



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON GIRLS' EDUCATION AND WELLBEING IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

RAPID EVIDENCE REVIEW



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Cover Image: Secondary School students in Bikenibeu, Kiribati 2007. Photo: DFAT/Lorrie Graham

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Kore Global is a women-led consulting firm specialising in gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). Kore Global's mission is to help strengthen the sector by providing our clients with the GESI-focused research, strategy, design and measurement support they need to drive transformative change in the lives of the diverse groups they work with and serve.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank	NDoE	National Department of Education
ASPBAE	Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education	PACE	Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development
BMP	Below Minimum Proficiency	PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	PICs	Pacific Island Countries
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey	PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
ECE	Early Childhood Education	PNG	Papua New Guinea
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia	RER	Rapid Evidence Review
FODE	Flexible Open & Distance Education	RGA	Rapid Gender Assessment
FWRM	Fiji Women's Rights Movement	SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
GBV	Gender Based Violence	TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
GPE	Global Partnership for Education	UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
IMF	International Monetary Fund	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
ITU	International Telecommunication Union	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
KOBLE	Kolisen Blong Leftemap Edukesen	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
LAYS	Learning-adjusted Years of Schooling	UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
MESC	Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture	VANSTA	Vanuatu Standardised Test of Achievement
MHMS	Ministry of Health and Medical Services	WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
MOE	Ministry of Education		
MOET	Ministry of Education and training		
NCDs	Non-Communicable Diseases		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) commissioned a rapid evidence review (RER) to inform current and long-term public policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to girls' education and wellbeing in the Pacific.

Selected evidence was included in the RER from eleven Pacific Island Countries (PICs): Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu. The RER is intended to be highly practical, drawing robust conclusions and evidence-based actionable recommendations to support education access, meaningful participation and demonstrated learning for girls and adolescents in PICs. The full set of recommendations can be found in the conclusions of this report as well as the PICs policy summary.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

At the time of writing, in early 2022, the COVID-19 situation in the Pacific Islands is rapidly changing and will likely continue to affect the education sector in different ways. The evidence collected for the RER, however, was primarily based on data collected in 2020 and 2021, and therefore focuses on the impacts that the pandemic had during that period of time.

The RER focused on the following areas:

- the impact of COVID-19 on girls' education, particularly in terms of access and participation, learning outcomes, teaching and curricula, and parental support and involvement.
- the impact of COVID-19 on girls' wellbeing, focusing primarily on physical and mental health, sexual and reproductive health, protection from gender-based violence (GBV), livelihoods and unpaid care; and
- the effectiveness of development partner responses to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls' education and wellbeing.

The RER specifically sought to explore any evidence of differential impact on certain subgroups, for example based on socioeconomic factors, age and ethnicity.

Evidence was identified primarily through online searches, but also through communication with organisations in the region. Identified documents were reviewed for relevance and content, with a subset of these selected for full review. Rapid quality assessments were carried out; however, no documents were excluded purely on the basis of quality. Overall, evidence was drawn from 68 documents. These were largely primary data resources, although only four had been published as journal articles. The majority of evidence included in the review had been generated by UN agencies, as well as some by national governments and NGOs. There was a concentration of evidence related to PNG, followed by Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Samoa and Vanuatu.

It is important to acknowledge that a sole focus on English language sources is a key limitation of the RER. In addition, a number of authors provided only limited information on the methodologies they had used to generate evidence and, in some cases, analysis and write ups were limited and lacked detail. Nevertheless, given the limited evidence sources identified, these were in some cases still included in the RER, albeit with caveats about the potential quality of the data.

A number of evidence gaps were identified, including (*inter alia*):

- **A lack of sex disaggregated data and gender analysis.** As a result, some non sex disaggregated data was included in the RER that related more broadly to 'children' or 'youth'.
- **Little evidence was available that focused on intersectional factors and impacts on specific subgroups.**
- **Lack of evidence on the drivers of gendered impacts of the pandemic.**
- **Lack of evidence on the effectiveness of response by development partners.** The review did not map responses or include evidence of reach/scope, but rather only included evidence relating to impact or change brought about by interventions.
- **Lack of recent evidence on impacts after schools reopened and on learning outcomes.** Much of the evidence was focused on impacts while schools were closed.
- **Limited evidence of impacts of the pandemic on girls' wellbeing and how this may indirectly impact on girls' education and learning.**

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE RER



PARTICIPATION TO HOME LEARNING DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES

This section summarises evidence on participation in home learning during school closures.

It also presents evidence on types of home learning provided, and the extent to which students engaged in learning during school closures. This section largely draws on evidence that was not disaggregated by sex, although a number of sources do provide some data and gender analysis.

KEY MESSAGES:

- **Among PICs, school closures varied from just three to four weeks to several months (as of November 2021).** Various types of home learning materials were provided across the region while schools were closed, including those delivered through online platforms, television and radio broadcasts, and take-home packages.
- **Regional estimates for East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) in early 2021 suggested that the majority of students would be reached by home learning measures,** but still highlighted that large numbers would be left out.

- **Very few studies have sex disaggregated their findings or analysed any gender differences.** Only one study disaggregates data and finds slightly higher engagement among girls; however, in households with lower access to devices, and in particular more traditional rural households, boys are more likely to be given preference and access to those devices for learning.
- **Evidence shows that access to online and broadcasting learning materials was a key challenge, and that this may have been worse for girls.** There was also a clear urban rural divide, with students in rural areas less likely to access digital learning. Some evidence specifically points to the risk of online violence and harassment as a barrier to home learning and online access for girls.
- **Some evidence suggests a lack of motivation and interest in learning among children more generally, and that girls in particular struggled to maintain motivation and concentration when learning from home,** although the document does not provide comparative data. Evidence also points to increases in paid and unpaid work, which was hard to balance with schoolwork, and increased unpaid caring and domestic burdens for girls and older siblings in particular.
- **Parental support, and ability to support, has been highlighted as a key enabler to home learning.** Although there is generally a lack of evidence that sought to explore any gender differences, some country and regional evidence points to a lack of support by parents for girls during home learning. In addition, some evidence highlights the impact of home learning in terms of increasing unpaid care work, especially for women.
- **Although there is no gender analysis, several reports highlight challenges that teachers and schools have faced in terms of effective delivery of home learning support,** which led to differing levels of support offered to students.



ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION WHEN SCHOOLS REOPENED

The section presents evidence on what happened once schools reopened, and students were able to join classes again in person.

Very little of the evidence included in this section is sex disaggregated. The vast majority of the evidence is based on data from PNG.

KEY MESSAGES:

- **Two studies estimated risk of dropout, of which one was regional for EAP as a whole, and one was specifically focused on Fiji.** The EAP study pointed to an increased risk of dropout across the region (slightly more so for male students, and more so for students at tertiary level). In **Fiji**, the study focused on secondary education and predicted a decrease in enrolment rates, although this was not sex disaggregated.
- **Data from PNG showed that the majority of students did return when schools reopened, but that there was some delay, with not all students returning immediately after school reopening.** The evidence from **PNG** also shows that slightly more girls than boys had withdrawn from school at elementary level, and that students at early childhood education (ECE) and elementary level were more likely to have withdrawn.
- **Available evidence also suggests that absenteeism among students is higher than it was before the pandemic, with the lowest attendance among youngest children (post ECE), and intra-country variation across regions.** This data on attendance is primarily drawn from **PNG** and points to some gender differences. The most recent available data from PNG suggests slightly lower attendance for girls at secondary levels, and slightly lower attendance for boys at ECE and primary; however the statistical evidence of these findings is not clear. Evidence from **PNG** suggests that not all students returned when schools reopened, although more did so with some delay.
- **Evidence drawn from a wider range of PICs highlights a number of barriers in relation to students' return to school.** Two key barriers were identified in the literature: 1) fear of catching COVID-19; and 2) the impact of livelihood loss on parents' ability to pay school fees.
- **In addition, specific physical barriers, such as movement restrictions across islands and the impact of the tropical cyclones, were also reported in Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu.** Only one of the documents that provided evidence on barriers to return highlighted particular challenges for girls (although this is not compared to boys). These girl-specific challenges related to households' loss of income, and a lack of prioritisation of girls' education. The remaining documents did not present any sex disaggregated data.



LEARNING LOSS

This section presents evidence on learning outcomes.

The evidence on learning is particularly limited. A majority of evidence included in this section had not been disaggregated by sex.

KEY MESSAGES:

- **Regional estimations point to modest learning loss across the Pacific region as a result of the pandemic.** Similarly, learning loss was estimated for **Fiji**. However, these estimates are not sex disaggregated. The estimations focus on loss of LAYS (learning-adjusted years of schooling), as well as PISA test scores.
- **Six reports, of which one is regional, suggest that students, parents and teachers felt the pandemic had negatively impacted on students' learning.** Much of the data upon which this evidence is based is not sex disaggregated, although two U-reports from **Kiribati** and **Solomon Islands** provide perspectives of both girls and boys, with a higher proportion of boys feeling their learning has been negatively affected.
- **Very little data on exam results and learning is publicly available.** As a result of the pandemic, examinations in many PICs could not go ahead as planned, although newspaper reports, and social media suggest that in several countries these did go ahead eventually. The limited data that is available suggests learning loss as a result of the pandemic.
- **Some data on results is available from Samoa (2020 and 2021), Vanuatu (2019 and 2020) and PNG (2020).** These provide some indication of learning losses and increased school year failures or repetition rates. Further research is needed to understand whether when there are worsened outcomes these are directly linked to the pandemic.
 - **Results from Samoa are mixed, showing worsened outcomes in some cases only.** For example, there are differences across skills, with improvements for numeracy and some worsened outcomes in literacy (English). Changes are also not consistent across all school years.
 - **Where results data is sex disaggregated (Samoa and Vanuatu),** it suggests that girls may be suffering larger learning losses than boys.
 - **In Samoa, where boys' repetition rates are already higher across primary and secondary, boys were most affected by increased repetition rates or worsened transition rates in 2020.** Girls' repetition rates also increased. Overall repetition rates doubled in 2020 from 1 percent to 1.8 percent and recovered to 1.3 percent in 2021.
 - **In PNG, there are reports of a larger number of students failing high school.**
- **Reports that focus on learning loss estimation provide some trends across education levels, although detailed analysis is limited.** Results data for **Samoa** is disaggregated by Year of schooling and subjects, while for **Vanuatu** only one year and Subject is available. Evidence on perception of learning loss does not refer to differences across education levels.



WIDER IMPACTS ON GIRLS' EDUCATION AND WELLBEING

This section summarises available evidence on girls' wellbeing.

The majority of this evidence is sex disaggregated or focused exclusively on women and girls. However, none of the evidence presented in this section makes specific links to education outcomes.

KEY MESSAGES:

- **Evidence points to decreased wellbeing outcomes across the region.** The available evidence suggests that the pandemic has had a negative impact on GBV for women and girls, sexual and reproductive health, in particular menstrual health management for girls, as well as mental health among young people.
- **Evidence suggests that across the region women and children, in particular girls, have been experiencing an increase in violence during the pandemic, including in the home.** This includes evidence from **Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu** and **Kiribati**. Data points to increases in a range of forms of violence, and in the severity of violence, with increased reporting to hotlines across age groups.
- **Data shows that both girls and boys have reported feeling less safe during the pandemic, while data from three countries suggests an increase in violent or negative behaviours from parents.** Regional and country focused evidence points to a link between increased violence and pandemic-related stress, such as economic pressure and restrictions to movement.
- **There is also evidence of reduced access to support services during the pandemic, in some cases because these services have been deemed 'non-essential'.** Despite evidence of increased violence, some data from **PNG** and **Fiji** suggests a reduction in formal reporting and survivors seeking help.
- **Evidence on early marriage is limited, although the data that does exist suggests some increases in early marriage during the pandemic.** In **PNG, Solomon Islands** and **Vanuatu** this appears to be driven by loss of livelihoods.
- **Quantitative data on early pregnancies is not available, but quantitative estimations in EAP suggest increases in adolescent pregnancies, while estimations in Fiji suggest that there will be increases in unwanted pregnancies as a result of the pandemic.** Qualitative evidence from **PNG** suggests increases in early pregnancies during school closures.
- **Evidence also points to negative impacts on access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services.** Although this evidence is limited, it illustrates increased challenges for girls as a result of the pandemic in at least four countries (**PNG, Vanuatu, Samoa** and the **Solomon Islands**). Some evidence also highlighted difficulties girls were facing in relation to menstrual health during the pandemic.
- **Several reports from Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu show worsened mental health among children, youth and adults during the pandemic.** The majority of evidence is sex disaggregated, although it does not show significant differences between boys and girls. Some evidence also suggests that access to mental and psychosocial services has worsened during the pandemic.



CONCLUSION

This review has synthesised the evidence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls' education and wellbeing in eleven Pacific Island countries.

The evidence collected points to a number of impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. Most directly, many schools in the Pacific have been closed for extended periods, and large numbers of children have been unable to access distance learning opportunities. The evidence points to a number of challenges for students, including difficulties in accessing and engaging with digital learning when schools were closed, with some indications that some of these challenges might be felt more acutely by girls and those in rural areas. Available evidence also suggests that absenteeism among students is higher than it was before the pandemic, with the lowest attendance among younger primary school age children (post ECE level), and intra-country variation across regions.

The economic shocks caused by COVID-19 and the loss of livelihoods at the household level has put girl's education at risk. Evidence points to some households' reduced capacity to pay for school fees. It is possible that girl's education is particularly at risk, as evidence has also highlighted that girls' education is given lower priority, and girls might be less supported at home.

Limited sex disaggregated evidence is available for PICs, and this review has largely drawn on non-disaggregated documents. Nonetheless, the evidence does point to a number of important challenges and impact on children's education and warrants further research to better understand gendered differences. It is likely that girls' education has been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, due to pre-existing gender inequalities and discriminatory gender norms, threatening to undermine gains made over the past decade.

When documents do disaggregate data, they rarely provide an analysis of drivers and discriminatory social norms, and this is a crucial research gap. Discriminatory social norms might lead to girls remaining out of school in the longer term, and evidence already points to some

increased risks of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and the need to perform unpaid labour to support their families. Although most of the available evidence does not provide this type of analysis, qualitative evidence from PNG (Costa, 2022) does suggest that norms define girls' experiences of the impact of the pandemic, and that even when quantitative data does not point to gender gaps, it is important to understand how these experiences can be different and how this will influence long term impacts on girls' education and wellbeing.

Very few studies have examined the impact that the pandemic has had on student learning outcomes, and those that have generated such evidence indicate that there might have been negative impacts on learning for both boys and girls, and possibly more so for girls. However, further research is needed to understand whether when there are worsened outcomes these are directly linked to the pandemic, whether there are differences between boys and girls, and which other factors of exclusion might increase vulnerability.

In addition to accessing educational opportunities amidst COVID-19, there is a need to support governments, schools, teachers, and parents in providing quality remote or hybrid forms of learning. Evidence suggests that schools and teachers have faced challenges in supporting students efficiently and has highlighted the key role of parents in supporting children participation. Evidence has also highlighted widespread difficulties in accessing digital modalities of learning, and this has been an important barrier to equitable access.

A number of impacts on girls' wellbeing have been identified. In particular, there have been negative impact on GBV for women and girls; increased parental violence or negative behaviours; worsened menstrual health management and access to health services; and a negative impact on mental health for both boys and girls, which has included increased stress and increased feelings of lack of safety. Reports from some countries also suggest a reduction in availability and access to services, including health services, response to GBV, and mental and psychosocial services.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE



The RERs are intended to inform current and long-term public policy responses to the pandemic.

This report presents evidence drawn from a number of Pacific Island Countries, while a separate report presents evidence from countries across South and South-East Asia.

This RER draws on evidence from eleven PICs: Cook Islands, FSM, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu. The RER is intended to be highly practical, drawing robust conclusions and evidence-based actionable recommendations to support education access, meaningful participation and demonstrated learning for girls and adolescents in PICs. The full set of recommendations can be found in the conclusions of this report as well as the PICs policy summary.

The RER focused on the following areas:

- the impact of COVID-19 on girls' education, particularly in terms of access and participation, learning outcomes, teaching and curricula, and parental support and involvement.
- the impact of COVID-19 on girls' wellbeing, focusing primarily on physical and mental health, sexual and reproductive health, protection from GBV, livelihoods and unpaid care; and
- the effectiveness¹ of development partner² responses to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls' education and wellbeing.

Wherever possible, the review integrated comparative data for boys, as well as non sex disaggregated data looking at 'children' or 'youth'. The review specifically sought to explore any evidence of differential impact on certain subgroups, for example based on socioeconomic factors, age and ethnicity.

¹ The team anticipated that evidence sources would differ in terms of how they defined 'effectiveness'. A flexible rather than rigid approach was therefore adopted, which aimed to include evidence of any form of 'change as a result of policies or programmes being implemented, regardless of whether this was at the output, intermediate outcome, outcome or impact level'. However, information simply on the implementation and reach of an intervention was not included.

² Development partner' was defined as any organisation who delivered policy or programme responses to the pandemic, including national governments, UN Agencies, bilateral and multilateral donors, development banks, NGOs and CSOs.

COVID-19 IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

PICs are not a homogenous group of countries. There are considerable differences between them in terms of population (from 1,800 in Niue to 685,000 in the Solomon Islands) and stages of economic development, with the PICs including a mix of low-, middle- and high-income countries (ADB, undated).

During 2020 and 2021 (when most of the evidence included in the RER was generated) COVID-19 cases in the PICs remained low, and several countries had not yet reported any cases at all. However, by February 2022, most countries in the Pacific region had not only reported cases, but also deaths. PNG and Fiji have so far been most severely affected with over 37 thousand and 63 thousand cases respectively, as of November 2021. Less than 20 cases have been reported in Samoa, Vanuatu and Tonga (Pacific Community, webpage, accessed on 14 Feb 2021).

Despite cases being relatively low among some PICs in the earlier stages of the pandemic, this did not mean that they were unaffected by the wider global and indirect impacts of the pandemic. Measures to restrict the spread of the virus brought the tourism sector in the Pacific to a virtual standstill and severely impacted on imports and exports, food security, and people's mobility (Pacific Women, 2021). One of the greatest concerns in the region was therefore the negative impact that the pandemic would have on livelihoods (World Vision and Lowy Institute, in World Vision Australia, 2021a).

Economic disruptions have been felt across the region and were often more pronounced in countries that were simultaneously dealing with other crises, such as natural disasters (World Bank, 2020c in Aharan et al., 2020). In 2020 two category-five cyclones hit the region: Tropical Cyclone Harold in April, which affected Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga and Solomon Islands, and Tropical Cyclone Yasa in December, which affected Fiji. UNICEF concluded that the compounded effects of disasters such as cyclones and the COVID-19 crisis posed significant risks for the region's economies and would have the potential to exacerbate socioeconomic impacts on those most vulnerable (UNICEF, 2020a). More recently, Tonga has suffered the impacts of a volcanic eruption (UNICEF, 2022), which has coincided with the first outbreak of COVID-19 in the country (Kwan, 2022).

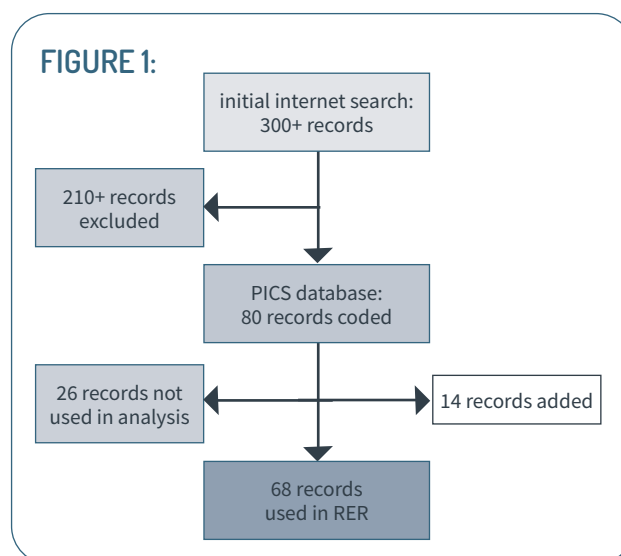
At the time of writing, in early 2022, the authors of this RER acknowledge the changing situation in the PICs, as COVID-19 continues to spread and will likely continue affecting health systems, as well as having wider social, economic and educational impacts.

The evidence collected for this paper, however, primarily presents data collected in 2020 and 2021, and therefore focuses on the impacts that the pandemic had during that period of time.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

Evidence was identified largely through online searches using a predefined list of keywords.

Further sources were found using a snowballing approach, by looking at referenced material within documents and by contacting organisations (including Australian Embassies and High Commissions) in the region.



As outlined in Figure 1, all identified material (over 300 documents) was initially reviewed for potential relevance and added to a database where it was categorised according to a list of sub themes. Based on relevance and content, a subset of documents was prioritised to be reviewed in full (80 documents), whilst other documents were considered but excluded from the review. No documents were excluded purely on the basis of quality. However, rapid quality assessments of included material enabled any findings to be caveated where there were concerns about the quality of the documents or the methodologies they were based on.

Evidence from the 80 reviewed documents was coded into an Excel spreadsheet so it could be synthesised.

Following review and coding, a minority of these documents were found not to include evidence that was directly relevant to the scope of the RER and were therefore not included in the write up.

Additional documents were retrieved and included at a later stage. These were two additional reports from **Samoa**, two reports from **PNG**, one U-Report, 7 newspaper articles and media reports, and 2 UNESCO website pages on school closures were included, bringing the total number of documents that were fully reviewed to 94. Evidence was drawn from 68 of these documents and has been referenced in the synthesis presented in this report.

LIMITATIONS

Given the primary focus on online searches using English keywords, the review has been limited to English-language material, and largely that which is freely available online. Literature was included based on relevance rather than quality, and this was to be more inclusive of voices of diverse and underrepresented researchers. A limitation related to this, however, is that some authors did not provide a clear analysis and write-up for their evidence. For example, some either did not indicate when differences based on gender (or other variables) were statistically significant, or they did not present a complete analysis that drew comparisons across variables. Nevertheless, in some cases, evidence was still included in the RER because it was directly relevant to the scope. In cases where there were clear concerns about quality, findings have been caveated to reflect this.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report presents findings on participation in home learning during school closures (section 2); attendance and retention when schools reopened (section 3); learning loss (section 4); and wider impacts on girls' education and wellbeing (section 5).

1.2 AVAILABILITY OF EVIDENCE

Of the total of 68 documents included in the RER, it is important to note the following:

- **Primary research sources were prioritised for full review.** The majority of reports cited in this report are therefore pieces of primary research. However, some documents containing secondary analysis have also been included. The majority of primary research reports were quantitative, although some were qualitative or utilised mixed methods.
- **The overall volume of relevant evidence available for the region is limited.** Therefore, although the review is focused on the gendered impacts of the pandemic on girls' education and wellbeing, it has been necessary to include evidence that does not specifically focus on girls. As a result, a large amount of evidence synthesised in this report draws from evidence that is non-disaggregated. This also means that little evidence was available that focused on intersectional factors and impacts on specific subgroups.
- **Efforts have been made to identify unpublished material not available online through in-country contacts, but this has yielded only limited material.** In addition, the majority of documents found online or through contacts has been grey literature, rather than papers published through traditional channels such as peer-reviewed journals. Only four of the primary research reports had been published as journal articles. Overall, the quality of evidence was mixed, with approximately one in three being categorised as 'high quality'.
- **Despite targeted searches, with the exception of just two documents (Vanuatu and Samoa), no evidence of effectiveness of approaches was found.** This may be because it is too early for such evidence to be available. The time of this work (with a cut off day in October 2021) has meant that it was potentially too early to locate evidence on the effectiveness of COVID-19 response efforts or learning assessment data.

- **The majority of evidence included in the review has been generated by UN agencies**, as well as some by national governments and NGOs. Where needed, other types of resources, such as blogs and media reports, have also been included. This has tended to be where there would otherwise be a complete lack of evidence to draw on.
- **There was a concentration of evidence related to PNG, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Samoa and Vanuatu.** Far less evidence was available for the **Cook Islands, FSM, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga and Tuvalu.** A smaller number of regional papers did not specify which countries they focused on but have, nevertheless, been included. Evidence on education is available from seven of the eleven countries included in the RER: **Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.** Evidence related to impact on wellbeing is available from seven countries: **Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.**
- **Very few reports included education related evidence that was sex disaggregated, and where they do, there is limited analysis of any gendered differences.** Instead, many of the reports focused more generally on children and/or young adults. This evidence has been included, even though girls' specific experiences, challenges and perspectives have not been explicitly drawn out. In particular, it is worth noting that although evidence shows patterns of access to home learning during school closures and challenges encountered by students, teachers and parents, none of this evidence provides sex disaggregated data or analysis. Similarly, the majority of documents that focus on return to school once these were reopened is not sex disaggregated. There are a few exceptions to this, with 3 documents providing some sex disaggregated data, although these do not show significant differences between girls and boys, nor do they specify whether differences are statistically significant. Finally, the limited evidence available on learning loss is generally non disaggregated, with three exceptions, three documents focusing, respectively, on learning data from **Samoa**, data on exam results for one subject in Year 10 in **Vanuatu**, teachers' perceptions of learning globally and in the region.
- **Key thematic research gaps can also be identified, these include:**
 - **Lack of recent evidence on education and learning outcomes.** Official data on enrolment, retention or learning outcomes is generally not available for 2020 and 2021, and few country focused studies have been collecting relevant data. In sections related to education outcomes, the RER has included documents providing estimations of impact carried out in 2020. It is not clear to what extent these have been proved right.
 - **Need for better understanding of barriers to return to school.** Although this RER has identified 3 key barriers, it is possible that other challenges have influenced return to school and retention rates, and that there may be differences between sexes, age groups, regions, etc.
 - **Lack of evidence on the drivers of gendered impacts of the pandemic.** The majority of documents included in this review did not provide an analysis of how social norms or other underlying factors of discrimination might explain gendered impacts.
 - **Lack of comparative analysis within the evidence sources available.** For example, none of the documents retrieved discuss teaching and learning interactions during home learning, nor is there any comparative analysis of different delivery modalities. Due to the different nature of the studies, it was not possible to conduct that comparative analysis.
 - **Lack of evidence on the effectiveness of development partner responses** to the impact of the pandemic. The RER only identified 2 documents (**Vanuatu** and **Samoa**) providing some information on the effectiveness of home learning.
 - **Limited evidence on impact on wellbeing within the region, and how this may have indirectly impacted girls' education.** Although the evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on wellbeing has a stronger focus on girls, or provides more disaggregated data, fewer documents that focus on relevant age groups were available, and therefore limited evidence has been included in this report. The evidence included does provide some examples of the impact on prevalence of GBV (including early marriage, unwanted pregnancies or online violence), access to SRHR, and worsened mental health for children and young people, but this is not linked to the indirect impact that these worsened outcomes may have on education.

PARTICIPATION IN HOME LEARNING DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES

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This section summarises evidence on participation in home learning during school closures.

It also presents evidence on types of home learning provided, and the extent to which students engaged in learning during school closures.

Evidence from 32 reports was included in this section, including a U-Report survey, and UNESCO data on school closures. Documents provide regional evidence, as well as country focused data from seven PICS: Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Two of the reports looked specifically at the effectiveness of education responses in relation to home learning in Vanuatu and Samoa. The majority of documents drawn on for this section provided quantitative evidence.

Of these, one provided estimations for the EAP region (Avanesian, Mizunoya and Amaro, 2021), while three presented data from large scale surveys (Johnston et al. 2021; World Bank and UNICEF, 2021; and UN RCO, 2021). Three of the documents included data from UN Women's Rapid Gender Assessments (RGAs). Other documents presented findings from smaller-scale surveys, qualitative data or secondary reviews.

This section largely draws on evidence that was not disaggregated by sex, although a number of sources do provide some data and gender analysis. In addition, some sources highlight urban-rural differences, and differences across education levels. Some of the NDoE baseline findings are disaggregated (Costa, 2022), as are findings from the UN Women RGAs; while two small scale surveys (Pacific Women, 2020; (FWRM, n.d. (a)) and 4 qualitative documents (Plan International 2021; CARE, 2020a; CARE, 2020b; CARE, 2020c) focus specifically on girls, and provide analysis on barriers to access.



KEY MESSAGES

- **Among PICs, school closures varied from just three to four weeks to several months (as of November 2021).** Various types of home learning materials were provided across the region while schools were closed, including those delivered through online platforms, television and radio broadcasts, and take-home packages.
- **Regional estimates for EAP in early 2021 suggested that the majority of students would be reached by home learning measures,** but still highlighted that large numbers would be left out.
- **Very few studies have sex disaggregated their findings or analysed any gender differences.** Only one study disaggregates data and finds slightly higher engagement among girls, however, in households with lower access to devices, and in particular more traditional rural households, boys are more likely to be given preference and access to those devices for learning.
- **Evidence shows that access to online and broadcasting learning materials was a key challenge, and that this may have been worse for girls.** There was also a clear urban rural divide, with students in rural areas less likely to access digital learning. Some evidence specifically points to the risk of online violence and harassment as a barrier to home learning and online access for girls.
- **Some evidence suggests a lack of motivation and interest in learning among children more generally, and that girls in particular struggled to maintain motivation and concentration when learning from home,** although the document does not provide comparative data. Evidence also points to increases in paid and unpaid work, which was hard to balance with schoolwork, and increased unpaid caring and domestic burdens for girls and older siblings in particular.

Among PICs, school closures varied from just three to four weeks to several months. As of November 2021, **Nauru** was the only country not to close schools at all (UNESCO, 2021a). Most PICs closed schools in the period between March and August 2020, with the exception of **Fiji** and **FSM**. **Fiji** later closed schools more than once, for a total of 40 week (35 of which were full time closures); most recently schools were closed for 4 weeks in the period of September to October 2021 (UNESCO, 2021a, accessed on 30 Nov 2021, data updated on 31st Oct 2021). In **Samoa**, schools had already been closed for five weeks in late 2019 due to a measles outbreak, and then closed again in 2020 for six weeks due to COVID-19, this closure was followed by two weeks of part time classes (SQA et al. draft, 2021).

Various types of home learning materials were provided across the region during school closures.³

These included those delivered through online platforms (**Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga Tuvalu and Vanuatu**), television and radio broadcasts (**Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu**), and take-home packages (**Cook Islands, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu**) (UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank 2020, in ADB, 2021).

Monitoring student engagement during school closures was challenging. Qualitative evidence from **Samoa** (where schools were closed at least partially until early July 2020) highlights the challenges of monitoring student engagement in home schooling during lockdown. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC) introduced distance learning options, with a primary focus on television and radio as these were considered to be more accessible than online provision. School staff were encouraged to develop programmes of work to support remote learning during the eight-week closure, and communication protocols were designed for school communities. However, conducting monitoring and measurement of student engagement proved to be challenging. Qualitative findings show that ‘live’ monitoring strategies were not possible, as there were challenges with technology and connectivity. As a result, schools instead attempted to monitor the level of work being completed and returned by students during school closures. However, this too proved to be challenging as the approach relied on parents’ engagement with schools, something that could not be consistently relied upon. A system of partial attendance was later implemented for some primary schools, to enable schools to better assess student attendance and engagement (Queensland Department of Education, North Coast Region, n.d).

Evidence shows very mixed levels of engagement in home learning by students. One study disaggregates data and shows that girls were slightly more likely to have participated, although in households with limited access to devices, usage preference was more likely given to boys. Three studies have sought to understand the extent to which children in **PNG** continued to receive an education while schools were closed. The findings of these studies varied enormously in terms of the proportion of students who had accessed remote learning, potentially due to the way they were sampled and the extent to which they were able to disaggregate. The National Department of Education (NDoE) baseline survey in **PNG**, which surveyed 401 schools, 1145 teachers and 3904 students in April-May 2020, found that 55 percent of students reported that they continued to study during school closures (Johnston et al. 2021). A slightly

higher percentage of girls (56.8 percent) continue learning at home compared to boys (53.8 percent).

Radio (girls: 35%, boys: 37%) and television (girls: 35%, boys: 34%) were the most accessible devices at home (Costa, 2022). Qualitative data from a gender study that was commissioned to complement the NDoE baseline survey quantitative findings suggests that in households with limited devices, particularly in more traditional households in rural areas, boys were more likely to be given preference and greater access to device over girls (Costa, 2022). The baseline report revealed differences across education levels, with older students far more likely to access home learning than younger students. Ninety percent of vocational training students engaged in some form of remote schooling, followed by 77 percent of those at secondary level, 65 percent at primary school, 46 percent at elementary level and 31 percent in early childhood education (ECE) (Johnston et al., 2021).

Other studies did not provide sex disaggregation of the findings, meaning it is not possible to identify specific figures in terms of girls’ engagement with home learning. One of these is a high frequency phone survey conducted with over 2,400 households with children in **PNG** found that the vast majority of children did not participate in distance learning (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). Results showed that just 6.5 percent of primary school students and 7.6 percent of elementary school students said they had engaged in learning during school closures (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). Based on the survey data collected and the analysis conducted, no groups of children or types of households were found to have been more or less likely to have engaged in remote learning and the data was not sex disaggregated (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). A far smaller-scale online U-Report poll of parents in **PNG** by UNICEF found that 37 percent reported that their children were accessing remote support from school, via radio, television, or online (U-Report, 2021a). However, it is important to note here that given the sampling approach used in this survey, parents who had easy access to online technology were more likely to participate, meaning the figure could have been far lower for a more randomly selected sample.

Students from remote rural areas were far less likely to study while schools were closed. A socioeconomic impact assessment in **Samoa** found a far higher proportion of children had participated in home learning compared to the figures generated by any of the PNG studies presented above. The assessment showed that 724 percent of children across the country had received some form of education at home during school closures (UN RCO, 2021). Importantly, however, this still indicates that almost a quarter of children did not. The same study

³ As reported in a survey administered to representatives of Ministries of Education. The report does not include information on FSM and Nauru.

⁴ In addition to the 72 percent of households who responded ‘yes’ to this question, another 6 percent reported that only some children were attending school.

also points to significant differences between urban and rural areas, finding up to 81 percent of children engaged in home schooling in Apia urban areas compared to 61 percent in Savai'i (rural). There are some differences across education levels as well, with students at higher levels more likely to have engaged in home schooling (77 percent for higher education, 70 percent for secondary education and 66 percent in primary). The data was not sex disaggregated (UN RCO, 2021). According to a regional youth-led action research study focused on the **Asia Pacific Region**, across the nine countries included (of which only one was a PIC: **Vanuatu**), students from marginalised communities living in remote areas were less likely to have access to remote learning once schools closed, largely due to the digital divide and problems related to internet connectivity and electricity (ASPBAE, 2021). The **PNG** National Department of Education (NDoE) baseline also found considerable regional differences across provinces, with 80 percent in the National Capital District and Morobe accessing home schooling, compared to up to just 12 percent in West Sepik (Johnston et al., 2021).

2.1 BARRIERS TO HOME LEARNING

Regional evidence suggests home learning methods were perceived to be effective by education officials.

A global survey commissioned by UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank gathered the perspectives of officials in Ministries of Education on how effective they thought various methods of remote learning had been. The survey did not ask respondents to consider differences by sex or other factors. The findings were aggregated regionally for **Oceania** and found that the majority of government representatives (eight out of 10) believed that, where provided, home learning through take-home packages had – at least to some extent – been effective. A similar proportion also believed that online learning platforms had been at least fairly effective (seven out of 10). A slightly smaller proportion believed radio had been an effective method (five out of 10) and fewer still thought that television had been (three out of 10). Rather than believing provision had been ineffective, many of the other respondents said they did not know or did not provide home learning support through these methods (UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank, in UIS, 2021). It is not clear how many of the ten countries in Oceania were PICs, although the paper refers to **Fiji, Samoa** and **Tonga** in its narrative.

Available evidence suggests that many children who engaged in home learning did so using printed materials or by working offline; the findings are non-disaggregated. For example, the high frequency survey in **PNG** showed that among those who did participate in home learning, 60 percent did so using printed materials (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). The NDoE Baseline survey in **PNG** also found that only 14 percent of students used resources such as the radio, telephone or audio classes, although secondary and vocational school students were more likely to use these compared to students at other levels, as were those in urban areas (Johnston et al., 2021). Similarly, a socioeconomic impact assessment in Samoa showed that when children did use technology to receive education, only 19 percent used the internet as a source of learning, with a far higher percentage using television (of 42 percent) (UN RCO, 2021). Another survey conducted in May 2020 by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture in **Samoa** also found that written materials were most commonly used for remote learning, followed by television, particularly among secondary school students (MESC(a), 2020, in Queensland Department of Education, North Coast Region, n.d).

Third grade students during class at Norsup Primary School. Photo taken by Connor Ashleigh for AusAID.



THE HOME ENVIRONMENT AND LACK OF MOTIVATION AMONG STUDENTS

In addition to challenges in accessing online and broadcast learning, evidence highlights a range of other difficulties faced by students in terms of home learning during school closures. Country-level evidence suggests that home environments were not always conducive to learning. For example, the formative evaluation of the home schooling package in **Vanuatu** found that half of children studied in their bedroom and community leaders and education authorities argued that *‘appropriate facilities for learning in the home and community are essential, as overcrowding, protection issues and domestic work can inhibit students’ learning outcomes’* (KOBLE, 2021, p.32). An online survey of 73 university students in **Tuvalu** found that 11 percent said their ability to study was impacted by a lack of space at home (Lagi, 2020). Beyond physical space, an NDoE baseline survey in **PNG** found inadequate access to basic materials for learning, with a third of students saying they lacked access to stationery (Johnston et al., 2021).

Evidence suggests that girls struggled to maintain motivation and concentration when learning from home. Qualitative data collected through workshops with girls in **Kiribati**, Indonesia and Vietnam found that girls spoke about finding it difficult to maintain concentration and motivation for studying without the social aspects of school to break up the day. In particular, those studying online mentioned ‘zoom fatigue’ (Plan International,

2021). In addition, a small-scale quantitative survey of 21 adolescent girls aged 14 to 19 in **Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu** found that among those who were able to study, a third said that they found it difficult to complete the work on their own (Pacific Women, 2020).

Although not sex disaggregated, further evidence points to a lack of motivation and interest in learning among children more generally. A mixed methods nutritional and socioeconomic assessment of the impact of COVID-19 in **Solomon Islands** also found that lockdown had a negative effect on students’ motivation to learn, with parents feeling their children were distracted or not interested in learning (Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development et al., 2020). In a socioeconomic impact assessment in **Samoa**, where 24 percent of households reported being concerned about children’s performance, 61 percent of concerned households said that their children were less interested in learning at home during school closures (UN RCO, 2021). Some evidence highlights challenges children have faced during lockdown that may impact on their ability to do their school work. For example, regional youth-led action research in Asia Pacific countries, including **Vanuatu**, shows that the inability to exercise increased reports among children of lethargy and obesity. The study also suggests worsened nutrition outcomes, with increased reports of reduced consumption of meals (ASPBAE, 2021). The formative evaluation of **Vanuatu’s** Home Schooling Package found mixed experiences of home learning. Students were split in terms of how easy or challenging

they found the resources to engage with. Of those surveyed, 54.5 percent said it was easy or very easy to understand. In contrast, 45.5 percent said they had found it hard or very hard to use. Students were also divided on whether the amount of work set was manageable, with half reporting that there was too much work (KOBLE, 2021).

Regional evidence from EAP shows that teachers identify cost as a barrier to remote learning, for students with disabilities; this evidence is not sex disaggregated. A global study conducted by the World Bank focused on school closures as a result of the pandemic. Eight percent of the overall sample of almost 4,000 respondents (teachers and parents of children with disabilities) were from the EAP region. The study found that 19 percent of teachers in EAP identified cost as a key barrier to remote learning for learners with a disability. It is not clear, however, what proportion of these respondents were from Pacific Island Countries. Globally, both parents and teachers reported that ‘cost’ includes the cost of data, utilities, devices, reading materials and assistive learning devices, as well as basic needs including food, water, medicines, and access to specialist services (World Bank, 2021).

ACCESS TO ONLINE AND BROADCAST LEARNING MATERIAL

Regional estimates suggest the majority of students would be reached, but with large numbers still left out. A global study conducted in 2021 proposed a new ‘reachability indicator’ to estimate the reach of remote learning measures adopted by ministries of education in response to school closures and included specific analysis for the EAP. However, it is not clear which PICs were included in these regional figures and the data has not been sex disaggregated. In part using data on the availability of household assets such as radios, televisions, computers and internet access, calculations suggested that 80 percent of students across EAP would have been reached by online and broadcast remote learning policies. The proportion was consistently high (between 94 to 96 percent) for primary and secondary students but nine percent for those who were pre-primary (Avanesian, Mizunoya and Amaro, 2021). However, despite what may seem like optimistic regional predictions given population sizes in the region, the authors also calculated that these figures would mean that up to 80 million children across the region would have been left out of home learning that was delivered online or through television or radio during school closures (Avanesian, Mizunoya and Amaro, 2021).

A number of evidence sources consistently point to challenges in students accessing remote learning when this is provided through technology such as the internet, radio or television. Data highlights challenges with online access across the region, which pre-date the pandemic. For example, in **Kiribati, PNG** and the **Solomon Islands** parents and children already reported financial challenges as a key reason for exclusion from digital devices and opportunities pre-pandemic (Third et al., 2020, in Plan International, 2021). In 2020, a third (32 percent, or 183 million) of children in the **Pacific** were not connected to the internet at home (UNICEF and ITU, 2020, in Plan International, 2021). There was also considerable variation across the region, with 50 percent access in **Fiji**, and as low as 11 percent in **PNG** (Wilson, n.d.). There are also variations among in-country regions. In **PNG**, the NDoE baseline study found that children in the National Capital District had the greatest access to all technologies (radio, television, computers, smart phones, mobile phones, WhatsApp and Social Media), while children in Western and West Sepik had the least access (Costa, 2022). Given challenges associated with online access to remote learning, qualitative evidence on the **Samoan** response to remote learning describes the efforts teachers made to deliver printed materials to students by hand in rural areas and through the use of distribution points in urban areas. Schools also remained open to enable staff to facilitate this process and support distance learning (Queensland Department of Education, North Coast Region, n.d.).

Students most affected by school closures were those for whom schools were not able to continue education through remote learning online. A socioeconomic impact assessment conducted in 2020 in **PNG** revealed that, when school closed, 1.5 million students (approximately 87 percent of enrolled) stayed at home with no access to technology to support distance learning (United Nations in **PNG** and UNDP, 2020). UNICEF **PNG** estimates that 80 percent of schools do not have access to electricity, making it difficult for them to use digital technologies (UNICEF PNG, no date). A mixed methods formative evaluation of the Home Schooling Package, which was introduced in **Vanuatu** in March 2020, was carried out from July to October 2020. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data from students, teachers, parents and carers, principals, provincial education officers and community leaders in two provinces. The findings are not sex disaggregated; however, it is noted by the authors that a gender analysis of the data had found no significant differences. Principals reported that most students could not access the online platform, so reverted to hard copies or offline use (KOBLE, 2021). A small-scale online survey of 73 students in **Tuvalu** in September 2020 shows that even at tertiary level, where online access tends to be highest, 20 percent of students had become inactive online when campuses closed (Lagi, 2020).

There is a clear urban-rural divide, with students in urban areas more likely to access digital learning.

The PNG NDoE baseline survey shows that low access to technological resources across the country excluded most students from digital remote learning. Almost no students in the rural provinces accessed learning through digital resources (Johnston et al., 2021). The formative evaluation of the Home Schooling Package in Vanuatu also highlights high levels of intra-country variation. Survey findings showed that 36.4 percent of students had managed to access home schooling through the internet. However, 87 percent of these students lived in urban areas, 8.7 percent were in rural areas, 3.5 percent were in peri-urban areas, and just 0.5 percent were in remote areas. Importantly, authors noted that even fewer would have accessed online learning in remote rural areas not included in the survey (KOBLE, 2021). Similar regional differences are highlighted in data from PNG, which shows that just over a third of students had access to radio, television or mobile phones. Twenty-one percent had access to a computer or tablet at home, while fewer students had access to WhatsApp or social media. However, the picture in Western and West Sepik provinces was very different, where only 6 percent and 2 percent respectively had access to television and just 3 percent and 2 percent had access to a computer or tablet (Johnston et al., 2021). As a result, across education levels, headteachers in PNG recommended physical home learning materials such as textbooks or activity books rather than online, television, radio or SMS learning during school closures (Johnston et al., 2021). However, findings from the high frequency phone survey in PNG show that over 20 percent of households believed that lack of access to a television, computer or smartphone played a key role in keeping children from engaging in remote learning (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021).

Access to electronic devices is a key enabling factor in relation to home learning. A socioeconomic impact assessment in Samoa found that despite 48 percent of students having access to electronic devices such as computers, smartphones or tablets, access to digital learning has remained low. Just half of those with access to online devices (24 percent) had access to an online learning platform while schools were closed, and just 19 percent of households reported children having engaged with home schooling through the internet. However, the study found that children in houses with access to technology had a higher chance of accessing education. Seventy-nine percent of children in households with access to electronic devices did access some form of education, compared to 65 percent of those who did not (UN RCO, 2021). A global survey targeted parents and teachers of children with disabilities and found that in the EAP roughly 20 percent of parents thought that difficulties in accessing the internet (23 percent) and devices

(21 percent) was a barrier to children's access to remote learning. Qualitative data, however, shows that even when families did have internet access, they could face challenges related to poor connectivity. The survey also found that in the EAP region 12 percent of these parents reported that lack of power or electricity was a barrier to their children engaging in remote learning. As the sample is not disaggregated by country, it is not possible to know whether any of these respondents were from PICs (World Bank, 2021).

Some evidence suggests that tertiary level students are also impacted by barriers to digital access. An online survey of 73 university students in Tuvalu found that 12 percent of students did not have a laptop or tablet to access their work, 16 percent said that they could not afford to pay for internet, and 19 percent said that they did not have internet at home (Lagi, 2020). In the Solomon Islands, the cost of internet connection was described as a barrier to online learning by two of the 16 university students participating in a small-scale qualitative study (Dorovolomo et al., 2021). Finally, data collected as part of a PhD study on digital literacy suggests that although the majority of first year students at the University of South Pacific in Fiji (88 percent) did have access to internet and a device, some first year students had somewhat limited access to internet and computers, which made it challenging to shift to online learning (Johnson et al., 2021).

Very little evidence has looked for gender differences, but some evidence indicates lower access among girls. Although most of the quantitative studies did not include sex disaggregated data, one qualitative, one mixed-method and one quantitative source suggest that unequal access to technology may impact girls more than boys. Qualitative data collected through workshops with adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years in Kiribati, Indonesia and Vietnam found unequal access to technology, with this being a recurring theme in discussions with adolescent girls. In particular, the research found that girls faced challenges with high data costs and limited access to devices, which were sometimes only used by male family members (Plan International, 2021). Similar findings were reported by a small-scale quantitative survey with 21 adolescent girls aged 14 to 19 years in four countries in the Pacific (Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu). A quarter of the girls cited lack of access to online learning as a reason for not doing their school work during closures (Pacific Women, 2020). Likewise, a small online quantitative rapid assessment of 20 young women in Fiji aged 13 to 35 found that 65 percent of those who were university students faced challenges in studying online at home, including because of a difficulty in accessing laptops. It is not specified how many respondents were university students (FWRM, n.d. (a)).

Some evidence specifically points to the risk of online violence and harassment as a barrier to home learning and online access for girls. Qualitative data collected through workshops with adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 in **Kiribati**, Indonesia and Vietnam shows that with learning shifting from schools to homes during the pandemic girls were concerned about an increased risk of both online and offline violence and harassment. Online safety concerns were also cited as a key reason why girls were not allowed to use phones or the internet during home learning (Plan International, 2021). Similarly, a study of adolescent girls by Pacific Women 2020 found that half (of 21) said they sometimes feel unsafe online (**Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands** and **Vanuatu**) (Pacific Women, 2020).

PAID AND UNPAID CARE WORK BY CHILDREN

In addition to increased care and domestic work among mothers, some evidence also highlighted an increase in caring and domestic work among children. In a small-scale survey of 21 adolescent girls in four PICs (**Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands** and **Vanuatu**), three in five confirmed they had been looking after other children during the pandemic, either in their family or their community (Pacific Women, 2020). In **Fiji**, some evidence specifically points to eldest siblings being mostly affected by additional care burdens. A gender analysis by CARE in **Fiji**, which looked at the dual impacts of the pandemic and Tropical Cyclone Harold, found that during school closures, girls were doing household chores such as cooking and cleaning rather than completing their schoolwork. Girls and older siblings were also often looking after younger children, as parents were busy dealing with the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Harold (CARE, 2020a). Similarly, in **PNG**, qualitative gender analysis data suggests that increased housework during the pandemic was often taken on by children who were at home due to school closures, this was found to be particularly the case for girls (CARE, 2020c). Other qualitative evidence from **PNG** suggests that expectations around girls' roles in domestic household chores, and looking after siblings, have led to increased time use for girls, and may increase girls' risk of dropping out from school. Youth who participated in the study reported that 31% of girls and 26% of boys participated in household chores and care, with 30% of girls who did so spending 5 hours a day on these tasks (Costa, 2022). Qualitative reports from women's groups in **Tonga** has also underlined the specific impact on girls. The research found that adolescent girls had described how staying at home from school during closures had reinforced gendered responsibilities and norms, particularly in terms of domestic labour and caring responsibilities. The girls also reported challenges in balancing increased domestic and care work with their schoolwork (Pacific Women, 2021). A global mixed methods research study (46

countries), led by Save the Children, showed that 13 percent of children aged 11-17 years in **PNG** and **Solomon Islands** reported increased care for siblings during the early stages of the pandemic, although this figure was not sex disaggregated. However, although this is a considerable increase, it is considerably lower than the global average, which suggested approximately half of children (52 percent of girls and 42 percent of boys) had taken on additional caring responsibilities (Ritz, O'Hare and Burgess, 2020).

Some evidence points to increased child labour. In PNG, poverty, which has been exacerbated by COVID-19, is highlighted as a key driver of children leaving schools and entering paid work. Although quantitative data is not available, qualitative evidence collected through key informant interviews suggests a perceived increase in child labour, including in subsistence agriculture and informal markets, as well as increases in adolescent girls engaging in sex work, in particular in urban areas. Informants attributed this to increased economic hardship among already vulnerable girls. Young focus group participants suggest that more girls than boys face financial difficulties (50% of girls, compared to 34% of boys), while boys were more likely to work to support families during school closures (55% of boys and 16% of girls worked), with boys working more hours as well (4.25 on average, compared to 3.2 hours a day for girl) (Costa, 2022). Concerns about child labour were also raised by 32% of teachers who had participated to the NDoE baseline survey (Costa, 2022).

Evidence also points to how children's increased involvement in paid and unpaid work has an impact on their ability to complete school work during school closures. For example, the United Nations Pacific socioeconomic impact assessment reports that pressure to contribute to family tasks such as fishing, farming, and domestic or unpaid care work was a barrier to completing school work remotely for students in **Fiji** (United Nations Pacific, 2020). Similarly, a quantitative survey in the Pacific Islands (**Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands** and **Vanuatu**) of 21 adolescent girls aged 14-19 years found that a quarter had not done their school work because of having to work to help the family (Pacific Women, 2020). In **PNG**, 7.4 percent of children who were not participating in distance learning were not doing so because of engagement in economic or household activities (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). In **PNG** 35 percent of teachers who participated in the NDoE baseline survey expressed concern about children being able to balance work at home with learning during school closures (Johnston et al., 2021).

2.2 SUPPORT DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES

SUPPORT FROM SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

Evidence highlights challenges that teachers and schools have faced in terms of effective delivery of home learning support.

This has included some reports of poor-quality materials, inconsistent delivery and insufficient teacher engagement. For example, qualitative data collected through workshops with girls in Kiribati, Indonesia and Vietnam showed that girls were finding remote learning challenging, as they had to continue preparing for exams while the curriculum was disrupted. Girls reported that challenges were due to changes to the curriculum and inconsistency in teaching styles and abilities, as well as lack of access to onsite facilities (Plan International, 2021). More specifically, a small-scale U-Report poll in PNG found that among parents of children who did engage in remote learning, 40 percent rated the quality of lessons as ‘poor’ (U-Report, 2021a). In Vanuatu teachers were responsible for producing content for the Home Schooling Package. However, the formative evaluation of the package found that the materials were not produced in a consistent learning format, with most teachers relying on their own approach or just photocopying existing content from textbooks, and others providing instructions to parents on a blackboard. Most teachers said they had not been given any resources for photocopying, which hindered their ability to produce paper-based resources. The evaluation report also noted that teachers experienced difficulties distributing the package, with many facing high costs and hazardous journeys, with particular difficulty in reaching students in offshore islands. Importantly, the authors note that teachers were not compensated for these kinds of additional activities during school closures (KOBLE, 2021).

Students received differing levels of support from teachers. Students in Vanuatu reported a lack of engagement by teachers, with 59.2 percent of students stating that they were never contacted by their teacher. Students living in urban and peri urban areas were more likely to be in contact with their teachers during school closures than those in rural and remote locations. The research also highlighted differences among teachers, with just 14 out of a sample of 89 saying they had contact with students and their families while schools were closed (KOBLE, 2021). Similarly, findings from the high frequency phone survey in PNG show that not all students were provided with support for remote learning by their school. Almost all parents whose children did

not participate in remote learning (96.6 percent) said their children had not been provided with materials from school (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). Findings from the NDoE Baseline survey in PNG show that only one in five students reported being contacted by their teacher, with those in secondary and vocational schools more likely to have been contacted. There was considerable regional variation, with just one in 10 students in West Sepik saying they had been contacted by their teacher. Just over half of the teachers interviewed (55 percent) said they had supported students to learn while schools were closed, again with stark regional variation, with just 15 percent of teachers in West Sepik reporting contact with their students during school closures (Johnston et al., 2021). Authors’ analysis shows that those who were most likely to support students in home learning were female teachers and teachers who were concerned about students’ welfare. These findings were statistically significant (Johnston et al., 2021). In addition, a small-scale survey of 20 girls and young women in Fiji found that, among the respondents in tertiary education, only 15 percent felt they had received sufficient support from their lecturers while campuses were closed (FWRM, n.d. (a))

Evidence also highlights challenges faced by teachers during school closures. A Government-led rapid assessment of the education sector in PNG highlighted the challenges teachers were experiencing during school closures. The assessment showed that only 31 percent of schools reported that all of their teachers had the guides they needed in order to effectively support home learning (Government of Papua New Guinea, 2020). The NDoE baseline survey in PNG found that a large proportion of teachers who participated in the survey (78 percent) said they faced significant challenges whilst schools were closed. This most commonly included anxiety about the pandemic (77 percent) and worry about the future (69 percent). Linked to this, some teachers reported particular worries about loss of employment and income, as well as increased violence at home. Among the 45 percent of teachers who did not support their students with home learning, just over half (52 percent) said they lacked the necessary budget to purchase the resources they needed for this. Just under half (47 percent) said they could not support home learning because they were afraid of catching COVID-19. Although just below one in five teachers stated a lack of training as a reason for not offering support, the research suggests that teachers were ill equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence they needed in order to support remote learning and to take on the additional responsibilities they were expected to during the pandemic (Johnston et al., 2021). Female teachers were more likely to struggle with time availability, as they were busy with family responsibilities during school closures. All female teachers reported this, compared to only 14% of male teachers (Costa, 2022).

Students from Fasi Moi Afi Government primary school take part in a class activity. Photo taken by Connor Ashleigh for AusAID.



Schools may have struggled to access the resources they needed to support online learning. The NDoE baseline in PNG shows that schools that were able to log on to the NDoE website were able to access a range of online materials to support home learning, including information on the syllabus, teacher guides, students' textbooks and COVID-awareness materials. However, the research also showed that schools' ability to access the website was extremely limited, with fewer than one in 10 schools being able to do so. There were also regional variations, with just 4 percent of schools in the Madang district being able to work online and no schools in the West Sepik province. The research also showed some difference in terms of education levels, with fewer than one in 20 early childhood education centres and elementary schools having access to the website (Johnston et al., 2021).

SUPPORT FROM PARENTS

Some evidence has focused specifically on the role of parental support in terms of enabling and encouraging home learning during school closures. UN Women has reported RGAS data from 11 countries in Asia and the Pacific, including Samoa and the Solomon Islands, which highlighted a roughly even split, with just over half of parents saying they had increased the time they spent teaching their children. The data showed that women were slightly more likely to be providing this additional support than men (estimated 59 percent for women compared to 53 percent among men across the region)

(UN Women, 2020a). A socioeconomic impact assessment in Samoa also found that rather than relying on lessons provided by schools, 64 percent of households said that parents were teaching children themselves, 48 percent said children were studying independently and 17 percent said they were paying for private tutors (UN RCO, 2021).

Many parents spent considerable amounts of time supporting their children's learning, but there are large variations, including by region. The formative evaluation of Vanuatu's Home Schooling Package showed higher levels of parental involvement in home schooling than the UN Women data, with 61 percent of students reporting that they had received support from parents or family members who were able to understand the learning materials they were using. The same research showed that 33 percent of parents reported spending more than three hours a day helping their children with their education (KOBLE, 2021). The NDoE baseline survey in PNG found even higher levels of parental involvement, with 68 percent of children saying they received help from someone at home. However, this research highlighted considerable regional variation, with over 80 percent of students in National Capital District, Madang and Morobe saying they were receiving parental support, compared to 52 percent in Western Province and 42 percent in West Sepik (Johnston et al., 2021).

Evidence suggests that parental engagement in home schooling has been critical. Qualitative evidence on the **Samoa** response to remote learning found parental engagement in home schooling to be fundamental for students' own engagement, especially when students lacked self-motivation (Queensland Department of Education, North Coast Region, n.d). In fact, in interviews, school staff referred to parents as 'second teachers' to highlight the importance of the role they believed they played in supporting remote learning. In contrast, evidence suggests that when parents have not been able to provide support or been able to understand assignments, this has created challenges for students. For example, among parents who participated in the evaluation of **Vanuatu's** Home Schooling Package, those in rural or remote areas reported difficulties in understanding the learning materials their children had been given due to their own low literacy levels. The authors concluded that parents needed guidance to effectively support their children with home learning (KOBLE, 2021). The high frequency household survey in **PNG** also found that 14.1 percent of respondents felt children did not participate in distance learning because their parents or caregivers were not able to support them (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). In addition, a socioeconomic impact assessment by the UN in **Samoa** found that parents' level of education was a factor in determining the likelihood of children continuing to engage in learning during school closures. Seventy seven percent of parents with higher education said that their children were continuing to learn at home, compared to 66 percent of those with primary education only (UN RCO, 2021).

Although there is generally a lack of evidence that sought to explore any gender differences, some country and regional evidence points to a lack of support for girls during home learning. Qualitative data collected through workshops with girls in **Kiribati, Indonesia** and **Vietnam** indicates that home environments may have been particularly unsupportive in terms of girls' home schooling. Girls who participated in the research tended to explain that they did not feel supported by their parents, who they felt struggled to understand the technology and were dealing with stresses brought on by the pandemic (Plan International, 2021). Qualitative data from **PNG** also suggests that girls received little encouragement or support to return to school, and that this is driven by parental attitudes towards education, and in particular girl's education, as well as other discriminatory gender norms that persist in the country (Costa, 2022).

A global online survey that collected data from 20,000 teachers found that 14 percent believed that boys' education had been prioritised over girls' education during lockdowns, while 28 percent did not know how to answer the question. Although 38 percent of the teachers in this survey were sampled from EAP, it is not clear which countries were included in the sample and there is no regional analysis of this data (Pota et al., 2021). However, a small online quantitative rapid assessment survey of 20 young women in **Fiji** aged 13 to 35 also found they faced particular challenges negotiating time away from unpaid care in order to focus on home learning during school closures (FWRM, n.d. (a)).

Evidence also highlights the impact of home learning in terms of increasing unpaid care work, especially for women. Evidence from Asia, collected through RGAS in 11 countries, including **Samoa** and the **Solomon Islands**, found that COVID-19 had increased demand for unpaid care. Although this has affected both men and women, women were taking on a larger share of the increased work across all countries. For example, in **Samoa**, 87 percent of women reported that the time they spent on unpaid care work had increased and 71 percent reported an increase in time spent on domestic work. Among men, fewer than half reported the same (only 48 percent and 32 percent respectively). The study also shows that increases in unpaid care burden were driven by the impacts of lockdown, school closures, and increased needs to care for both children and other family members (Seck et al., 2021). Similarly, a qualitative gender analysis by CARE in **Fiji** showed that care responsibilities had increased as a result of lockdown measures, including school closures, as well as the compounding effects of Tropical Cyclone Harold. For some women (particularly those working from home) this has doubled their care burdens and tripled them for those who also had to home school. The authors concluded that this increase in care work was driven by women being traditionally responsible for both unpaid care and children's education (CARE, 2020a). A small online quantitative rapid assessment survey in **Fiji** found that two thirds of their sample of 20 young women stated that they were expected to do more domestic work than male members of the household (FWRM, n.d. (a)). For similar reasons, care burdens were also found to have increased during the pandemic in both the **Solomon Islands** (CARE, 2020b) and **PNG** (CARE, 2020c).

ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION WHEN SCHOOLS REOPENED

3



The section presents evidence on what happened once schools reopened, and students were able to join classes again in person.

The findings draw on 18 reports and data from two U-report surveys. Of these reports, two provided estimations and projections, while 16 presented primary or secondary data.

Two large scale and one smaller quantitative survey in PNG provide data specifically on students' return to school. Two UN papers provide predictions on dropout rates, while a wider range of qualitative and quantitative reports present information on the barriers students faced in returning to school. All evidence highlighted in this section is based on data collected in 2020, or the first half of 2021, as well as estimations calculated shortly after schools reopened.

Very little of the evidence included in this section is sex disaggregated. Just five of the 19 documents provided any sex disaggregated data (Johnston et al., 2021, Petai, 2021, NDoE, 2022, Costa, 2022, and UNESCO, 2020), of which two focused on PNG and one focused on the EAP region. As well as regional evidence, at least some country focused evidence is drawn from seven PICs: **Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu**. However, the vast majority of the evidence is based on data from PNG. In some reports evidence is disaggregated across education levels and this is included wherever possible. However, this is not the case across all of the reports and in many cases the evidence relates more broadly to 'schools' or 'education' as a whole.

KEY MESSAGES:

- **Two studies estimated risk of dropout**, of which one was regional for EAP as a whole, and one was specifically focused on **Fiji**. **The EAP study pointed to an increased risk of dropout across the region** (slightly more so for male students, and more so for students at tertiary level). In **Fiji**, the study focused on secondary education and predicted a decrease in enrolment rates, although this was not sex disaggregated.
- **Data from PNG showed that the majority of students did return when schools reopened, but that there was some delay, with not all students returning immediately after school reopening.** The evidence from **PNG** also shows that slightly more girls than boys had withdrawn from school at elementary level, and that students at Early Childhood Education (ECE) and elementary level were more likely to have withdrawn.
- **Available evidence also suggests that absenteeism among students is higher than it was before the pandemic, with the lowest attendance among youngest children (post ECE), and intra-country variation across regions.** This data on attendance is primarily drawn from **PNG** and points to some gender differences. The most recent available data from PNG suggests slightly lower attendance for girls at secondary levels, and slightly lower attendance for boys at ECE and primary; however the statistical evidence of these findings is not clear. Evidence from **PNG** suggests that not all students returned when schools reopened, although more did so with some delay.

3. ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION WHEN SCHOOLS REOPENED

Students from Caritas Technical Secondary School in various classrooms, East Boroko, PNG. Photo taken by Ness Kerton for AusAID.



Evidence drawn from a wider range of PICs highlights a number of barriers in relation to students' return to school. Two key barriers were identified in the literature: 1) fear of catching COVID-19 and 2) The impact of livelihood loss on parents' ability to pay school fees.

- **In addition, specific physical barriers, such as movement restrictions across islands and the impact of the tropical cyclones, were also reported in Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu.** Only one of the documents that provided evidence on barriers to return highlighted particular challenges for girls (although this is not compared to boys). These girl-specific challenges related to households' loss of income, and a lack of prioritisation of girls' education. The remaining documents did not present any sex disaggregated data.

3.1 ATTENDANCE AFTER RETURN TO SCHOOL

Evidence suggests increased rates of absenteeism when schools reopened, and this is possibly higher among girls at secondary level.

As lockdowns eased, schools across the Pacific did not all immediately fully reopen. In many PICs, schools often introduced systems of partial attendance and a gradual return to school (UNESCO, 2021a). In Samoa, for example, primary schools initially reopened for students to attend on a part time basis, with alternate years attending for half of the week. However, although only partial, this reopening enabled schools to monitor student attendance and engagement more effectively (Queensland Department of Education, North Coast Region, n.d). Four surveys in PNG, including two that were relatively large-scale, found that although the majority of students did return to school when they reopened, there was evidence of increased absenteeism among students. Although much of the data that is available has not been sex disaggregated, some evidence does suggest that girls went back with poorer attendance, although findings are mixed. A large-scale survey (NDoE baseline survey), which was conducted in PNG, pointed to girls being at higher risk of non-attendance (Johnston et al., 2021). Analysis

of the two follow up surveys carried out in 2021 suggest that although initially there were no gender differences in terms of absenteeism (183 institutions, surveyed by phone in May 2021, Petai, 2021), by the end of 2021, girls were slightly more likely to be absent in secondary schools, while boys were more likely to be absent in primary and ECE (147 institutions, detailed surveys in late 2021, NDoE, 2022). Overall, only 68 percent of enrolled students were still attending regularly, with lower attendance in primary (67 percent of boys and 69 percent of girls attending), and higher in ECE (75 percent of boys and 78 percent of girls attending) (NDoE, 2022). It is important to note that, in PNG, poor attendance is common, and it is often an indicator of early school dropout, which can lead to early marriage and pregnancy for girls. Key informants interviewed suggested that in some cases the impacts of the pandemics have been the final catalysts in driving vulnerable children out of schools, in particular girls, children with disabilities, children from rural areas and children living in poverty (Costa, 2022).

Attendance is lowest among younger children (post-ECE). The second round of the PNG High Frequency Survey conducted by UNICEF, which was carried out in early 2021, focused on households that had children under 15 and collected data across a range of themes, including education. Findings showed that most households with students whose schools had reopened had then returned to school. However, the survey also revealed drops in attendance compared to pre-pandemic levels, with the biggest decreases among younger children. The data presented shows percentage attendance rates falling as low as 29 percent for students aged six to eight years old, compared to 70 percent at the beginning of the 2020 school year. Attendance was found to be 40 percent for students aged 9 to 11, compared to 91.8 in 2019, although data for the start of the 2020 school year was not available for this age group. At 48 percent, levels were slightly higher again for those aged 12 to 14, compared to 94.4 percent at the beginning of 2020. This data shows a dramatic decline in attendance among students of all ages. However, it is important to note that this survey was carried out during holiday periods, which the authors note may have created some confusion among survey respondents when asking questions related to attendance (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). Given this challenge in interpreting the data, the authors planned to repeat the survey after February 2021 when the new school year had started, but analysis of this data is not currently available. However, data collected more recently through an NDoE baseline follow up survey (NDoE, 2022), also suggests lowest attendance at primary school.

There appear to be large regional differences in attendance levels, as well among school levels. The NDoE baseline survey in PNG found that 73 percent of teachers reported decreased attendance among their students since COVID-19 and after schools reopened. This varied significantly across regions, with, for example, 91 percent of teachers in the National Capital District reporting low attendance, 79 percent in Morobe, 62 percent in Western Province, and 48 percent in West Sepik. The majority (89 percent) of teachers in FODE (Flexible Open & Distance Education) and Technical and Vocational Educational Training (TVET) reported a decline in attendance, followed by 75 percent of elementary teachers, 73 percent of primary school teachers, 69 percent of ECE teachers, and 64 percent of secondary school teachers. The report suggests that the higher decline in TVET might be due to students moving into the labour market (Johnston et al., 2021). A phone survey in PNG, collected data from 183 education institutions. This included data from across school levels, from ECE to Tertiary education, as well as among TVET institutions. The survey data showed that, on average, 92 percent of students who had enrolled at the start of the 2021 school year were still attending school regularly by May 2021. This reflects an eight percent drop in regular attendance, equivalent to just over 6,300 students having poorer attendance. Results show no overall difference between girls' and boys' absenteeism; however, the data did reveal some differences across school levels, with the highest percentage drops in regular attendance at ECE level, which reduced by 38 percent, compared to an 8 percent reduction in attendance at secondary level (Petai, 2021). Variations also exist across provinces, with the highest levels of absenteeism in Western Province. Although no further analysis is available, 69 percent of the 83 schools where students with disabilities attend classes noted a reduction in attendance among students with disabilities (Petai, 2021). Although the data is not compared to previous years, it was noted that 39 percent of respondents explained drops in regular attendance as due to 'COVID-19-related reasons'.

3.2 DROPOUT AND DELAYED RETURN

ESTIMATED RISK OF DROPOUT

A regional study published early on in the pandemic has used modelling and simulations in an attempt to capture the increased risk of dropout as a result of the pandemic.

A regional simulation exercise carried out by UNESCO focused on numbers of students at risk of not returning to education institutions in 2020 due to COVID-19. The study was based on a simulation exercise using economic outlook projections from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as enrolment data and gender parity indices from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). The simulation model covered 25 countries across the EAP, of which eight were Pacific Island Countries (**Fiji, Kiribati, FSM, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu**). However, it is important to note that larger high-income countries, such as **Australia** and **China**, were also included in the sample and reflected in the aggregate figures. Looking at boys and girls across all levels of education, from primary up to tertiary, the study found that up to 4.5 million learners were at risk of not returning to school across the region, a 0.92 percent increase in at risk students in the EAP region. (UNESCO, 2020).

Regional estimates suggest girls and students at primary and lower secondary levels may be at slightly lower risk of dropout than boys, but this data may not be geographically relevant. The UNESCO simulation exercise suggested a lower risk of dropout among female students compared to male students (0.8 percent increase compared to 1 percent increase). This equates to a total of 1.9 million female students at risk, of the existing 236 million female student population: and 2.5 million of an existing 250 million male students across the region being at risk of not returning to school (UNESCO, 2020). This gendered difference was most pronounced at tertiary level where the at-risk male students increased by approximately 3 percent, compared to 1.9 percent increase for female students. However, for each of these figures it is not possible to know what proportions specifically relate to PICs, as country projections were not conducted. Crucially, the authors note that given that national economies would be affected differently by COVID-19, country-specific projections were critical in terms of enhancing the robustness of the model (UNESCO, 2020).

Further country-focused case studies and updated projections are forthcoming but not yet available. The simulation data also showed some degree of variation in levels of risk across education level, with slightly higher increases in percentages of students at risk of dropping out in pre-primary and then again at upper secondary and tertiary levels, compared to primary and lower secondary. Although no regional insights are available, evidence from global literature suggests that students in higher education are at greater risk of dropping out because of higher costs associated with tertiary education (UNESCO, 2020).

Country-level estimates specifically for Fiji also indicate a potentially negative impact on enrolment and dropout. A socioeconomic impact assessment published in 2020 by UN Pacific provides country-level estimates for **Fiji**. The study considered the pandemic's impact across a range of sectors and, as part of a broader analysis, included a short section on the impact of lockdowns on secondary enrolment rates (United Nations Pacific, 2020). To estimate secondary enrolment rates, dropout rates were calculated using projected scenarios of the economic impact of lockdowns, including possible changes to poverty rates. The study found that enrolment rates were expected to remain below pre-pandemic levels. Based on the calculations, it was estimated that between 237 to 1,356 students would have dropped out in 2020 and that in the worst-case scenario over 500 students would remain out of school in 2022 (United Nations Pacific, 2020). However, these estimations were not sex disaggregated.

EVIDENCE RELATED TO RETENTION AND DELAYED RETURN

One study points to increased drop out, with some students not returning to school once schools reopened. The NDoE baseline study in **PNG** collected data in April and May 2020 from students and teachers in over 400 education institutions. The study found that two thirds of the education institutions reported that at least some students had withdrawn from school, on average 11 percent. In contrast, one third of the schools reported that none of their students had withdrawn. However, the report does not compare the average withdrawal rate it detected to previous years, limiting scope to interpret the data (Johnston et al., 2021). The data showed that greater numbers of younger children had withdrawn from school, with higher rates at ECE and elementary levels. Overall, the data suggests that slightly more female students (10.7%) had not returned to school compared to male students (10.4%), although this was not evident at all levels. At elementary level, 19 percent of girls had withdrawn from school compared to 17 percent of boys (Johnston et al., 2021).

Evidence indicates that many students went back to school after a delay, rather than as soon as they reopened. The second round PNG High Frequency Survey, conducted by UNICEF, was carried out in December 2020 and January 2021, approximately six months after the NDoE baseline. Although sampling for both studies was different and therefore not directly comparable, the findings for the high frequency survey highlight a potentially important finding in terms of delayed return to school. The survey data shows that among students whose schools had reopened, 81.1 percent returned to school straight away, with 18.9 percent not returning to school. However, a further 17.4 percent of students eventually returned to school after some delay. This means that 1.5 percent of students had still not returned to school by January 2021 (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). This indicates far lower levels of students not going back to school than the NDoE baseline suggests. The PNG High Frequency survey also suggests that children whose parents had completed tertiary or higher education were more likely to return to school when they reopened and that younger children aged 9-11 were more likely to be delayed going back to school compared to older children aged 12-14 (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). However, no statistical differences were found for gender or other characteristics (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021).

A report suggests that some secondary students might be attending primary schools closer to home.

A funding cover note by Global Partnership for Education in Tuvalu highlights an issue with some boarding secondary students who moved back home with their families during lockdown having now joined local primary schools. The report notes that this has created challenges for local teachers who are now responsible for teaching them without having knowledge of required specialist areas or teaching at that level. The reprint also highlights that this noted increase in students locally has increased class sizes and stretched resources. However, it is not clear what evidence source these findings come from (GPE, 2020).

3.3 BARRIERS TO ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION

Some evidence points to physical difficulties students faced in accessing schools when they reopened.

A UNICEF report from 2020 that presents secondary analysis of evidence from Fiji and Samoa suggests that when schools reopened some students could not return due to restrictions around inter island travel. However, no further detail is provided, and it is not clear what primary data this is based on (UNICEF Pacific Islands, no date). A post disaster needs assessment of Tropical Cyclone Harold and COVID-19 in Vanuatu highlighted the compounded effects of the pandemic alongside other shocks. The report showed at the point where schools were already closed due to COVID-19, the cyclone then badly damaged many of a large proportion of school buildings (448 of the 654 surveyed). This meant that even when COVID-related restrictions eased and schools could open again a high proportion remained inaccessible, with many students unable to attend school in person or even access home learning materials. The report also mentions loss or diversion of funding as key pre-existing barriers to recovery and resilience of the sector and its ability to respond to COVID-19 (Government of Vanuatu, 2020).

FEAR OF CATCHING COVID-19

Several surveys suggest that decreased attendance and delayed return to school could – at least in part – be attributed to a fear of contracting COVID-19.

The NDoE Baseline survey in PNG consulted head teachers from 401 institutions, at most levels of education, from pre-primary to secondary, and including vocational training, in 2020. It found that 66 percent of these head teachers believed that fear went at least some way to explaining decreased attendance among their students (Johnston et al., 2021). This perception held a year later. A survey carried out in 2021 found that 39 percent (out of a sample of 183 schools) cited covid related reasons for decreased attendance. Sixty five percent of these, believed fear of COVID-19 to be the reason for student absenteeism in PNG (Petai, 2021). A funding cover note by GPE in Tuvalu similarly refers to parents' ambivalence about children returning to secondary school, as they were worried about their children's safety during the pandemic. However, it is not clear what primary or secondary evidence this statement was based on (GPE, 2020).

Evidence highlights COVID-19-related concerns among parents. In the NDoE baseline study in PNG 72 percent of teachers said that parents had raised COVID-19-related concerns with them. This was particularly the case for parents who had younger children in early childhood education centres and elementary schools. Teachers said the most common concern among parents related to their child's risk of catching COVID-19 at school (reported by 87 percent of teachers). Sixty two percent of teachers reported that parents were specifically worried about a lack of social distancing at school and 45 percent that they were concerned about a lack of PPE. Twenty eight percent of teachers also reported that parents were anxious about schools not following COVID-19 protocols. The authors of the report concluded that parental concerns of this kind were likely to lead to higher rates of absenteeism among students as their parents kept them at home. Parental concerns were found to be highest in the National Capital District, which the authors reflected could be because they had been exposed to greater amounts of information on COVID-19 compared to those in areas such as West Sepik, where parental concerns were lowest (Johnston et al., 2021). In the PNG High Frequency Survey, telephone interviews with household members showed that a perceived lack of safety in schools was one of the main reasons given to explain why children had not returned to school when they reopened, as reported by 59.9 percent of respondents (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). A gender analysis report by Care in PNG in 2020 also highlighted parents' concerns about inadequate Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities in school, as well as overcrowding during the pandemic (CARE, 2020c).

Some evidence also points to COVID-19-related concerns among teachers and students. In the NDoE baseline survey in PNG teachers were also asked about the challenges they faced when schools reopened. Fifty six percent of the teachers reported difficulty maintaining social distancing and 43 percent cited crowded classrooms in particular. Students who participated in the survey also expressed some concerns regarding contracting COVID-19, with 70 percent of students (out of the sample of 3904 students) said that they were not attending school because they were worried of catching COVID-19. The report also mentions that some children were expressing anxiety about being forcefully vaccinated. (Johnston et al., 2021).

Evidence shows that young people are worried about the virus itself. Two U-report polls in FSM (U-Report, 2021d) and Solomon Islands (U-Report, 2021e) asked young people whether they were worried about being at school. In FSM a quarter of respondents said they were worried (26 percent for female respondents, and 19 percent for male respondents) and 39 percent said they were not. The remaining respondents said they did not go to school.

In the Solomon Islands, just over half said they were worried about going to school, with an almost equal split between male and female respondents. Respondents to a socioeconomic assessment survey in Samoa reported that their children were worried about the pandemic; however only 14 percent of households reported that children were worried about difficulties in studying and remote learning. The majority (63 percent) were worried about the virus, while 30 percent were worried about losing a loved one (UN RCO, 2021).

LOSS OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The pandemic resulted in loss of family livelihoods and an inability to meet the costs of education as a key factor influencing attendance and retention.

Some evidence suggests that loss of household income has meant that students' return to school has been deprioritised. A regional youth-led action research study focused on the Asia Pacific, including Vanuatu, has highlighted widespread livelihood losses. The study showed that women tended to be more affected due to their overrepresentation in the informal sector and precarious jobs (ASPBAE, 2021). Several studies go on to mention costs as a barrier to return to school. The high frequency survey in PNG found that lack of money to pay school fees was cited by just over 21 percent of households whose children had not returned to school when they reopened (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). Similarly, the NDoE baseline survey in PNG found that a quarter of heads of schools identified costs such as fees, lunches, and transportation as a barrier to enabling children to return to school (Johnston et al., 2021).

Evidence specifically points to difficulties parents faced in affording fees and other costs. Similar findings were also found in other countries, with two studies in Vanuatu indicating that children were not returning to school because of reduced livelihoods among their families. A regional action research study focused on the Asia Pacific found that young people from Vanuatu reported that many parents had lost their jobs, which had '*left them with little money to pay their school fees and continue their education*' (ASPBAE, 2021 p.46). They reported that it was becoming increasingly difficult to pay the fees of technical colleges (ASPBAE, 2021). Another piece of qualitative research in Vanuatu highlighted that business owners, street vendors, builders and transport operators have been negatively impacted by the border closures. The report noted that the loss of income they suffered had led to difficulties in paying school fees. It was also noted that in light of these challenges in one community there had been a community fundraiser, to ensure that all children can still attend schools (VCCI, 2021).

3. ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION WHEN SCHOOLS REOPENED

Grade 11 students complete classwork at Norsup Secondary School. Photo taken by Connor Ashleigh for AusAID.



A mixed methods nutritional and socioeconomic impact assessment in the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu reported that schools stated that loss of income was a key reason for children not returning to school, as parents could no longer afford costs of transport, uniforms and fees (Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development et al., 2020). However, it is important to note that limited analysis was available in the report and little information was provided on the methodology. Further – albeit limited – evidence specifically from **Tuvalu** highlighted reports of girls having returned to their rural homes when their parents could no longer afford to pay their fees (PACE, 2020, in Pacific Women, 2021).

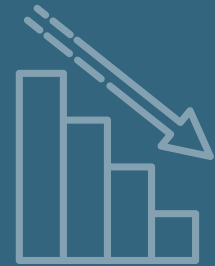
Some evidence highlights the specific challenges faced by girls. Qualitative data collected through workshops with adolescent girls (15 to 19 years) in **Kiribati**, Indonesia and **Vietnam** makes specific reference to girls' secondary education in relation to loss of income. Girls in **Kiribati** reported that parents who relied on the tourism industry were no longer able to pay for their fees, which impacted on girls' ability to return to school. The study also suggests that girls' education was not considered a priority, and this may have been a factor in discouraging girls from returning to school when they reopened. Furthermore, girls reported that once out of school, many did not want to return, and the authors framed this analysis in relation to a broader lack of awareness around the importance of girls' education. The paper also highlighted that adolescent girls can be particularly influenced by social norms, and this being a crucial time for family decisions around education and marriage, and that girls themselves may undervalue education (Plan International, 2021).

Young people were involved in economic activities to support their families during the pandemic. According to a World Vision survey of 752 households in 4 countries (of which three are Pacific Islands: **PNG**, **Solomon Islands** and **Vanuatu**), almost 60 percent of respondents either lost livelihoods or had to resort to alternative sources of income. Among the surveyed households, 14 percent reported sending their children to work (World Vision Australia 2021b). In **PNG**, the high frequency phone survey found that 6.1 percent of children aged 6 to 14 years had done some form of paid work or activity to support the family in generating income since the pandemic started. The data was not sex disaggregated; however econometric analysis showed that children from poorer households were more likely to have engaged in paid work. Children 9 years old and above were also more likely to work than younger children (World Bank and UNICEF 2021).

LEARNING LOSS

4

The section presents evidence on learning outcomes.



The evidence on learning is particularly limited, and this section draws on just 12 reports and data from two U-Report surveys.

Of the reports, three provided estimations and projections (ADB, 2021, Azevedo, 2020, United Nations Pacific 2020), while the remaining presented findings from primary data, including two large scale surveys conducted in Samoa (UN RCO, 2021) and PNG (Johnston et al., 2021). All of the findings were quantitative with the exception of those drawn from a single qualitative report from PNG (CARE, 2020c). Two of the reports presented data for official exam results. Findings were also drawn from data from a global online survey of 20,000 teachers, in addition, evidence has also been drawn from a selection of websites, blogs and Facebook posts. Country-specific evidence draws on data from seven PICS: Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. The evidence included in this section is based on data collected in 2020 and 2021, as well as estimations carried out in 2020 and 2021.

A majority of evidence included in this section had not been disaggregated by sex. Four reports included quantitative data that had been sex disaggregated: two U-Reports surveys (Kiribati, U-Report 2021b, and Solomon Islands, U-Report 2021c), as well as learning data from Samoa (SQA et al., 2021) and from Vanuatu (KOBLE, 2020).

KEY MESSAGES

- **Two studies estimated risk of dropout**, of which one was regional for EAP as a whole, **Regional estimations point to modest learning loss across the Pacific region as a result of the pandemic**. Similarly, learning loss was estimated for **Fiji**. However, these estimates are not sex disaggregated. The estimations focus on loss of LAYS, as well as PISA test scores.
- **Six reports, of which one is regional, suggest that students, parents and teachers felt the pandemic had negatively impacted on students' learning**. Much of the data upon which this evidence is based is not sex disaggregated, although two U-reports from **Kiribati** and **Solomon Islands** provide perspectives of both girls and boys, with a higher proportion of boys feeling their learning has been negatively affected.
- **Very little data on exam results and learning is publicly available**. As a result of the pandemic, examinations in many PICS could not go ahead as planned, although newspaper reports and social media suggest that in several countries these did go ahead eventually. The limited data that is available suggests learning loss as a result of the pandemic.

- **Some data on results is available from Samoa (2020 and 2021), Vanuatu (2019 and 2020) and PNG (2020).**

These provide some indication of learning losses and increased school year failures or repetition rates. Further research is needed to understand whether when there are worsened outcomes these are directly linked to the pandemic.

- Results from **Samoa** are mixed, showing worsened outcomes in some cases only. For example, there are differences across skills, with improvements for numeracy and some worsened outcomes in literacy (English). Changes are also not consistent across all school years.
 - Where results data is sex disaggregated (**Samoa** and **Vanuatu**), it suggests that girls may be suffering larger learning losses than boys.
 - In **Samoa**, where boys' repetition rates are already higher across primary and secondary, boys were most affected by increased repetition rates or worsened transition rates in 2020. Girls' repetition rates also increased. Overall repetition rates doubled in 2020 from 1 percent to 1.8 percent and recovered to 1.3 percent in 2021.
 - In **PNG**, there are reports of a larger number of students failing high school.
- **Reports that focus on learning loss estimation provide some trends across education levels, although detailed analysis is limited.** Results data for **Samoa** is disaggregated by Year of schooling and subjects, while for **Vanuatu** only one year and subject is available. Evidence on perception of learning loss does not refer to differences across education levels.

4.1 ESTIMATED LEARNING LOSS

Estimations point to increased learning loss across the region as a result of the pandemic.

However, these estimates are not sex disaggregated.

The Asian Development Bank used LAYS (learning-adjusted years of schooling) as a measure of learning loss for pre-primary, primary and secondary education. The study estimated relatively modest losses in the Pacific of 0.08 LAYS (equivalent to 1.3 percent of the baseline). This estimate is much lower than those for all countries in developing Asia (estimated to be between 23 and 38 percent). The lower estimates for the Pacific are explained in terms of the shorter length of school closures (ADB, 2021). A separate study by the World Bank used quantitative simulations to estimate learning loss. The study also indicates increased learning loss, but the figures are not directly comparable to the ADB estimates as they are for the EAP as a whole but does not specify which countries were included in the sample. The simulations suggest that the impact of COVID-19 would be a drop in LAYS of between 0.2 to 0.9 (Azevedo et al., 2020, table A.3.1). The World Bank study also provides global and regional analysis of estimated test scores, using the OECD's PISA⁵ (Programme for International Student Assessment) and PISA for Development datasets (for grades 9 and 10). Even in the most optimistic scenario, globally the study estimates that students will lose 7 PISA points (compared to 27 points in the pessimistic scenario). Results are similar for the EAP, where the optimistic scenario suggests a loss of 6 points, and the pessimistic scenario a loss of 26 points. Finally, the study estimates an increase in the percentage of secondary school students who will be Below Minimum Proficiency, from 36 percent at baseline, to between 41 and 46 percent (Azevedo et al., 2020).

Only one country-specific study that estimates learning loss was identified and estimates loss in total LAYS.

This is a multi-sector socioeconomic impact assessment in **Fiji**. The report includes an overview of education, and estimates loss of learning years at pre-primary, primary and secondary level. The report considers the impact of the three-month lockdown and calculates the total numbers of years lost, using enrolment rates from 2012, lockdown length, the percentage of curriculum that could be achieved through distance learning as well as economic and poverty rates projections. The study concludes that 38,373 years will be lost by Fijian students, of which 4,213 will be at pre-primary level, 21,435 at primary and 12,724 at secondary (United Nations Pacific, 2020). Differently from the

⁵ As explained in OECD's PISA Webpage: 'PISA is the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment. PISA measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges.' (OECD, PISA webpage, accessed on 30 Nov 2021)

4. LEARNING LOSS

Children at the Maamatoa Kindergarten play on the play equipment during their lunch break. Photo taken by Connor Ashleigh for AusAID.



regional reports outlined in the paragraph above, this report does not present the findings as average LAYS per student, or as a percentage loss from the baseline.

Estimates from Fiji also highlighted the likelihood that only a small proportion of the curriculum could be taught through home learning. In Fiji, where lockdown was in place from April to June 2020, UNESCO estimated that – despite government measures to enable learning through printed materials and online, radio and television-based lessons – only a small percentage of the curriculum would be completed through home learning. More specifically, the study estimated that 20 percent of the national curriculum could be taught through remote methods at pre-primary and secondary levels, but that between 20 and 50 percent could be completed at primary level (UNESCO, 2020, in United Nations Pacific, 2020). It is not specified whether this is a percentage of the yearly curriculum, or the curriculum that should have been covered during the school closures.

4.2 PERCEIVED LEARNING LOSS

Evidence from various countries in the region suggests that students, parents and teachers feel that COVID-19 has negatively impacted on students' learning.

Evidence from U-Report polls in Kiribati (U-Report, 2021b) and the Solomon Islands (U-Report, 2021c) indicates that students aged 15 to 24 felt that COVID-19 had impacted on their own learning. Sixty seven percent of respondents in the **Solomon Islands** and 46 percent of those in **Kiribati** said their learning was 'worse' as a result of the pandemic. However, the majority of these respondents felt that things could improve. In both countries, slightly more male students felt that their learning had been negatively impacted (68 percent for boys and 62 percent for girls in the **Solomon Islands**, and 48 percent for boys and 44 percent for girls in **Kiribati**). A higher percentage of those aged 20 to 24 felt their learning was negatively affected (71 percent in the **Solomon Islands** and 59 percent in **Kiribati**) compared to those aged 15 to 19 (69 percent in the **Solomon Islands** and 33 percent in **Kiribati**). In contrast, some students believed their learning had actually improved during the pandemic, something which was expressed by 12 percent in the **Solomon Islands** and 14 percent in **Kiribati**. Similarly, in **PNG**, a gender analysis found that parents believed their children's learning had been affected by missed lessons, that it may be hard for them to catch up, and that some children had lost interest in

school during closures (CARE, 2020c). In **Samoa**, almost a quarter of households expressed concern around learning and performance during remote learning; out of these, 80 percent were worried about children passing exams or the school year (UN RCO, 2021).

Teachers globally suggest learning loss may be higher among girls. A global online survey of 20,000 teachers, of which 38 percent were from EAP found that teachers in the region were most likely to report learning loss among their students (Pota et al., 2021). Although the regional data was not sex disaggregated, the global data highlighted gender differences with 16 percent of teachers reporting higher learning loss among girls and 25 percent not knowing if there was a difference in learning loss among girls and boys (Pota et al., 2021).

Teachers were expecting an increase in students needing to repeat the year. The NDoE baseline survey in **PNG** showed that, as of May 2020, many head teachers and teachers expected a spike in students needing to repeat the 2020 academic year as a result of school closures, long absences from school and missed curriculum, all leading students to fall behind. Most felt that no more than 10 percent of students would need to repeat but one in twenty predicted a very high rate of repetition of between 75 and 100 percent. The study did not include any further analysis in terms of gender and socioeconomic factors (Johnston et al., 2021). The study reported that the majority of schools (88 percent) would allow students to repeat grades. However, ECE schools were less likely to allow for repetition than all other levels, with just over half expecting to do so.

4.3 EXAM RESULTS

As a result of the pandemic, examinations in many countries in the Pacific could not go ahead as planned.

For example, a UNESCO Bangkok survey reports that in Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga examinations in 2020 were either delayed or postponed (UNESCO Bangkok, 2020, in UIS, 2021). Newspaper articles, social media posts, and official government pages suggest that examinations did eventually go ahead in some form in some PICs. For example, exams were administered in **Fiji** (Ministry of Education FIJI, Facebook post, 2020), **Kiribati** (MOE Kiribati, n.d.), **PNG** (PNG Education News, 2021), **Vanuatu** (Ministry of Education and Training, Vanuatu, 2021), **Solomon Islands** (Solomon Islands iResource, n.d. Accessed on 01 Dec 21), and **Tonga** (Ministry of Education and Training Tonga, Facebook post, 2021). In **Samoa**, national secondary examinations did not go ahead (Queensland Department of Education, North Coast Region, n.d).

With the exception of Samoa, 2021 results are largely not yet available. Results in Samoa show decreases in literacy competencies among year 4 and 6 students, and decreases in the numbers of students attaining Post School Education and Training qualifications.

In contrast, improvements were recorded for numeracy competencies, as well as improvements across all subjects monitored for the Samoa School Certificate. In **Samoa**, data comparing years 2019-20 and 2020-21 is available, and shows a mixed picture. Data on indicators reporting the percentage of students meeting minimum competency requirements shows improvements for numeracy, but worsened results for literacy in Year 4 and Year 6. For instance, in 2020-2021, 26 percent of Year 4 primary school girls at Government Schools met a minimum level of English literacy, compared to 47 percent the previous year (among boys, 22 percent met the requirements in 2020-21, compared to 26 percent the preceding year). In contrast, the percentage of Year 4 primary school children at Government Schools meeting the minimum level 3 for Numeracy increased, from 32 percent to 41 percent for girls, and from 25 percent to 42 percent for boys. This increase is, however, still below the targets that the Government had set in its Education Sector Plan (ESP). The ESP Annual Review (draft) states that the lower-than-expected increase is due to challenges stemming from school closures and remote learning, which influenced students' engagement and led to delayed or cancelled assessments. For older students, at Samoa School Certificate level, all ESP targets were achieved, and show improvements across all subjects

monitored (English, Maths and Sciences) (SQA et al., draft, 2021). The report provides no analysis of these differences across education levels, and the extent to which Covid-19 disruptions may have affected different age groups more or less severely. In Post School Education and Training, an 11 percent decrease in students attaining qualifications was noted in 2020 compared to 2019, with 1,704 students attaining qualifications from universities, TVET or religious providers in 2020. The ESP review (draft) notes that this decrease may have been due to school closures in 2020 (due to measles and COVID-19) (SQA et al., draft, 2021).

Results for 2020 exams are also rarely available but data that is available suggests large drops in pass rates and scores. Official 2020 assessment statistics for **Vanuatu** show a dramatic drop in average marks for both boys and girls. For example, the Year 10 JSC Mathematics Exam in English shows that girls scored an average of 34.2 percent in 2019 and boys scored an average of 34.3. By 2020, these scores had fallen to 23.4 percent for girls and 21.9 percent for boys (MOET VANSTA data, obtained through informal correspondence). However, it is not clear whether these drops in exam results can be attributed to COVID-19, or how they sit within broader trends. **PNG** also appears to have experienced large drops in pass rates during the pandemic. Uncited evidence presented in a newspaper article indicates that there was a 50 percent increase in students failing high school in 2020, with a total of more than 6,000 students failing. The article attributes this decrease in pass rates to the pandemic and points to lockdowns and school disruptions as being to blame. Other media reports highlight that, as a result, universities in **PNG** are struggling to recruit new students, with 7,000 school leavers accepted to fill 9,000 places available in 2021 (Faa, 2021). Limited information available on the government of **Tonga's** press release posted on social media shows that National Form Seven Certificate results show some improvement in 2020 compared to 2019, with an overall pass rate of 73 percent in 2020, up from 68 percent in 2019 (Ministry of Education and Training Tonga, Facebook post, 2021).

There is also some indication that exam disruption has caused concern among students. A small online quantitative rapid assessment survey of 20 young women in **Fiji**, aged 13 to 35 years, highlights that Year 8 students were worried about uncertainty around the transition from primary school to high school during the pandemic. In particular they worried about not being able to attend the high school of their choice due to the uncertainty of scheduled examinations (FWRM, n.d. (a)).

Statistical data comparing the school years 2019, 2020 and 2021 is available from Samoa, and suggests increased repetition rates in 2020 with some improvements in 2021. Overall, repetition rates across primary and secondary levels almost doubled between 2019 and 2020 (from 1 percent to 1.8 percent), but decreased in 2021 (1.3 percent), closer to pre-pandemic levels. In each year, repetition rates among male students were higher than rates among female students across all school years, particularly in Year 1. Repetition rates for Year 1 were highest in each of the three school years, with 3.6 percent repetition in 2019 (4.7 for male students and 2.4 among girls), doubling to 6.9 percent in 2020 (9.0 percent among boys and 4.7 percent among girls) and reaching 3.9 percent in 2021 (5.3 percent for boys, and 2.3 percent for girls). In addition, transition rates (primary to secondary) show a ten percent drop for male students in 2020 (from 90.3 percent transitioning in 2019 to 80.7 percent in 2020), with improvements in 2021 (91.1 percent). Transition rates for girls were relatively stable, with improvements in 2021 (93.2 percent in 2019, 93.4 percent in 2020, and 96.2 in 2021). It is not clear whether these patterns can be attributed to COVID-19, as the pandemic is not mentioned in the statistical report. (MESC, 2022).

WIDER IMPACTS ON GIRLS' EDUCATION AND WELLBEING

5



This section summarises available evidence on girls' wellbeing.

Twenty-six reports were included here, as well as data from four U-Report surveys, and one news report. These were either published in 2020 or 2021, with one report published in 2022. Of these reports, eleven provided quantitative data, nine qualitative data, and two were mixed-method.

An additional four reports drew on secondary data sources. Of the quantitative evidence, one provides estimations (United Nations Pacific, 2020), while four are large scale surveys (Johnston et al., 2021; Ritz, O'Hare and Burgess, 2020; World Bank and UNICEF, 2021; World Vision Australia, 2021b).

The majority of this evidence is sex disaggregated or focused exclusively on women and girls. However, none of the evidence presented in this section makes specific links to education outcomes. Evidence on GBV is available for seven countries: **Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu**. Some regional evidence and estimations are also available. Evidence on SRHR draws on data from four countries: **Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu**, as well as qualitative evidence across the Pacific Region. Documents from four countries – **Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu** – present data on mental health.

KEY MESSAGES:

- **Evidence points to decreased wellbeing outcomes across the region.** The available evidence suggests that the pandemic has had a negative impact on GBV for women and girls, sexual and reproductive health, in particular menstrual health management for girls, as well as mental health among young people.
- **Evidence suggests that across the region women and children, in particular girls, have been experiencing an increase in violence during the pandemic, including in the home.** This includes evidence from **Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu** and **Kiribati**. Data points to increases in a range of forms of violence, and in the severity of violence, with increased reporting to hotlines across age groups.
- **Data shows that both girls and boys have reported feeling less safe during the pandemic, while data from three countries suggests an increase in violent or negative behaviours from parents.** Regional and country focused evidence points to a link between increased violence and pandemic-related stress, such as economic pressure and restrictions to movement.

- **There is also evidence of reduced access to support services during the pandemic, in some cases because these services have been deemed 'non-essential'.** Despite evidence of increased violence, some data from **PNG** and **Fiji** suggests a reduction in formal reporting and survivors seeking help.
- **Evidence on early marriage is limited, although the data that does exist suggests some increases in early marriage during the pandemic.** In **PNG, Solomon Islands** and **Vanuatu** this appears to be driven by loss of livelihoods.
- **Quantitative data on early pregnancies is not available, but quantitative estimations in EAP suggest increases in adolescent pregnancies, while estimations in Fiji suggest that there will be increases in unwanted pregnancies as a result of the pandemic.** Qualitative evidence from **PNG** suggests increases in early pregnancies during school closures.
- **Evidence also points to negative impacts on access to SRHR services.** Although this evidence is limited, it illustrates increased challenges for girls as a result of the pandemic in at least four countries (**PNG, Vanuatu, Samoa** and the **Solomon Islands**). Some evidence also highlighted difficulties girls were facing in relation to menstrual health during the pandemic.
- **Several reports from Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu show worsened mental health among children, youth and adults during the pandemic.** The majority of evidence is sex disaggregated, although it does not show significant differences between boys and girls. Some evidence also suggests that access to mental and psychosocial services has worsened during the pandemic.

5.1 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

RATES OF VIOLENCE AND FEELING UNSAFE

Evidence points to an increase in violence against women and girls.

In a small-scale study with 21 adolescent girls in four countries in the Pacific (**Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu**) two in five said that at times they have felt unsafe at home or with an intimate partner during the pandemic. They described feeling unsafe as a result of increased tensions at home, often as a result of the pressure caused by family members losing income, experiencing health issues or drinking more heavily since COVID-19 (Pacific Women, 2020). Results from another small-scale U-Report Poll in **Kiribati** showed more mixed results. While 17 percent of girls now felt less safe during the pandemic than they did before the outbreak of COVID-19, 67 percent said they now felt safer during the pandemic (U-Report, 2020a). However, qualitative data collected through workshops with adolescent girls (aged 15 to 19) in **Kiribati, Indonesia** and **Vietnam** found that in **Kiribati** girls felt at increased risk of violence as a result of the pandemic (Plan International, 2021). In the **Solomon Islands**, in 2022, 53 percent of female respondents to a similar U-Report stated that they felt less safe now than in the previous year, while 23 percent stated they now felt safer. Similarly, 55 percent of boys said they felt less safe, and 23 percent said they felt safer (U-Report, 2022).

A range of violence was perpetrated against women and girls – and boys – at home.

A UNICEF rapid assessment survey in **PNG** found that over a quarter of respondents (27 percent) reported increases in domestic violence against women and children during the State of Emergency as a result of COVID-19 (the survey was disseminated on social media and existing clusters, details on the sample are not available) (UNICEF, 2020b). Qualitative gender analysis in **PNG** also highlighted the concerns about increased violence and harassment against women and girls in public spaces (CARE, 2020c) and increased accusations of sorcery against women, which has been related to public violence in the Eastern Highlands (Eastern Highlands Family Voice et al., 2020). The research also points to women and girls being subjected to violence and harassment perpetrated by the police, who have claimed it is related to the enforcement of curfew times and social distancing measures (Eastern Highlands Family Voice et al., 2020). Data from a national counselling helpline in **PNG**, as reported in a newspaper article, also shows increases in calls, including from

adolescents. Overall, there was a 75 percent increase in calls from April 2020 to March 2021 compared with the year before. This included an increase in calls related to sexual violence. Among youth, there was a 128 percent increase in calls received from 11- to 15-year-olds and 150 percent increase in those aged 16 to 20 years. This data is not sex disaggregated but the report mentions that this pattern holds for both male and female adolescents (Loop PNG, 2021). A U-Report poll in **PNG** found that 41 percent of parents confirmed that children in their family suffered from violence due to COVID-19 and related lockdowns. Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to report this (51 percent compared to 32 percent respectively) (U-Report, 2020b).

Evidence points to an increase in violent behaviours by parents during the pandemic. A global survey (46 countries) on the impact of COVID-19 on children, led by Save the Children, and including data collection in **PNG** and the **Solomon Islands** found an increase in reports of violence and physical punishment by parents against children. In the Pacific (**PNG** and **Solomon Islands**), over a quarter of parents (28.5 percent) reported an increase in 'negative or violent parenting practices', such as reduced patience and calmness, or increase in aggression, shouting, or use of physical punishment (Ritz, O'Hare and Burgess, 2020). According to a World Vision survey of 752 households in four countries in 2021 (of which three are Pacific Islands: **PNG**, **Solomon Islands** and **Vanuatu**; the fourth is **Timor Leste**), 80 percent of parents or caregivers had used either psychological aggression or physical punishment against children in the month before the survey (World Vision Australia, 2021b). Similarly, a rapid assessment by UNICEF of the secondary impacts of COVID-19 on children in **PNG** found that 36 percent of respondents reported an increase in physical discipline since the start of the pandemic. The survey was aimed at youth, and respondents were reached through social media and existing clusters and subclusters. Additional information on the methodology and sample is not available (UNICEF, 2020b). Finally, qualitative data from **PNG** suggests that pandemic stresses have led to higher risk of neglect and violence particularly towards children with disabilities (Costa, 2022). However, the high frequency phone survey conducted in June 2020 in **PNG** presented a very different picture. Survey data suggested no overall change in intrahousehold conflict since school closures and the State of Emergency began. This included no reported increase in physical discipline for children or disagreements between household members. Only 6.6 percent of respondents said that physical discipline had increased, while 9.1 percent said it had actually decreased (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021)

Data from helplines for people who have experienced or witnessed violence also suggest that violence has increased during the pandemic. There have been reported spikes in calls, including from children to helplines and crisis centres across the region, primarily from **Fiji**, **Samoa**, and **Tonga**. For example, the Women's Crisis Centre in **Tonga** recorded a 54 percent increase in calls (UN Women, 2020b). Similarly, in **Samoa** case management data from the Samoa Victim Support Group recorded a 48 percent increase in reports of sexual, emotional, physical and verbal abuse in the period March to May 2020 compared to comparable data from the year before (Eastern Highlands Family Voice et al. 2020). Increases in calls to the national domestic violence helpline have also been reported in **Fiji**, with 527 cases in April 2020, compared to 87 cases in February 2020. The authors note that this has included an increase in cases from women who have previously reported violence as well as from those who are reporting violence for the first time, suggesting both an increase in intensity of existing violence and new violence. Three quarters of women who contacted the helpline reported physical violence (UN Women, 2020b). Helplines also reported an increase in calls related to child abuse, although further detail on this was not available (United Nations Pacific, 2020; CARE 2020a). Qualitative data from a gender analysis in **Fiji** also suggests an increase in child abuse and exploitation, particularly of girls. The report also refers to an increase in calls to the Child Helpline, although no details on this are available (CARE, 2020a). In **Samoa**, which recorded more than twice the number of calls compared to the same period in 2019, with increases in cases of physical abuse and child abandonment (UNICEF, in United Nations in Samoa, 2020).

Reports from across the region have linked increases in violence to COVID-19-related stresses, such as economic pressures and restrictions of movements, particularly in relation to domestic violence where women and children have been forced to stay at home with perpetrators. For example, qualitative reports from **PNG** show that the lockdowns have made it difficult for women to escape difficult situations at home (Eastern Highlands Family Voice et al., 2020). Other regional and country focused documents report similar findings (including UN Women, 2020b; UNFPA and WEI, 2020; Pacific Women, 2020; PNG GBV sub-cluster and UNFPA, 2020, in UN Women, 2020c; CARE, 2020a).

Evidence on early marriage is limited, although the evidence that is available suggests increases in early marriage as a result of COVID-19. World Vision's survey of 752 households in four countries (**PNG**, **Solomon Islands**, **Vanuatu**, and **Timor Leste**) found that 1.5 percent of respondents reported early marriage as a coping mechanism in response to the loss of livelihoods that resulted from the pandemic (World Vision Australia,

2021b). A post disaster needs assessment of Tropical Cyclone Harold and COVID-19 in **Vanuatu** also found an increase in early marriage (Government of Vanuatu, 2020). Finally, qualitative data from **PNG** suggests that there is a perceived increase in child marriage and early pregnancy, with youth in citing these as reasons for friends or siblings not returning to school (Costa, 2022). These findings are supported by Save the Children's regional estimates for EAP as a whole, based on economic projections, which showed a risk of 61,000 additional early marriages in the first year of the pandemic, reaching 305,000 after five years. These additional early marriages would be on top of the five million girls already at risk of early marriage before COVID-19. The report also estimates an additional 10,000 adolescent pregnancies in the EAP region within the first year of the pandemic (Save the Children, 2020).

Some country evidence also points towards an increase in unwanted pregnancies during the pandemic but this did not distinguish between age groups so it is not possible to draw out the specific implications for adolescent girls. Quantitative modelling in **Fiji**, presented as part of a socioeconomic impact assessment, estimated the number of unintended pregnancies in part based on changes in use of contraceptive methods during the pandemic. The study predicted that there would be between 2,392 and 9,592 additional unintended pregnancies in 2020. In the longer term, unintended pregnancies were expected to continue but decrease each year (United Nations Pacific, 2020). Schools participating in the follow-up survey to the NDoE baseline, collected in 2021 in PNG, reported instances of early pregnancies during school closures (NDoE, 2022). While qualitative data suggests that early pregnancy is both a driver of dropping out of school, as well as a result of a lack of supervision at home during school closures. In these instances, early pregnancies can result in forced marriage, with adolescent girls at higher risk of not returning to school due to social stigma and discrimination (Costa, 2022).

Teachers were concerned about the risks of several forms of violence and abuse. In **PNG**, the NDoE baseline study found that most teachers were worried about student welfare during the pandemic. Eighty six percent specifically expressed concern for students during school closures. Concerns cited included lack of supervision at home (63.3 percent), emotional abuse (37.7 percent), hunger (36.8 percent), child labour (35.5 percent), bullying (35 percent) and stigma around disease or illness (30.9 percent). Other concerns (reported by less than 30 percent of teachers) included sexual abuse, GBV, child marriage, community or tribal conflict, discrimination against children with disabilities, sorcery and corporal punishment (Johnston et al., 2021).

LACK OF ACCESS TO REPORTING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Alongside evidence of increased levels of violence and potential demand for services, there is also evidence of reduced access to support services during the pandemic, in some cases because these services have been deemed 'non-essential'. Findings from the **PNG** GBV sub-cluster on the State of Emergency showed a 31 percent decrease in access to violence-related services, compared to the same reporting period preceding the State of Emergency (**PNG** GBV sub-cluster and UNFPA, 2020, in UN Women, 2020c). More specifically, further evidence in **PNG** has underlined existing challenges that often prevent women and girls from reporting violence, including lack of mobile phone access. However, there was some indication of this challenge becoming more pronounced during the pandemic, with the increased prices of prepaid phone credit. Early on in the pandemic, Family Support Centres in **PNG** were initially declared to be non-essential services and were scaled back as a result. Reporting violence to the police was also identified as a challenge, with the police force's attention being redirected towards the COVID-19 response (Boroko family violence unit, no date, in United Nations in **PNG** and UNDP, 2020; CARE 2020c). Data from UNFPA on access to services in **PNG** highlighted that 85 percent of people responding to a recent survey said they had either directly witnessed or heard of cases where survivors of violence had been turned away from support services due to COVID-19 restrictions or closures. No information is available on methodology or sampling for this survey (uncited, in UNFPA, n.d.). Regional data for Asia and the Pacific, including **Samoa** collected through Rapid Gender Assessments (RGAs) showed that among CSOs working to address GBV, 71 percent were only operating on a partial basis since the spread of COVID-19, while 12 percent said they had suspended services completely (UN women, 2020a). In **Fiji**, evidence pointed to service providers being unable to support survivors in person because of physical distancing measures (Hamilton, 2020).

Despite evidence of increased violence, evidence suggests a reduction in formal reporting and survivors seeking help. A mini-survey by UNFPA in **PNG** found a reduction in the registering of family violence cases (UNFPA 2020, in United Nations in **PNG** and UNDP, 2020). In the **Solomon Islands**, service providers have reported that cases have dropped because of movement restrictions (CARE, 2020b). Similarly, in **Fiji**, although hotline data suggests an increase in cases, police statistics show a decrease in reporting (FWRM, n.d. (b)).

5.2 SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Evidence across the region also points to a broader issue of a decrease in access to health-related services during the pandemic, including sexual and reproductive health services.

World Vision's survey of 752 households in four countries (PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Timor Leste) found decreased access to services, with only 60 percent of respondents having access to hospitals (compared to 76.5 percent pre COVID-19), and 56.6 percent reporting having access to maternal centres (compared to 69.7 percent pre COVID-19) (World Vision Australia, 2021b). Across the Pacific, disruptions in family planning and sexual health services were reported, due to closure or limitation of services, mobility restrictions, supply chain disruptions, and fear of contracting COVID-19 (International Planned Parenthood Federation, Sub-Regional Office for the Pacific, 2020, in Pacific Women, 2020). In PNG, a third (36.4 percent) of households with children who participated in the high frequency survey perceived a decline in the availability of health services, with differences across geographies and type of care (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). Also in PNG, a U-Report poll found that 86 percent of respondents said they were less able to access healthcare during the pandemic. Reasons given included 'fear of getting COVID' (42 percent), 'no transport' (25 percent), and 'distrust of health services' (19 percent) (U-Report, 2020b).

Evidence highlighted difficulties girls were facing in relation to menstrual health during the pandemic.

In Vanuatu, the post disaster needs assessment found that travel restrictions have impacted the supply of personal hygiene and menstrual products (Government of Vanuatu, 2020). Research by Plan has also pointed to the issue of menstrual health management having become increasingly challenging across the region, due to limited access to wash facilities and water, as well as access to relevant information (Plan International, undated, in Pacific Women, 2020). In Samoa almost all women surveyed in the UN Rapid Gender Assessment (93 percent) reported difficulties in accessing reproductive, sanitary and health products, compared to just over a third in the Solomon Islands (36 percent) (UN Women, n.d.). A small-scale quantitative survey with 21 adolescent girls in four countries in the Pacific (Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) found that a quarter reported having to manage their sexual health and menstruation differently

as a result of COVID-19 (Pacific Women, 2020). Existing barriers such as lack of basic water facilities in schools were already contributing to menstruating girls' absences from schools in pre-COVID-19 PNG. This lack of facilities has compounded health risks faced by students (PNG NDoE, 2021 in Costa 2022), and has been reported as a barrier contributing to increasing absenteeism among girls (NDoE, 2022).

Evidence also points to potential wider health impacts as a result of increased school dropout. A socioeconomic impact assessment by UN Pacific, which used quantitative modelling (2020), predicted impacts on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) as a result of children leaving school in Fiji. The report found that between 231 and 769 children across the country were at risk of developing an NCD if they did not return to school. The study also estimated an increase in underweight prevalence among children, with an immediate increase of between 0.012 and 0.05 percent and additional, but slightly lower, percentage increases over the coming years. The study also predicted an increase in the prevalence of wasting among children and obesity among adults as a result of the pandemic's negative impact on income (United Nations Pacific, 2020). Anecdotal data from Fiji also suggests that the pandemic has negatively impacted health seeking behaviours (UNFPA Pacific Sub-Regional Office/MHMS, 2020, in United Nations Pacific, 2020).

5.3 MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Data shows worsened mental health among children, youth and adults, with increases in prevalence of stress, anxiety, depression and mental health needs.

The Pacific Humanitarian Team's Humanitarian Response Plan refers to emerging evidence, including from UNICEF, that shows that children's mental health and psychosocial support needs have increased across 12 countries in the Pacific, as a result of the pandemic and restrictions. Humanitarian partners on the ground have collected reports of increased youth suicide, substance abuse, domestic and child abuse, as well as increased stress, anxiety and depression (Pacific Humanitarian Team, 2021). Data from the national counselling helpline in PNG, as reported in a news article, shows an increase in calls related to mental health by 263 percent between April 2020 and March 2021, compared to the previous year (Loop PNG, 2021).

There was an increase in negative feelings and behaviours among girls and boys. A small-scale study with 21 adolescent girls aged 14 to 19 years in four countries in the Pacific (Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) found that three out of five experienced stress because of the pandemic, while four in five felt lonely. The main reason given for loneliness was the isolation driven by restrictions (Pacific Women, 2020). A U-Report online poll of young people in PNG found that a third of girls were feeling either sad (15 percent), very angry (12 percent) or upset (9 percent), with similar percentages for boys (U-Report, 2020c). A global mixed methods research study (46 countries), led by Save the Children, looks at children's and parents' feelings during the pandemic and includes the Pacific, with data collected in PNG and the Solomon Islands. In these two countries, the majority of children (54.9 percent of girls and 54.8 percent of boys) reported expressing more negative feelings as a result of the pandemic. This is considerably lower than the global average of 83.6 percent of girls and 82.3 percent of boys (Ritz, O'Hare and Burgess, 2020). A UNFPA socioeconomic impact assessment of the pandemic in Fiji also found that 28 percent of young people aged 20 to 24 years said they now felt anxious all the time (UNFPA, 2020 in United Nations Pacific, 2020). The high frequency survey in PNG found that, in the 15 days before the survey, more than a third of children (35.1 percent) had exhibited at least one potentially negative behaviour including crying more than usual, which was particularly common among younger children and children in rural areas, and being more irritable than normal, which was more common among boys (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). A U-Report poll in

PNG found that 13 percent of respondents (of which 78 percent were young people under 30) stated that school closures were making them sad and depressed. Slightly fewer female respondents said this compared to male (9 percent compared to 12 percent). Other reasons for feeling sad and depressed included lack of financial resources and employment opportunities, as well as lack of social interactions and friendships (U-Report, 2020d).

Some evidence also suggests that access to mental and psychosocial services has worsened during the pandemic. A large-scale quantitative survey in PNG (high frequency phone survey) found that 22.9 percent of households with children noticed a decrease in mental health and psychological support in their community, with minimal variation across respondent's characteristics and location (World Bank and UNICEF, 2021). A mixed methods research study, led by Save the Children, found that a smaller percentage of parents/caregivers in PNG and the Solomon Islands reported lack of access to services for themselves, with 6.2 percent reporting that they had not receiving the counselling they needed, and 2.7 percent not receiving the mental health services they needed (Ritz, O'Hare and Burgess, 2020). A U-Report poll among young people in PNG found that the majority of respondents either reported a lack of support services in the community (43 percent) or did not know about them (34 percent). Only 23 percent of respondents (and 20 percent of female respondents) said that support services for depression or feeling sad existed in their communities (U-Report, 2020d).



6

CONCLUSIONS

This review has synthesised the evidence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls' education and wellbeing in eleven Pacific Island countries.

The evidence collected points to a number of impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. Most directly, many schools in the Pacific have been closed for extended periods, and large numbers of children have been unable to access distance learning opportunities.

The evidence points to a number of challenges for students, including difficulties in accessing and engaging with digital learning when schools were closed, with some indications that some of these challenges might be felt more acutely by girls and those in rural areas. Available evidence also suggests that absenteeism among students is higher than it was before the pandemic, with the lowest attendance among younger primary school age children (post ECE level), and intra-country variation across regions.

The economic shocks caused by COVID-19 and the loss of livelihoods at the household level has put girl's education at risk. Evidence points to some households' reduced capacity to pay for school fees. It is possible that girl's education is particularly at risk, as evidence has also highlighted that girls' education is given lower priority, and girls might be less supported at home.

Limited sex disaggregated evidence is available for PICs, and this review has largely drawn on non-disaggregated documents. Nonetheless, the evidence does point to a number of important challenges and

impact on children's education and warrants further research to better understand gendered differences. It is likely that girls' education has been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, due to pre-existing gender inequalities and discriminatory gender norms, threatening to undermine gains made over the past decade.

When documents do disaggregate data, they rarely provide an analysis of drivers and discriminatory social norms, and this is a crucial research gap. Discriminatory social norms might lead to girls remaining out of school in the longer term, and evidence already points to some increased risks of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and the need to perform unpaid labour to support their families. Although most of the available evidence does not provide this type of analysis, qualitative evidence from PNG (Costa, 2022) does suggest that norms define girls' experiences of the impact of the pandemic, and that even when quantitative data does not point to gender gaps, it is important to understand how these experiences can be different and how this will influence long term impacts on girls' education and wellbeing.

Very few studies have examined the impact that the pandemic has had on student learning outcomes, and those that have generated such evidence indicate that there might have been negative impacts on learning for both boys and girls, and possibly more so for girls. However, further research is needed to understand whether when there are worsened outcomes these are directly linked to the pandemic, whether there are differences between boys and girls, and which other factors of exclusion might increase vulnerability.

In addition to accessing educational opportunities amidst COVID-19, there is a need to support governments, schools, teachers, and parents in providing quality remote or hybrid forms of learning.

Evidence suggests that schools and teachers have faced challenges in supporting students efficiently and has highlighted the key role of parents in supporting children participation. Evidence has also highlighted widespread difficulties in accessing digital modalities of learning, and this has been an important barrier to equitable access.

A number of impacts on girls' wellbeing have been identified. In particular, there have been negative impact on GBV for women and girls; increased parental violence or negative behaviours; worsened menstrual health management and access to health services; and a negative impact on mental health for both boys and girls, which has included increased stress and increased feelings of lack of safety. Reports from some countries also suggest a reduction in availability and access to services, including health services, response to GBV, and mental and psychosocial services.

GIVEN THE EVIDENCE COLLECTED AND SYNTHESISED, VARIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS ARE MADE:



PRIORITISE LIVELIHOODS THROUGH TARGETED SOCIAL PROTECTION, IN PARTICULAR FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Ensure these programmes target the most marginalised girls in each context (including rural/remote girls, girls with disabilities, refugees or ethnic minorities) and include accountability mechanisms to ensure effective rollout.



PROMOTE THE SAFE-GUARDING AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Especially vulnerable groups including married or pregnant girls and young women, LGBTQI+ communities, learners with disabilities, and children of female-headed households, who may be more prone to child labour or domestic work.



PROMOTE POSITIVE MESSAGING AROUND THE IMPORTANCE OF GIRLS' EDUCATION AND ADDRESSING NORMS

that increase risks of early marriage and pregnancy as a result of school dropout or school closures.



DIVERSIFY REMOTE TEACHING AND LEARNING MODALITIES

Including hybrid forms of digital and non-digital learning, as well as synchronous and asynchronous delivery approaches. A focus on low-cost approaches and lower usage of e-learning might be more appropriate for resource poor environments. Develop guidance for online safety.



SUPPORT TEACHERS THROUGH TRAINING AND COACHING TO BETTER SUPPORT STUDENTS

as well as practical resources such as budgets for learning materials and travel, or support for increased unpaid care burden of female teachers. approaches.



PROMOTE GENDER-SENSITIVE PEDAGOGY, AND TRAIN TEACHERS

In ICT skills, curricular adaptation and digital content creation, as well as psychosocial support (PSS).



SUPPORT PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Through fostering social networks and remote communities of practice and providing workshops on MHPSS and learning.



SUPPORT A MULTISECTORAL APPROACH AND EXPLORE PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

In order to equip schools and communities with ICT infrastructure, and teaching and learning materials, WASH facilities and appropriate health, nutrition or school-feeding programmes.



COMMISSION, SUPPORT, AND/OR ADVOCATE FOR MORE RESEARCH THAT EXAMINES LEARNING LOSS

and ensure that data is disaggregated by both sex and other variables of marginalisation, including age, location, displacement and disability, to highlight intersecting vulnerabilities.



COMMISSION, SUPPORT, AND/OR ADVOCATE FOR MORE RESEARCH THAT EXAMINES DRIVERS OF EXCLUSIONS AND PANDEMIC RELATED RISKS FOR BOTH SEX AND OTHER VARIABLES OF MARGINALISATION,

Including age, location, displacement and disability, to highlight intersecting vulnerabilities.

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