.

Protection of women and girls against all forms of violence

72. Although marital rape is not explicitly defined as a crime in the FPDV Act, both the Penal Code and FPDV Act address rape and sexual abuse. The Penal Code broadly addresses rape as an offense against morality, defining it as unlawful sexual intercourse, punishable by life imprisonment. The FPDV Act, while not explicitly mentioning marital rape, does identify "sexual abuse" as a form of violence. This encompasses any sexual act or conduct that abuses, humiliates, degrades, or violates the sexual integrity and autonomy of the complainant without their consent, regardless of the nature of the relationship within a domestic setting.

73. Section 156(5) of Tuvalu's Penal Code previously classified incestuous acts involving victims aged 15 or older as offenses committed by both the perpetrator and the victim. While this provision has not been repealed, the age threshold for the victim has been raised to 18 years, thereby considering such acts felonies when the victim is under 18.

Prosecution of perpetrators

74. There are still important gaps in terms of resources allocated to ensure that perpetrators of gender-based violence are prosecuted and punished with sanctions commensurate to the gravity of their crimes. The steps taken and resources allocated to ensure that perpetrators of gender-based violence against women and girls are prosecuted and punished with sanctions commensurate to the gravity of their crimes as revealed by the analysis of domestic violence cases filed in court between 2020 and 2023. The data reveals significant delays in the judicial process, with an average of three years between the offense and final judgment, and 19 out of 37 cases still pending. Additionally, the prevalence of peace bonds and suspended sentences, with only one imprisonment, indicates challenges in ensuring that sanctions are commensurate with the gravity of the crimes.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

75. There is no current data or evidence indicating the sexual exploitation of girls by foreign fishermen and other seafarers or any trafficking issues in Tuvalu. Nevertheless, Tuvalu has maintained its existing legislative framework. The Penal Code continues to criminalize prostitution. Furthermore, the 2009 Counter Terrorism

and Transnational Organised Crime Act provides comprehensive definitions and penalties for exploitation, trafficking, and smuggling. This Act ensures that consent cannot be used as a defence and safeguards trafficked individuals from facing criminal charges.

Challenging social acceptance of domestic violence

76. In addition to awareness raising programs run by civil society organisations such as the Tuvalu National Council of Women, Women for Change (Fatu Lei) and the Tuvalu Family Health Association over the years about violence against women and girls, the Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act, CEDAW, and women's human rights in general, the Gender Affairs Department has also run several activities, to raise awareness about what domestic violence entails and its impacts. Those awareness raising sessions has been impactful. The data from the 2019–2020 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey showed that around 40 per cent of women and men justify domestic violence in some situation. But this figure is down from 70 per cent, which was the rate reported by the Demographic and Health Survey, of women and men who justify domestic violence. Although 43 per cent of women and 39 per cent remain high rates, the changes registered in terms of acceptance of domestic violence is significant.

77. Efforts have been made in recent years for encouraging women to report incidents of sexual and domestic violence by destigmatizing victims and raising awareness about the criminal nature of such acts. Currently, there is a concerning level of tolerance towards domestic violence, and it often remains unreported due to cultural perceptions that consider it a private matter confined to families. The 2019–2020 Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey's results indicate that one third of the victims are hesitant to seek help or report the violence they experience.

78. However, there is a growing awareness among people that domestic violence is not acceptable, and efforts have been made to disseminate information about the law and available resources. Regular broadcasts during the COVID-19 state of emergency have informed the public about actions they can take if they encounter domestic violence. The annual 16 Days of Activism Campaigns Against Gender-Based Violence have also proven successful in raising awareness across diverse segments of society about the individual and collective impacts of gender-based violence.

79. One significant breakthrough has been the request from participants in the 2019 Women and Youth forum to establish safe spaces, with the support of traditional leaders in the 2020 Forum for this measure. This demonstrates the growing recognition of the need for safe environments and support for survivors of domestic violence.

80. While progress has been made, the reporting of incidents is still alarmingly low. Many cases go unreported, giving a false impression that there are few incidents of domestic violence.

81. Since 2020, GAD, in partnership with other government departments and civil society organizations has led the 16 Days of Activism campaign against gender-based violence, a flagship initiative that has reached communities and leaders, breaking the silence on these critical issues. The campaign has highlighted not only the effects on victims but also the broader socioeconomic impacts of gender-based violence.

82. Regarding measures taken to encourage women and girls to report gender-based violence and protect them against stigmatization and reprisals, there is still a lot of work to do. The MICS reported that only one out of three victims seek help, and in the large majority, will ask help towards family and friends, while only 11 per cent

will seek help from the Police and report. In addition to social stigma, lack of institutional support and limited housing present real obstacles. In addition, the delays for the court ruling are likely to be a deterrent.

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Counselling services and first responses

85. Maintaining counselling services for victims of GBV has been challenges. In the absence of a coordinating and support mechanism, and with a high staff turnover in both Gender Affairs and Social Welfare Department, the expertise and experience in counselling has been fluctuating. From the government side, the Social Welfare Department is taking the lead in providing psychosocial support and counselling services, while Gender Affairs Department continues to manage the Domestic Violence Funds, which aim to provide emergency financial support to victims and enhance services. However, government funding for this initiative was significantly reduced from AUD 50,000 to AUD 10,000 in 2020.

86. Civil society organizations remain key players in providing support to survivors of GBV. Another successful initiative emerged from civil society through the Fakalaafiga Network of CSOs, which focuses on preventing gender-based violence (GBV). Through the network, Women for Change (Fatu Lei) mobilized resources to conduct a comprehensive training program in counselling. This accredited training, provided by the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC), includes over sixty hours of content and offers a diploma upon completion. It also features a specific module on counselling for victims of GBV. Fifteen women attending will graduated from the course in January 2025. In addition, the Fiji Women Crisis Center held a 2-weeks training on basic counselling in Funafuti in October 2024, which further build capacity of counsellors in Funafuti and also 4 more from the outer islands.

87. The government established a Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Task Force in August 2023, which includes representatives from government and civil society organizations to coordinate services to protect and support survivors of GBV, improve referral, and build the capacity of each institution to provide comprehensive and professional survivors-based services. Guidelines have been drafted, and each partner will be trained on its used and technical support provided for their implementation. Key partners include hospital and clinics, the Police, the Judiciary and People’s Lawyer Office, Social Welfare Department, Gender Affairs Department, and the key CSOs providing counselling services, Women for Change and the Tuvalu Family Health Association. The guidelines include modules on protection and support to survivors during disasters, and the collection and analysis of data.

88. In response to the urgent needs that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government took the initiative to establish a temporary safe space. However, limited resources and technical capacity posed challenges to sustainably address the issue, leading to the temporary safe house ceasing operation.

89. Currently, the government is exploring options to support civil society organizations in establishing permanent safe spaces for women. This includes the development of a safe house to provide emergency accommodation for survivors of violence and their children. Enhancing cooperation with non-governmental organizations, particularly women's organizations, is a priority to ensure comprehensive assistance and rehabilitation services for victims. Through these collaborative efforts, we aim to create a sustainable and supportive network to protect and assist women who are victims of violence, particularly in the outer islands where resources are even more limited.

Capacity development of first responders

90. Every two years the Magistrates undertake a comprehensive training on the Tuvalu legislation, including the FPDV Act. In 2023, the Gender Affairs Department conducted a session to explain the context of the FPDV, to which 8 magistrates participated to. In June 2024, 2-day workshop facilitated by the Gender Affairs

91. Department was organised by the Office of the Judiciary to build the capacities of magistrates to understand the issue of gender-based violence in Tuvalu and understand the Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act and the articles of the Penal Code related to sexual and gender-based violence. The magistrates were also introduced to technology facilitated gender-based violence. 20 people attended the workshop, including 8 magistrates (2 women and 6 men) from 7 of the 8 islands.

92. Similarly, awareness raising sessions on violence against women are regularly taking place in the Police Force.

Data collection on cases of gender-based violence

93. Tuvalu acknowledges the need for systematic data collection on sexual and domestic violence, including complaints, prosecutions, and convictions (para. 22g). Currently, there is no comprehensive system in place for such data collection, though the MICS 2019–2020 survey provided valuable insights into attitudes towards domestic violence. Discussions within the GBV Task Force are ongoing to establish a reliable monitoring and evaluation mechanism to track incidents of violence and assess the effectiveness of the government's interventions.

XII. Participation in political and public life

Leadership development

94. In response to the Committee's recommendations, the Government engaged in diverse programs to develop women's leadership and management skills to prepare them as candidates and positions in political life and various areas of public administration.

95. In July 2018, the Gender Affairs Department, with support from UNDP, conducted a workshop on women's participation in politics. The workshop brought together 20 women who expressed a desire to pursue political careers and run for

national and/or local elections in the future. As a result, one woman became members of the Parliament out of 16 after the 2020 election.

96. In 2022, 22 women participated in the UNDP's Practice Parliament Initiative. This capacity-building program is designed to enhance the legislative skills and parliamentary practices of women and marginalized groups, offering hands-on experience through simulated parliamentary sessions. Despite these initiatives, the political landscape remains challenging for women, as evidenced by the outcome of the 2024 elections where no women were elected.

97. In response to this ongoing challenge, the Gender Affairs Department has launched a new program in 2024, in collaboration with civil society organizations to empower women and girls in the outer islands by providing training in leadership. Similarly, the Tuvalu National Council of Women, the organization Fatu Lei (Women for Change), and FFEKT (Fakaifoaki Fakatupu Fakaleiaga a Te Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu) continue to create spaces for women and girls to develop and exercise leadership skills. These initiatives aim to prepare women as candidates for political positions and roles in various areas of public administration, ensuring they have the necessary skills and confidence to succeed.

Temporary special measures

98. Regarding the Committee's recommendation on temporary special measures, efforts made to promote this option remained unsuccessful. The Gender Affairs Department has been actively collaborating with civil society organizations to raise awareness about the benefits of temporary special measures to enhance women's representation and promote inclusive governance.

99. The Strategic National Plan for Sustainable Development, Te Kakeega III (2016–2020), proposed a provision to reserve two additional seats in Parliament exclusively for women, which would have increased the total number of seats to 17. However, despite information papers outlining the rationale for Temporary Special Measures and detailing various options, no submission has been tabled to Cabinet. However, this approach has faced resistance from communities, including some women, who view it as conflicting with cultural practices.

100. Despite the initial challenges, we are encouraged by the positive developments observed during various forums and consultations. The 2019 National Women and Youth Forum, 2022 National Women Forum, and consultations for the formulation of the National Gender Equity Policy Plan of Action witnessed an increasing number of women expressing their desire for measures to be taken to boost women's representation in politics and other governance institutions.

101. The upcoming Shared Leadership Forum in December will serve as a platform to facilitate a meaningful dialogue on measures that can be undertaken to increase women's representation in politics and other governance institutions. This forum aims to engage diverse stakeholders, including community members, leaders, civil society organizations, and women themselves, to collaboratively explore viable solutions and build consensus on effective strategies. By promoting shared leadership and mutual understanding, we hope to find common ground and identify culturally sensitive measures that align with the community's values while advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in governance.

102. In addition, the current government has prioritised the reform of the national parliamentary electoral processes including a review of the electoral legislation and related processes. Although the review does not recommend any temporary measures, it stressed the importance to increase women's representation in the Parliament.

XIII. Education

103. Tuvalu has made progress in ensuring equal rights for women and men in the field of education, creating an environment where both genders can access education on equal terms. This has been made explicit in the recently drafted Tuvalu Safe Schools Policy.

Transition rate to secondary schools

104. According to the 2022 Annual Statistical Report by the Tuvalu Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, girls have consistently exhibited higher net enrolment rates across all educational levels compared to boys.

105. In primary education, girls' net enrolment rates were 93.8 per cent in 2020, 104 per cent in 2021, and 101.4 per cent in 2022, while boys' rates stood at 88 per cent in 2020, 102 per cent in 2021, and 99.5 per cent in 2022.

106. This trend continues in secondary education, where girls achieved net enrolment rates of 70.1 per cent in 2020, 83.7 per cent in 2021, and 76.7 per cent in 2022, compared to boys' rates of 57.1 per cent in 2020, 63.6 per cent in 2021, and 54.5 per cent in 2022.

107. At the tertiary level, girls maintained higher enrolment rates than boys, continuing the pattern observed in primary and secondary education.

108. Academically, girls have outperformed boys across various levels. In the national Year 8 examinations, girls' pass rates were 76 per cent in 2020, 90 per cent in 2021, and 94 per cent in 2022, while boys' rates were 46 per cent, 61 per cent, and 77 per cent, respectively.

109. Repetition rates in primary education further highlight this difference, with boys' rates at 8.5 per cent in 2020, 11.2 per cent in 2021, and 9.4 per cent in 2022, compared to girls' rates of 1.1 per cent, 1.8 per cent, and 1.7 per cent during the same years.

110. Out-of-school rates also indicate a greater issue for boys, decreasing from 28.6 per cent in 2020 to 14.8 per cent in 2022, while girls' rates dropped from 10 per cent to 2.9 per cent over the same period.

Ending discrimination against pregnant girls

111. In addressing the educational needs of young mothers, MEYS permits pregnant students to stay in school and return after giving birth. However, societal pressures often lead them to drop out, highlighting the need for stronger support systems, including childcare facilities and broader community education, to ensure these young mothers can continue their education.

Challenging gender stereotypes and career pathway

112. Despite these positive indicators for girls in general education, their participation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs remains low. At the Tuvalu Atoll Science Technology Training Institute (TASTTI) in 2024, only 6 out of 92 students were girls. TASTTI offers programs in traditionally male-dominated fields such as carpentry, basic construction, plumbing, electrical work, welding, and mechanics.

113. While no formal studies have been conducted to determine the reasons behind the low enrolment of girls in these programs, the gender disparity suggests that societal perceptions and traditional gender roles may influence educational choices.

114. In addition, in response to the Committee's recommendation to eliminate gender stereotypes, Tuvalu implemented the National Curriculum Policy Framework (TNCPF), which emphasizes the use of gender-sensitive teaching materials. However, traditional gender norms still influence career choices, particularly in secondary technical subjects like agriculture and home economics. Efforts are being made to encourage girls to pursue male-dominated fields, such as agriculture, where enrolment has increased. A review and re-drafting of the TNCPF completed in October 2024 includes the cross curricular themes of GEDSI and Social Citizenship aimed at further mitigating female gender stereotypes.

115. Education initiatives include the Social Citizenship Program, launched in 2020 by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport to promote gender equality in the school curriculum. The Tuvalu Inclusive Safe Schools Initiative (TISSI), created by the Tuvalu Australia Partnership for Quality Education and focused on secondary schools, was also combined with this program under the new Positive Behaviour Management Program. Starting in 2025, this program will support non-discriminatory, inclusive school environments with a focus on safeguarding the rights of girls in the education system.

116. Additionally, TAPQE regularly airs radio programs that challenge gender stereotypes and promote positive portrayals of women and girls, helping to foster a wider societal understanding and support for gender equality.

Improvement of schools' infrastructure

117. The education sector consistently receives the largest share of Tuvalu's national budget, which rose from 13 per cent in 2012 to 18.4 per cent in 2019. Schools across all islands are equipped with separate latrines for boys and girls, dormitories for both, and transportation facilities. However, efforts are ongoing to improve sanitation and accessibility, especially in remote areas.

XIV. Employment

Unemployment rate among women and young women

118. Tuvalu gathers sex-disaggregated data on women's participation in the labour market through the Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) and Census. However, there is still a gap in data on informal income-earning activities, as a majority of women earn an income from informal work, which is not captured in official statistics. market participation, especially in the informal sector.

119. Employment opportunities remain constrained in Tuvalu, with the government being the primary employer, especially for women in the education and health sectors. The small local market restricts the development of profitable businesses, and prevailing social norms often prioritize family responsibilities for women over economic engagement. Additionally, the adverse impacts of climate change, such as droughts and cyclones, directly affect the resources needed for handicraft production and other economic activities.

120. In addition, the traditional gender division of labour contribute to women's high rate of unemployment. Women's unpaid care work continues to limit their economic participation and with a high rate of non-communicable diseases, this obstacle will

remain unless public care services improved, NCDs significantly decrease, and a more balanced distribution of unpaid care work is being done in the homes.

Labour and Employment Relation Act 2017

121. While the Labour and Employment Relations Act references the fundamental ILO conventions, Tuvalu has yet to ratify specific conventions such as the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), the Maternity Protection Convention (No. 103), and the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) as recommended by the Committee.

122. However, Tuvalu successfully enacted the Labour and Employment Relations Act in 2017, which came into force on October 5, 2018. This Act establishes fair labour standards and promotes productive employment relationships in alignment with the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions. It applies to all employers and employees across all workplaces in Tuvalu:

- Part 5 of the Act ensures equal employment opportunities, prohibiting both direct and indirect discrimination in recruitment, promotion, training, and other employment matters. Discrimination on the grounds of gender and sex is explicitly prohibited under Section 50;
- Section 30 provides for 100 per cent paid maternity leave for 12 weeks. Section 31 grants 12 weeks of fully paid adoption leave to female employees (adoptive mothers). The Act also provides 10 days of paid paternity leave for the spouse of a woman who gives birth or adopts a child;
- Section 53 explicitly prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace;
- Section 54 mandates equal pay for work of equal value, making any breach of this provision an offense;
- Part 6 requires employers to maintain a safe and healthy working environment;
- These provisions reinforce Tuvalu's commitment to promoting fair and equitable work conditions in line with international labour standards.

123. In addition, the 2016 General Administrative Orders reinforced the government's commitment to non-discrimination in employment based on gender, pregnancy, marital status, disability, and family responsibilities. Although no temporary special measures have been adopted to address vertical and horizontal occupational segregation, progress has been made in increasing women's representation in senior government roles, including state-owned enterprises. Since 2017, women have constituted approximately 45 per cent of the public service workforce.

124. However, there is no temporary special measure in place to address occupational vertical or horizontal segregation as recruitment is strictly based on merits.

XV. Health

125. Since the submission of the last national report to CEDAW, Tuvalu has made important progress in implementing Article 12 of CEDAW, particularly in the areas of healthcare and family planning, despite facing considerable health challenges such as a high rate of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts have been focused on enhancing healthcare facilities, especially in remote areas, and improving the quality of medical services to ensure equal access for all, including women and girls.

126. The government has increased the number of clinics, upgraded medical centres, and provided up-to-date medical equipment, ensuring essential health services reach even the most remote communities. This effort includes improving services for women, particularly in reproductive health and family planning. Tuvalu's commitment to SDG3 and its National Health Strategic Plan (2020–2024) is reflected in the establishment of medical clinics on every island, with four islands staffed by doctors and the others by professional nurses. Each clinic provides primary care, and at least 90 per cent of outer island clinics have a midwife or doctor to attend deliveries. Complicated obstetric cases are referred to the main hospital or to overseas facilities through the Tuvalu Overseas Medical Referral Scheme (TOMRS).

Sexual and reproductive health services

127. Collaborations with civil society organizations such as TuFHA and the Tuvalu Red Cross Society have been instrumental in promoting sexual and reproductive health, preventing epidemic diseases, and raising awareness about healthy lifestyles. TuFHA provides family planning counselling, SGBV counselling, HIV/AIDS screening, and cervical cancer screening, as well as running a mobile clinic for outreach in Funafuti and the outer islands. They further collaborate to deliver specific health programs and initiatives such as extensive vaccination programs, including HPV vaccines for girls and PAP smear screenings and community engagement efforts, including house-to-house outreach and distribution of educational materials on typhoid, dengue, and COVID-19.

128. Tuvalu has enhanced maternal and child health services, providing free care related to pregnancy, childbirth, and postnatal periods to ensure that women across the country, including on the outer islands, have access to appropriate care.

129. Modern contraceptives are available to 24 per cent of Tuvaluan women, including those living on the outer islands. The government has increased the availability of healthcare facilities to ensure broader access to reproductive health services, including contraceptives. Educational programs targeting adolescents and the general public focus on responsible sexual behaviour, preventing early pregnancies, and preventing sexually transmitted diseases. The TuFHA plays a key role in delivering these services and raising awareness in remote areas.

130. TuFHA and local clinics provide free and confidential family planning services at the community level, including on the outer islands. These efforts include educating both women and men on responsible sexual behaviour and preventing early pregnancies and STDs. The government supports educational programs on sexual and reproductive health and rights, which are aimed at equipping young people with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions.

131. While abortion remains a criminal offense under Section 214 of the Penal Code, there is an exception for cases where the mother's life is at risk.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights education

132. Tuvalu has also made progress in integrating **sexual and reproductive health education** into the curriculum for students aged 12–13, ensuring they receive essential information on their health and well-being. This initiative is supported by the **Tuvalu Family Health Association (TuFHA)**, which provides comprehensive sexual education programs, especially for youth and marginalized groups, to promote informed and responsible health choices.

133. TuFHA provides educational sessions that include Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE). These sessions are designed to equip individuals, especially young adults, with the knowledge and skills they need to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. The focus on CSE helps to promote safe practices, reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and empower individuals to take control of their sexual health.

134. TuFHA's approach includes targeted efforts to reach young adults and underserved, marginalized groups. Collaborations with organizations such as Akanda Alliance, an LGBTQI association, and Fusi Alofa, a Disability Association, have been instrumental in extending these critical services to diverse and often vulnerable communities. By fostering these partnerships,

135. TuFHA ensures that SRHR education and support are inclusive and respectful of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or physical abilities. The clinic run by TuFHA provides family planning counselling, SGBV counselling, HIV/AIDs screening, and cervical cancer screening. The organization also run a mobile clinic that do house outreach in both Funafuti and the outer islands.

136. Furthermore, the Red Cross has partnered with Tuvalu Family Health to raise awareness about menstrual hygiene and health in schools across Funafuti. This initiative aims to eliminate stigma and misconceptions surrounding menstrual practices, thereby promoting better menstrual health and education for girls.

XVI. Economic empowerment

Supporting women's entrepreneurship

137. In 2023, in order to boost women and youth entrepreneurship, the Development Bank of Tuvalu introduced a new loan product of \$50,000 designed to assist women and youth entrepreneurs who face difficulties accessing financing. This initiative focuses on promoting ecotourism and climate-smart agriculture, aiming to foster financial inclusion, economic empowerment, and job creation. Besides providing loans from \$200 to \$10,000, the Development Bank also offers training in business management, e-commerce, and disaster preparedness.

138. The Tuvalu National Provident Fund (TNPF) continues to play a vital role in enhancing economic security. It offers low-interest loans for housing, education, and small business ventures, enabling women to improve their living conditions and establish or expand businesses. The monthly market, Tau Maketi, serves as a platform where women can sell their products and access new markets, further supporting women's entrepreneurship.

Social Protection

139. Tuvalu has maintained its commitment to providing social protection to women and girls through various initiatives and programs. The Tuvalu Overseas Referral Medical Scheme ensures that individuals, including women and girls, can access essential health services not available locally. Over the past five years, 446 women and 374 men have benefited from this scheme. The Tuvalu Senior Citizen Support Scheme also supports the elderly, benefiting 243 women and 141 men in 2024. Moreover, female-headed households utilized this scheme more than their male counterparts (23.6 per cent vs. 17 per cent).

140. Nearly half (49 per cent) of households received external economic support through social transfers or benefits schemes (Department of Central Statistics, 2021)

Access to these benefits showed minimal disparity between female-headed households (51.9 per cent) and male-headed households (48.2 per cent). Programs such as the Financial Support Scheme for Persons with Disabilities and the Retirement Pension Scheme provide critical assistance, ensuring that women, particularly those with disabilities or those who have contributed to the workforce, can lead dignified lives with financial security.

141. The absence of social protection for individuals facing hardship remains a significant challenge. There are no financial support programs or other forms of assistance available to provide aid to those with low incomes, to help alleviate poverty, or to improve their living conditions. Compounding this issue is the severe housing crisis on the capital island of Funafuti. In various forums, women have highlighted the problems of overcrowded housing and the financial and environmental pressures it creates.

XVII. Climate change and disaster risk reduction

142. In response to the Committee's recommendations regarding the impact of climate change and natural disasters on women, Tuvalu has implemented measures to address these challenges while ensuring gender equality and inclusivity in its climate and disaster management efforts.

143. The National Climate Change Policy 2021–2030, known as Te Vaka Fenua o Tuvalu, prioritizes gender equality and social inclusion. The policy outlines climate actions that aim to eradicate social inequalities and address the specific vulnerabilities, capacities, and contributions of various societal groups, including women. To ensure that women, particularly those living in the outer islands, are actively involved in decision-making processes, the policy calls for the development of robust and transparent climate finance systems. These systems are designed to improve institutional procedures for project management, risk assessment, and environmental and social safeguards, while ensuring gender and social inclusion are integral to every aspect of climate action.

144. Over the past decade, the government has increased women's participation in the formulation of climate change and disaster risk strategies. During the development of the Updated National Determined Contribution (NDC) in 2022, for instance, women made up 20 per cent of those consulted, ensuring that their voices were represented in shaping national climate policies. Furthermore, the Tuvalu Coastal Adaptation Project (TCAP), launched in 2017 with support from the Green Climate Fund and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), integrates gender perspectives into its long-term adaptation strategies. A comprehensive gender strategy and action plan embedded within the project support women's empowerment and gender equality, with the Tuvalu National Council of Women playing a crucial role in the project's Steering Committee.

145. The Tuvalu National Council of Women has been instrumental in ensuring that women's perspectives and contributions to environmental protection and climate change adaptation are recognized and incorporated into national strategies. As a member of the National Advisory Committee on Climate Change and a board member of the TCAP project, the Council ensures that women's needs are addressed in reports, decision-making processes, and the implementation of climate-related projects. The Council also advocates for gender considerations in Island Strategic Plans, scholarships, and other national projects, ensuring that women are central to development and climate resilience efforts.

146. Tuvalu has made substantial progress in integrating a gender perspective into sustainable development, disaster risk reduction (DRR), and climate change policies through the Island Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Plans 2021. Developed by local councils (Kaupules), the plans provide a comprehensive framework for building resilience while ensuring that gender considerations are embedded throughout the disaster management process. These plans specifically address the vulnerabilities women face during disasters and encourage their active participation in recovery efforts. For instance, the Funafuti Plan emphasizes the importance of strengthening systems for addressing gender-based violence (GBV) during emergencies, including the establishment of trained personnel, accessible shelters, and clear protocols for reporting and managing GBV cases.

147. Tuvalu's commitment to protecting and supporting women and girls during disasters is also evident in its collaboration with civil society organizations. The Tuvalu Red Cross Society (TRCS) plays a vital role in disaster preparedness and humanitarian work, addressing the specific needs of women and girls through various initiatives. This partnership ensures that gender-sensitive responses are integrated into disaster risk management and that women have access to necessary resources and support in times of crisis.

XVIII. Disadvantaged groups of women

148. In terms of promoting the rights of women and girls with disabilities, Tuvalu has recognized the disproportionate challenges they face. The 2018 Tuvalu Study on People with Disabilities revealed significant human rights violations and social exclusion for women with disabilities. These women experience higher rates of abuse, bullying, harassment, and violence compared to their male counterparts, with deaf women and those with psychosocial disabilities being particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. Women with disabilities also face greater economic hardship, with 63 of the 96 individuals identified as living in hardship being women. Additionally, women with disabilities are less likely to participate in family and community activities due to physical barriers and lack of assistance.

149. In response to these challenges, the Government of Tuvalu has introduced policies to protect the rights of women and girls with disabilities. The Tuvalu National Policy for Persons with Disability, endorsed in 2018, focuses on empowering women with disabilities, raising awareness, and providing support for caregivers. The policy includes proposals for increasing access to assistive devices and enhancing the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities. Although this policy was revised in 2023, it has yet to be endorsed, and the absence of a robust monitoring and reporting system makes it difficult to assess its impact.

150. The 2023 Constitution Review strengthened protections for people with disabilities by explicitly prohibiting discrimination based on disability. Despite this progress, certain exceptions related to personal matters, land ownership, and job standards remain, highlighting the complexities of fully integrating non-discriminatory practices.

151. The commitment to promoting inclusivity is reflected in Tuvalu's National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2021–2030 (Te Kete), which emphasizes that no one should be left behind, regardless of gender, disability, or socio-economic status. One of the strategic actions in Te Kete focuses on increasing the participation of people with disabilities in development efforts. In 2024, the government reiterated its commitment in its statement of priorities, which underscores inclusivity in government policies, legislation, and infrastructure development.

152. Financial support for persons with disabilities is provided through a social transfer scheme administered by the Social Welfare Department. In 2024, 112 women and 113 men with disabilities received financial assistance, enabling them to lead more independent and dignified lives. The government also supports the Persons with Disability Organization – Fusi Alofa, which advocates for disability rights, operates a school, and promotes the delivery of services for people with disabilities.

153. Founded in 2009, Fusi Alofa plays a crucial role in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities in Tuvalu. The organization provides essential support services, skill development, vocational training, and educational opportunities, empowering individuals with disabilities to participate fully in society. Fusi Alofa works closely with the government and other stakeholders to raise awareness of disability rights through public campaigns and workshops. The organization is also involved in policy advocacy, ensuring that disability-inclusive policies and legislation are implemented to protect the rights of people with disabilities.

154. Tuvalu has also made strides in inclusive education. The Aofiaga (Disability) Class, established in 2013, provides children with disabilities a specialized learning environment within the mainstream school system, promoting their right to education and ensuring their inclusion in the broader educational community. This initiative represents an important step towards ensuring that all children, regardless of disability, have access to quality education in Tuvalu.

155. These efforts reflect Tuvalu's commitment to promoting equality before the law for women and persons with disabilities, while recognizing the ongoing need to address remaining legal and social barriers.

XIX. Marriage and family relations

156. Tuvalu has made some progress in addressing discrimination in matters related to marriage and family relations. One significant development is the amendment of the Marriage Act, which raised the minimum age for marriage to 18 years for both girls and boys. This amendment aligns with international standards and aims to prevent child marriages, ensuring that individuals enter into marriage with full consent and maturity.

157. Tuvalu has taken important steps to ensure that both spouses have equal rights and responsibilities during marriage and upon its dissolution. The Custody of Children Act requires the court to conduct thorough inquiries into all circumstances before making custody decisions, ensuring that the welfare of the child remains paramount. The Maintenance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance provides for maintenance orders during separation and after divorce, allowing the court to consider all circumstances, particularly the resources of the defendant, to ensure adequate provision for both children and spouses. Additionally, the Matrimonial Proceedings Act emphasizes the welfare of children in all decisions concerning marriage and family matters, including maintenance orders for any party involved.

158. Despite this positive change, there have been few other substantial reforms in the legal framework governing marriage and family relations. Discriminatory provisions, such as those in the Native Lands Act and the Tuvalu Lands Code, continue to place women at a disadvantage in matters such as the custody of illegitimate children. Under current laws, custody is automatically granted to the father, provided he acknowledges paternity once the child reaches two years of age. The review of these discriminatory measures is ongoing, with the Lands Department actively working on amendments to ensure that women's land and custodial rights are

respected, especially in cases concerning the best interests of children born out of wedlock.

159. Efforts to address cultural practices that disadvantage women in marriage and family relations are also being pursued. Although married women are still generally expected to adopt their husband's surname, a growing number of women are choosing to retain their family names. However, cultural norms around land ownership and inheritance rights continue to pose challenges.

160. In response to the Committee's recommendation to eliminate discriminatory customs and traditional practices that hinder women's full enjoyment of land and inheritance rights, the government is working to ensure that local customary leaders and magistrates in the Lands Court are trained to uphold women's land rights at the community level. However, there remains resistance in some communities to transforming long-standing customs and practices, which complicates the full realization of gender equality in these areas.

XX. Data collection and analysis

161. Over the past five years, Tuvalu has not made significant progress in the area of gender statistics at the national level. However, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019–2020 produced with the technical support of UNICEF, UNFPA, and the Pacific Community (SPC), represents the most comprehensive data collection initiative in recent years.

162. The MICS 2019–2020 has provided critical data across several key areas, including reproductive and maternal health, child health and wellbeing, education, and violence. The data obtained has been essential in informing the development of policies aimed at improving gender equality and addressing the specific needs of women and children in Tuvalu. This survey is noteworthy for generating critical information on gender-based violence (GBV), which has been instrumental in identifying and addressing GBV issues in the country.

163. Over the next five years, Tuvalu's priorities for strengthening national gender statistics focus on enhancing the capacity for gender analysis, producing comprehensive gender profiles, and ensuring the availability of sex-disaggregated data across all sectors. One of the key initiatives is to conduct training on gender analysis for sectoral and island-specific gender profiling. This initiative aims to build the skills necessary to understand and address gender disparities effectively.

164. Advocacy efforts will also be intensified to ensure the production of sex-disaggregated data across various sectors and at the Kaupule (local council) levels. This will involve working closely with local authorities to incorporate gender perspectives into their data collection and reporting processes. The goal is to establish a robust framework for capturing and analysing data that reflects the distinct experiences of men and women in different communities and help identify gender disparities to inform policy making and program design.

165. The production of a statistical gender profile is another critical priority. This profile will provide a comprehensive overview of gender-related statistics, highlighting key areas of inequality and progress. The Gender Affairs Department (GAD) will play a pivotal role in this process, collaborating closely with the Central Statistics Division. This collaboration will be particularly significant during the combined Census and Household Incomes and Expenditures Surveys scheduled for 2024, and the next Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) planned for 2025. These surveys will be essential for gathering detailed and accurate data that will support gender analysis.

166. Through these concerted efforts, Tuvalu aims to create a robust and reliable system for gender statistics that will inform policy decisions and drive progress towards gender equality.
