

**Thirtieth anniversary of the
Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)**

**National Narrative Report
Republic of Palau**

**Division of Gender, Bureau of Domestic Affairs,
Ministry of State, Republic of Palau**

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Ministry of State

Foreword

It is with pleasure that I present this national narrative report for the Republic of Palau in response to the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration.

Palau is an adopting state to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for the advancement of women of 1995. Every five years an international review and appraisal process is led by UNWomen, requiring the reporting on national developments of the previous five-year period. This is now the **30th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, and the current reporting period is for 2019–2024.**

The Beijing+30 reporting process for Palau was led by the Division of Gender, located within the Bureau of Domestic Affairs in the Ministry of State. Data collection for the report involved consultations with a broad range of relevant government and non-government stakeholders and reference to primary data and other secondary documentation. We are grateful for the support of the Australian Pacific Women Lead fund implemented via the Pacific Community (SPC) for this process. And, we also sincerely thank all the people who gave their time and expertise as part of our consultations process.

In addition to meeting Palau's international reporting obligations, we have found this process to be an important opportunity to review the current situation for women and girls, and gender social inclusion more broadly, in our country. This represents a critical foundation for developing future policy approaches.

This narrative report systematically outlines the current situation for women and girls across various aspects of social and economic life in Palau, identifying where gender equality has been achieved and where there are remaining challenges for both the government and for civil society. The report will be an invaluable resource as we seek to more fully implement the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy, strive to achieve the goals set out in the Palau National Development Plan and seek to achieve the objectives of the Beijing Declaration and other regional instruments on gender social inclusion.


Gustav Aitaro
Minister of State
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Ministry of State

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Kom Kmal Mesulang.

List of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AHTU	Anti-Human Trafficking Unit, Ministry of Justice
BANGO	Belau Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, an umbrella NGO
BNPL	Basic Needs Poverty Line
BPS	Bureau of Public Safety, Ministry of Justice
BPWP	Building Prosperity for Women Producers, Processors, and Women-Owned Businesses through Organic Value Chains Project
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
COCP	Court of Common Pleas
COFA	Compact of Free Association
CROSS	Coronavirus One Stop Shop
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
EQPB	Environmental Quality and Protection Board
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FY	Financial Year (or Fiscal Year)
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEF	Global Environment Fund
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LAIIB	Living All-Inclusive in Belau, an NGO
LGBTQI+	An umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people
MAFE	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Environment
MHHS	Ministry of Health and Human Services
MIF	Micronesian Islands Forum
MOS	Ministry of State

MSA	Medical Savings Account
NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
NDBP	National Development Bank of Palau
NDRMF	National Disaster and Risk Management Framework
NEC	National Emergency Committee (NEC)
NEMO	National Emergency Management Office (NEMO)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NHI	National Health Insurance
FPA	<i>Family Protection Act</i> (codified at Title 21, Chapter 8, Palau National Code)
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPII	Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Industries
NDRMF	National Disaster Risk Management Framework
OAG	Office of the Attorney General
OEK	Olbiil Era Kelulau, Palau National Congress
PCAA	Palau Community Action Agency
PCC	Palau Community College
PCS	Palau Conservation Society
PGST	Palau Goods and Services Tax
PICRC	Palau International Coral Reef Center
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PLGED	Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration
POEA	Philippine Overseas Employment Administration
POETcom	Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community

POGA	Palau Organic Growers Association
PNMS	Palau National Marine Sanctuary
PPA	The Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights
PPE	Palau Parents Empowered
PPUC	Palau Public Utilities Corporation
PRCS	Palau Red Cross Society
RDATs	Red Cross Disaster Action Teams
ROP	Republic of Palau
RPPL	Republic of Palau Public Law
SBDC	Small Business Development Center
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SKO	Semesemel a Klengelakel, an NGO
SPC	The Pacific Community
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UPR	Universal Periodic Review (of the Human Rights Council)
VNR	Voluntary National Review (of the Sustainable Development Goals)
VOCA	Victims of Crime Advocate
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (US)
WHO	World Health Organization

Section 1: Highlights

This narrative report presents the findings of a synthesis and review of available data, documentary sources, and of qualitative information and views provided through a series of consultations with key government and non-government stakeholders in the Republic of Palau in May 2024. The report paints a picture of the background context, and outlines initiatives aimed at gender equality and empowering women and girls in Palau at present and over the previous five year period (2019–2024). The report closely follows the question format set by the Beijing+30 guidance documents.

Palau has a unique set of cultural traditions with matrilineal descent and strong roles for female clan leaders alongside the male chiefs. Equality has been achieved in many areas for women and girls in modern life in Palau, particularly in relation to social protection, access to healthcare, educational achievement and representation in government employment and many other roles. However, women remain underrepresented in elected office and still bear higher care burdens for children, elderly and the disabled. Certain groups of women, including rural women, those pursuing livelihoods in the informal economy, migrant women, those who identify as LGBTQI+ and women prisoners, may experience particular forms of marginalization and have not been fully considered in government policy and decision-making.

While a Gender Mainstreaming Policy was adopted in 2018, much of the impetus for gender mainstreaming has been occurring at the project level, largely driven by international donor requirements. A remaining key challenge is to fully integrate gender mainstreaming principles in national and state government processes including through gender-responsive budgeting.

At the project level, there has been considerable success in approaches that have mainstreamed gender considerations into environmental and disaster risk management and in initiatives to improve rural livelihood options. In relation to disaster risk management, a very successful partnership between the government's National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) and the Palau Red Cross Society (PRCS) has trained teams of men and women across all 16 States to ensure that they are ready to support their respective communities in any future time of need. It is the women trainees who are particularly attuned to the vulnerable persons in their communities. The program is continuing to grow in strength and is now able to add extra forms of training including leadership training to capable participants. As an example of the enhancement of rural livelihoods, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has funded and supported post-COVID-19 recovery initiatives for groups of women farmers. These farmers are being assisted to develop taro crops in upland areas and to create new value-added products such as taro chips and flour. This program has many simultaneous benefits for rural women's livelihood creation, climate change resilience, local food security and health.

There are still areas of needed support in Palau to enable the achievement of the Beijing Platform for Action and SDG 5. These include capacity building for future women leaders, data gathering and analysis, perhaps particularly in relation to any gender impacts of climate change, and governmental capacity for gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting.

Section 2: Priorities, Achievements, Challenges and Setbacks

1. Over the past five years, what have been the most important achievements, challenges and setbacks in progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women?

Five years ago, Palau's Beijing+25 report identified the major challenges for gender equality in Palau as: (1) the crisis of non-communicable diseases; (2) the need for a comprehensive gender disaggregated data collection and reporting process to link information between government, state, community and private organization to track progress; (3) effective enforcement of existing protective legislation about human trafficking, prostitution, and domestic violence; and (4) the impacts of climate change across all sectors.¹ To a large extent, these challenges remain, and others have emerged or increased in prominence in public consciousness.

Achievements over this five-year period include the continued relatively high educational achievement of women and girls, broad health services delivery to women and girls, and women's strong participation in most areas of society, including equal if not predominant representation in government employment, on public and private boards, in the private sector, in civil society and in cultural roles. The Palau government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the severe downturn in the tourism industry likely prevented many citizens and residents from sinking into poverty. Updates to the anti-human trafficking legislation and strengthening of related institutional procedures saw Palau increase its tier ranking from Tier 2 Watchlist to Tier 2 in the US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report in 2023. This strengthens the protections for both women and men against trafficking in or through Palau.

Palau has seen the implementation of a wide range of programs aimed at livelihood creation, environmental restoration and disaster risk management which successfully mainstream gender equality concerns, include women participants and address the needs of women and men. However, the gender mainstreaming aspects of these programs have largely been driven by international donor requirements rather than by the Palau government itself. And these aims and outcomes have often been confined to the particular funded programs. The Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy (2018), while a significant achievement in itself, has largely remained unknown and has not been widely used to guide government policy and institutional processes at either National or State levels. Translating the Gender Mainstreaming Policy, and the gender equality aspects of the Palau National Development Plan 2023–2026 into concrete actionable items remains a key challenge. The Division of Gender in the Ministry of State has a very limited budget and personnel, but is expected to lead all issues on gender within the government administration. There is also yet to be any means of tracking budgetary allocations to women or gender-responsive budgeting tools. Women remain severely underrepresented in elected positions at both National and State levels, and this likely hampers the adoption of policies

¹ Republic of Palau, Ministry of Culture and Community Affairs and Ann Hillman Kitalong (April 2019) 'Republic of Palau National Review for the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) in the context of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.'

aimed at supporting women's needs such as maternity leave in the private sector and measures to relieve the care burdens for children, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

The setbacks for the achievement of women's empowerment over the last five years can be linked to the broader macroeconomic context, in particular to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting cessation of the tourism industry while borders were closed during 2020–2021 and then the tourism industry's slow recovery. The limited government capacity in Palau has largely been preoccupied with other priorities, including the COVID-19 recovery and introduction of a new tax system, and the political culture of Palau has probably not been conducive to advocacy of women's rights and needs in areas where they are still disadvantaged such as in elected office.

2. Over the past five years, what have been the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country through laws, policies and/or programmes?

Over the past five years, the top five priorities for legal, policy and programming that benefit women and girls in Palau have been the following:

1. Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls

The elimination of violence against women and girls has been a key area of legal, policy and program development in Palau since the enactment of the *Family Protection Act* (FPA) in 2012. This is a priority due to survey and administrative data evidence demonstrating that domestic and family violence continues to be a problem in the country. Both the response to cases, and preventative action, require inter-agency coordination and cooperation that remains a challenge despite many years of institutional practice. Cultural norms of silence, difficulties involving men and boys in discussions of family and domestic violence, and ensuring that victims have accommodation, and financial and practical support are also challenges. The available data, institutional and individual program responses to gender-based violence in Palau are outlined below at Questions 16–19.

2. Women's Entrepreneurship and Women's Enterprises

While the social protection system in Palau is relatively strong, and the unemployment level low, there are nonetheless certain sections of the community that need to ensure their livelihoods through self-employment or developing their own enterprises. According to the available statistics, women are less likely to be self-employed or to employ others compared to men. Given women's traditional roles as farmers of taro and other agricultural products, they are also a key to ensuring sustainable food production and security, and to increasing local produce that has lower embedded carbon emissions and higher nutrient value. Such livelihood options also serve as a buffer in times of economic crises or downturns, such as occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, supporting women, especially rural women, in agricultural and other enterprises is essential to their own well-being as well as that of the broader community.

As is outlined at Questions 6 & 10 below, there have been some successful recent programs aimed at increasing women's knowledge, skills, access to credit and ability to start and sustainably maintain enterprises, both individually and in groups.

3. Access to Health Care, including Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights

While women are not necessarily disadvantaged in health access and outcomes in comparison to men in Palau, women's healthcare has nonetheless been an area of constant priority for programming. As outlined at Question 12, the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS) provides a range of health services to women. There have been clear successes in relation to pregnancy and maternity care and access to sexual and reproductive health services. Non-communicable diseases such as obesity and diabetes, however, remain a serious problem for the whole community including women.

4. Gender-Responsive Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Building

Due to its geographical location and isolation, and due to the effects of climate change, Palau is vulnerable to a range of natural disasters. These affect the whole community, but may have particularly severe impacts on the most vulnerable groups and individuals, including women. It is therefore essential that women are able to fully participate in disaster risk and management planning and responses in order to ensure that women's particular needs are mainstreamed within all programs. Women are also a strong resource in times of need and their inclusion is likely to lead to better outcomes for the community as a whole. As outlined at Question 32, the training of women and men, and planning for women's needs in times of disaster is being actively pursued by the Government in partnership with key international agencies and local organizations.

5. Quality Education, Training and Lifelong Learning for Women and Girls

Women and girls' educational attainment in Palau now surpasses that of men and boys, however, this does not mean that the country can be complacent. The future of the nation depends on a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce, and therefore the delivery of high-quality education programs to all is a national priority. As explained at Question 13 below, a recognized emerging challenge is to ensure that males are not disadvantaged in their academic attainments. While there is no known overt discrimination in the education and training sector, there are also issues in challenging gender stereotypes that prompt both males and females to tend to choose particular disciplines.

3. Over the past five years, what specific actions have you taken to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls?

In Palau, particular groups of women and girls who may experience marginalization include: women and girls with disabilities; rural women living further away from government services and with fewer economic opportunities; migrant women who are not afforded all of the benefits provided to Palauan citizens and by living in a foreign country may also lack strong social protections from their own home communities; women who identify as belonging to the LGBTQI+ community, and women prisoners.

The specific vulnerabilities that these groups of women and girls may face are only partially documented. A disability report on Palau in 2017, based on the 2015 census, noted for example, that only 18.7 percent of the male and 9.5 percent of the female population with disabilities

were economically active compared to 74.5 percent and 58.1 percent respectively for male and females without disabilities.² The rights and well-being of women and girls with disabilities are advocated by the NGO Omekesang, which has a majority female active membership. This NGO is often consulted by the government in policy-making and programming processes and states a broad concern with women’s empowerment. Palau Parents Empowered (PPE) is another NGO working in this space and aims to support the parents and families of disabled youth and children in Palau.

A study published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2023 examined the particular context and experiences of rural women in Palau, generally noting that they may experience more difficulties in accessing employment opportunities and government services.³ As is detailed in the Report below (see Question 10), some rural development programs have specifically aimed to encourage and support agricultural activity, innovation and small-business development. The Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS) is also aware of the difficulties that rural women may have in accessing health services, and has, for example, recently organized a mobile breast cancer screening service to assist these women (see Question 12).

Current situation analysis work in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on the development of a migration policy is examining the particular dynamics for migrant workers in general, including migrant women.⁴ This information is also being used in the development of a new Employment Policy (see Question 6). The Anti-Human Trafficking program is actively monitoring for, and responding to, any victims of human trafficking in Palau – this has more commonly been migrant male workers caught up in labor exploitation but this does not exclude the possibility of women victims.

A gender gap analysis of Palauan law briefly examined legal protections and gaps for the LGBTQI+ community, finding that they do experience some discrimination under the law.⁵ The rights and well-being of this group are advocated for by the NGO ‘Living All-Inclusive in Belau’ (LAIIB), and the US Embassy in Palau holds an annual pride event. While the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS) is collecting health information in relation to people who identify as LGBTQI+, this is a group that tends to be left out of government policy attention.

The same gender gap analysis of Palauan law also noted that although the law largely protects women prisoners in accordance with international principles, women prisoners (and potentially also juvenile prisoners) are still housed within the same facility as male prisoners while a new prison facility is being completed.⁶

² UNICEF Pacific, Office of Planning & Statistics and Pacific Community (2017) ‘2017 Palau Disability Report: An Analysis of the 2015 Census of Population, Housing and Agriculture,’ p. 22.

³ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau.’

⁴ IOM (2023) ‘Migration Governance Indicators Profile 2023 - Republic of Palau.’

⁵ Petra Mahy and Elilai Ngirmang (September 2023) ‘Legal Gap Analysis of Gender Equality in the Republic of Palau’ (report prepared for the International Organization for Migration), pp. 42–44.

⁶ Ibid, pp. 58–59.

4. Over the past five years, how has the confluence of different crises affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country, and what measures have you taken to prevent their negative impact on progress for women and girls?

Over the past five years, Palau has been subject to the combined impacts of climate change, Typhoon Surigae and the COVID-19 pandemic. Climate change is an ongoing process with a range of current and expected impacts on weather patterns, land and marine biodiversity, sea-level rises, high tide events and coastal erosion. These issues are exacerbated by Palau's geographical remoteness. In April 2021, severe Tropical Storm Surigae hit Palau, causing three days of power outages, communication service disruptions, and water cuts, property damage of around US\$10 million, including damage to 1,500 homes while destroying 150 houses and US\$100,000 in crops. The COVID-19 pandemic had some health impacts, and through border closures and the cessation of the tourism industry there were deep economic impacts and ongoing challenges related to the repayment of government debt incurred in the response.

The Government of Palau, in partnership with international and local organizations, has responded to these crises through a range of climate change mitigation and adaptation policies and measures, disaster risk management programs and through a COVID-19 economic response package. As will be detailed in the report below, these measures have each had aspects of gender sensitivity incorporated, although there are also still some remaining areas of challenge and unmet needs for women and girls.

5. Over the next five years, what are the priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country through laws, policies and/or programmes?

The key policy document that sets out Palau's socio-economic and environmental context and priorities in the near future is the 'Palau National Development Plan 2023–2026'. In general the plan aims to 'substantially enhance the quality of life of current and future generations of Palauans' and by 2026 to 'improve standards of living, reaffirm Palauan culture, sustain the environment, grow the economy, and continue to strengthen good governance'. In relation to progress for women and girls specifically, the Plan identifies the disproportionate burden of childcare and elder care on women as a concern. It reaffirms the role of the 'Palau National Gender Mainstreaming Policy' (2018) in ensuring that sensitivity to gender differences are integrated across all policies and programs. The Plan also notes the need for high-quality sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators to be collected and used to inform policy-makers. This is a broad policy document, and arguably there is still much work to do to translate these general goals into actionable programs.

The 'Palau National Gender Mainstreaming Policy' has been in place since 2018. However, it must be acknowledged that its implementation has been patchy across the different branches of government. Much of the work on gender equality in Palau in recent times has instead been driven by international donor and technical partners at the project level. Translating the Gender Mainstreaming Policy into government action and the creation of ministry-level action and coordination plans is a future priority. The Division of Gender within the Ministry of State is leading this work with some support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Pacific Community (SPC).

There are also Pacific-level instruments that may guide action on gender equality in Palau particularly as work on gender mainstreaming progresses. The Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights (PPA) 2018–2030 aims to accelerate the implementation of gender commitments at all levels and contains a set of strategic objectives. In November 2023, the Pacific Islands Forum adopted a ‘Revitalized Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (Revitalized PLGED)’. The Government of Palau will need to consider the PPA and Revitalized PLGED and the operationalization of its goals in the local context.

General policies and programs for social protection, economic development, health and education should continue to prioritize vulnerable groups and ensure equal opportunities and support for all sections of the Palau population. This includes their continuing consideration in key areas of climate change mitigation and adaptation and in disaster risk management.

Section 3: Progress Across the 12 Critical Areas of Concern

6. Over the past five years, what actions has your country taken to advance gender equality in the world of work (including informal and non-standard employment as well as entrepreneurship)?

The data on women's employment in Palau is complex and needs to take account of various intersectional issues such as migrant status and the distinction between the government, private, and informal/rural sectors. The most recent census data (2020) indicate that there is a significant gap in paid employment with 77% of men but only 65% of women in paid employment.⁷ This gap is widely perceived to be a result of women's caregiving responsibilities for children and the elderly. However, when employed, women are more likely to be in higher positions and to earn more, and this is likely linked to women's higher levels of educational achievement (see Question 13 below). The median wage for Palauan females is higher than males in high and medium level occupation levels.⁸ Women in Palau are significantly less likely to be employers than men (only 55 women employers compared to 109 men in 2015), and represent just over one third of all self-employed (115 of 306).⁹ Females with a disability are less likely to be in paid employment than males with a disability.¹⁰

The statistics vary based on migrant status. The overall distribution of immigrants by sex shows that 2,200 (43.2%) were female and 2,888 (56.8%) were male (2020).¹¹ Among the migrant worker population, males are far in the majority, especially among those from Bangladesh who tend to work in construction, agriculture and other manual labor roles. However, the ethnic and gender composition of migrant workers is subject to fluctuation, including in relation to particular construction and other projects. 82% of migrant females are in paid employment compared to 58% of Palauan females.

In terms of the labor law framework, only national government employees enjoy strong legal protections against discrimination in hiring and firing. The principle of equal pay for equal work for government employees might be implied from the Constitutional provision prohibiting unequal treatment on the basis of sex, but is not reinforced by legislation, and also not extended to the private sector. Permanently employed females in the national government and in some State governments also have rights to paid maternity leave. Private sector workers, however, have almost no labor law protections other than the minimum wage, and there are exclusions from the minimum wage for domestic helpers, babysitters, caretakers, houseboys, students and farmers.¹² Migrant workers in the private sector have more labor protections than local workers, but there are no principles of non-discrimination or specific accommodation of gender needs.¹³ While there have been several attempts to introduce Bills for maternity and paternity leave for private sector workers, mostly championed by the female Senators, these

⁷ Republic of Palau (2024) 'VNR Report 2024: Harnessing Our Cultural Heritage to "Build Back Better" for a Sustainable Future,' p. 39.

⁸ Pacific Community, 'Palau Gender Fact Sheet 2023.'

⁹ Pacific Community (July 13, 2018), 'Ideas to Lift the Barriers to Women's Economic Empowerment'.

¹⁰ Pacific Community, 'Palau Gender Fact Sheet 2023'.

¹¹ IOM (2023) 'Migration Governance Indicators Profile 2023 - Republic of Palau', pp. 16–17.

¹² Palau National Code, Title 13, § 1306.

¹³ Petra Mahy and Elilai Ngirmang (September 2023) 'Legal Gap Analysis of Gender Equality in the Republic of Palau' (report prepared for the International Organization for Migration).

have not so far been successful.¹⁴ MHRCTD's Office of Labor Compliance, with its limited staff of nine personnel, only inspects for compliance with migrant worker regulations. It finds that compliance issues in the workplace tend to be around wage payment, and there are few cases of sexual harassment or abuse, although anecdotally this has sometimes happened in service work in tourist businesses, especially during the Chinese-led tourism boom in the mid-to late-2010s.

With consultation and discussion processes beginning in February 2023, the Ministry of Human Resources, Culture, Tourism and Development (MHRCTD) is currently developing an 'Employment Policy' with the support of the International Labor Organization (ILO).¹⁵ No such policy has previously been in place. The focus of the discussions regarding the employment policy has been on the protection of Palauan workers in the private sector and particularly responding to the impetus of declining local birthrates and significant numbers of Palauans preferring to leave and work in the United States under the terms of the Compact of Free Association leaving local reliance on the migrant workforce in Palau. The policy is also concerned with workforce planning and meeting the needs of particular industries and the small pool of local unemployed people looking for work. Our consultations for this report indicate that gender equality is being considered as an important factor in the development of this policy, including specific aspects addressing men's needs in light of their lower educational achievement and representation in higher professional roles (see Question 13 below), and inviting more male participants to attend policy development activities given the predominance of women.

While women are well-represented in the workforce in general, physical, technical, and 'frontline' worker roles tend to be dominated by men. For example, a key statistic from the 2020 census shows that there were 1019 men working in construction (this would include mostly migrant male workers) and only 66 women.¹⁶ Male dominance was also mentioned in our consultations as being an issue for government agencies such as the police, labor compliance, the Environmental Quality Protection Board (EQPB), and also the government-owned electricity and water company the Palau Public Utilities Corporation (PPUC).

PPUC, the largest state-owned enterprise in Palau, has been developing gender equal workplace policies through its partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as one part of a broader support project. PPUC developed a Gender Strategy for 2020–2023, consistent with the Palau National Gender Mainstreaming Policy (2018), and PPUC's Board approved new corporate gender sensitive human resources management procedures, including flexible working hours, the introduction of parental leave, and protocols to protect against workplace harassment and discrimination (including gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment). PPUC has prioritized developing a skilled, diverse, and more gender-balanced workforce,

¹⁴ The most recent attempt was Senate Bill no. 11-52 (2021) which included paid annual and sick leave for all employees, and one month paid leave to new parents including adoptive parents. Although now somewhat dated, the most thorough examination of maternity leave in Palau was documented in: Health Impact Assessment Working Group (February 2013) 'Rapid Health Impact Assessment of the Maternity Leave Bill (S.B. 9-20-SD2): Maternity Leave in the Palauan Workforce'.

¹⁵ See ILO (23 July 2023) 'Summary Report: Workshop for the Development of a National Employment Policy for Palau, 9-10 March 2023'. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/resource/brief/summary-report-workshop-development-national-employment-policy-palau>.

¹⁶ Republic of Palau (August 2022) '2020 Census of Population and Housing of the Republic of Palau,' p. 31.

contributing to efficient business processes and organizational productivity.¹⁷ While these policies have been successfully adopted, effective implementation processes are still being developed, including workplace training programs and development of standard operating procedures and referral mechanisms within the organization. There is also a small pilot program on access to childcare for PPUC employees. The aim is that PPUC will become an employer of choice for women and encourage more to consider STEM careers.

The US federally-funded Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program particularly works on training people in Palau from marginalized backgrounds with the aim of increasing relevant workplace skills. This program has strong anti-discrimination protections under US Federal law, including on the basis of sex/gender. Given the very small pool of unemployed in Palau, the participants in these programs are often returned Palauan workers from the US who have been working in low skilled employment, deportees back to Palau or other persons with particular vulnerabilities. As of June 2024, the WIOA Office is undertaking a survey of employers to determine training needs for its ‘Adult and Dislocated Program’ and expects implementation to resume in August 2024. The WIOA Office also has a youth program and as of June 2024 is administering ‘on the job training’ for 80 youth participants in various industries around Palau. These trainees receive a stipend while participating in the program.

Entrepreneurship is supported through the National Development Bank of Palau (NDBP) small business loans program. The NDBP is a Palau state-owned enterprise in operation since 1982. The NDBP is able to offer somewhat more flexible services compared to the commercial banks, including supporting more start-up businesses and assisting applicants to improve their paperwork or referring them to the Palau Small Business Development Center (SBDC) for support. Some of the NDBP’s loan programs have been specifically supported by donor partners, including the ADB. The NDBP has been capturing sex disaggregated data for about the last 4–5 years prompted by a specific donor program requiring inclusion of women and youth. NDBP’s current loan profile of around 300 loans consists of 40% women borrowers (based on those loans with sex disaggregated coded data). Specific loans programs for energy efficiency also have around 51% of women borrowers. The anecdotal experience of NDBP bank employees indicates that women applicants tend to be quite organized with their business plans and paperwork, usually more so than men.

The Palau Small Business Development Center (SBDC) has been providing training and support for small-scale commercial activities since 2013. It provides training and one-on-one counselling on financial education to existing small businesses and start-ups, including to women-owned businesses. As noted, SBDC often assists applicants with loan paperwork when applying to the NDBP for a loan.¹⁸

The Palau Chamber of Commerce reports no known barriers to women in terms of financial inclusion and access to credit. However, an FAO report published in 2023 identifies rural finance as being a challenge for all farmers, especially for women. A major problem is that financial institutions require assets as collateral, and for most rural farmers, land is their only major asset and they do not want to risk losing it. Women farmers have the added disadvantage of generally not having the skills needed to report financial information and project their

¹⁷ Asian Development Bank (June 2023) ‘Completion Report: Palau: Palau Public Utilities Corporation Reform Program (Subprograms 1 & 2).’

¹⁸ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. 28.

potential earnings. At present, the main source of rural finance is grants from the international community to supplement loans for smaller businesses.¹⁹

7. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, promote work-life and family balance and strengthen the rights of paid care workers?

The burden of childcare and care for the elderly and persons with disabilities in Palau culturally falls disproportionately on women. Our consultations indicate that while men might be called on to occasionally assist with their male relatives, it is women who bear responsibility. Women often need to leave the formal sector workforce as a result of their caregiving responsibilities. Palau's aging population and the high rates of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) makes care responsibilities a current and future key social concern. This issue has been prominently flagged in the Palau National Development Plan 2023–2026. The Plan notes that low-income families with children, especially single-parent households, could benefit from an expansion of low-cost childcare options and targeted labor market support to assist parents to prepare for and find work.

In the main urban area of Koror there are two childcare centers operated by the non-profit Palau Community Action Agency (PCAA) with 5 classrooms serving 75 children ages 1-5 years. A third center is planned to open in Airai in 2024 with support from the Government of Japan.²⁰ These services are co-funded through user fees and a national government subsidy for PCAA operations. Priority is given to low-income households, single parents, and student parents. Ten percent of places are reserved for children with disabilities. The program operates in tandem with the Head Start program so that upon reaching 3 years of age, children spend half a day in Head Start and half a day in childcare. Besides the PCAA centers, there are several small for-profit centers operating primarily in Koror.²¹ The Palau Community College also operates a Child Care Center for the children of students and workforce applicants/single parents or both parents employed, with a maximum of 30 children aged 2.5–5 years.²²

Outside of Koror, the number of childcare facilities is more limited. A minimum number of children must be present to trigger new Head Start facilities, which is difficult to achieve in States with small populations. Families making above the income threshold have almost no access to childcare in the communities and generally rely on older female relatives for childcare.²³

Concerned that the government was not adequately meeting its obligations for early childhood care and that for-profit childcare facilities were not providing high quality care, the National Congress passed the Palau National Framework on Early Childhood Act.²⁴ The Bill established an Early Childhood Council tasked to develop a plan for a comprehensive system of early

¹⁹ FAO (2023) 'Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,' p. 28.

²⁰ Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Palau (May 23, 2024) 'Grassroots Project Handover Ceremony to PCAA Held,' https://www.palau.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/11_000001_01327.html.

²¹ Republic of Palau (2023) 'Third Periodic Report of States Parties to Committee on the Rights of the Child - Republic of Palau.'

²² Palau Community College, 'Child Care Center,' <https://pcc.palau.edu/community/child-care/>.

²³ Palau Development Plan 2023–2026, p. 13.

²⁴ RPPL 8-3, 2009.

childhood care. While a promising initiative, the Council functioned only briefly, never completed the mandated plan, and is not currently operational. Nevertheless, the legislation remains and can be used to complete this important work.²⁵

In relation to the care of elderly, as noted at Question 12 below, some new developments, with the deployment of community health workers and a new ‘Step Down’ long-term care unit soon to come into operation at the National Hospital, may take some of the burden of elder care. A collaborative caregiver training program between the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS) and Palau Community College (PCC) should fill this market need for trained carers (although there is some noted risk that those trained may seek employment in the United States where salaries are higher).

As noted at Question 6 above, the labor rights of caregivers working in the private sector (anyone other than a permanent government employee) are still very limited. Palauan private sector workers in general have few labor rights, and all domestic helpers, babysitters, caretakers are currently excluded from the minimum wage. Migrant workers have some additional protections. According to our consultations for this report, market trends in wages for child and other care workers may nonetheless be approaching the minimum wage (\$3.50 per hour). This is driven at least partly by requirements set by the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) which requires that citizens of the Philippines only take roles overseas with at least a salary of US\$500 per month. There have also been a number of Fijians coming to Palau to work as carers recently and they also have a minimum US\$500 wage requirement.

The labor rights of parents are also still limited in Palau. As noted at Question 6 above, only permanent national government employees have access to some paid maternity leave. Bills to introduce parental leave more widely have repeatedly failed to pass Congress. Some private sector employers, such as PPUC (see Question 6) above have independently introduced formal parental leave and care policies. Some other workplaces (such as the Bureau of Public Health and Office of the Vice President) have informal flexibility arrangements allowing parents to, for example, bring their children to work or to leave for school pick-up times.

There are no known programs aimed at encouraging more men to counter cultural expectations and take on more family caregiving roles in Palau.

8. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to reduce the gender digital divide?

Palau has rapidly been adopting internet use, especially since the construction of the first submarine fibre optic cable in 2017 which greatly increased internet speeds and reliability. This has triggered an uptake in connectivity. The 2020 census found that 96% of Palau households have at least one cell phone, most with internet connectivity, while 43% of households had a separate home internet connection. There has been significant international investment in digital and mobile infrastructure in Palau, and a second submarine internet cable is being added with the support of the Governments of Australia, United States and Japan.

²⁵ Republic of Palau (2023) ‘Third Periodic Report of States Parties to Committee on the Rights of the Child – Republic of Palau.’

There is no concrete evidence of a gender digital divide in Palau, and in fact the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) of 2014 found that women were slightly higher users of the internet and cell phones compared to men.²⁶ Updated data from the current HIES is still pending.

Education programs in Palau's schools are providing IT skills training, including courses that are largely computer or tablet assisted. There are also future plans to link to Taiwan in order to be able to offer more sophisticated coding skills programs. There is no data or other observations indicating differences in girls' and boys' access to digital technology.

Rather, the generational divide is more commonly observed with older persons struggling more than the younger generation to make use of digital technologies. For example, a new app (Tupaia) developed by the Bureau of Agriculture to link farmer producers to buyers is reportedly difficult for the older demographic of farmers (most of whom are women) to use.

Online safety may be an area of greater vulnerability for women and girls compared to that of men and boys (see also responses to Question 18). The National Security Strategy (2022) identifies cybersecurity and halting such issues as child pornography as being key objectives. The Australian Aid program has also identified this as an area of concern for regulatory policy development and gender mainstreaming objectives.²⁷

From 2018–2021, the Koror State Government implemented a Digital Citizenship Initiative to raise awareness about on-line security among children, youth, and parents. Initially targeting Koror residents, with support from the United States Embassy in Palau, the project trained 19 youth leaders to conduct outreach training in rural states. Since the cessation of this program, e-security education in schools and communities has been conducted by the Division of Juvenile Justice, Bureau of Public Safety (national police). Although committed to this work, the Bureau is limited by lack of human and financial resources.²⁸

In 2013, the need for a National ICT Policy was officially recognized,²⁹ including the need to ensure digital access to all persons in Palau without discrimination. In 2023, a National ICT Policy was drafted under the leadership of the Bureau of Communications in the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Industries and in 2024 awaits finalization. The draft policy includes recognition of the need for outreach and training in ICT skills for underrepresented groups such as women and girls, senior citizens and persons with disabilities. It also seeks to lay the foundations for the development of legislation to protect individuals (particularly women and girls), the community, and businesses against cyber-crime and inappropriate online content and behavior. The draft policy also recognizes the need to support, train and mentor entrepreneurs, including women-owned businesses, in the incorporation of digital technologies.

²⁶ See: Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs and the Ministry of Finance, 'Palau 2013/2014 HIES Gender Profile' (SPC).

²⁷ Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (October 2023) 'Palau Gender Equality Country Plan 2023–2027'.

²⁸ Republic of Palau (2023) 'Third Periodic Report of States Parties to Committee on the Rights of the Child – Republic of Palau,' para. 89.

²⁹ Executive Order no. 351, 2013.

9. In the past five years, how has the macroeconomic and fiscal policy environment affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country, and what macroeconomic policies has your country implemented in support of a more gender-equal economy?

At Independence in 1994, the World Bank classified Palau as a lower middle-income country. By 2018, a thriving tourism industry catapulted Palau into the high-income group with GDP (current prices) reaching US\$284.7 million in FY2018 or US\$16,263 per capita. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of borders between March 2020 and January 2022, and cessation of the tourism industry resulted in significant economic losses and reclassification of the country as being middle income country. While the tourism industry has since been recovering, it is not doing so as quickly as expected and government revenues from tourism remain highly volatile.

The Government of Palau took on a large amount of debt to deal with the COVID-19 crisis both in order to continue its regular expenditures and also to finance the special COVID-19 economic support program. By doing so, it was able to retain all government employees in their normal roles and to provide support to the thousands of people in the private sector who lost revenues and wages through closure of the borders. External public debt rose from 34.4% of GDP in FY2017 to an estimated 85.7% of GDP in FY2021, largely because of the additional debt of US\$35 million incurred as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in part due to the declining GDP denominator. The Government now faces the long-term problem of needing to repay that accumulated debt.

A key aspect of Palau's fiscal policy environment is the Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the United States. This treaty provides, among other issues, for US defense of Palau and significant financial support, and in May 2023 the US agreed to extend financial support for an additional 20 years. This agreement was then finally passed and signed into US law in March 2024 following lengthy delays in the US Congress. Although the COFA economic assistance for Palau was not set to expire until the end of FY2024, the United States and Palau agreed to start the next (third) term of assistance at the beginning of FY2024. The agreement includes grant assistance and trust fund contributions to Palau that total \$0.9 billion over 20 years for FY2024–FY2043. The COFA should help alleviate budgetary problems, but the Government also needs to maintain domestic revenues. The COFA also creates a large degree of reliance on US funding for specific programs, for example sexual and reproductive health programs and education programs for children with special needs.

Another important factor is the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (PGST) on January 1, 2023. This has required major government activity over the last two to three years. The PGST applies a 10% value added tax to most goods and services, and replaced the previous Gross Revenue Tax. Any gender implications of this taxation reform are still largely unknown – the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is currently planning a tax and gender study to discover this.

Palau's inflation for FY 2022 and 2023 hit a historical high of 13% before dropping to the current rate of around 3.1% in 2024.³⁰ These inflation rates have undoubtedly put pressure on households and their ability to meet their basic needs.

The Government of Palau, therefore, has tight fiscal capacity and must prioritize where to spend money. The National Development Plan 2023–2026 has been produced (with assistance from the Asian Development Bank) as a framework for determining areas of fiscal need. The Government now needs to develop more detailed, actionable, sector plans, and priorities within them. To do so, it requires improved capacities in budget forecasting and governance. While gender equality objectives are stated at a general level in the National Development Plan, translating these into actionable items still requires a great deal more work and support.

10. In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls?

Palauans have traditionally conceived poverty in broader terms than simply low (monetary) income. Palauan (and Pacific) definitions of poverty include access to basic services, land, and ocean resources, and interpersonal relationships, as well as money.

The last analysis of poverty indicators for Palau was based on the 2014 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES). The 2014 HIES documented 3,400 Palau residents living below the Basic Needs Poverty Line (BNPL) representing 19.4% of the population. In addition, there were 1,779 people classified as near poor (basic need poverty line + 20%) and therefore, vulnerable to slipping into poverty. While the 2014 survey results are valuable, the situation has undoubtedly changed significantly in the decade since then due to significant economic change (see above at Question 9). The full impacts of COVID-19, the tourism downturn and inflation on poverty will not be known until the 2023 HIES is completed, and its data analyzed.³¹

According to the 2014 HIES, poverty levels for female-headed households (20%) were somewhat higher than for male-headed households (18.6%). The average monthly per capita income for households headed by women was US\$660, compared to US\$800 for households headed by men, indicating a gender gap of 18 percent. However, the more significant differential was between urban and rural households. Rural households were 50% more likely to live below the BNPL than urban households.

Palau does not have an overarching policy on poverty, but the Palau National Development Plan 2023–2026 addresses the issue through general social protection programs and sensitivity towards the most vulnerable sections of society. These social protections include tax refunds for low income earners, disability assistance, the child-raising subsidy, public utilities subsidies and assistance for those in the informal *makit* (market) sector (see details at Question 11 below).

A key program response to vulnerability of women and other groups during and following the COVID-19 pandemic was the Asian Development Bank's 'Palau: COVID-19 Response for

³⁰ International Monetary Fund, 'Inflation Rate, Average Consumer Prices – Palau,' <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PCPIPCH@WEO/PLW?zoom=PLW&highlight=PLW>.

³¹ Palau National Development Plan 2023–2026, pp. 17–18.

Affected Poor and Vulnerable Groups Project’ (2020–2024) with an overall budget of around US\$3.7million.³² This project consists of three components: (i) welfare support to highly at-risk elderly and persons with disabilities; (ii) food security and income-generating support for small-scale agricultural producers; and (iii) multidisciplinary responses to address family and gender-based violence. These projects are being implemented by selected local community organizations including the Belau Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (BANGO) and Semesemel a Klengelakel (SKO), with the Palau Conservation Society (PCS) engaged to undertake periodic monitoring and evaluation of the project, and there are, therefore, clear local organizational capacity-building objectives built in. Under Part (ii) of the project, 20 women’s groups across Babeldaob have been supported to start upland taro farming using seed grants, seedlings and new technologies. The project also includes supported construction and equipment for a taro processing facility to allow the development of new value-added products such as taro chips and flour. The gender-based violence aspects of the program, implemented by BANGO and SKO, are addressed further below at Question 16.

Another project with similar aims to support women’s livelihoods in agriculture is the ‘Building Prosperity for Women Producers, Processors, and Women-Owned Businesses through Organic Value Chains (BPWP) Project’ (2018–2023). This is an Australian Aid-funded program, implemented via SPC’s larger Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom) initiative of promoting organic farming. The local Palau implementing partner is the Palau Organic Growers Association (POGA). The project has sought to increase women’s financial independence while strengthening organic value chains and local healthy food security. In Palau, 34 men and 108 women were trained on different aspects of organic agriculture and gender related topics. POGA also worked on a situational analysis on organic agriculture in Palau and developed a 5-year strategic plan with support from the BPWP project, with the plan aiming to strengthen the organic movement in the country. In addition, POGA, with support from a consultant, was able to formulate a Palau National Organic Policy, and is now qualified to certify organic farms.³³

Other sets of small projects funded under the Global Environment Fund (GEF) Small Grants Program across different phases (2013–2020) also supported environmental and livelihoods programs, and had strong gender mainstreaming requirements and objectives and equal numbers of male and female participants.³⁴

11. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve access to social protection for women and girls?

According to an analysis by the Asian Development Bank from 2022, Palau has one of the most comprehensive social protection systems in the Pacific, and social protection expenditure is quite equal for men and women.³⁵

³² See Asian Development Bank, ‘Inclusive COVID-19 Recovery in Palau,’

<https://www.adb.org/multimedia/partnership-report2021/stories/inclusive-covid-19-recovery-in-palau/>.

³³ Palau Organic Growers Association (POGA), Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETcom) and Building Prosperity for Women Producers through Organic Value Chains (BPWP) (2023) ‘Project Implementation in Palau through Partnership with Palau Organic Growers Association’ (Unpublished report).

³⁴ For further details, see FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. 19.

³⁵ Asian Development Bank (December 2022) ‘The Social Protection Indicator for the Pacific: Tracking Developments in Social Protection,’ p. xvi.

In Palau, the social insurance system is a key component of social protection. This is administered by the Republic of Palau Social Security Administration. All employees (including government employees, elected officials, private sector workers, non-resident (migrant) workers and self-employed) working in the Republic of Palau must be covered by the Palau Social Security system. Employees must contribute 7% of their wages as premiums and this is deducted and paid directly by employers. This amount should also be matched by an employer contribution. Those who are self-employed should pay their own contributions, and they are encouraged to do so even if on a low income (with a minimum \$300 in remuneration per quarter). The Social Security system offers five types of benefits to eligible insured individuals or their qualified survivors: (i) retirement pension (old age, over age 60); (ii) permanent disability benefits; (iii) surviving spouse's insurance; (iv) surviving child's insurance; and (v) lump sum death benefits. Note that this does not include unemployment or illness insurance, and that it is not possible to gain early access to the fund in any other extenuating circumstances. This system is formally gender neutral, although it does exclude de facto and same-sex couples from the surviving spouse's insurance, and rules on qualifying periods of contribution may disadvantage those who take time out of the workforce such as for maternity and childcare.³⁶ Overall, the opt-in system for the self-employed likely leaves out some of the informally employed, a sector which includes more women.³⁷ Separately, those who have worked in the public sector are eligible for a retirement pension under the Civil Service Pension Plan.

Palau also has a public HealthCare Fund consisting of two components: the individual Medical Savings Account (MSA) and the National Health Insurance (NHI). These two funds are funded together through mandatory employee (2.5% of earned income) and employer (also 2.5%) contributions. Individuals may also voluntarily contribute to the funds, and may also voluntarily add additional funds to their own MSA. The government covers subscription costs for the NHI for individual citizens who are aged sixty (60) and older and not working, or persons who are disabled and not working. The fund may cover health services provided within Palau as well as internationally according to particular regulations.

Senior citizens, therefore, over 60 years of age have access to a retirement pension and their subscription to the NHI is covered. Specific social protection benefits for senior citizens include services such as hot lunches provided at community-based senior centers and home-based health care for the homebound.³⁸

In general, unemployment is not covered by the social security system in Palau, although there were special temporary unemployment benefits provided under either the United States CARES Act (administered via the Palau WIOA Office) or the local (Coronavirus One Stop Shop (CROSS)) Act during the COVID-19 pandemic (applicants were eligible for one of these sources of support but not both simultaneously). Note that Palau's unemployment rate is low, possibly artificially low, due to the high rates of emigration to the United States including for unskilled work.

³⁶ Petra Mahy and Elilai Ngirmang (September 2023) 'Legal Gap Analysis of Gender Equality in the Republic of Palau' (report prepared for the International Organization for Migration), pp. 30–31.

³⁷ FAO (2023) 'Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,' p. 12.

³⁸ Asian Development Bank (December 2022) 'The Social Protection Indicator for the Pacific: Tracking Developments in Social Protection,' p. 25.

For persons with a disability, legislation enacted in 2019 increased the monthly stipend for individuals receiving assistance under the Palau Severely Disabled Fund.³⁹ The stipend was subsequently doubled in 2021 to \$200 per month for those who are homebound and require 24 hour care and \$150 per month to those who are wheelchair bound or blind.⁴⁰ As of August 2023, there were 324 beneficiaries of the Fund, including 85 children (62 boys and 23 girls).⁴¹ This disability stipend is not a living wage but rather a small income stream to provide a measure of self-sufficiency.⁴² Despite the services and small government stipends provided for adults with disabilities, a 2017 study found that people with disabilities remain disadvantaged in regard to education, employment, and poverty status.⁴³ As an additional note on this issue, the Disability Rights NGO Omekesang also reported during our consultations some concern that relatives of persons with disability may sometimes be picking up the stipend for their own use.

Other social subsidies include a ‘Child Raising Subsidy’ of \$100 per child per annum which was first introduced in 2023. This is a means-tested subsidy for Palauan citizens earning below \$15,000 per annum, and only one person (parent/guardian with legal custody) can claim per child. The law does not differentiate between parents’ gender.

Introduced in March 2021, a social assistance payment is available for persons engaged in the informal *makit* (market) sector. Recipients must be Palauan citizens, not employed in the formal sector, and involved in the informal *makit* sector with a gross revenue of \$15,000 or less. The payment will equal 4% of the citizen’s total *makit* revenue, subject to a maximum payment of \$600.⁴⁴ The same benefit is also available to those whose combined retirement and *makit* income does not exceed \$15,000.⁴⁵ Note that the *makit* sector is typically characterized by women who sell their agricultural produce and prepared food at traditional markets, although men may also sell fish.

Under the new GST (value-added tax) tax system introduced on January 1, 2023, Palauan citizens earning \$15,000 or less per year are entitled to be refunded any tax that had been withheld from the citizen’s salary or wages. Tax refunds are also available for children’s education expenses.⁴⁶ This refund system excludes migrant workers in Palau, many of whom would also fall below the \$15,000 income threshold.

Over the period 2023–2024, a series of ‘Lifeline’ subsidies for electricity, water and wastewater have been applied to low income household utility bills via the Palau Public Utilities Company (PPUC). In addition, all residential customers currently have their electricity bill covered by \$0.10 for each KWH up to 500 KWH.

³⁹ RPPL 9-55, March 2019.

⁴⁰ RPPL 11-2, February 2021.

⁴¹ Source: MHHS Division of Human Services, 2023, cited in: Republic of Palau (2023) ‘Third Periodic Report of States Parties to Committee on the Rights of the Child – Republic of Palau.’

⁴² FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. 13.

⁴³ UNICEF Pacific, Office of Planning & Statistics and Pacific Community (2017) ‘2017 Palau Disability Report: An Analysis of 2015 Census of Population, Housing and Agriculture’.

⁴⁴ Palau National Code, Title 40, § 1106.

⁴⁵ Palau National Code, Title 40, § 1107.

⁴⁶ Palau National Code, Title 40, § 1104.

Finally, the cultural tradition of ‘sharing and caring’ may also be seen as an integral part of social protection in Palau.⁴⁷ This involves the responsibility of families and clans, particularly maternal uncles, in overseeing the wellbeing of family members and practices of collecting together money to cover the expenses associated with life events.⁴⁸ However, this system is under stress due to socio-economic and demographic changes.⁴⁹

12. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve health outcomes for women and girls in your country?

Palau’s health service, under the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS), strives to provide gender equitable physical and mental health services to all. The MHHS operates the 80-bed Belau National Hospital (BNH) in Koror and nine strategically located primary care community health centers. All Palau residents live within a one-half hour travel time to a primary care facility. In addition to government facilities, there are four private ambulatory care clinics located in Koror. To strengthen primary care, a new cadre of health workers – community health workers – is being trained and will be deployed in all communities by 2024. Palau continues to work toward a modern climate-resilient health infrastructure – notably the planned development of a new national hospital in a more suitable location. It has been noted that rural women may still experience more difficulties in accessing health services compared to those living in the main urban areas.⁵⁰

A partnership between the MHHS and Palau Community College provides formal training for and certification of caregivers, while a partnership between MHHS and the non-profit Belau Wellness Center provides medical and social support and home renovations for persons who are homebound due to age or disability. For those needing continuous care not available at home, MHHS with assistance from the Government of Japan, has recently constructed and outfitted a “Step Down” long-term care unit at the national hospital.⁵¹ This unit is only awaiting funding for staff salaries before becoming operational.

As noted above at Question 11, Palau also has a public HealthCare Fund, introduced in 2010, consisting of two components: the individual Medical Savings Account (MSA) and the National Health Insurance (NHI). There is universal enrolment in the HealthCare Fund and 100% of the population is covered for essential healthcare services.⁵² To assist low-income earners, government health services are billed according to an income-based sliding fee schedule. Some specific programs within Palau’s health system are funded through US Federal funding such as sexual and reproductive health services.

On average Palauan women live longer than men, with life expectancy at birth for women of 77.8 years and 68.1 years for men.⁵³ In 2023, a slightly higher number of women reported

⁴⁷ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. 12.

⁴⁸ Republic of Palau (2024) ‘VNR Report 2024: Harnessing Our Cultural Heritage to “Build Back Better” for a Sustainable Future,’ p. 20.

⁴⁹ Palau National Development Plan 2023–2026, p. 17.

⁵⁰ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. 15.

⁵¹ Republic of Palau (2024) ‘VNR Report 2024: Harnessing Our Cultural Heritage to “Build Back Better” for a Sustainable Future,’ p. 65.

⁵² Ibid, p. 50.

⁵³ Pacific Community (2023) ‘Life Expectancy, Mortality and Causes of Death,’ <https://sdd.spc.int/topic/life-expectancy-mortality-and-causes-death>.

themselves to be in fair health (52.8%) compared to men (43.6%),⁵⁴ and men were slightly more likely (44.1%) to have not had an annual exam in the previous year compared to women (41.7%).⁵⁵ Health behaviors and literacy levels also vary between genders in Palau, with men being less likely to participate in health practices, activities, and programs and having lower health literacy levels that discourage them from seeking medical help.⁵⁶

Palau has a comprehensive system of maternal and child health services including ‘well-woman’, family planning, prenatal, postnatal, ‘well-child’, school health services and services for children and adolescents with special health care needs. Family planning services are free and available for adolescents. Although counselors encourage adolescents to involve parents in reproductive health decisions, parent consent is not required for adolescents to receive information, counseling, or contraceptives. Participation rates by target populations are high. Pregnant women and their families recognize the importance of medically supervised deliveries. Women from outlying islands routinely relocate to Koror prior to their due date to ensure easy access to hospital facilities. For the eight-year period 2012–2022, there were only 4 out-of-hospital deliveries (0.2% of total deliveries).⁵⁷ Maternal deaths are rare; in the past decade there was one maternal death in 2013, one in 2019, and one in 2023. A ‘focus on the mom’ has significantly reduced pregnancy-related anemia while health promotion has increased breastfeeding rates. Palau has provided free cervical and breast cancer screening services since 2017, with a new mobile mammogram unit recently coming into use to better reach women living in rural areas.

Palau’s health system monitors the gender differences between prevalence of both communicable and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and associated social behaviors. Some key differences from recent survey data are that being overweight/obese affects 71.6% of males and 80.2% of females;⁵⁸ cigarettes are smoked by 31.9% males and 8.3% females;⁵⁹ betelnut chewing, with or without tobacco is more prevalent among females (50.5%) compared to males (43.2%); and alcohol was consumed in the previous 30 days by 44.9% of males and 25.1% of females, with males significantly more likely to engage in binge drinking. Suicide in Palau is almost exclusively a male phenomena, with the suicide rate for males in Palau significantly higher than the global average.

Palau is experiencing a rapidly aging population, with the percentage of people aged 60 and older projected to increase from 9.9% to 24.6% by 2050.⁶⁰ In relation to aged care, in March 2020, the government introduced a legislative requirement for the creation of a National Policy on Care for the Aging, which among other factors must take account of gender values.⁶¹ Following technical assistance from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Policy

⁵⁴ Ministry of Health and Human Services, Government of Palau (2023) ‘Palau Adult Hybrid/Community Health Assessment Survey,’ p. 14.

⁵⁵ Ministry of Health and Human Services, Government of Palau (2023) ‘Palau Adult Hybrid/Community Health Assessment Survey.’ p. 15.

⁵⁶ Wenqian Xu et al. (2024) ‘Toward Healthy Aging in Palau’, *The Gerontologist* 64:1–8, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Republic of Palau (2023) ‘Third Periodic Report of States Parties to Committee on the Rights of the Child – Republic of Palau’.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Health and Human Services, Government of Palau (2023) ‘Palau Adult Hybrid/Community Health Assessment Survey,’ p. 23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 33.

⁶⁰ Wenqian Xu et al. (2024) ‘Toward Healthy Aging in Palau’, *The Gerontologist* 64:1–8, p. 1.

⁶¹ RPPL 10-51 (March 2020), and amended by RPPL 11-2 (February 2021) – codified in Palau National Code, Title 21, ch. 10.

adopted in April 2023. The policy consultations process recognized cultural changes occurring in relation to aging, the need to create age-friendly social environments, the need for health-enhancing physical environments, and to address lifelong health needs. The consultations also found a strong recognition of the role of gender in different aged care needs and experiences in Palau.⁶²

13. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls, including in sectors where they are underrepresented?

Primary and secondary education in Palau is provided free of charge and is compulsory for all students between the ages of six (6) and seventeen (17) years or until graduation from high school, for all children regardless of their nationality and residency status. A small number of private schools also offer religious or culture-based primary and secondary education on a fee basis, which beyond basic accreditation requirements are self-governing. Starting in 2023–2024, free public kindergarten programs are also provided for children prior to beginning primary school education. Palau Community College (PCC) is the only vocational and tertiary education provider, which requires payment for study, although many Palauan students at PCC are supported by Federal US funding. The Palau Scholarship Board also provides financial support to students pursuing tertiary education off-island.

By law, the Palau Community College, cannot make any gender distinction in its offerings of educational programs to students.⁶³ The Ministry of Education School Handbook also explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, national origin, age, and disability in its schools.

In general, Palau has gender parity in terms of access to primary and secondary schooling, but a higher number of women complete tertiary education than men, both within Palau and among Palauans studying outside the country. In general, females tend to have higher educational attainment at upper elementary and high school levels and in recent years, almost all of the high school valedictorians have reportedly been female. Enrolment, completion and headcount statistics at Palau Community College show consistently higher female participation rates compared to male, ranging from around 54–57% female.⁶⁴ More females also tend to be enrolled part-time than male at PCC. Organizations that provide community extracurricular educational programs, such as the Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC), including open-water scuba diving courses, reported often having more females than males choosing to be involved in their activities. Higher education scholarship opportunities, such as the Australia Awards, also report experiencing problems finding suitable male applicants to ensure gender equality in their programs.

All schools in Palau have safe separate bathroom facilities for girls and boys.

As of 2024, it is also notable that the school teaching workforce in Palau is predominantly female (78%), with the remaining (22%) being male. Of the 16 school principals, 13 are female and three are male. Recruiting suitable male teachers has been difficult given female

⁶² Wenqian Xu et al. (2024) 'Toward Healthy Aging in Palau', *The Gerontologist* 64:1–8, p. 7.

⁶³ Palau National Code, Title 22, ch. 3.

⁶⁴ Palau Community College (2023) 'Palau Community College 2023 Factbook', pp. 22–24.

dominance in teaching programs and in higher education more generally. At Palau Community College, men and women are evenly represented as faculty staff but there are a majority of female administrative staff.⁶⁵

In general, our consultations indicated no forms of overt discrimination in access to education or to specific sectors. However, self-selected choices of discipline or training area do produce gender unequal enrolments in particular sectors, with, for example, more males choosing more ‘technical’ or ‘vocational’ education areas and more females choosing ‘caring’ areas such as nursing and teaching. For example, the 2020 census indicated that there were 57 women with an academic major in engineering, manufacturing and statistics compared to 719 men. There were also 306 women with academic majors in health and welfare compared to 67 men.⁶⁶ Our consultations for this report did not indicate that there have been any particular programs in Palau aimed at encouraging males or females to consider non-traditional areas of education in order to balance these choices, and this has unfortunately not been identified as a policy area of need.

Many of the people consulted for this report have voiced strong concern regarding the academic underachievement for males in Palau, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels. This educational imbalance appears to also flow through to the dominance of women in mid- to upper-level management in government (see further information at Question 6). Participants in our consultations thought this may be caused by cultural expectations, observing that young men are more likely to take time out of education than young women (for example, to join their male relatives fishing), or to spend time hanging out rather than studying. It is more common to see groups of male students spending time socializing on the Palau Community College campus, while female students are more often found studying in the library.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) Palau Office undertook a survey of high school students, parents and teachers in September–October 2023 to try to understand these gender differences in academic attainment among students in Palau. While the results have not yet been fully analysed or reported, this survey does indicate a fairly strong agreement among all survey participants that boys may be underperforming academically as they tend to spend more of their time on sports and other extracurricular activities than girls, and that Palauan parents and society more generally expect girls to be more ambitious and responsible and they are therefore more lenient towards boys. There was also a strong trend in identifying the need for strong male role models as a means of encouraging boys to greater academic attainment. Another factor may be bullying or violence affecting more boys. The annual School Health Survey includes a psychosocial assessment and is a source of data on violence against children. For the School Year 2022–2023, 7% of boys and 4% of girls reported having been hurt, abused, or neglected. However, when data from the school surveys are compared across a ten-year period, no trends are evident.⁶⁷

14. What actions has your country taken to ensure that economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic closes gender gaps in poverty, employment, social protection, education, and/or health that the pandemic has exacerbated?

⁶⁵ Palau Community College (2023) ‘Palau Community College 2023 Factbook’, p. 36.

⁶⁶ Republic of Palau, ‘2020 Census of Population and Housing of the Republic of Palau: Volume 1 Basic Tables,’ p. 28.

⁶⁷ Source: MHHS-Family Health Unit, 2023, cited in Republic of Palau (2023) ‘Third Periodic Report of States Parties to Committee on the Rights of the Child – Republic of Palau’.

As noted at Question 9 above, the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of Palau's borders between March 2020 and January 2022, and the resulting cessation of the tourism industry caused significant economic losses. COVID-19 set economic growth in Palau back by nearly a decade. The collapse of tourism saw the economy contract by 17% in 2021 following a 8.7% decline in 2020. The impact was borne almost exclusively by the private sector. By March 2021, 779 jobs had been lost, about 7.0% of the FY2019 labor force, all in the private sector.

The Government responded to COVID-19 with the Coronavirus Relief One-Stop Shop (CROSS) Act⁶⁸ that provided (i) unemployment compensation, (ii) temporary public service employment, (iii) lifeline utility subsidies for low-income households, and (iv) direct assistance to impacted businesses. Citizens of the Freely Associated States, including Palau, who lost jobs or income due to COVID-19 also could qualify for unemployment benefits under US pandemic relief programs. (Note that eligible workers could choose either Palau or U.S. benefits but not obtain both). There were no layoffs or reductions in salaries for national government employees. Migrant workers were also supported with employment transfer programs. With government support, the National Development Bank of Palau (NDBP) also allowed debt payment holidays of 3–6 months for borrowers during the pandemic and supported businesses with additional financing. As noted at Question 9 above, to fund this relief package, the Government took out substantial loans from the Asian Development Bank. As noted above at Question 10, other programs that aimed to support particularly vulnerable groups were also initiated. The Government's responses were also supported by development partners who provided technical, financial, and in-kind support. Supporting partners included the United States, Republic of China (Taiwan), Japan, Asian Development Bank, the United Nations system and many others.

Without mitigation, average household incomes had been projected to drop by 11.0%. With mitigation, average household income actually rose by 2.0% over FY2019 levels, and arguably the Palau Government may claim a major policy success as a result.

In addition to the Palau government's response, Palauan citizens were also able to take advantage of support provided through the US CARES Act, which was administered by the Palau WIOA Office. Between June 2020 and July 2022, the Palau WIOA office disbursed financial assistance to 1,449 individuals (783 males and 666 females). After July 2022, some of these individuals were still receiving disbursements in the forms of refunds and underpayments as the WIOA Office caught up with its administration. The large majority of recipients of CARES Act assistance were in the: accommodation and food services; agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; and transportation and warehousing sectors. Some recipients began with support from Palau's CROSS Act before switching to the CARES Act.⁶⁹

The health impacts of COVID-19 were comparatively low, but there were six deaths attributed to the disease and it also caused some people to skip or delay routine health checks once COVID-19 began to spread within the community. However, there were no particular gender impacts on health observed. The pandemic impacts on school education were relatively light in Palau. Schools were only closed for a brief period of about three weeks and students experienced a small amount of online learning. There was no indication of students dropping

⁶⁸ RPPL 10-56 and RPPL 11-3.

⁶⁹ Note that the WIOA program has experienced some problems relating to management of US CARES Act relief funds and some former staff have been criminally charged. These court cases are ongoing.

out of school in order to earn an income for their families. There were, therefore, no particular gender impacts observed in relation to education services.

An assessment by the FAO (2023) argued that the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic did differ somewhat for men and women in Palau.⁷⁰ This was because, for example, in rural communities, women are expected to provide funds and food for traditional community events. Under the pandemic economic hardships, this put pressure on women and their spouses, leading to stress and tension in the home. Furthermore, restricted movement and confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic was particularly stressful for women, who are the main caregivers and managers of the household. Closure of schools required that parents and guardians home-school their children, a task that falls to the women. Mothers sometimes had to take time off from work to care for their children and instruct them.

As noted at Question 10 above, the awaited HIES survey results will be needed before the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and other economic shocks will be known.

15. Over the past five years, which forms of gender-based violence, and in which specific contexts or settings, has your country prioritized for action?

The focus for action in relation to gender-based violence in Palau has been, and is, on domestic and family violence. Other than this, the only other known risks are the small incidence of sexual assaults and a generalized risk of human trafficking.

The most recent country-wide survey on violence against women was conducted in 2014, now ten years ago, with the assistance of Australian Aid funding and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).⁷¹ The key findings from the 2014 survey were that 25.2% of women in Palau had experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime perpetrated by an intimate partner, and 9.1% had experienced such violence in the previous 12 months. While this survey data indicated lower prevalence rates than some other parts of the Pacific, this evidence means that GBV is present in Palau.

This data is now a decade old. In November–December 2023, the UNFPA supported a workshop on GBV data collection with key selected government office holders, and has since been supporting the MHHS, Family Protection Act Working Group and the Office of Planning and Statistics in formulating a plan to run a new survey. At the time of writing, a funding partner was being sought to support this survey.

Beyond the 2014 survey, the main current data on gender-based violence is largely limited to administrative data collected by the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS) and the Judiciary.⁷² This data was collated for the 2024 Voluntary National Review on the SDGs, and is reproduced below. The trends indicate some increase in violence against women during the years 2020–2021 corresponding to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Graph 1). While the majority

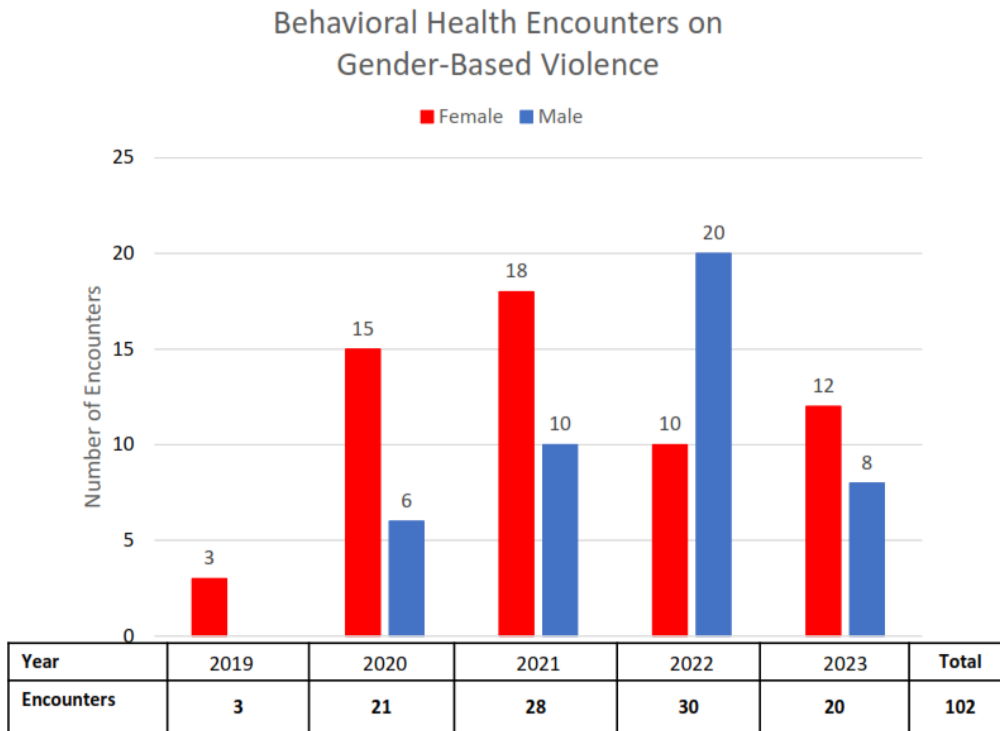
⁷⁰ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. 10.

⁷¹ Palau Ministry of Health (October 2014) ‘Belau Family Health and Safety Study: National Research Project on Violence Against Women in Palau’ (Australian Aid, Palau Ministry of Health and UNFPA).

⁷² The Bureau of Public Safety (BPS) also collects data on numbers of criminal cases handled by the police under the *Family Protection Act*, however their data collection processes are under review and omitted here, and in any case largely overlap with that of the Judiciary.

of people seeking government services for family and domestic violence are women, there are also males. The majority of criminal cases under the Family Protection Act are filed against males (80–90%) (see Table 3). The majority of identified victims of human trafficking have been male, with labor exploitation as the cause (see Table 5).

Graph 1: Behavioral Health Encounters on Gender-Based Violence (Source: Ministry of Health and Human Services)



Graph 2: Emergency Room Visits for Gender-Based Violence by Gender, 2018-2022 (Source: Ministry of Health and Human Services, Republic of Palau).

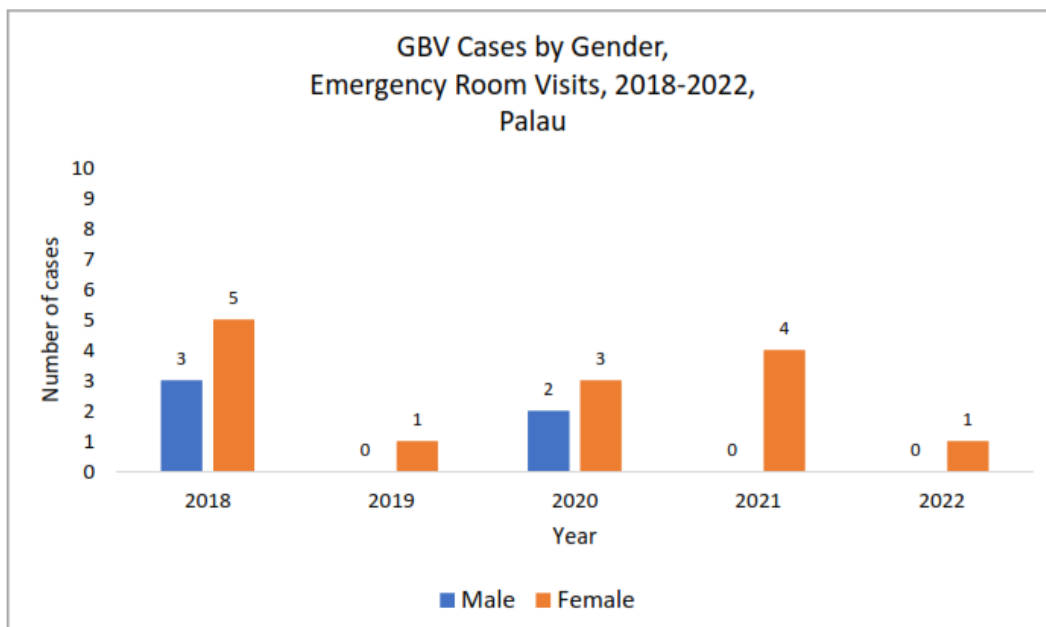


Table 1: Sexual Assault Cases Filed and Convicted in Palau 2018–2023 (Source: Palau Judiciary).

	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Filed	Convicted	Filed	Convicted	Filed	Convicted	Filed	Convicted	Filed	Convicted	Filed	Convicted
Sexual Assault Cases	4	4	3	3	5	4	4	4	3	3	2	1

Note: This data counts the cases and convictions for sexual assault offenses under the Penal Code (Title 17) of the Palau National Code. This is a separate set of (generally more serious) offenses to those charged under the *Family Protection Act* (see Tables 2 and 3 below). In 2020, one case was dismissed when the victim refused to testify and the prosecution requested dismissal. In 2023, one case was dismissed because the key witness (the victim) had left Palau. This data is not disaggregated by the gender of the accused and/or victim(s).

Table 2: Number of Criminal Cases Filed under the *Family Protection Act*, 2015–2022 (Source: Palau Judiciary).

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of FPA Criminal Cases Filed	35	28	44	54	50	66	53	59

Note: This data counts the numbers of criminal cases filed under the *Family Protection Act* (but not convictions). The majority, if not all, of these cases are domestic abuse offenses, however, in theory the data would also pick up any other criminal cases filed under the *Family Protection Act*. The vast majority of these counted cases are misdemeanor offenses. For example, in 2022, there were fifty-five (55) FPA misdemeanor citations filed, and four (4) FPA felony cases filed, totaling fifty-nine (59) criminal actions filed.

Table 3: Criminal Cases Filed Under the *Family Protection Act*, Gender Disaggregated for Defendants, 2020–2022 (Source: Palau Judiciary).

Year	Criminal Cases under FPA filed against males in Trial Division and COCP	Criminal Cases under FPA filed against females in Trial Division and COCP	Criminal Cases under FPA filed jointly against males and females	% of cases where defendant is male	% of cases where the defendant is female	% of cases where the defendants are both male and female
2020	54	11	0	83%	17%	0%
2021	48	4	0	92%	8%	0%
2022	53	6	0	90%	10%	0%

Table 4: Number of Civil Protection Order cases filed under the *Family Protection Act* 2015–2022 (Source: Palau Judiciary).

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022

Number of Civil Protection Orders Filed	47	70	78	74	69	67	69	40
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Note: This data counts all petitions filed for civil protective orders under the *Family Protection Act*, whether granted or not, and involving all genders. Cases may include joint applicants.

Table 5: Identified Victims of Human Trafficking in Palau 2018–2023 (Source: Anti-Human Trafficking Unit, Ministry of Justice, Palau).

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Total no. of victims	18	5	1	0	1*	6	31
Females	6	2	1	0	0	2	11
Males	12	3	0	0	1	4	20
Forced Labor	18	5	1	0	1	3	28
Sexual Exploitation	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
People Smuggling	2	0	0	0	0	3	5

*Recurring victim. Note: Some of the victims were classified according to more than one human trafficking category (especially in 2018), which explains why there are more offenses than victims in the second half of the table.

16. In the past five years, what actions has your country prioritized to address gender-based violence?

The response to gender-based violence in Palau is largely conducted with reference to the legal framework established by the *Family Protection Act* (FPA), which criminalizes physical abuse of family and household members (and also sets out some other offenses including endangering welfare of a minor or incompetent person) and also provides victims with access to civil protective orders. The language of the ‘FPA’ has become well-recognized in Palau⁷³ – and is often used as a local replacement for the term ‘GBV’ or domestic abuse. The FPA was enacted in late 2012 and began to be fully implemented in 2014. Over the decade or so of implementation of this Act, there have been several adjustments made to its institutional supporting structures and procedures.

⁷³ A survey conducted in 2023, indicated that around 75% of 1,172 respondents were familiar with the *Family Protection Act*. See: Belau Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (BANGO) (2023) ‘F&GBV Survey Results and Quarter 2 Social Marketing and IEC Materials’.

Implementation of the FPA requires complex cross-agency coordination. Since 2021, under the current administration, the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS) has been designated as the lead agency in relation to the coordination and implementation of the *Family Protection Act*.⁷⁴ The key coordinating structure is the ‘Family Protection Act Working Group’, consisting of representatives from the MHHS, Bureau of Public Safety (BPS) within the Ministry of Justice, Office of the Attorney General (OAG), Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Judiciary. This group meets fairly regularly and is also called together whenever one of its member agencies feels that a particular issue needs attention. An MOU, first developed in 2014, sets out the respective agreed roles of each of these agencies and includes an attached referral pathway for victims of domestic and family violence. This MOU has since evolved through several iterations and was last amended in December 2023.⁷⁵

Each of the implementing agencies and organizations also has, or needs to have, their own internal procedures for identifying and supporting victims and dealing with perpetrators. This is an ongoing challenge of policy and procedural alignment.⁷⁶ The FPA Working Group and its members have been working hard to remedy gaps and inefficiencies. In particular, recent work has been occurring on developing Ministry of Education procedures for referral of cases identified by teachers and other school staff, and a draft Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on the policing of family, domestic and sexual violence was drafted by an Australian Volunteer for the Bureau of Public Safety in 2023 but is yet to be implemented.

Also, to respond to these inter-agency coordination challenges, funded by Australian Aid, an ‘FPA Advisor’ has been appointed, for an initial 12 month period, to work on these coordination issues and further developing internal agency procedures. As of May 2024, the FPA Advisor was being on-boarded for the role. The FPA Advisor will also work on improving internal agency data collection, collation of the various sources of data on GBV and undertaking analysis for further policy development.

The Palau Judiciary has long had well-developed procedures for processing petitions for protective orders and produces several information sources for public use.⁷⁷ Under the most recent version of the FPA Working Group MOU it has sought to reduce its role in assisting petitioners with the paperwork in order to maintain the independence and integrity of the courts. Instead, the other implementing agencies are being asked to increase their roles in providing this assistance. In 2023, the Palau Judiciary published the results of a 2019–2020 court user survey.⁷⁸ From a survey of 65 respondents, most participants reported a positive experience with the court and 96% got all or part of the result that they wanted through their use of court services. However, almost 40% of survey respondents reported facing difficulties in going to

⁷⁴ Executive Order no. 466 on Reorganizing the Ministry of Health and Human Services.

⁷⁵ Memorandum of Understanding between the Office of the Attorney General, the Bureau of Public Safety, the Ministry of Health and Human Services, the Ministry of Education and the Palau Judiciary concerning the Family Protection Act, December 2023.

⁷⁶ Many of the coordination issues identified in the Australia Aid-funded review of the Family Protection Act in 2017 are still present. See: Australian Aid and Pacific Women Shaping Development (December 2017) ‘Review of the Implementation of the Family Protection Act 2012.’

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Palau Judiciary (June 2014) ‘Family Protection Act: Domestic Abuse Information Handbook’.

⁷⁸ Ann Sumner and Jazmine Elmolla (May 2023) ‘2019/2020 Family Law and Family Protection Cases in Palau: A Review of the 2019/2020 Family Law & Family Protection Act Survey.’

the police or courts, with the most common difficulty being delays in police serving a restraining order, and a desire for better police communication and training.

A Victim of Crime Advocate (VOCA) has also been an important part of the overall response under the FPA. The VOCA role was moved from its previous location in the Ministry of Justice to the MHHS Bureau of Public Health and Human Services. While the VOCA hotline number is retained and responded to, currently rather than being a single person role, the response services are being handled by a small team of social workers who provide case management support to victims.

In relation to training, the MHHS has been able to widely provide training on GBV to medical and social worker staff. Training needs remain relatively unmet within the police, school teachers and other frontline workers primarily due to the difficulties in arranging time out of normal schedules for such training to take place.

Through various sustained outreach programs, the FPA Working Group has sought to ensure that the public is aware of the avenues for seeking assistance and services in relation to GBV in Palau. This has included FPA Working Group members, especially Vice President Uduch Sengebau Senior and Justice Honora Rudimch, presenting information to women's groups and leaders around the country in person and also via radio and streamed broadcasts.⁷⁹ These leaders have reported anecdotally that following such outreach activities there would often be one or two applicants from those communities who filed petitions for protective orders.

A more recent outreach program 'No Silence on Violence', with funding from the ADB's 'Covid-19 Reponse Project' (US\$209,000, December 2021–mid-2024) and the IOM (\$US10,000, September–December 2023), and implemented by an NGO, the Belau Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (BANGO), included distribution of pamphlets and other public information campaigns on how to access government services. BANGO also held awareness-raising training for teachers at three elementary schools and for women's organizations. Another branch of this project supports a specialized counseling service provided by the civil society organization, Semesemel a Klengelakel (SKO).

The Palau Red Cross Society (PRCS), through its 'Single Incident Emergency Assistance' program is able to provide victims of domestic and family abuse with short-term emergency accommodation for three days and essential supplies on a case by case basis. This program is funded through the PRCS' own fundraising efforts because large grant funding is not available to cover individual households. There are also ongoing efforts to establish a permanent shelter and 'one-stop-shop' to assist women who are victims of domestic violence and their dependent children. Funding for such a shelter has been promised by the government of India, and as of early 2024, a suitable site is being sourced where site preparation costs are not prohibitive.

A legal review of the FPA has been flagged as a needed process, to examine issues including the treatment of non-physical coercive control and the operation of the 'no drop policy'.

⁷⁹ See Judy Putt and Lindy Kanan (2021) 'Family Protection Orders in the Pacific Region: Report from a Symposium Held in December 2021' (Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University and the Pacific Community), pp. 14–16.

17. In the past five years, what strategies has your country used to prevent gender-based violence?

Prevention of gender-based violence in Palau takes a number of different approaches.

Criminal penalties for domestic and family abuse under the *Family Protection Act* commonly require offenders to undertake rehabilitation programs implemented by the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS) Division of Behavioral Health. This is a specialized group ‘12-step’ counseling program on ‘Living Without Violence’.

The Division of Behavioral Health has also launched a ‘Strengthening Families Program’ to help prevent family violence by bringing entire families together to improve communications and address root causes of violence.

Counseling and advice to men regarding domestic and family abuse is provided in the men’s health clinics. However, more widespread programs for men and boys are still generally lacking. A survey conducted by BANGO in 2023 on knowledge and attitudes towards GBV, indicated that it was much more likely for men to hold the view that family and domestic violence should be kept private,⁸⁰ perhaps indicating that more open discussion among males is desirable.

Palau has been taking part in annual ‘16 days of activism campaigns,’ which include such activities as ‘roadside campaigns’, national forum events and media coverage all aimed at general public awareness-raising on the issue of gender-based violence. Such events have tended to be funded by international donor partners such as the IOM and UNFPA.

The above-mentioned ‘social marketing on GBV prevention’ programs run by BANGO and funded by the ADB and IOM (see Question 16) have included various outreach activities aimed at prevention of gender-based violence. The ADB reported that one of its objectives in developing the project with BANGO was to engage an organization that could approach different groups of women on a personal level, without necessarily using large public events as their forums.

The Palau Media Council has provided training and resources to journalists, collaborated with local NGOs, and developed media campaigns to raise awareness about GBV issues and advocate for policy change.

18. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence (e.g. online sexual harassment, online stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images)?

While there is growing awareness that technology-facilitated gender-based violence may be a problem in Palau, particularly among youth, there is yet to be a legislative framework to support action on these issues. A Senate Bill was introduced in 2019 sought to make cyberbullying a crime, and included a crime of non-consensual sharing of explicit, identifiable, photographs

⁸⁰ Belau Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (BANGO) (2023) ‘F&GBV Survey Results and Quarter 2 Social Marketing and IEC Materials’.

online.⁸¹ Another cyberbullying Bill was also introduced by the Senate in 2022, and included concern with abuse of minors through technology and the introduction of cyberstalking as a crime.⁸² However, these Bills are yet to be enacted. There is also very limited capacity within the Bureau of Public Safety for policing of online activities in Palau.

Note that the Ministry of Education (MOE) ‘School Handbook’ (2019) strictly prohibits cyberbullying among school students. The MOE reports that this is an area that may need more attention, although there is no specific survey data indicating a problem, and schools have not yet worked with students on issues of online sexual harassment.

19. In the past five years, what measures has your country taken to resource women’s organizations working to prevent and respond to GBV?

The ADB and IOM-funded projects introduced at Questions 16 and 17 above, resourced BANGO to undertake social marketing on anti-GBV projects. SKO was also resourced to undertake social counselling activities. These projects also assisted with capacity-building within this key NGO in Palau. Traditional women’s organizations have been involved as participants in community outreach campaigns against gender-based violence in the hope that they will become active support within their local communities, but these groups have not been financially resourced for these activities.

20. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to address the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, including social media?

A free media is guaranteed under the Palau Constitution (*Article IV §2*). Palau is served by two local newspapers, six radio stations, and two cable television stations broadcasting news, sports, education, and entertainment on a fee-for service basis. Certain channels are designated for local broadcasting and feature a combination of current affairs, entertainment, health, and public information from local and regional sources. Internet access also allows Palauans to freely access local and international social media and other websites.

The Palau Media Council, a small association of journalists, reports that it has actively worked to increase the leadership, representation, and participation of women in media through mentorship programs, capacity-building workshops, and advocacy efforts. These initiatives aim to empower women journalists and promote gender equality in decision-making processes within the industry. The Palau Media Council has integrated gender perspectives into media coverage of disaster risk reduction and climate resilience by highlighting the gendered impacts of environmental challenges and amplifying the voices of women and vulnerable communities. To address violence against marginalized groups of women and girls, the Palau Media Council has promoted diversity and inclusion in media representation, amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and challenging harmful stereotypes through accurate and sensitive reporting.

⁸¹ Island Times (April 12, 2019) ‘Senate Introduces Cyberbullying Bill’ <https://islandtimes.org/senate-introduces-cyber-bullying-bill/>.

⁸² Island Times (January 14, 2022) ‘Cyberbullying Bill Introduced’. <https://islandtimes.org/cyber-bullying-bill-introduced/>.

21. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken specifically tailored to address violence against marginalized groups of women and girls?

The well-established disability rights NGO ‘Omekesang’, which has around 35–40 (majority female) active members, has been a frequent participant in promoting gender equality in Palau in general, and in the campaign against gender-based violence specifically. They are engaged with the ‘FPA Working Group’ in the effort to refine referral pathways for victims. During a consultation, Omekesang’s leadership did not report any specific known vulnerability of women and girls with disabilities to gender-based violence, although they noted that they could not speak for what may occur behind closed doors. They did report that minor harassment of women and girls with disabilities occasionally occurs in public places, but that the police would respond well when called. They saw gender-based violence as a general issue of importance in the country and because of this Omekesang is engaged in preventative activities.

Non-Palauan migrant residents can access the same government services in relation to gender-based violence as per Palauan citizens. However, there have not been any programs on gender-based violence specifically tailored to migrant groups of women and girls in Palau. The migrant population in general is recognized as a vulnerable group in relation to the risk of human trafficking through the anti-human trafficking policies and programs.

The outreach activities on gender-based violence detailed at Questions 16 and 17 above have sought to reach women living outside of the main urban areas in Palau as far as possible. There are no known programs tailored to women and girls who identify as LGBTQI.

22. In the past five years, what actions and measures has your country taken to promote women’s participation in public life and decision-making?

Palau is a constitutional democratic republic with a directly (and separately) elected President and Vice President, a bi-cameral Congress (*Olbiil Era Kelulau*), and an independent judiciary. Sixteen subnational ‘States’ each have an executive and legislature and have mandates over natural resources in their territories including local land-use zoning. Traditional governance is also recognized in the Constitution and it operates alongside, and is partly incorporated into, the constitutional government. In particular the national Council of Chiefs (*Rubekul Belau*), consisting of the highest ranking male chiefs of each State, is given a constitutional role of providing advice to the President on matters of traditional laws and customs.

Palau is a matrilineal society in which traditional titles and authorities are inherited through the female lineage.⁸³ According to tradition, different complementary roles are allocated to men and women. This is seen as a balanced duality rather than a dominant-subordinate relationship between genders, where the success of each depends on the other.⁸⁴ Female chiefs (title holders) are selected from among female strong members of their clan, and they in turn select male chiefs from among those of suitable matrilineal descent. According to custom, male chiefs manage clan lands, but do need to consult with strong members of the clan, both male and

⁸³ This is not to say that Palau culture is homogeneous; there are regional variations. For example, see this interview explaining such variations: Island Conservation (December 2017), ‘Interview with Ungilreng Takawo, Matriarch of Kayangel, Palau,’ <https://www.islandconservation.org/interview-matriarch-kayangel-palau/>.

⁸⁴ Republic of Palau (2024) ‘VNR Report 2024: Harnessing Our Cultural Heritage to “Build Back Better” for a Sustainable Future,’ p. 37.

female, when selling or leasing the land.⁸⁵ The reality for women in Palau is that their traditional roles have meant that they are often seen as the power behind the men in the community.⁸⁶

Each of the 16 States, based on their respective Constitutions, have various governance configurations and different approaches to appointing Governors and legislators, but all include some form of advisory or direct law-making roles for the State’s highest ranked male chiefs. In some States this involves traditional leaders forming a council of chiefs, in others they automatically become legislators, and in a few States the high chief is automatically appointed as Governor or in a co-executive role. Due to the way that these traditional chiefs are appointed by custom, these roles would never be held by women.⁸⁷

Women are well-represented as judges in the Judiciary but remain under-represented in the Congress (*Olbiil Era Kelulau*), the Cabinet, and in elected State positions. To date, there has been no female President, but there have been two female Vice Presidents, including the incumbent. At present, of the eight Ministries only one is headed by a woman – i.e. the Minister of Justice J. Uduch Sengebau-Senior who is appointed to a ministerial portfolio by virtue of her election as Vice President. There are no temporary special measures such as parliamentary quotas to improve political representation of women in Palau, and proposals to introduce such in the past did not gain much traction. A number of our consultations indicated concern that the low numbers of women in elected positions means that issues that particularly affect women such as maternity leave and the climate change impacts on women’s traditional livelihoods, may be dismissed or given lower priority.

Table 6: Women members of the Palau National Congress (Olbiil Era Kelulau), 2013–2024.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
No. of women members of the House of Delegates (from total of 16)	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
% of women members of the House of Delegates	0	0	0	0	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	6.3	6.3	6.3	6.3
No. of women members of the Senate (from total of 13)	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
% of women members of the Senate	23	23	23	23	15.4	15.4	15.4	15.4	8	8	8	8

⁸⁵ Petra Mahy and Elilai Ngirmang (September 2023) ‘Legal Gap Analysis of Gender Equality in the Republic of Palau’ (report prepared for the International Organization for Migration) p. 41.

⁸⁶ Republic of Palau (June 2019) ‘Pathway to 2030: Progressing with our Past Toward a Resilient, Sustainable, and Equitable Future.’

⁸⁷ Petra Mahy and Elilai Ngirmang (September 2023) ‘Legal Gap Analysis of Gender Equality in the Republic of Palau’ (report prepared for the International Organization for Migration), p. 19.

At the national level, the Mechesil Belau, a pan-Palau organization of traditional women title holders from each State, provides some balance to the role of the Rubekul Belau (Council of Chiefs). For three decades it has held an annual conference and advocates on women’s concerns, and has had some success in having such concerns translated into legislative action. Among these reported successes is the *Family Protection Act* (2012). Mechesil Belau also advocates for overall support for women’s and men’s traditional roles in food production and advocates for conservation laws, including customary laws, and for healthy diets.⁸⁸

At the State level, over the years 2019–2024, there have been a small handful of women elected executive leaders. In Ngatpang State, Ms. Francesca Otong was Governor from 2019–2023. The Governor of Ngeremlengui State, Ms. Mary Frances Remengesau, has been in office from 2016 to present. In Hatohobei state, the Governor and Lieutenant Governor across the period 2019–2024 have both been female. In Sonsorol State, Ms. Laura I. Miles was Governor in 2019, and Ms. Lucy Pedro was Lieutenant Governor from 2020–2024, before becoming Governor in 2024. In the State legislatures, women representatives have ranged from 0% to 38% of the total membership, with a slight overall upward trend in recent years (see Table 7 below). Some States, such as Melekeok and Ngiwal, which have a high number of dedicated seats for chiefs have notably had low proportions of women legislators.

Table 7: Women Members of State Legislatures in Palau (per January 1 each year)

⁸⁸ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. 27.

State	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Aimeliik (9 seats)	2/9 (22%)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)
Airai (15 seats)	3/15 (20%)	3/15 (20%)	3/15 (20%)	3/15 (20%)	5/15 (33%)	5/15 (33%)
Angaur (9 seats, 4 are chief seats)	0/9 (0%)	0/9 (0%)	0/9 (0%)	0/9 (0%)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)
Hatohobei (9 seats)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)
Kayangel (12 seats)	4/12 (33%)	4/12 (33%)	4/12 (33%)	4/12 (33%)	4/12 (33%)	4/12 (33%)
Koror (17 seats)	3/17 (18%)	3/17 (18%)	3/17 (18%)	2/17 (12%)	2/17 (12%)	2/17 (12%)
Melekeok (16 seats, 10 are chief seats plus 1 Governor seat)	0/16 (0%)	0/16 (0%)	0/16 (0%)	1/16 (6%)	1/16 (6%)	1/16 (6%)
Ngaraard (9 or 10 seats)	2/9 (22%)	2/9 (22%)	2/9 (22%)	2/9 (22%)	2/10 (20%)	2/10 (20%)
Ngarchelong (16 seats, 8 are chief seats)	2/16 (12.5%)	2/16 (12.5%)	2/16 (12.5%)	2/16 (12.5%)	2/16 (12.5%)	2/16 (12.5%)
Ngardmau (9 seats)	3/9 (33%)	3/9 (33%)	2/9 (22%)	2/9 (22%)	2/9 (22%)	2/9 (22%)
Ngatpang (9 seats)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (11%)	1/9 (33%)	3/9 (33%)
Ngchesar (17 seats, 8 are chief seats)	2/17 (12%)	2/17 (12%)	2/17 (12%)	3/17 (17%)	3/17 (17%)	3/17 (17%)
Ngeremlengui (11 seats)	3/11 (27%)	3/11 (27%)	4/11 (36%)	4/11 (36%)	4/11 (36%)	4/11 (36%)
Ngiwal (17 seats, 10 are chief seats)	1/17 (6%)	1/17 (6%)	2/17 (12%)	2/17 (12%)	1/17 (6%)	1/17 (6%)
Peleliu (15 seats, 5 are chief seats)	2/15 (13%)	2/15 (13%)	2/15 (13%)	2/15 (13%)	2/15 (13%)	2/15 (13%)
Sonsorol (13 seats)	1/13 (8%)	1/13 (8%)	1/13 (8%)	1/13 (8%)	1/13 (8%)	5/13 (38%)
Total	30/203 (14.8%)	29/203 (14.3%)	30/203 (14.8%)	31/203 (15.3%)	34/204 (16.7%)	39/204 (19.1%)

Note: Data for Table 7 were manually collected by the Bureau of Domestic Affairs, Ministry of State, from each State Office (June 2024).

Women are well-represented in management positions within national government ministries and other agencies and on national boards. In a 2021 analysis of eight sampled organizations conducted by the ADB/Private Sector Development Initiative, women in Palau were found to occupy 33% of senior management positions, including Chief Executive Officers, Chief Financial Officers and Chief Operating Officers. This is among the highest in the Pacific.⁸⁹ In our consultations for this report, equal or greater employment of women in government and non-government organizations, including at management levels, was also consistently reported.

⁸⁹ The Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (September 2021) ‘Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific’.

There have been some sporadic past initiatives to promote women’s participation in elected office in Palau. Earlier UNDP-supported programs held in 2011 and 2013 involved ‘Practice Parliaments for Women Leaders’.⁹⁰ The ‘Center for Women Empowerment Belau’ (C-WEB), an NGO dedicated to encouraging and assisting women to run for public office was established in 2014 by Vice President Uduch Sengebau Senior, Senator Rukebai Inabo and former Minister Baklai Temengil, but has remained inactive of late. The Australian-funded ‘Pacific Women’s Parliamentary Partnerships’ (2013–2018) supported capacity-building for selected Palauan women parliamentarians to ensure gender equality issues are better addressed.⁹¹

Triggered by a 2016 study showing challenges in State government capacities, the Bureau of Domestic Affairs in the Ministry of State through a technical partnership with the UNDP, has run a ‘Governance Strengthening Program’. This program is aimed at strengthening institutional and leadership capacities at the State level, including in relation to financial management. This program included several multi-day training events on ‘Governance Clinic for Leadership’ (August 2022), ‘Governance Clinic for Office of the Governor and Legislature’ (Nov-Dec 2022) and ‘Public Financial Management’ (February 2024). All these clinics have had a fairly even proportion of male and female participants.

On September 20, 2023, a one-day meeting of elected women members of the Senate, House of Delegates, State Executives and State Legislatures of the Republic of Palau was held in Koror. This event was organized by the Office of the Vice President and sponsored by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Thirty-three (out of the total 43) women members of the Senate, House of Delegates, State Executives and State Legislatures came together to reflect on issues of women’s political representation and to recommend actionable changes to support women’s empowerment in decision-making institutions. In the ‘Joint Communiqué’ from the event, it was noted that the participants discussed the value of having more women in elected leadership, and also acknowledged the barriers for women’s electoral success including: assumptions about the proper roles of men and women in public elected roles and other spaces; and women’s lack of knowledge, experience and encouragement. The participants agreed to establish a network of women elected leaders in Palau to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and support among themselves, as well as to establish a platform for seeking additional program support and allies for the empowerment of current and future women leaders. However, this resolution has not yet taken strong organizational shape.

A seminar on ‘Women in Government’ is also planned for August 2024 as a requested initiative by the National Security Coordinator. Organized by the US Department of State, the event is expected to have around 35 invitees from the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. This will be a seminar for women to discuss challenges facing women in today’s workplace. The seminar will foster discussions on issues participants have had to conquer in order to become the leaders they are today. The seminar will give participants tools and strategies for leading teams, making strategic decisions in uncertain environments, and managing change and conflict while building relationships and networks.

⁹⁰ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. 27.

⁹¹ Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (September 2020) ‘Pacific Women Shaping Development: Palau Country Plan Summary.’

23. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase women’s access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technologies (ICT)?

No known initiatives have been undertaken in relation to this issue in Palau.

24. Please describe your country’s current national women’s machinery (government entity exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women) and describe the measures that your country has taken over the past five years to establish and/or strengthen it.

In the 2000s, there was only non-specific mention of the needs of women within the formal institutional structure of the national government in Palau. The Bureau of Community Services, within the Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs, had a broadly defined role of identifying and formulating responses to the needs of women and youth and issues of child and spousal neglect (per Executive Order no. 203, 28 November 2001).

Then, during the previous national administration of President Tommy Remengesau Jr. (January 2013–January 2021), a Division of Gender, within the Bureau of Aging, Disability and Gender, was established within the Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs (per Executive Order no. 381, 21 September 2015). In accordance with Executive Order no. 381, this Division of Gender was formally mandated to conduct a gender needs assessment survey, coordinate gender sensitive policies that correlate with CEDAW, serve as a focal point on gender issues, manage funded technical assistance and training, collaborate with State governments to establish “Family Resources Centres” and coordinate with traditional and non-traditional organizations. A 2016 stocktake of the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming in Palau, conducted by the former Ministry of Cultural and Community Affairs with support from the Pacific Community (SPC), showed commitment to gender equality in key strategic planning documents, but limited technical capacity for gender analysis and policy implementation.⁹² It was during this administration period that the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy was first developed and formally issued in April 2018. The development of the Gender Mainstreaming Policy, and some other technical support and programming on gender, was supported by the Australian Government’s Aid program.⁹³

Under the current national administration of President Surangel Whipps Jr. (January 2021–present), the Division of Gender was shifted to the Bureau of Domestic Affairs within the Ministry of State (per Executive Order no. 452, June 16, 2021). The Division of Gender is formally mandated to ensure that gender equality policies are shared across government and involve the highest levels of government, to assess and report on the gender responsiveness of government departments and to implement the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy. In theory, the Division should be headed by Chief with up to five staff members. At present, the Division of Gender is underfunded with low staffing. There has been no Chief of the Division since mid-March 2022,⁹⁴ and therefore responsibility is covered by the Director of the Bureau of Domestic Affairs. The Division is currently reliant on funding from the Pacific Community

⁹² Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs and Ann Kitalong (2016) ‘Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments: Republic of Palau’.

⁹³ Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (September 2020) ‘Pacific Women Shaping Development: Palau Country Plan Summary.’

⁹⁴ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. 36.

(SPC) for a gender program officer (since 2023) and the ADB's support for a gender mainstreaming technical consultant (2023–2024).

At least on paper, a 'High Level Committee for Gender Mainstreaming' has been initiated through the Ministry of State. Key stakeholders and potential members of this high-level committee are as follows: all ministries, the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO), the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), the Office of Climate Change, the Office of Planning and Statistics (OPS), the National Environment Protection Council (NEPC), the Palau Chamber of Commerce (PCOC), Palau Organic Growers Association (POGA), Palau Red Cross Society (PRCS), Mechesil Belau, Palau Community College (PCC), Risel Belau (an open membership Palauan women's group established in 2018) and top businesswomen in Palau.⁹⁵ However, this Committee is not yet in active operation.

Under the current administration the Division of Gender has been involved in the following activities: An gender assessment of agriculture and the rural sector;⁹⁶ coordinating with the ADB for revisiting the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy, including development of terms of reference; establishment of the Micronesia Islands Forum (MIF) Gender Equality Committee; establishment of the MIF Gender Equality Committee Framework; coordinating with the development of the Australia - Palau Gender Country Plan, via the Pacific Women Lead Program for Palau; annual International Women Day Ceremonies; annual 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence campaigns; Local Governance Strengthening Program, including establishment of Public Finance Management Standard Operating Procedures at local level to ensure transparency, accountability and access to allocations of public funds, lands and service delivery; numerous inter-ministerial and agency working groups, including relating to SDGs, Anti-Human Trafficking, Food Security, Humanitarian Demining, Repatriation, Governors' Association, Association of Speakers, etc; providing local and regional support to the annual Palau Mechesil Belau Conference; numerous Regional and International gender working groups and components, including the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the Pacific Community (SPC), Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); providing input to the Palau National Development Plan and the Palau National Infrastructure Investment Plan.

Consultations for this report with government stakeholders indicate that there is a gap in high-level coordination and budgeting for gender equality, and a need for coordinated monitoring of progress across ministries. Further, staff skills for gender-based analysis of issues across sectors and ability to influence transformational change and facilitate whole-of-government mainstreaming are still limited.⁹⁷

25. In the past five years, what other mechanisms and tools has your country used to mainstream gender equality across sectors? (e.g. gender focal points in the Executive, Legislature or Judiciary; inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms; gender audits, consultations with women's organizations)

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 36.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ FAO (2023) 'Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,' pp. 37–38.

There are no formally appointed gender focal points in the executive, legislature or judiciary, although key women leaders within these institutions do tend to act informally by championing gender equality objectives.

Individual ministries and agencies have sometimes considered gender aspects within their policy development processes and programming, but also do not generally have gender focal points.

As noted above at Question 16, the ‘Family Protection Act Working Group’ has been a key inter-agency coordination mechanism in relation to gender-based violence. Within some of the member agencies of the Family Protection Act Working Group, such as in the Bureau of Public Safety (national police), there are ‘FPA Focal Points’ or lead contact persons. Similarly, the ‘Anti-Human Trafficking Working Group’ performs a similar coordinating function for Palau’s recently revamped anti-human trafficking program and there are appointed leads within the involved government agencies.

The Australian Government’s ‘Palau Gender Equality Country Plan 2023–2027’, together with the consultation processes for producing this plan conducted by the Australian Embassy in Palau, have also functioned to draw together analysis of particular gender issues and gaps in the country.

26. If there is a national human rights institution in your country, what measures has it taken to address violations of women’s rights and promote gender equality?

Palau does not have a national human rights institution that conforms with the Paris Principles. During the 2011 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process of the UN Human Rights Council, Palau accepted recommendations to establish such a national human rights institution. This issue was again raised during the 2021 Universal Periodic Review. However, this international recommendation has not yet been acted on due to lack of institutional and funding capacity and political will.

Note that the Office of the Special Prosecutor is legislatively authorized to: (i) receive complaints, investigate, and prosecute violations of the Palau Constitution and laws; and (ii) investigate and act as prosecutor for the national government in cases in which the Ministry of Justice or the Office of the Attorney General face a conflict of interest or other ethical considerations.⁹⁸ In theory, therefore, the mandate of the Special Prosecutor is sufficiently broad to enable them to address violations of human rights guaranteed under the Palau Constitution or law. To date, however, the Office of the Special Prosecutor has focused primarily on prosecuting cases of misconduct in public office, and there is no indication that any complaints of human rights violations have been overlooked.

27. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the women, peace and security agenda?

⁹⁸ Palau National Code, Title 2, § 503.

Palau is a country at peace and does not have its own military. The country's defence is secured through the Compact of Free Association with the United States. It has therefore not been felt necessary to pursue implementation of the women, peace and security agenda. No issues in this regard have been raised in relation to US military presence in Palau and military personnel interactions with local communities.

Note that the Office of Professional Standards (also known as the Bureau of Professional Conduct) within the Ministry of Justice, is authorized to receive and respond to any public complaints of police misconduct, including police treatment of women members of the public.

28. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase the leadership, representation and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and crisis response, at decision-making levels in situations of armed and other conflicts, and in fragile or crisis settings?

Palau is not involved in armed or other conflicts or humanitarian actions. It has therefore taken no action in relation to the leadership, representation or participation of women in conflict prevention or responses.

29. In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to enhance judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women and girls in situations of armed and other conflicts or humanitarian action and crisis response?

As noted at Questions 27 and 28 above, Palau is not engaged in any conflicts, humanitarian actions or crisis responses.

In 2019, Palau ratified the United Nations Trafficking in Persons Protocol and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its supporting protocols. In April 2023, Palau significantly amended its *Anti-Human Trafficking Act*.⁹⁹ The new law refined the relevant criminal offenses, significantly increased maximum and minimum penalties, and particularly removed the previous judicial discretion to impose either a fine or prison term – now both are mandatory. These actions reaffirm the government's continuing commitment to combat transnational crime with special attention to human trafficking, and this was recognized in the upgrading of Palau from 'Tier 2 Watchlist' to 'Tier 2' in the 2023 US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report.

30. In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child, including adolescent girls?

⁹⁹ RPPL 11-28, codified at Palau National Code, Title 17, ch 21.

Palau ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1995. Palau's third periodic report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, prepared in 2023,¹⁰⁰ raised some general issues of child rights, including age of criminal responsibility, concerns around customary adoption practices and rules preventing passing Palauan citizenship to children not of Palauan heritage.

In relation to issues of discrimination and violation of the rights of the girl child specifically, it was noted that there is remaining concern about the legal age of marriage which is not regulated when both parties are Palau citizens and is set as 16 for girls (with parent consent) and 18 for boys when one party in the marriage is non-Palauan.¹⁰¹ This law remains unchanged. While it is widely recognized that this law should be amended for consistency with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international principles, marriage prior to age 18 does not exist in practice in Palau. The 2020 Census reported no married persons under the age of 18.

Beyond providing all usual educational, health and other services to all children, including girl children and adolescent girls, no action has been deemed necessary to correct any discriminatory practices.

31. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation and land degradation?

The Palau Climate Change Policy, adopted in 2015, has the objectives of enhancing adaptation and resilience to the expected impacts of climate change across all sectors, improving Palau's ability to manage unexpected disasters and to minimize disaster risk and to mitigate climate change by moving towards low carbon emission development. While the Climate Change Policy predicts adverse effects on subsistence livelihoods, households, families and health, it does not explicitly address gender concerns. The Office of Climate Change is currently developing a new climate change policy which will make more direct reference to gender concerns – this was triggered through consultations with other government officers who pointed out the need for gender and inclusion to be incorporated into the policy. At the time of writing in mid-2024 this policy is still in draft form. A National Adaptation Plan is also under development with coordination by the Office of Climate Change.

Understanding and monitoring the exact impacts of climate change on women's lives and livelihoods in Palau is still developing, and the Office of Climate Change acknowledges a need for additional capacity in this regard. The Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC), which mostly focuses on scientific studies of marine biodiversity and ecosystems, is currently conducting a socio-economic survey to understand the expected values and benefits of the Palau National Marine Sanctuary (PNMS) across all 16 States of Palau, including whether households can easily access marine foods.¹⁰² The results of this survey are not yet available but are likely to be a valuable resource when complete.

¹⁰⁰ Republic of Palau (2023) 'Third Periodic Report of States Parties to Committee on the Rights of the Child – Republic of Palau.'

¹⁰¹ Palau National Code, Title 21, § 201.

¹⁰² Palau International Coral Reef Center, 'Palau National Marine Sanctuary,' <https://picrc.org/work/palau-national-marine-sanctuary/>.

A study by the Ebiil Society from 2020 on gender and natural resources in Palau¹⁰³ detailed the traditional and changing gender roles in relation to fisheries, aquaculture, gleaning of invertebrates, collecting of traditional medicines from forests and in agriculture. Participants particularly voiced concern around disappearance of traditional medicine plant habitats as well as the impacts of unsustainable coastal development. Our consultation for this report with a leader of the Palau Conservation Society (PCS) indicated similar concerns, including noting a link between women-focused cultural ceremonies such as the ‘hot bath ritual’ and other first birth practices and the increasing difficulty in obtaining the particular traditional medicines that are specific to each clan. The loss of such medicinal plant resources poses threats to Palauan women’s cultural identity. Another theme mentioned was the potential erosion of traditional knowledge around best invertebrate gleaning times and other agricultural planting and harvesting practices which may lose relevance as the climate changes.

There has been some gender responsive programming in this space. The Asian Development Bank (ADB), through the ‘The Disaster Resilient Clean Energy Financing Project’ (2020–present) (US\$4.9m), is facilitating access of low income households and female borrowers to affordable disaster resilient clean energy financing in Palau via the National Development Bank of Palau. The project has strong pro-poor, socially inclusive and gender sensitive features. The project will directly benefit approximately 900 households in Palau (or about 3,000 inhabitants), including at least 450 low-income households and 180 women-headed households. The project recognizes that women are more likely to be primary carers and household managers and therefore should be integrally involved in household energy decisions.¹⁰⁴

The Green Climate Fund has also been sponsoring climate and gender projects in Palau, including the ‘SAP029: Ecosystem-based Adaptation for Reducing Community Vulnerability to Climate Change in Northern Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS)’ (2021–present). This program is aimed at building resilience to reduce the vulnerability of the natural ecosystems upon which these communities rely to climate change stressors, and involves both technical studies and small community grants.

The Global Environment Fund (GEF) Small Grants Program (SGP) also funded various phases of programs from 2013–2020, providing small grants to women, men and youth to improve community-level environmental actions and plans. This included taro patch restoration projects using traditional knowledge and sustainable agriculture. Gender-equal participation objectives were met.¹⁰⁵

Island Conservation, an international NGO, which has invasive species eradication programs in some islands of Palau, including Kayangel, reports working closely with local women matriarchs and community leaders to ensure the success of their programs. While Island Conservation liaises with elected government officials for certain activities, it is the women leaders who tend to ensure program progress by mobilizing their communities.

¹⁰³ Ann Singeo et al. (2020) ‘Palau Gender and Natural Resources 2020 National Report’ (Global Environment Fund, UNDP and others); Ann Singeo et al. (2021) ‘Key Findings from Palau’s Gender and Marine Resources Assessment: Women and Men both Important for Use, Management and Youth Empowerment.’

¹⁰⁴ ADB, ‘Palau: Disaster Resilient Clean Energy Financing,’ <https://www.adb.org/projects/54011-001/main>.

¹⁰⁵ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau.’

The Belau National Museum has a local medicinal plant conservation and education program. There is also a community group of women who have maintained the ‘Oidel a Chas’ indigenous and medicinal plant garden at Ngermalk (Long Island Park Conservation Area) in Koror since 2021.

32. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction and building environmental and climate resilience?

Palau, like other small Pacific Island countries, is highly impacted by climate change and climate-related disasters. In recent years, tropical storms, typhoons, floods and droughts have affected livelihoods on multiple levels, including loss of crops and depletion of natural resources essential to sustain the rural economy and food security. Within this reporting period, in 2021, Typhoon Surigae caused approximately US\$4.8 million in losses.¹⁰⁶

Palau’s ‘National Disaster and Risk Management Framework 2010’ (NDRMF) was revised in 2016. The Framework aims to strengthen national disaster risk management structures and mechanisms to support improved disaster/emergency preparedness, response and recovery as well as the more effective integration of disaster risk considerations into the national development planning. The main implementing government agency is the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO). Partner organizations in this space include the Palau Red Cross Society (PRCS), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Australian Aid program.

The NDRMF has only brief mention of gender and of women as vulnerable groups in disasters and as needing special attention in relation to livelihood protection. NEMO acknowledges the limited narrative around gender within the NDRMF, but notes that gender equality is nonetheless an important part of project work occurring in relation to disaster management.

The ADB-funded ‘Disaster Resilience Program’ (2018–2020) was a loan of \$15 million to the government of Palau.¹⁰⁷ It supported gender actions on disaster resilience, inclusion of sex-disaggregated tracking of evacuees, and identification of their special needs in the Mass Rescue Operations Contingency Plan. The gender-related indicators within the program were successfully achieved. The program outcomes included the approval and implementation of gender-responsive community disaster plans and gender-responsive state disaster plans for all 16 states. Training workshops on gender-responsive community-based disaster risk reduction toolkits were also carried out. The School Emergency Management Plans developed included sex-disaggregated emergency cards, and training manuals rolled out for livestock and horticulture in relation to climate change and disaster resilience measures had gender considerations. A lesson learned from the program was that longer term relationship building and policy dialogue on gender (ahead of program preparation) can support deeper engagement on gender activities.

A key area where gender has a focus of concern is in relation to disaster management training. Beginning in 2018–2019, the PRCS started to take over training responsibilities from NEMO given its limited staff capacity. In March 2021, using funds received from the Green Climate

¹⁰⁶ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Asian Development Bank (December 2022) ‘Palau Disaster Resilience Program: Completion Report.’

Funds, PCRS conducted five days of comprehensive disaster management training with representatives from 13 of the 16 States, including by requesting that State Governors send members of both male and female community groups. By chance, this was just one month before Typhoon Surigae hit Palau. NEMO had managed to do initial preparedness work on evacuation shelters for vulnerable populations, especially the elderly. After the storm, the initial damage assessment was able to happen very quickly. The Red Cross was involved in that, and it was really female volunteers who pulled all the data together, made sure that all households were covered within 72 hours. After that initial training in 2021, the role of women in this space has shined through, especially in approaching female-headed households and those with disabilities.

After 2021, individual states requested State level disaster management training. As of June 2024, PCRS will have completed training in all 16 states. These trained community members now form 'Red Cross Disaster Action Teams' (RDATs). Training has also expanded over the years to include first aid, emergency communications, and Level 2 training on leadership management skills for selected participants. This training work has been funded by a patchwork of grants and donations, including from Japan and the Australian Embassy in Palau.¹⁰⁸ PCRS survey work has also helped to document vulnerable households and to build understanding of cultural preferences in relation to non-food item (NFI) emergency kits, including female hygiene products.

In relation to emergency shelter infrastructure, the IOM has been a key partner with NEMO. This has included revamping emergency evacuation shelters by installing typhoon shutters, solar lights etc¹⁰⁹ and installing three storage container units in the outer islands.¹¹⁰ IOM has also assisted States to revise their disaster plans and prepare community members through table-top exercises. IOM ensures that all its community consultations around disaster management include men and women.

The PCRS has identified the need for finding a way to adequately respond to climate change impacts on individual households and property, such as rising sea-levels or landslides caused by heavy rain. Households, including women-headed households, often do not have the resources to be able to build new required infrastructure on their land.

¹⁰⁸ Further details of training activities can be read in FAO (2023) 'Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau', pp. 29–30.

¹⁰⁹ IOM (23 August 2022) 'IOM Supports Palau to Build Community Resilience and Preparedness for Natural Hazards,' <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-supports-palau-build-community-resilience-and-preparedness-natural-hazards>.

¹¹⁰ IOM (17 May 2024) 'IOM Boosts Palau's Disaster Readiness with Container Units Handover,' <https://roasiapacific.iom.int/news/iom-boosts-palau-s-disaster-readiness-container-units-handover>.

Section 4: National Institutions and Processes

33. Please describe your country's national strategy or action plan for gender equality, including its name, the period it covers, its priority, funding and alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the targets under SDG 5.

Palau's strategy for achieving gender equality is stated in the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy (2018) and associated Action Plan (2018–2023). The Gender Mainstreaming Policy recognizes the need to ensure that all policies and services benefit all women and men. It aims to ensure equal rights, equal opportunities and equal access to services of women, men, girls and boys in accordance with the cultural values of Palau. It includes addressing the specific vulnerabilities and needs of disadvantaged segments of the population.

The Gender Mainstreaming Policy includes four strategic actions: (1) formation of a high-level coordination mechanism across the government to support the mainstreaming process; (2) the integration of gender perspectives in national, state and sector-level policies, legislation, strategies and programmes; (3) an organizational culture responsive to gender mainstreaming; and (4) a monitoring, evaluation, learning and accountability mechanism to assess progress towards gender equality.

These strategic actions require collaboration, cooperation and coordinated interventions with multiple entry points in ministries, civil society and development partners. The Gender Division, under the Bureau of Domestic Affairs at the Ministry of State, is responsible for implementing the Gender Mainstreaming Policy. However, as noted at Question 24, the Division is highly constrained by its limited staff capacity and budget. Also as noted, at Question 24, the Palau High Level Committee for Gender Mainstreaming is formed in theory but it is not fully operational. There is no specific funding allocated to gender mainstreaming under the national budget, but assistance is being provided by an ADB-funded consultant in 2024 to review the Gender Mainstreaming Policy and its implementation.

The Gender Mainstreaming Policy is a high-level policy that is explicitly linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as to the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2012 Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration. It does not reference the specific targets under SDG5 on Gender Equality. Such specific setting and measuring of targets occurred through the Voluntary National Review processes of 2019 and the process which is currently being completed and finalized in 2024.

34. Please describe your country's system for tracking the proportion of the national budget that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (gender-responsive budgeting), including the approximate proportion of the national budget that is invested in this area.

There is currently no formal mechanism for tracking the proportion of the national budget that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (gender-responsive budgeting), other than the direct budgetary allocation made to the Division of Gender itself (or to the larger Bureau that it sits within). This situation has not changed since

the Beijing+25 report where it was reported that the approximate share of the national budget that is allocated to pursuing gender equality and women’s empowerment was unknown.¹¹¹

For example, budget allocations for fiscal year 2019 show that \$377,000 was allocated for support to gender and aging in the Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs, representing 0.79% of the total budget. Later in time, budget allocations for fiscal year 2023 show an allocation of \$180,000 (0.12% of the total budget) to the Bureau of Domestic Affairs in the Ministry of State, within which the Division of Gender is located, but no specific budgetary allocation to the Division itself. Direct comparisons over time can, therefore, be difficult given the changing location and splitting and amalgamation of government portfolios across different administrations.

35. What formal mechanisms are in place for different stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

The Palau Government has formed an ‘SDGs Steering Committee’ to lead the processes for the Voluntary National Review for Palau’s 2024 review (via Executive Order no. 483 on Establishing a Framework for the Monitoring and Evaluation of the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, May 3, 2023). This SDGs Steering Committee consists of the President of the Republic, each of the eight Ministers or their designees, and representatives from the Rubekul Belau (Council of Chiefs), Mechesil Belau (Women of Palau), the Governors’ Association, the Organization of State Speakers, the Palau Chamber of Commerce and the Belau Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (BANGO).

This Steering Committee has also been requested to support the validation of this report in relation to the Beijing Declaration and Platform and Action. Beyond this, there are no standing processes for other stakeholder engagement in relation to these international commitments, however, broad government and non-government consultations are undertaken on an ad hoc basis for data collection and validation purposes. Our consultations also noted that community consultations conducted for policy-making and validation purposes are often dominated by women, especially the various women government office-holders.

The Office of the President has been exploring future options for building data collection tools that facilitate the continuous collection of information from both government and non-government sources rather than only doing so in an ad hoc manner for each separate reporting process.

36. Please describe how stakeholders have contributed to the preparation of the present national report.

¹¹¹ Republic of Palau, Ministry of Culture and Community Affairs and Ann Hillman Kitalong (April 2019) ‘Republic of Palau National Review for the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) in the context of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.’

A broad set of individual and small group stakeholder consultations have been undertaken for the preparation of this report including with government ministries and agencies, non-government organizations and international donor organizations and development partners. (See Appendix for the list of consultations.) Specific attempts were made to contact all organizations known to have an interest in, or programs relating to, issues of gender equality.

The stakeholders were each asked to describe the issues and background context relating to gender equality that occur within their area of responsibility or interests, to report on any related policy developments, to describe relevant programs or initiatives as well as any evidence of outcomes from such programs or initiatives and challenges encountered. The stakeholders were also invited to comment on the specific questions included within the Beijing+30 Report. The interviews with stakeholders were all recorded and transcripts generated, and relevant information and views incorporated into the drafting of the Report. In some cases, stakeholders opted to provide written responses rather than meeting due to their time constraints. Other written resources were also collected and referred to, including those referenced during the stakeholder interviews. A small number of stakeholders approached for consultations were unfortunately not available during the information-gathering timeframe.

The ‘SDG’s Steering Committee’, as introduced above at Question 35, has been requested to provide oversight and validation of the information included within the Report.

37. Please describe your country’s action plan and timeline for implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (if a State party), or of the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review or other United Nations human rights mechanisms that address gender inequality/discrimination against women.

Palau is a signatory to the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), but has not fully ratified it, and therefore has not reported to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process was last undertaken in Palau in 2021. Several recommendations relating to gender equality were made through the UPR review process, as follows:

- to ratify CEDAW without further delay, as well as the remaining yet unratified core international human rights treaties and their optional protocols, including ILO Conventions;
- to examine and take legislative measures in relation to the the lack of explicit legal prohibition on discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity;
- to ensure that children with disabilities and girls have equal access to education, health care, employment and a decent standard of living;
- to facilitate greater participation and representation of women in public office, including the legislature, executive and the judiciary including by adopting temporary special measures and by identifying and addressing the social factors that impeded women’s participation in public and political life, particularly at decision-making levels; and

- to revise the national code to ensure that the minimum age for marriage is 18 years for both males and females.¹¹²

Palau's ministries and service providers continue to strive to ensure that girls have equal access to education, health care, and a decent standard of living, as outlined in response to other questions in this Report. Some initiatives have been undertaken in response to the need to promote greater participation of women in elected office (see response to Question 22). However, Palau's National Congress and the general political and cultural climate has not supported the ratification of CEDAW and the other international human rights conventions, or to undertake constitutional or legislative changes related to principles of non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity or to amend the minimum age of marriage.

¹¹² United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, thirty-eighth session (3-14 May 2021) Compilation on Palau'.

Section 5: Data and Statistics

38. What are the most important areas in which your country has made most progress over the past five years when it comes to gender statistics at the national level?

Some key developments in collecting and organizing sex-aggregated statistics occurred beginning with the 2015 census. The census now classifies persons engaged in unpaid or domestic work as being ‘in the labor force’. Previously such persons were classified as outside the labor force. This change responds directly to SDG 5.4.¹¹³

Otherwise, the conduct of the latest Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) with results due to be released soon, the first since 2014, represents an important achievement.

Palau’s introduction of a digital health records system in 2023, with funding support from Australian Aid, is creating accessible and shareable comprehensive health records. This can facilitate person-centered assessment and care, and also forms an important source of information on gender differences in relation to healthcare.

39. Over the next five years, what are your country’s priorities for strengthening national gender statistics?

The Palau National Gender Mainstreaming Policy (2018) advocates for the production of sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators that can be used to monitor the impacts of programs and services on women and men and to use in closing gender gaps when appropriate.

While existing indicators from the National Population and Housing Census and the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) highlight the demographic differences in men and women’s economic participation in paid work, subsistence production and household labour, this arguably provides an incomplete picture of the status of gender equality in Palau. There is limited availability of sex-disaggregated data at the household and community levels which constrains the understanding of power dynamics at those levels.¹¹⁴ There are also gaps in sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis, including cultural statistics related to agriculture, fisheries and forestry.¹¹⁵

Cultural statistics that address the added value of agricultural products to local customary exchanges, such as first birth ceremonies, funerals and the bestowing of traditional titles, requires further data collection and analysis, as the value of these exchanges to family security and reciprocity are critical to Palau society.¹¹⁶ Further, the financial burdens that fall primarily on women from cultural obligations, particularly funerals, have particular impacts including potentially being one factor in causing out-migration from Palau and loss of local labor forces, and therefore documenting these gendered cultural burdens may be important in various policy-

¹¹³ Republic of Palau (June 2019) ‘Pathway to 2030: Progressing with our Past Toward a Resilient, Sustainable, and Equitable Future.’

¹¹⁴ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. 5.

¹¹⁵ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. xiii.

¹¹⁶ FAO (2023) ‘Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector – Palau,’ p. 23.

making areas. Women's and men's time use allocation to the care of children, the elderly and persons with a disability may be another area of need for data collection.

Crime statistics, including statistics disaggregated for the sex of both offenders and victims, from the Bureau of Public Safety is an area of needed development that is currently being worked on. The Judiciary has also been steadily increasing the sex disaggregated case data that it produces for the Supreme Court annual report.

In relation to gender-based violence, there is still a need for linking of data between the different ministries and agencies that provide services to victims so that their referrals and progress can be tracked while still maintaining their right to confidentiality. At present ministries' administrative data is likely to count single cases multiple times. Case management processes would also benefit from better linked data.

The population-wide impacts of climate change is another area of needed development for data collection, both quantitative and qualitative. Relatedly, sex disaggregated energy and water usage data would also be useful for planning purposes to show any differences between male and female-headed households.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has current or upcoming projects on two areas of data collection in Palau: the tax system and gender, and gender and access to insurance, including micro-insurance.

In general, more automated data collection is an area of need.

40. What gender-specific indicators has your country prioritized for monitoring progress on the SDGs?

In the 2019 Voluntary National Review Report, Palau integrated 6 of the 9 SDG5 indicators into the national SDG framework. These were 5.1 on ending all forms of discrimination against women, 5.2 on eliminating violence against women, trafficking and exploitation, 5.3 on elimination of gender-based harmful practices, 5.4 on recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work, 5.5 on women's full participation in leadership and society and 5.6 on universal access to sexual and reproductive health.

In the 2024 Voluntary National Review report, which is still being finalized at the time of writing this Beijing+30 report, Palau has integrated 5 of the 9 SDG5 indicators. These are 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6. The omission of 5.3 is due to the fact that neither child marriage nor female genital mutilation are issues in the Palau context.

The data for the 2024 VNR largely needed to be hand collected from the various government ministries and agencies. Processes for routine collection of this information are needed to ensure that Palau can continue to track progress for SDG5 and the other SDGs.

41. Which data disaggregations are routinely provided by major surveys in your country?

Data is fully sex-disaggregated in the major statistical surveys in Palau. These are conducted by the Office of Planning and Statistics, within the Bureau of Budget and Planning, Ministry of Finance.

The Palau Population and Housing Census has been, in recent times, conducted every five years, with the latest 2020 data released in 2022.¹¹⁷ The census covers basic demographic and housing data including current age, birthplace, household composition, usual place of residence, labor force statistics including paid and unpaid employment, income levels, marital status, religion, fertility rates, ethnicity, reason for migration, school enrolment, education level and discipline, household income and expenditures. Most tables in the publicly available census data compilation are sex disaggregated.

The second major statistical data collection survey is the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES). The last released survey data was in 2014. Another HIES survey has been conducted but at the time of writing the data are yet to be publicly released. The 2014 HIES survey provided a sex-disaggregated picture of employment, income, status of household heads, subsistence agriculture and handicraft activities, household expenditures by various categories, and access to amenities and communications.¹¹⁸

The Office of Planning and Statistics also publishes an annual Statistical Yearbook, with the most recent version released for 2022.¹¹⁹ The Statistical Yearbooks re-present census population and housing data alongside additional government data provided from ministries and other agencies. This additional data therefore relies on the sometimes limited capacities of the relevant agencies and is not always presented in sex-disaggregated form or necessarily designed to capture important gender data.

National health surveys conducted by the Ministry of Health and Human Services are all routinely sex disaggregated, and now also include information on sexual orientation.¹²⁰

A nation-wide survey of violence against women was last conducted in 2014,¹²¹ and this data is therefore now a decade old. Initial preparations are underway with the aim of conducting another survey on this topic, but external funding will be needed.

¹¹⁷ Republic of Palau, Office of Planning and Statistics (August 2022) ‘2020 Census of Population and Housing of the Republic of Palau,’ <https://www.palau.gov.pw/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2020-Census-of-Population-and-Housing.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ For a summary analysis of the 2014 HIES survey, see: Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs and the Ministry of Finance, ‘Palau 2013/2014 HIES Gender Profile’ (SPC).

¹¹⁹ See ‘Republic of Palau Statistical Yearbooks,’ <https://www.palau.gov.pw/executive-branch/ministries/finance/budgetandplanning/rop-statistical-yearbooks/>.

¹²⁰ See, e.g. Ministry of Health and Human Services, Government of Palau (2023) ‘Palau Adult Hybrid/Community Health Assessment Survey.’

¹²¹ Palau Ministry of Health (October 2014) ‘Belau Family Health and Safety Study: National Research Project on Violence Against Women in Palau’ (Australian Aid, Palau Ministry of Health and UNFPA).

Section 6: Conclusion and Next Steps

A key takeaway from this review has been the realization that while there has been much activity in relation to gender mainstreaming and inclusion of women and girls in Palau, it has largely been driven through the requirements of separate international donor partners at the project level. Individual implementing agencies and organizations have been happy to adopt these understandings and approaches. However, this has not yet fully ‘trickled up’ to the main government structures and policies. At the same time, the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy (2018) has remained fairly inactive during this government administration, and current plans and actions to push it along are also being primarily supported by international donor partners. Government and political buy-in is yet to occur.

One of the reasons for this might be the continued underrepresentation of women in elected offices in Palau, both at the National and State levels. Those women who are in office report that they face difficulties advocating for policies and laws on gender equality within these male dominated spaces. Cultural arguments that women are already powerful behind the scenes, or can wield their power through the traditional women’s organization Mechesil Belau, can be deployed to resist change.

There are many macro-economic and associated challenges in Palau, including an aging population, continued patterns of out-migration to the United States, low birth rates, a slow recovery of the tourism industry, reliance on migrant labor, and climate change impacts, all point to the need for gender sensitive policy-making and program implementation. Palau has achieved many successes in providing general equal access to education, social protection and health, but these other remaining challenges arguably need close attention to their gender dynamics.

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Appendix: List of Consultations

Stakeholders	Consultation Date	Representative(s)
Office of Climate Change	May 21, 2024	Mr Joe Aitaro
Ministry of Finance, Office of Budget and Planning	May 14, 2024	Director Casmir Remengesau, Mr Kyonori Tellames and additional staff
Ministry of Education	May 15, 2024	Dr Dale Jenkins, Minister of Education
Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS) /Family Protection Act Working Group	May 29, 2024	Ms Sherilynn Madraisau, Director of Bureau of Public Health
National Congress (OEK) - Senate	May 15, 2024	Senator Rukebai Inabo
National Emergency Management Office (NEMO)	written response provided	Mr. Waymine Towei, Executive Director
Environmental Quality and Protection Board (EQPB)	May 27, 2024	Ms Kliu Basilius, Environmental Outreach Officer
National Development Bank of Palau	May 16, 2024	Ms Karla West, Chief Operations Officer
Ministry of Human Resources, Culture, Tourism and Development	May 27, 2024	Chief Wanda Remeliik
Palau Community College	May 14, 2024	Dr Patrick Tellei, President
SDG Steering Committee	May 11, 2024	Ms Charlene Mersai, National Environment Coordinator
Palau Chamber of Commerce	May 9, 2024	Ms Vivien Protine, President, and Ms Ilebrang Olkeriil
International Organization for Migration (IOM), Palau	May 14, 2024	Mr Yohan Senarath, Head of Sub-Office
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	May 30, 2024	Ms Malika Shagzatova, Mr Ashish Narain, Ms Hilary Gorman, Ms Rachel Mary Anne Basas, Ms Alfonsa Koshiba and Ms Zoe Kintaro
Palau Media Council	written response provided	Ms Jill Senior
Australian Embassy in Palau	May 15, 2024	Ambassador Richelle Turner and Ms Clarissa Adelbai, Senior Program Manager
Palau Conservation Society	May 24, 2024	Ms Umai Basilius, Program Manager

Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC)	May 20, 2024	Ms Caryn Koshiba, CEO
Omekesang	May 16, 2024	Ms Tessy Nobuo, President
Palau Organic Growers Association	May 29, 2024	Ms Carol Ngiraidis, President
Palau WIOA Office	written response provided	Ms Glendalynn N. Ngirmeriil, Executive Director
Office of the President	June 7, 2024	Ms Landisang Kotaro, Chief of Staff
Belau Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (BANGO)	written response provided	Ms Sylvia Kloulubak
Island Conservation	June 12, 2024	Ms Loyola Darius, Program Manager