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LEADERSHIP MATTERS 2024

BENCHMARKING WOMEN IN BUSINESS LEADERSHIP IN THE PACIFIC

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Asian Development Bank, or its Board of Governors, or the governments they represent, or the governments of Australia and New Zealand.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	—	Asian Development Bank
CEDAW	—	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEO	—	Chief Executive Officer
CFO	—	Chief Financial Officer
COO	—	Chief Operating Officer
COVID-19	—	Coronavirus disease
DFAT	—	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
FAO	—	Food and Agriculture Organization
FSM	—	Federated States of Micronesia
FY	—	Fiscal Year
GDP	—	Gross Domestic Product
IFC	—	International Finance Corporation
ILO	—	International Labour Organization
IMF	—	International Monetary Fund
IOM	—	International Organization for Migration
MFAT	—	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (New Zealand)
MP	—	Member of Parliament
OHCHR	—	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PNG	—	Papua New Guinea
PSDI	—	Private Sector Development Initiative
RMI	—	Republic of the Marshall Islands
RPC	—	Regional Processing Centre
SOE	—	State-Owned Enterprise
UNDP	—	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	—	United Nations Population Fund
US	—	United States
WEF	—	World Economic Forum

CURRENCIES AND EXCHANGE RATES

Currencies and Exchange Rates to the United States dollar (annual average)

Country	Currency	Symbol	Exchange Rate				
			2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Australia	Australian dollar/s	A\$	1.44	1.45	1.33	1.44	1.51
Cook Islands	New Zealand dollar/s	NZ\$	1.49	1.57	1.44	1.47	1.62
Papua New Guinea	kina	K	3.39	3.46	3.51	3.52	3.58

Source: Asian Development Bank. 2024. *Asian Development Outlook*.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific offers an in-depth analysis of the progress and challenges in elevating women to leadership roles within business across the 14 Pacific developing member countries of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). This 2024 edition expands upon the baseline established in the original 2021 report to track advancements in women's positions as board directors, board chairs, and chief executive officers (CEOs) in the Pacific. Set against a backdrop of global gender disparities, this report highlights key changes since the first edition and integrates insights from both men and women business leaders on the evolving influences impacting women in business leadership in the Pacific.

The study used a comprehensive, mixed-method approach to evaluate women's leadership in business across the Pacific. Data were collected through a desk-based review of publicly available information on the composition of boards and senior management across 397 organizations in 14 countries, spanning various sectors and organization types, including industry associations, publicly listed companies, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), private non-listed companies, and branch offices of regional or international companies. The study includes insights from 285 Pacific women leaders who participated in the Leadership Matters survey conducted for this report, and 54 business leaders (men and women) with whom the authors held in-depth interviews. This methodology not only grounds the report's findings but also provides deeper insights into the factors facilitating and challenging the progression of women in leadership roles, thereby enhancing the nuanced understanding of these dynamics in the Pacific.

The second edition of the Leadership Matters report identifies significant progress in the representation of women in business leadership in the Pacific. Although progress varies by country and sector, the regional trajectory is positive. Women's representation in board director and CEO roles has shown a promising increase, with the proportion of women directors rising from 21% in 2021 to 26% in 2024 and the proportion of women CEOs rising from 13% to 20% during the same period. These gains reflect not only remarkable achievements by individual women but also a shift in social norms and attitudes toward greater recognition and appreciation of women's contributions to business.

For the second time, Pacific regional averages for women's representation in business leadership surpassed global averages, where women hold 23% of board director positions and only 6% of CEO roles. The region's progress toward the global target of 30% women in all leadership roles is evidence of a growing acceptance of women as business leaders. In 2024, 15% of boards had achieved gender parity or even exceeded it. This signals a departure from male-dominated boards and indicates a more balanced and representative leadership structure. Such trends suggest a promising move toward more inclusive and diverse corporate cultures in the Pacific, where women are pivotal leaders shaping the future of business.

Despite these gains, disparities persist in the Pacific. Almost one-quarter (24%) of all boards still have no women directors, and a further 32% have fewer than 30% women directors. Women's attainment of CEO positions remains deeply inequitable across the Pacific, with men holding 80% of these roles, leaving women with only a 20% representation. Similarly, the stagnation in the low number of women serving as board chairs at just 12% and deputy chairs at 18% highlights persistent obstacles to women reaching the highest levels of leadership.

The proportion of women in leadership roles varies considerably by country, organization type, and sector. Similar to the findings of the 2021 report, the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Samoa, and Tuvalu stand out as having higher proportions of women directors and CEOs than regional averages, while Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and Vanuatu lag behind regional averages for both roles. Several sectors meet or exceed regional averages for women directors and CEOs (diversified, finance and insurance, and tourism). However, traditionally male-dominated industries (information technology, manufacturing, resources, and transport and infrastructure) continue to lag in appointing women CEOs.

By organization type, there has been an encouraging increase in the representation of women as SOE directors between the first and second editions, from 18% to 26%. This increase can be partly attributed to national efforts to improve SOE director appointment processes, including setting targets for women's representation, such as PNG has done. This is significant as SOEs offer almost half of all leadership opportunities in the sample.

Overall, women are more likely to attain leadership positions in industry associations, where they hold 40% of board chair roles and 47% of CEO roles. In contrast, publicly listed companies in Fiji and PNG have much lower representation, with women holding only 19% of director roles and 4% of CEO positions. Private non-listed companies and branch offices have similar rates of women CEOs (20%–21%) but lower representation in other leadership roles.

The Pacific region shows considerable variation in the legislative and policy environment supporting women's leadership, such as legal protection against gender-based discrimination and harassment in employment, equal pay, and dismissal due to pregnancy. Maternity leave provisions also vary significantly by country and by sector, with public sector provisions more generous in most countries. Paternity leave is rare and typically limited to those employed in the public sector.

Many businesses in the Pacific are investing in measures to attract and retain women, acknowledging the importance of competing for talent in a limited pool, especially amid rising migration trends across the Pacific. In particular, workplace flexibility is highly valued by women, with the majority of survey respondents noting its positive impact on their career advancement. Businesses are also adopting policies, targets, and quotas to increase the representation of women in leadership positions, driven by a growing recognition of their contribution to enhanced decision-making, better performance, and profitability.

The report also highlights how cultural traditions and social norms influence women's experience of balancing career progression and family obligations, compounded by persistent gender biases that undermine women's capabilities and leadership styles. Women report that they continue to face bias and discrimination in the workplace, with 44% of Leadership Matters survey respondents encountering gender bias and stereotypes.

The double burden of managing both paid and unpaid work is a persistent challenge, with 60% of survey respondents expected to maintain the same level of household responsibilities as they advance in their careers. However, signs of cultural change are emerging, with 70% of women emphasizing the importance of family and partner support for career advancement and 30% of women reporting that their partner or other family members have taken on additional domestic responsibilities. Interviews indicated shifting social norms in the Pacific, with increasing family expectations for girls to pursue careers and more women attaining tertiary qualifications.

Amid these dynamics, the aspirations of women, driven by their education, confidence, and ambition, emerge as powerful drivers. Pacific women are ambitious, increasingly well educated, and actively building networks to support each other in attaining leadership positions. Despite barriers such as low self-esteem and confidence, 42% of women business leaders in the Pacific have been promoted in the past 2 years, and 66% aspire to be promoted in the next 2 years.

A multitude of interconnected layers and domains shape Pacific women's leadership opportunities. Various facets play a pivotal role in either facilitating or constraining women's advancement in leadership roles, including global standards and norms and Pacific cultural values, legislative frameworks and organizational policies, and networks and family support systems. However, amid these complex dynamics, women's own aspirations, shaped by education, confidence, and ambition, emerge as powerful drivers of change. Recognizing and addressing the intersectionality of these influences can create an environment where Pacific women are empowered to lead, contribute, and thrive.

1. INFLUENCES SHAPING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE PACIFIC

Within the dynamic and evolving landscape of the Pacific, the role of women in leadership remains a subject of crucial inquiry and evolving discourse. This chapter provides a foundational exploration of the factors shaping women's business leadership in the Pacific, developed through a synthesis of existing literature on Pacific leadership, and the perspectives gleaned from 54 key informant interviews and a survey of nearly 300 women business leaders (the Leadership Matters survey). The chapter aims to not only provide a background for the country profiles in the report but also to illuminate the multifaceted environment in which women's leadership journeys unfold. This chapter navigates the complexities surrounding women's business leadership—including entrenched barriers and promising enablers—and offers insight into the challenges and opportunities shaping the Pacific's business landscape.

A. NATURE OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE PACIFIC

A study on women's opportunities for leadership in any context must first consider the nature of leadership in the Pacific. Pacific leadership theory emphasizes the collective nature of leadership, stressing the importance of recognizing coalitions and networks in effecting change for development challenges (Howard 2019). Leadership is not confined to a single person or position but is a process of influencing others toward change, often working within informal networks of power and influence (Howard 2019). Moreover, the barriers and facilitators to women's leadership can be both tangible, such as policies or quotas, and intangible, such as social norms (Howard 2019). In the Pacific context, leadership is often understood as serving others, aligning with the concept of servant leadership (Jackson et al. 2022). This approach emphasizes serving the needs of others, promoting their growth and well-being, and fostering community.

"Leadership is, in my view, it's about service. It's about living through others. And your role as a leader is really turning the pathway to a lot of opportunities for others."

Female interviewee, Samoa

Conceptualizing women's leadership involves recognizing the gendered nature of leadership dynamics and the nuanced challenges women face in exercising authority across

different spheres. Women leaders often navigate a delicate balance, facing scrutiny for either appearing too masculine in assertiveness or too feminine in collaboration (Howard 2019). Complex power dynamics may cause women to wield power through subtle strategies. However, without cultural and structural changes, promoting women to leadership roles risks exacerbating gender disparities (Howard 2019).

In the Pacific, gender roles and social norms play a significant role in shaping women's leadership opportunities. The gendered nature of leadership in the Pacific is multifaceted, influenced by social relationships and power dynamics within communities. Women face barriers (such as violence, stereotypes, and limited access to resources) while also navigating fluid gender roles (where their leadership is accepted in some contexts) that influence their experiences of leadership and vary widely based on factors like age, location, and education, with young women particularly marginalized (Howard 2019). While women are widely accepted as leaders in certain spheres like church and community organizations, they encounter obstacles in politics and business, often because of entrenched perceptions of leadership as male-dominated (Jackson et al. 2022). Despite a rich history of women in leadership roles, political representation remains disproportionately low.

"If we can recognize women's leadership in the home and we can also accept that the same skills that women have in the home can be brought to the organization level, then that's when we can support more women. Because from there, you'll be able to realize the value that women can bring in their leadership. If we can manage a small unit like a family, then managing an organization, it's just an expansion of the basic skill."

Female interviewee, Solomon Islands

Despite challenges, women leverage social capital and resilience, finding leadership opportunities in various contexts. In family and community settings, women frequently employ indirect methods to influence decisions. They leverage social capital gained through family and community relationships; suggest ideas to male relatives in private; act as mediators within their families and communities to resolve conflicts and facilitate compromises; and manage household resources to make decisions about daily expenditures, children's education, and family health. Church groups, in particular, serve as vital training grounds for women leaders across the Pacific, highlighting the importance of leveraging cultural institutions

for women's empowerment (Jackson et al. 2022). Although many of these activities occur in private settings, they are powerful demonstrations of how women effectively exert influence and leadership without formal titles.

“There’s other ways that women can influence without authority, but still be recognized. And I think that for us, sometimes it’s not the Western style that’s always the right way. You have to look in your cultural context on how you can maneuver so that you get the respect and other people will recognize it. It’s a subtle way of influencing so that you don’t “big note” yourself, but you still get what you do in terms of credit.”

Female interviewee, Papua New Guinea (PNG)

For many years, global research has confirmed the value of women in business leadership, including increased productivity, profitability, and performance (Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative [PSDI] 2021). Interviews conducted for this study revealed a growing recognition across the Pacific of women as leaders who bring valuable skills and perspectives that enhance workplace organization and performance.

“When you have an equal workforce, you have a more balanced organization. Your organization reflects the views and aspirations of society because society is roughly 50-50, right? So why would a company choose to ignore 50% of its customer base and not be represented in that way?”

Male interviewee, PNG

Interview subjects perceived the skills women develop managing families and households as highly transferable to organizational leadership, and highlighted the value of recognizing and utilizing these skills. Interviewees expressed diverse views on the value of women in the workplace and leadership, including the following:

- **Effectiveness and efficiency.** Women are perceived as getting the job done more effectively than men, with a focus on productivity and results.
- **Different perspectives and innovative thinking.** Women bring different perspectives and experiences to decision-making, leading to more innovative and creative solutions.
- **Increased empathy and emotional intelligence.** Women's emotional intelligence and empathy contribute to their ability to understand and connect with others on a deeper level, leading to more inclusive and compassionate leadership.

- **Improved decision-making.** Women's representation in leadership roles positively impacts decision-making processes, as they can bring the perspective of women customers and employees, leading to better outcomes for organizations.
- **Financial performance and productivity.** Women are perceived as more focused, organized, and productive, contributing to better execution and higher productivity levels.
- **Multitasking and attention to detail.** Women's multitasking abilities and attention to detail enable them to handle multiple responsibilities efficiently, ensuring that all aspects of an organization are considered and addressed.
- **Improved communication and collaboration.** Women's leadership style tends to foster open communication, collaboration, and teamwork, leading to enhanced organizational culture and performance and enhanced morale.

These themes collectively emphasize the unique contributions of women to leadership, the importance of diversity and inclusion, and the benefits of leveraging a diverse talent pool for organizational success.

“Overall, I believe that promoting greater representation of women in leadership has been a positive development. It has helped us to improve our decision-making, increase employee engagement, enhance innovation and creativity, improve financial performance, increase membership, improve relationships with stakeholders, and enhance our reputation.”

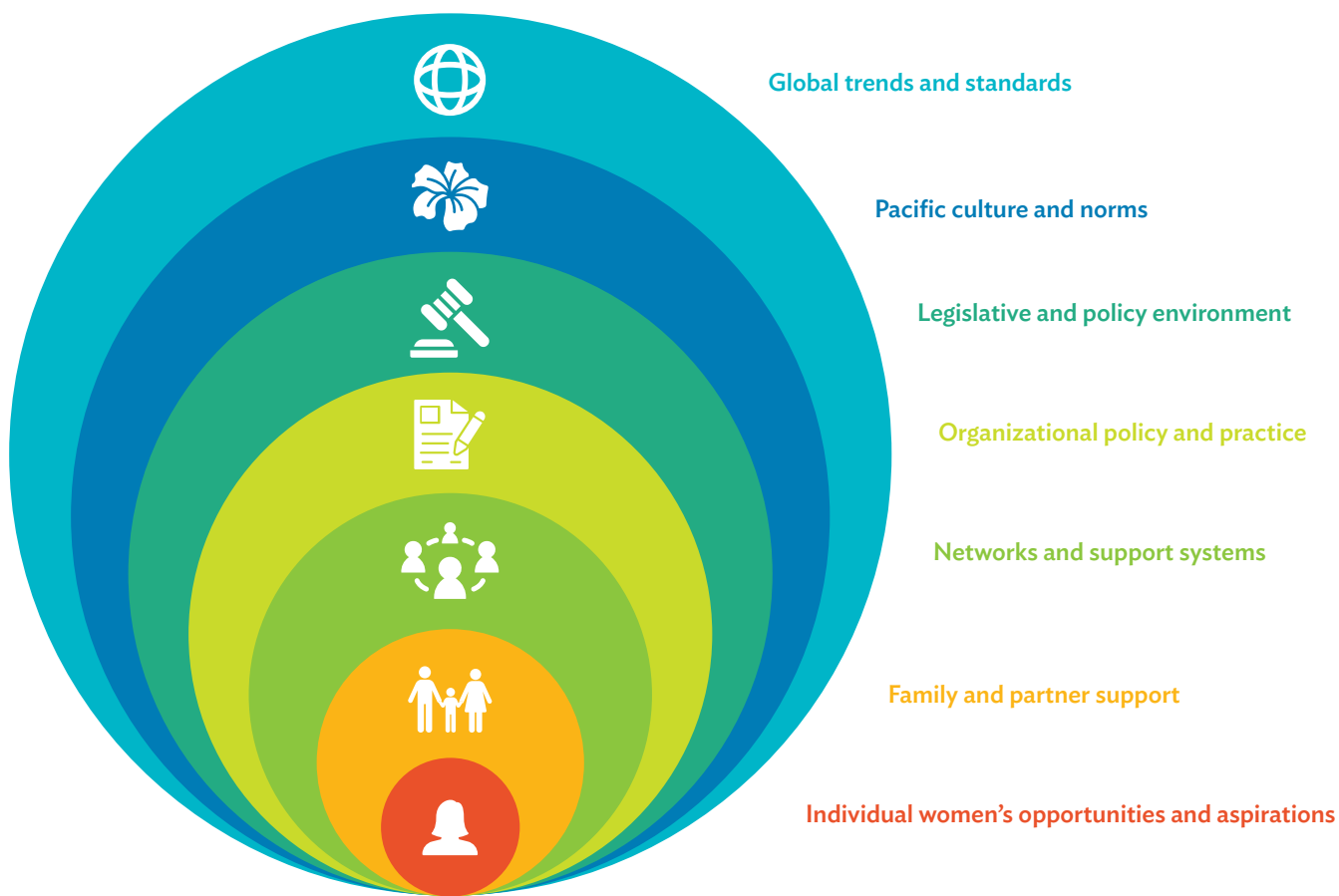
Female interviewee, Samoa

B. CONCEPTUALIZING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE PACIFIC

In understanding women's leadership opportunities in the Pacific, it is crucial to delve into the influences that shape these prospects. This section presents a conceptualization and analysis of the diverse factors that act as barriers or enablers for women in leadership roles. Figure 1 outlines the interconnected spheres of influence, starting from an individual woman's personal aspirations and agency, through societal norms and organizational policies, to the impact of global trends and

standards. Dissecting these influences with a Pacific lens can establish a more nuanced understanding of how women's leadership opportunities are both shaped and constrained in various contexts.

Figure 1 Influences on Pacific Women's Leadership



Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative.

i. Global Trends and Standards



Global trends and standards significantly shape women's leadership opportunities in the Pacific. The aftermath of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, economic disruptions, and shifts in workforce dynamics have uniquely impacted women globally and in the Pacific, particularly in sectors susceptible to crisis, such as tourism. However, these challenges also present unparalleled opportunities for redefining leadership roles. The acceleration of automation and digital technologies globally, while introducing new challenges, also opens doors for women in the Pacific to develop and leverage critical skills as the labor market evolves. Understanding how these global trends intersect with local contexts is important in navigating the complex landscape of women's leadership.

a. Women's Workforce Participation

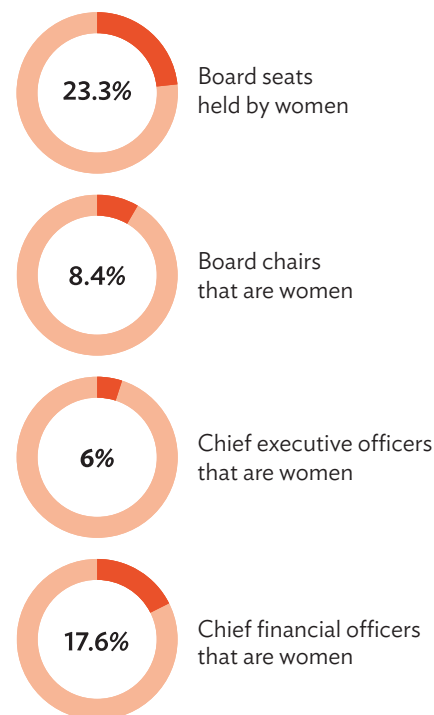
The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected women's workforce participation and overall progress toward gender equality. The pandemic had a disproportionate impact on women's employment, especially in sectors that are more exposed to crisis, such as hospitality, retail, and education (World Economic Forum [WEF] 2023a). Women experienced job losses because of changes in the labor market but have also opted out or reduced their hours for the purposes of caregiving (Bower 2021). The pandemic further exacerbated the challenges and risks faced by women in both the public and private spheres such as gender stereotypes, discrimination, violence, and lack of resources and support (UN Women 2020). The economic and social impact of the pandemic widened global gender gaps according to the WEF's global gender gap score, a combined measure of gender gaps in economics, politics, health, and education. It is now estimated to take 131 years to reach full parity (WEF 2023b).

Both the unemployment rate and the jobs gap have declined below pre-pandemic levels, but the recovery in labor force participation rates has been uneven and has not benefited all labor market groups in the same way (International Labour Organization [ILO] 2023). Global employment growth was projected to remain positive but modest in 2024 (0.8%) and 2025 (1.1%), but global labor force participation rates are predicted to decline for women (ILO 2024).

b. Global Progress in Women's Representation in Leadership

Progress toward achieving greater representation of women in business leadership appears to have slowed. Globally, the share of women in senior leadership roles has increased. A study of over 18,000 companies across 50 countries shows that since 2022, the number of women on boards has risen by 3.6 percentage points, yet women still hold less than a quarter of board seats globally at 23.3% (Figure 2) (Deloitte Insights 2024). The study also reports that only 8.4% of boards are chaired by women and women comprise just 6% of chief executive officers (CEOs), with global gender parity for chairs projected to take until 2073 and CEOs until 2111 (Deloitte Insights 2024).

Figure 2 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions, Global 2023



Source: Deloitte Insights. 2024. *Women in the Boardroom: A Global Perspective*. 8th Edition.

Table 1 Board Seats and National Quotas for Listed Companies

Country	Board Seats Held by Women (2023)	National Quotas for Listed Companies
France	44.0%	National quota for listed companies (40%)
Norway	43.5%	National quota for listed companies (40%)
Italy	40.4%	National quota for listed companies (40%)
Belgium	38.0%	National quota for listed companies (33%)
New Zealand ^a	36.3%	None
Netherlands	35.8%	National quota for listed companies (33%)
Sweden	35.3%	None
Finland ^b	35.1%	None
South Africa	34.9%	None
Denmark	34.2%	Voluntary targets for listed companies (40%)

^a New Zealand has voluntary targets for listed companies and targets for 50% representation of women on public sector boards as well as targets for Maori and other ethnic groups.

^b Finland – government bodies and state-owned enterprises are required to have equal representation of men and women.

Source: Deloitte Insights. 2024. *Women in the Boardroom: A Global Perspective. 8th Edition.*

Despite an overall increase in women’s representation in senior leadership since 2016, the pace varies across industries, with the technology, professional services, and government sectors making the most notable gains. However, significant disparities persist in fields such as manufacturing, agriculture, supply chain, transportation, oil, gas, mining, and infrastructure (WEF 2023b). A study monitoring women’s representation in the finance sector for more than a decade concluded that despite significant turnover in leadership positions, opportunities to advance women are still being overlooked, with men occupying 86% of these roles (Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum 2024). Sectors like health care, education, consumer services, government, retail, entertainment, administrative support, and accommodation and food show more gender diversity in leadership, with women occupying from one-third to one-half of senior roles (WEF 2023b). Opportunities for women to take on leadership roles continue to be mostly within feminized industries that are generally lower paid such as health care and education.

c. Quotas and Targets

Government action, including quotas and targets, has driven increases in women’s representation on boards. Government initiatives to increase the representation of

women on boards get results, with five of the six countries with the highest proportion of women on boards having implemented mandatory quota legislation (Deloitte Insights 2024). As of November 2022, the European Union has mandated that women constitute 40% of nonexecutive directors on the boards of publicly traded firms by 2026 (Wiersema and Mors 2023). Voluntary targets have also proven to be effective in increasing women’s representation in business leadership. Table 1 lists the top 10 countries for women’s representation on boards with the accompanying government action (where applicable).

Many corporations are also adopting policies, targets, and quotas to increase the representation of women in leadership positions. These initiatives aim to ensure a minimum percentage of women on boards and in senior management roles. This trend is driven by a growing global recognition of the importance of diversity and inclusion in business leadership and research showing that diverse leadership teams can lead to better business outcomes, including improved financial performance, innovation, and enhanced company culture (McKinsey 2023). Companies with strong environmental, social, and governance practices, including gender diversity in leadership, are more attractive to investors and perform better overall. This is pushing

companies worldwide, including those in the Pacific, to tap into the potential of women leaders to drive innovation and competitiveness. Enhancing gender diversity has become part of corporate social responsibility and business strategies to perform well, improve market reputation, and foster a more inclusive and positive company culture.

d. Social Norms and Gender Biases

Social norms and gender biases continue to be major impediments to women's career aspirations and opportunities. The overall context of gender equality in a country is a significant factor in women's leadership opportunities, with women in countries that have greater gender parity and equal opportunity for education and employment regarding women in senior leadership positions as normal (Zaccone and Argiolas 2023).

e. Unpaid Care Work

The unequal distribution of unpaid care, in particular childcare, remains one of the biggest impediments to women's leadership opportunities and aspirations. Women with children under the age of 6 have significantly lower labor force participation than women who live alone or in a couple (ILO and Asian Development Bank [ADB] 2023). A survey of working women showed that nearly half of respondents that worked full-time had primary responsibility for domestic tasks, with only 10% reporting that these responsibilities fell to their partner (Deloitte 2023). The impact of unequal responsibility for unpaid care work continues to hamper women's economic prospects, which is commonly referred to as the "motherhood penalty" (ILO and ADB 2023).

f. Hiring and Promotion Practices

The "broken rung" phenomenon, where women in entry-level positions are promoted to management positions at lower rates than men, is another barrier to women attaining leadership positions. A study shows that for every 100 men promoted from entry level to manager, 87 women were promoted, with rates of promotion for women of color even lower (McKinsey 2023). Women struggle to catch up to men once this first opportunity has been missed.

Studies show that women bring many qualities to leadership roles such as providing better support to employees to navigate work-life challenges; contributing more time to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts; and being more

prepared when attending meetings (Wiersema and Mors 2023). Despite this, bias still exists in the perception of women's and men's leadership capabilities. For example, a 2018 survey of more than 1,500 people showed that almost half (45%) believed that men use logic in decision-making, while women use emotion (Bower 2021). Further, women are expected to be likable to succeed as a leader in a way that men are not (Bower 2021).

Despite persistent challenges, women are ambitious and are seeking leadership roles in greater numbers. Personal qualities such as low self-esteem, lack of confidence, or being less ambitious are frequently cited as barriers to women's leadership opportunities. Performance bias is more likely to negatively impact women's leadership opportunities, with women more likely to be hired and promoted based on past accomplishments and men more likely to be hired and promoted on future potential (McKinsey 2023). However, recent research shows that post-pandemic, women are even more ambitious and that at every stage of their careers, women and men are equally interested in promotion, with young women being especially ambitious (McKinsey 2023).

ii. Pacific Culture and Norms



Culture informs all aspects of life in the Pacific and plays a significant role in defining the roles of both men and women. Culture and social norms vary significantly across and within Pacific countries and are constantly evolving. Culture was consistently identified as both a barrier and an enabler for women's leadership aspirations in the Pacific during interviews with both men and women business leaders.

"I don't see any reason that why females are not given the chance to excel further. I think this cultural mentality or mindset has to be get rid of. Culture is evolving as we said and very soon there will come a time that all these things will change, culture will change. We have to adapt the new ways of thinking and doing things and all human beings will be the same, so I don't see any reason why they are not promoting a female to reach their potential."

Male interviewee, Solomon Islands

"Even in our own cultural setting, women have a specific role in villages, in churches, in organizations where we bring our own unique leadership role into those spaces. So, I believe that is what's driving a lot more women."

Female interviewee, Samoa

While no one standard for social norms exists in the Pacific, in general, women continue to be "associated with the domestic realm, impacting heavily on their participation in public leadership" (McLeod 2008 p.4). Regardless of the type of work they perform, Pacific women struggle with the "double burden" of balancing work with family commitments (McLeod 2015). Professional women across the Pacific face the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities, often feeling pressure to overcompensate for their roles outside the home (McLeod 2015).

"The biggest stumbling block is cultural expectations that women are for the home. This leads to less women in formal education and therefore less pool of women to choose from for leadership roles."

Male interviewee, Solomon Islands

These dynamics highlight the intricate interplay between cultural expectations, societal norms, and women's leadership experiences in the Pacific context. The role of culture in shaping social norms and women's leadership opportunities in the Pacific was explored through surveys and key informant interviews, with several key themes emerging.

a. Gender Roles and Cultural Expectations

Deeply entrenched gender roles and cultural expectations play out across all aspects of life and often limit women's opportunities for leadership. This includes the perception that certain roles are reserved for men, while women are expected to fulfill domestic duties. These cultural norms not only influence roles, but also set expectations around behavioral traits like humility and assertiveness. Women shared that they often felt pressure to downplay their achievements and be humble, which can affect their confidence and willingness to take on leadership roles. Interviewees also cited the challenges women face in balancing work and family responsibilities, the stigma around women needing to work extra hard to prove their worth, and the barriers women encounter in accessing leadership roles because of cultural and historical contexts, including bias in the workplace and limited opportunities for networking and advancement.

"If you look at the nature of the roles of females in the households, they are mostly in the cooking space, do the dishes, the washing clothes, and all that sort of thing, and males are more the heavy work that they are always allocated to do. So even if you come and work in organizations, like in the public sector or in private organizations, this mentality or mindset is also taken into the workplace, and that, I suppose, it contributes to why females are not excelling...to become leaders in higher places. And I think that's the main or the key challenge to this one."

Male interviewee, Solomon Islands

Responses to the Leadership Matters survey also confirm that Pacific women continue to experience challenges in their leadership opportunities based on cultural expectations and social norms, with 80% of women encountering gender-related barriers in their professional careers. Balancing family responsibilities with career

expectations was identified as a challenge for 46% of survey respondents.

“A woman has multiple roles to play—a mother, a housewife, a friend, a teacher, a guide, a supervisor, wife, daughter and a best friend—as well as mentoring, guiding, and coaching others with some level of expectation and in the process many a time that same woman forgets her own self, self-care, and self-development. She goes through a lot of ups and downs in the process of ensuring all is well.”

Leadership Matters survey respondent, Fiji

b. Bias and Discrimination

Women continue to experience bias and discrimination in the workplace, yet they navigate these challenges through personal resilience. Of Leadership Matters survey respondents, 44% reported encountering gender bias and stereotypes in the workplace. Several interviewees shared personal anecdotes illustrating their experiences with gender biases and the importance of resilience in navigating these challenges. Examples ranged from requests to make tea and coffee to overt hostility from male colleagues, especially when working in male-dominated workplaces:

“I think I needed that coming into the male-dominated industry, because when I first started, and especially when I went up to be the director a few years back, it was highly technical with mostly males in the industry ... I can tell like some of them, they won't take me seriously. So, I have to have thick skin in order to overcome that barrier.”

Female interviewee, Tonga

Similar to sentiments shared in global research, Pacific women reported feeling the need “to work even that extra hard to be seen as being worthy of the role” (female interviewee, Samoa). For many, gender stereotypes began at school and continued to create additional barriers to women in the workplace. Consistently, the survey and discussions identified that societal change was necessary to address underlying norms and expectations regarding women's roles in both the workplace and the home.

“I think people need to, both men and women, need to change their mindsets about, okay, this is a woman's role where she should be at home in the kitchen and a man is the breadwinner for the family and he's the leader of the house. They should be encouraging each other. I think it

starts from home before it actually comes to your work area. If everybody could change their mindset stop thinking that a woman's role is in the kitchen and start thinking, oh, she can do more than that.”

Male interviewee, Fiji

c. Examples of Women's Leadership in Culture

Some aspects of culture were cited as supportive of women in leadership roles, including recognition of women's contributions to their communities and families. Women were cited as being the backbone of community activities, making significant contributions behind the scenes.

“I think in our culture, not only in Solomon Islands, but in the Pacific as well, there's been recognition of women already. In the decision-making process, women have been recognized and have been participating for a long time.”

Female interviewee, Solomon Islands

The centrality and value of family to Pacific island culture were also cited as being crucial to women's workforce participation and leadership opportunities, in particular the acceptance of working mothers' responsibilities outside of work. Interviewees reported a high level of flexibility in the workplace for women to manage these commitments, including time and facilities to breastfeed, time off to care for sick children, school-friendly hours, and the ability to bring children into the workplace. In many cases, these were informal arrangements.

“Luckily, in Tuvalu we're a little bit more understanding and when they say you can just quickly drive over to your house, breastfeed, and then come back, everyone understands.”

Female interviewee, Tuvalu

Different cultural traditions, including those in matrilineal and patrilineal societies, have an impact on women's leadership opportunities. Interviewees noted the role of culture in women's opportunities and also the significant variations between Melanesian and Polynesian cultures and matrilineal and patrilineal societies. Women from Polynesia reported fewer career barriers related to gender, crediting this to cultural norms and a long history of women holding leadership roles at the community level.

"I think women are given a lot of power actually and so far, I can see that a lot of women are empowered to do a lot more than just being at home."

Female interviewee, Tonga

"We do have matrilineal lines in PNG; many of our islands and areas are matrilineal. There is a concept that's quite

deeply ingrained within PNG and more broadly within Polynesia and the Pacific islands of a matrilineal society. That doesn't exist in many other parts of the world. And so that means that women are seen as natural leaders."

Male interviewee, PNG

iii. Legislative and Policy Environment



The legislative and policy environment in each Pacific country profoundly influences women's leadership by setting the legal framework within which gender equality is promoted or hindered. An examination of laws across the region reveals considerable variations in how gender issues are addressed, which affects women's ability to participate in the workforce and ascend to leadership roles both in the public and private sectors.

a. Legislative Support for Gender Equality

Laws prohibiting discrimination based on gender are fundamental as they provide a legal basis for equal treatment in employment. Only half of the Pacific countries included in this study have laws prohibiting discrimination based on gender, with no legal protections in the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu (Table 2).

b. Sexual Harassment Laws

Laws addressing sexual harassment are essential for fostering safe workplace environments, but these are less common in the Pacific. Only the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, and Tuvalu have sexual harassment legislation and only Fiji, Kiribati, and Samoa have laws that include civil penalties. However, most countries lack both criminal and civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment, limiting the deterrent effect against such behavior. This absence of defined penalties results in inadequate protection for women, leaving them vulnerable to harassment with limited legal recourse.

c. Maternity and Paternity Leave Provisions and Protections

Maternity leave provisions significantly affect women's career trajectories. The ability to return to work after childbirth to an equivalent position to the one held prior to going on maternity leave and with appropriate support received after returning is crucial for maintaining women's engagement in the workforce. The most recent international labor standard, the ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) stipulates at least 14 weeks of maternity leave with payment equivalent to at least two-thirds of the regular salary. Fiji is the only country meeting this international standard in the region. Most other nations provide significantly less paid maternity leave.

Maternity leave provisions vary significantly for public and private sector employees. While countries like the Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu extend these provisions to both sectors, it is noteworthy that they are exclusive to the public sector in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Marshall Islands, Niue, Nauru, and PNG. Even when available in both sectors, public sector employees often enjoy additional benefits. Broadening the scope of maternity leave across both sectors is essential for enhancing employment opportunities for women.

In most Pacific countries, funding for maternity leave is generally the responsibility of the employer, not the government. The only exception to this in the Pacific is the Cook Islands, where paid maternity leave is a government-funded entitlement. As a result, employers might be hesitant to hire or promote women of childbearing age, fearing the potential costs associated with maternity leave. This could lead

Table 2 Legislative Support for Gender Equality

Country	Legislation Prohibiting Discrimination in Employment Based on Gender	Legislation on Sexual Harassment	Maternity Leave Provisions- Public Sector (weeks)	Maternity Leave Provisions- Private Sector (weeks)	Legislation Prohibiting Dismissal of Pregnant Workers	Paid Paternity Leave	Equal Remuneration Legislation	Legislation on Gender-Based Violence
Cook Islands	Yes	Yes	6	6	No	Yes	No	Yes
Fiji	Yes	Yes	14	14	Yes	No	No	Yes
Kiribati	Yes	Yes	12	12 ^a	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Marshall Islands	Yes	No	4	0	No	No	Yes	Yes
Micronesia, Federated States of	No	No	6	0	No	No	No	Yes
Nauru	No	No	12	0	No	Yes	No	No
Niue	No	No	18 ^b	0	No	No	No	No
Palau	No	No	4	0	No	No	No	Yes
Papua New Guinea	Yes	No	18	0	No	No	No	Yes
Samoa	Yes	Yes	12	4	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Solomon Islands	No	No	12	12 ^a	No	No	No	Yes
Tonga	No	No	6	6	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Tuvalu	Yes	Yes	12	12	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vanuatu	No	No	12	12 ^a	No	Yes	No	Yes

^a Maternity leave provisions for private sector employees are not paid at full pay.

^b Maternity leave provisions are 12 weeks at full pay and 6 weeks at half pay.

Sources: World Bank. *Women, Business and the Law 2024*; and additional review of relevant legislation by authors.

to discrimination in hiring and career advancement for women, directly impacting their representation in leadership roles.

Laws prohibiting dismissal of pregnant workers helps maintain continuity in women's careers, which is crucial for advancing to leadership positions. Such legislation is essential for protecting pregnant employees from unjust termination. However, only Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu prohibit the dismissal of pregnant workers.

Paternity leave provisions, while less prevalent, also impact women's leadership by encouraging shared childcare responsibilities. This, in turn, facilitates women's continuous professional engagement and enhances their prospects for leadership roles. Many countries worldwide have increased

their statutory paternity or parental leave provisions. In the Pacific region, the Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Tuvalu, Tonga, and Vanuatu offer paid leave to fathers, though typically for very short periods and usually only applicable to those working in the public sector. Prior to 2020, Fiji had legislated 5 days of mandated paternity leave available to fathers. However, the number of days was reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic and the provision was rescinded entirely in 2022.

d. Equal Pay Laws

Equal pay legislation is directly tied to gender parity and leadership. In countries lacking laws to ensure equal remuneration for work of equal value, women may be systematically undervalued and less likely to rise to high-ranking positions. In the Pacific, legislation on equal

remuneration for work of equal value is surprisingly scarce, with only Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu having such provisions.

e. Domestic Violence Laws

Legislation against domestic violence, while primarily a protection and human rights issue, indirectly supports women’s empowerment and leadership. By safeguarding personal safety and promoting justice, such laws help

ensure that women can participate in all aspects of society, including employment and leadership, without the debilitating impact of violence. Most Pacific countries have specific legislation addressing domestic violence, demonstrating a regional acknowledgment of the need to tackle this issue.

iv. Organizational Policy and Practice



Across the Pacific, fostering gender diversity and inclusion has become increasingly important for organizations to thrive and remain competitive within a limited labor market. Organizational policies and practices designed to attract, retain, and support women in the workplace are central to achieving this goal.

Pacific private sector organizations are employing a wide range of policies and practices to support women in the workplace. The Leadership Matters survey results showed that the most prevalent organizational initiatives include training and skills development opportunities (78%), family-friendly policies to accommodate family commitments (57%), support networks for women in business leadership (55%), flexible work arrangements (54%), and promotion of diversity and inclusion (52%). However, access to on-site childcare facilities remains limited, with only 7% of respondents reporting their availability.

An even broader range of policies and strategies to attract and retain women in the workforce was identified through key informant interviews with commentary on the business imperative for diversity (Table 3). These strategies reflected a deep understanding of the unique needs of women in the Pacific, showcasing how businesses can respond effectively with targeted initiatives. Examples included the creation of women-only gyms, school pickup bus services, counseling for domestic violence survivors, and safe transportation options for women commuting to and from work.

“All these initiatives that we do give us a bit of a stronger employee value proposition, places us as a stronger employer

within the market. And so when we’re competing for talent, particularly in areas where the pool is a little bit shallower, we have an advantage to attract people because we know the nonmonetary benefits are, you know, quite expensive. We know that all of these things in terms of our culture are really, really important. And we know that it’s not always money that drives people to roles. We know that organizational culture is a big factor in how people decide where to work.”

Female interviewee, PNG

a. Flexible Work

Global studies have shown that the move toward increased workplace flexibility in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has had positive benefits for both men and women, with flexibility rated as a “top-three” employee benefit for men and women (McKinsey 2023). Women report that flexibility has decreased fatigue and provides more focused time to get their work done (McKinsey 2023). Despite the trend toward flexible and hybrid work, one study has shown that 97% of women believe that requesting flexible work arrangements could adversely impact their chances of promotion (Deloitte 2023).

In the Pacific, 78% of all Leadership Matters survey respondents reported access to some form of flexible work arrangements, which can help them better manage personal and family responsibilities while maintaining their professional roles. A further 63% of respondents indicated that their current organization offers flexible work hours, and 49% reported being able to access the option to work

Table 3 Women-Friendly Organizational Policy and Practices in the Pacific

Category	Initiatives/Examples
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender equality and/or diversity • Sexual harassment • Domestic violence • Remuneration and/or equal pay • Whistleblower • Breastfeeding • Affirmative action
Education and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's leadership programs • Short courses • Directorship training and/or exposure • Scholarships • Unconscious bias and gender stereotypes awareness training • Participation in national, regional, and international workshops and conferences
Mentoring, coaching, and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one coaching • Mentoring programs (national and international) • Organizational or sector-specific women's networks
Leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternity and paternity leave • Compassionate leave to care for sick children and/or attend funerals • Generous sick leave provisions • Domestic violence leave
Women's health and safety in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe transportation to and/or from work • Menstrual health facilities • Family planning clinics • Medical and/or health insurance • On-site gym with women only sessions • Counseling and/or employee assistance programs
Provisions for caring responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-site childcare facilities • Remote working • Flexible hours • Transportation for school drop offs and picks • Provisions to travel with children on business trips • Nursing rooms
Recruitment and promotion strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets for workforce participation and leadership • Gender balance on recruitment panels • Requirement to shortlist at least one woman candidate • Affirmative action and/or prioritization of underrepresented groups in appointments • Identification of high-performing women • Succession planning • Support for newly promoted women • Programs to support women into nontraditional roles and/or sectors
Organizational values and executive leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of diversity in organizational value statements • Spotlighting women in leadership and/or women's achievements • Communication and messaging on the value of women and/or diversity including by the chief executive officer and senior leadership • Reporting on diversity metrics and achievements in annual reports

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters key informant interviews.

from home. Arrangements that deviate from the traditional full-time, standard workweek model, such as job sharing (17%), part-time or reduced hours (15%), and compressed workweeks (7%), were less available. Many respondents had more than one option available to them, while 22% of respondents were not able to access any flexible work arrangements. Businesses reported flexible work arrangements as a win-win situation for employees and the organization, with many citing increased loyalty as a benefit of flexible work arrangements. Of the companies in the 2024 Leadership Matters dataset that provided information on their workplace measures, 73% reported having flexible work arrangements.

“You know, I think if you offer that flexibility, and if you offer that opportunity, loyalty is a huge thing. I think, especially for women, if women are able to grow their career with an organization where they offer the opportunity and offer the flexibility, they will stay loyal to your company.”

Male interviewee, Fiji

Some limitations of flexible work arrangements in the Pacific context were expressed. Many of the limitations expressed regarding working from home, with some interviewees noting that the home environment is not always conducive to work.

“And I think that the challenge with women specifically is, I mean, it’s a fact that home is just not a conducive place for a lot of women to be able to manage productivity from being out of the office. There’s just so many things that happen at home, so many wantoks [a term used in Melanesia to describe extended family or other strong social bonds, usually based on shared language] and other external pressures that happen....There’s just too much distraction at home. It’s hard to focus, it’s hard to concentrate.”

Female interviewee, PNG

b. Accommodation of Culture

Many workplaces in the Pacific accommodate cultural obligations. Many interviewees discussed the ways in which their workplaces adapt to meet cultural and family obligations for both men and women, emphasizing the integral role of these practices in their professional environments. For instance, it is common for employees to return to their villages to attend funerals or participate in

significant cultural events, reflecting the deep respect for tradition and culture in the Pacific.

The prominent value placed on family across the Pacific influences workplace norms, especially regarding the role of women as caregivers. This cultural norm facilitates practices such as women taking leave to care for sick children, stepping out during work hours to breastfeed, or bringing their children to the workplace after school or during school holidays. These accommodations, while not always codified as formal policies, are widely accepted and practiced across many businesses in the region.

Such an organizational culture acknowledges that employees are not solely workers but also individuals with significant personal and familial commitments. By providing a supportive and accommodating environment, these workplaces not only respect cultural norms but also create a more inclusive and supportive space for women who wish to pursue careers while managing family responsibilities.

c. Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Policies

Studies confirm that workplace sexual harassment is pervasive in the Pacific region, with internal mechanisms often deemed inadequate for addressing such issues (McLeod 2015). In a 2023 survey of employed women in Port Moresby, 71% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination and harassment at work (Mambon and Poka 2023). Educational attainment seems to offer some protection, as individuals with university degrees were 11% less likely to report experiencing workplace harassment. Furthermore, women who have held or currently hold leadership roles demonstrate significantly lower odds of encountering harassment, with a 182% decrease in likelihood compared to those without leadership opportunities.

Interviews suggest a growing trend in the development and implementation of organizational policies to combat workplace sexual harassment and discrimination. The issue of workplace safety and organizational responses was a particular focus for businesses in PNG.

“I guess we’ve had issues over the years where there’s been sexual harassment or things like that in the workplace. And whereas, previously certain things were just, okay, slap on

the wrist, don't do that again, I have a zero tolerance. We had an incident early on and we sacked someone who was very senior on the spot. And so that sort of sent a message that this is not tolerated. So, we tried to build that across the whole workforce to say this is, you know, everyone's equal."

Male interviewee, PNG

d. Leadership Support for Diversity

Board and senior executive support for diversity and role models in leadership roles are both crucial factors. The importance of business leaders sending clear messages on the value of diversity and women's representation in leadership was noted by many interviewees. Strong leadership on the value of women's leadership was attributed to creating a supportive organizational culture for women. The importance of seeing women in senior leadership roles was also highlighted as a key contributor to women's leadership aspirations.

"There is a definite objective to promote women's leadership. That's been stated right from the top in terms of our governance, there's an objective to promote women's leadership...they do it from governance down to management level, to middle management across the organization. And it's done to promote diversity and inclusiveness."

Female interviewee, Samoa

"Seeing other women in very senior leadership roles and hearing their story about how they made it—CEOs, heads of departments, senior management. It's empowering to hear them in whatever setting. It makes me think I can do it if they can."

Female interviewee, PNG

e. Organizational Culture

Organizational culture significantly influences women's sense of value within the organization, especially regarding their contributions to decision-making processes. In the Leadership Matters survey, only 54% of respondents feel their contributions to discussions and decision making are always valued, whereas 36% feel their contributions to discussions and decision-making are only sometimes

valued, and 10% do not feel that their contributions to discussions and decision making are valued.

Smaller, local companies also noted the value of women in the workforce and in leadership, but they adopted the approach of instigating change through organizational culture rather than the adoption of formal policies. Many of the practices supporting women's participation in the workforce, such as flexibility for working mothers, have been long-standing in the Pacific without formal policies in place.

"So, we're bringing that slowly. So we test it, change the culture and then politicize it, rather than saying the policy and shocking the people."

Male interviewee, Fiji

Most interviewees highlighted positive changes within their organizations regarding leadership opportunities for women and the recognition of their value within the organizational context. The most significant change observed was a move toward more equal representation of men and women in leadership. Several interviewees identified themselves as being the first woman in a leadership position within their organization and many also reported observing more women rising through the leadership ranks. Other changes in organizational culture included greater respect for women's capabilities, more inclusive decision-making and collaboration as a result of women's participation, more inclusive and diverse workplaces and teams, and improved staff conduct.

"I believe that having women in leadership roles has changed the culture of our organization in a number of ways. First, it has helped to create a more inclusive and equitable workplace. Women now have a greater voice in decision-making, and they are more likely to be promoted into leadership positions. This has led to a more diverse and representative workforce, which has benefited us in a number of ways. Second, having women in leadership roles has helped to promote a more collaborative and supportive work environment. Women are more likely to focus on building relationships and working together to achieve common goals. This has created a more positive and productive work environment for everyone."

Female interviewee, Samoa

f. Adoption of Global Trends and Standards

Where present, international companies have influenced organizational policies and practices in the Pacific. As previously noted, global trends and standards influence leadership opportunities for women in the Pacific. The research sought to understand the extent to which global standards on diversity introduced through international companies had influenced local practice and opportunities for women. The research sample included representatives of both local businesses and international companies, with 29% of Leadership Matters survey respondents and 43% of interviewees employed by international companies.

Interviewees acknowledged the role that international companies have had locally in opportunities for women's leadership through the implementation and enforcement of global standards and policies. Several senior women credited their advancement into leadership positions to their employment at international companies, which had established policies and processes specifically designed to support women in attaining leadership roles.

"In the private sector, the leadership is exposed to best practices, you know, internationally and all of that. So, they bring that into the country and that's embedded in their policies and governance framework and all of that. So, that is the trigger that's driving it in my view."

Female interviewee, PNG

"We had more female managers coming in because it became a mandate for the [foreign-owned banks]. You had to be balanced. They always had to have women in leadership. So, I think that's what actually started happening."

Female interviewee, Fiji

v. Networks and Support Systems



Literature on the role of networks, mentors, and sponsorship in the Pacific argues that mentoring plays a pivotal role in women's leadership trajectories. However, questions persist regarding the optimal alignment between mentors and mentees concerning gender, socioeconomic status, education, and cultural backgrounds (Howard et al. 2020). Women in the Pacific often receive mentoring primarily for psychosocial support rather than intentional sponsorship for career progression, with mentoring programs sometimes prioritizing adapting individuals to existing systems rather than collectively challenging barriers to success (Howard et al. 2020). Nevertheless, strategic mentorship can be profoundly impactful, particularly when mentees are paired with mentors who enhance their legitimacy, possess influential connections, or provide access to key networks.

"It's definitely once you're in that position, you're in a position of influence and you have a great opportunity to start to do things, to actually start to see how you can make change for women."

Female interviewee, PNG

In the Pacific, the role of networks is complex and multifaceted. Howard (2019) highlights the elusive nature of effective networks and how power can manifest through less apparent channels. Family networks, especially for those from prominent families, offer women a significant avenue for influence, and can facilitate leadership opportunities. However, the success of women leaders hinges not only on their individual agency but also on the presence of supportive environments and women's access to resources, networks, and opportunities.

a. Importance of Women as Champions, Sponsors, and Mentors

Women supporting each other plays an important role in advancing women's leadership and empowerment. One of the key aspects of this support is the promotion and championing of capable women for opportunities. Many women in leadership positions take the time to mentor younger women, providing guidance and sharing their experiences. Of Leadership Matters survey respondents, 90% identified themselves as a sponsor or mentor for others, indicating a widespread willingness to support and guide fellow women in their career development. This mentorship often goes beyond professional development and focuses on the emotional and personal aspects of leadership.

"I'm always putting whoever I know that's capable within my circle forward, putting forward their names."

Female interviewee, Fiji

"I do, and I have supported younger females in roles just by offering coaching and just, you know, mentor discussions with them."

Female interviewee, Tonga

"I always have a chat, I'm on Facebook, you know, just message and sometimes they ask me for feedback and how to prepare them with writing applications, especially on the state-owned enterprise level."

Female interviewee, Samoa

While there was a high degree of support displayed among women, there were also suggestions that not all women support others. The level of support among women toward each other is a positive development, but some interviewees indicated that this wasn't always the case, particularly between older and younger women.

"I think there's this mindset that I've had to fight tooth and nail to get where I am so as a result of that, you know, you should as well. When it should be a bit of a mindset shift to say, listen, I'm here now, what can I do for other women because I don't want them to go through the experiences I've had to go through to actually get to this particular point. It's almost like we're fighting between ourselves as opposed to

looking at how we can actually hold hands and kind of lift each other up."

Female interviewee, PNG

Women acknowledge the impact of sponsors on their own careers and express a willingness to sponsor others. There is a high level of positive sentiment toward the importance of sponsorship in the Pacific, with 45% of Leadership Matters survey respondents reporting that sponsors have helped them advance their careers. Several interviewees showcased the tangible impact of sponsorship on women's career progression.

"I have nominated a woman for a promotion to a senior leadership position. I highlighted her accomplishments and her potential to make a significant contribution to the organization. She was promoted to the position."

Female interviewee, Samoa

b. Professional and Grassroots Networks

Creating support networks is another way that women are supporting each other in the Pacific. Of Leadership Matters survey respondents, 59% reported that they actively participate in professional networks. However, unlike traditional notions of professional networks, which typically occur in formal settings characterized by structured, often competitive business interactions, women in the Pacific often engage in networking in more informal settings, which often fosters a more collaborative and nurturing environment. These networks can provide a sense of community and solidarity. Interviewees provided examples of grassroots efforts to support and empower women at a local level by leveraging personal relationships. These examples highlight the dynamic ways in which women in the Pacific are redefining networking to advocate for and promote women into leadership roles.

"I get women to my house every Saturday evening and we talk and I help them, we fundraise and then we share the money to the young mothers that cannot really support themselves."

Female interviewee, Vanuatu

“We have individual members and I asked everyone to give me their CV. So, when that opportunity arises, I, as a vice president, will nominate one of these women.”

Female interviewee, PNG

c. Importance of Men as Champions, Sponsors, and Mentors

Men still overwhelmingly occupy leadership positions, thereby holding substantial influence that can either bolster or impede women’s leadership ambitions in the Pacific. Research underscores the critical role of men in fostering women’s leadership in the Pacific (Masta et al. 2023). Men’s allyship in the workplace is crucial, encompassing actions such as valuing women’s ideas and providing support for their professional development. Male advocates for women’s leadership serve as important role models, especially those with influence and authority (Masta et al. 2023). Furthermore, recognizing that men often hold leadership positions and act as gatekeepers to decision-making underscores the importance of forming alliances between women and influential men at various levels (Howard 2019). Both male and female interviewees spoke of the critical role that men play in determining leadership opportunities, sharing views on how this can manifest in both positive and negative outcomes.

“I think it’s also important to work with our male counterparts to ensure that they are open to the idea of women sitting at these positions and to give them training on the benefits of having women in leadership and in boards. I think if we focus our efforts on reaching out to the men then we wouldn’t have too much of a barrier.”

Female interviewee, Solomon Islands

“What I’ve noticed, men tend to protect their turf, and they tend to be quite insecure about the roles they are in, and they try to guard that as much as possible. So, if such or such a person in senior leadership was also given the role of sponsorship, I don’t think the outcome would be positive.”

Male interviewee, Fiji

“We still have issues with men. We also have opportunities with champion men who let us take leadership roles and encourage us along the way, saying that we can do it.”

Female interviewee, Tonga

The majority of men interviewed held top positions within their organizations and, as such, felt a responsibility to actively promote women’s leadership within their organization. A prominent theme emerging from these interviews was the value they placed on women’s leadership skills and contribution to organizational success.

“As a male leader, I have worked with so many capable women leaders that I realize that this country is missing a potential pool of experts if equal opportunities are not given to women. My simple belief is, leadership is about capacity and ability, not sex. It is up to every male leader to recognize that fact and not only act on it but live the belief.”

Male interviewee, Solomon Islands

“It’s the person that sits at the top of the pyramid, which is leadership. So, it’s that culture of engaging females or looking at the significance of having female representation at leadership levels and the value they bring and the change that has come about because of that, it’s evident... So, it’s that culture, that significance that the person right on top places on female representation at [the] leadership level.”

Male interviewee, PNG

vi. Family and Partner Support



Supportive environments, including family and partner support, were seen as critical to supporting women's leadership aspirations. A study on women's leadership in the Pacific found that "when women advance in their careers it is firstly because they have a supportive father and if they are married, a supportive husband" (Masta et al. 2023). The Leadership Matters survey findings confirmed the vital role of family support in managing both family caring responsibilities and work commitments.

"In the Pacific, family support with larger extended family plays a vital role in progression for women. I can say that certainly in my case the main contributing factor has been the support of my 'village' or my 'tribe.' In Fiji, I can count on a circle of trust—a network of very close family and lifetime friends who provide support at home and work."

Leadership Matters female survey respondent, Fiji

A majority (70%) of respondents emphasized the importance of family support in shaping their career opportunities and choices, while 77% said they rely on family support to balance caring responsibilities. On the other hand, 9% of women cited a lack of family support as a hindrance to their career progression. Similar sentiments were shared by interviewees.

"The women who I know of personally—because a lot of these women, we share the same circles—they've got very supportive family, very open-minded very, you know, goal-oriented family where, because in [an argument], if the family decides that the woman is to lead the family, there is no issue. It doesn't become an issue because she's a woman. It's the family's choice."

Female interviewee, Nauru

a. Sharing of Domestic Responsibilities

As women advance in their careers, their domestic workload tends to remain unchanged. More than half of Leadership Matters survey respondents (60%) reported that they were still expected to maintain the same level of household and family responsibilities. However, 30% reported that their partner or family have taken on some household and family

responsibilities, while a smaller proportion (10%) stated that their partner or family have taken on many household and family responsibilities. This was also noted in the interviews.

"The change in the last 5 years we have seen more women take up leadership roles in the public and private sector—more than there has ever been. Changes in domestic roles and more equitable sharing of responsibilities between men and women have taken place over a longer period of time. This is allowing women to participate more holistically."

Female interviewee, Cook Islands

While family support is the primary means of managing caring responsibilities, 36% of women also use paid care in their homes, and a smaller percentage (14%) utilize formal childcare or aged care centers. As women's roles continue to evolve both at work and at home, broader support systems are emerging to facilitate these changes, enabling women to better balance their professional ambitions with personal responsibilities.

b. Support for Women's Education and Careers

While both survey and interview responses demonstrate that significant barriers remain, interviewees confirm that many families now prioritize education for daughters, enabling them to pursue careers, a shift from previous generations.

"Values are changing and people are now realizing how important women are."

Leadership Matters female survey respondent, Fiji

Education, particularly for women, serves as a tool for challenging traditional norms and fostering active participation in society. More women are attaining leadership positions in both the public and private sectors, indicating changing societal perceptions of women's capabilities. Younger generations exhibit more inclusive attitudes toward gender equality, reflecting evolving cultural norms.

“Maybe the old, if I may use the word, maybe the older generation might need a bit more convincing. But the younger generation that’s coming through, about to become chiefs or traditional leaders, they are a lot more inclusive. They are a lot more aware of the need to have, you know, this balance.”

Female interviewee, Fiji

“I have the same opportunity as my brother to sit at the table and have a conversation in my family or my clan or whatever. In actual fact, I get the front seat, but in other cultures in Papua New Guinea, it’s very different, so it depends. And so, getting our families to understand the role that women can play ... it’s a generational thing, but we are beginning to see it move very fast now, I must say.”

Female interviewee, PNG

Women’s contributions to families, communities, and workplaces are increasingly acknowledged and valued. Exposure to diverse cultures is influencing perceptions of gender roles, fostering openness to alternative models of gender equality among younger generations.

vii. Individual Women’s Opportunities and Aspirations



Education, confidence, and ambition collectively play pivotal roles in shaping women’s leadership opportunities and aspirations. Education serves as a foundational pillar, equipping women with the knowledge, skills, and credentials necessary to navigate complex professional landscapes and assume leadership roles. Likewise, confidence emerges as a crucial catalyst, empowering women to overcome barriers, assert themselves, and pursue ambitious career paths with resilience and determination. Ambition, on the other hand, acts as a driving force, driving women’s aspirations for leadership and propelling them to seek out opportunities for growth and advancement. Together, these factors can empower women to break through barriers, challenge traditional norms, and thrive in leadership roles.

a. Education

Education plays a significant role in shaping women’s leadership opportunities in the Pacific, with higher education, especially obtained overseas, often correlated with formal leadership capabilities (Jackson et al. 2022). However, the relationship between education and women’s leadership is complex. While education can serve as a form of social capital that successful women leaders leverage to achieve their corporate ambitions, it can also evoke envy from men and other women because of the greater income-earning potential and career progression it offers. This envy can manifest in workplace discrimination, gossip,

and even domestic violence, highlighting the multifaceted challenges women face in navigating leadership roles in the Pacific context (Jackson et al. 2022). In interviews across various organizations and countries in the Pacific, education emerged as a crucial factor contributing to women’s leadership opportunities. Changes in attitudes toward girls’ education were also mentioned as critical, with interviewees referring to generational change in opportunities for girls and women.

“Now we have a lot of women coming back with master’s degrees, bachelor’s degrees and then all of a sudden you see all these women who are taking up managerial positions...so yeah, it’s a big change.”

Female interviewee, Tuvalu

“One of the values that came out very strongly is the value of education. Families now allow their daughters to go to school. 40 years ago, they would end up being a house girl to somebody in Honiara. But nowadays, they want to put them to school. They want to know the value of education. They will have a job. And those who are good enough will go further in their studies.”

Male interviewee, Solomon Islands

The availability of scholarships to study nationally, regionally, and internationally, along with reduced gender bias in the application process, was suggested as key to increasing the rate of women attaining tertiary qualifications. Data on the regional average gross attendance ratio for tertiary education indicates a notable rise for women, climbing from 3.4% in 2018 to 15.4% in 2019 and 21.7% in 2020. Concurrently, male attendance also increased, from 4.0% in 2018 to 13.2% in 2019, before slightly dropping to 11.4% in 2020 (Pacific Data Hub). The highest rates for postsecondary education attainment in the Pacific are Tokelau (35%), Palau (29%), Samoa (28%), Cook Islands (26%), Tonga (20%), and Fiji (17%), with Cook Islands and Fiji having close to gender parity in attainment (Pacific Community 2021).

Analysis of the educational background of Leadership Matters survey respondents showed that 87% are tertiary educated, which is significantly higher than the regional gross attendance ratio for women and the postsecondary attainment rate for the top-performing countries. A further breakdown of the highest level of education shows that of this group, 37% held a bachelor's degree, 12% a postgraduate certificate or diploma, 20% a master's degree, and 1% a doctor of philosophy degree. This likely indicates that many women in business leadership in the Pacific are tertiary qualified.

b. Notions of Confidence

The scarcity of women in leadership positions is frequently attributed to factors like women's perceived lack of confidence and ambition, rather than systemic barriers or biases. Likewise, when women fall short of their career aspirations, it's often attributed to a supposed lack of self-confidence. However, it's crucial to recognize that the notion of confidence and its expression are deeply influenced by gender norms. A study conducted in the United Kingdom found that the vast majority of women interviewed raised confidence as a key barrier to career progress; confidence was also highlighted by men in relation to women's careers (Baker and Bourke 2022). The study noted that urging women to exhibit greater confidence can be a "double-edged sword" because women often face penalties for such behavior, given the societal expectation for women to be warm and likable (Baker and Bourke 2022).

In the Pacific context, 43% of Leadership Matters survey respondents identified feelings of self-doubt or inadequacy as a barrier for women in advancing into leadership roles. The theme of lacking self-confidence emerged consistently during interviews by both genders across various countries and sectors, indicating its significance as a challenge to women's representation in leadership.

"I think we need to upskill ourselves a lot more in terms of our confidence. I think that's the main thing that is lacking in most of us. It's probably because of our cultural upbringing that makes us not really raise our voices in a lot of things."

Female interviewee, Vanuatu

"I think a lot of women feel that they're not capable...we have to do a lot more in terms of not being afraid to put ourselves out for the opportunity to be placed in those positions of leadership."

Female interviewee, PNG

Interviewees also cited examples of women not pursuing senior roles, even when encouraged, or being reluctant to put themselves forward for a role unless they met all the criteria. This hesitancy shown by Pacific women when applying for senior roles aligns with global studies that consistently reveal similar patterns.

"We are in the process of recruiting a female director for our board of directors. And we have really, really, really struggled to get Papua New Guinean female qualified candidates. And that's part of its history of all the things that we've talked about. But it's also because the candidates that we're interviewing don't have confidence in themselves. And they're incredibly intelligent, incredibly capable ladies. They don't have the confidence in themselves to be able to hold their own in what is still a male-dominated board environment."

Male interviewee, PNG

"I often used to say 'why won't women apply for promotion? Why don't they put their hand up, even knowing they can't do the job, but why don't women do it?' And what I discovered from my studies was that predominately woman want to be able to tick every single box on a job description"

to feel confident enough to throw their hat in the ring. Men don't even think like that."

Female interviewee, Cook Islands

Most interviewees, men and women, concluded that the level of confidence exhibited by women is closely tied to prevailing social norms and that, in general, Pacific women are socialized to be humble. Women were described using terms such as "shy," "reserved," and "introverted" and this was specifically noted as a challenge when in the company of men:

"I think one of the things that can be an obstacle sometimes is I think it's because of the cultural thing. I find that, you know, even though women can have such wonderful ideas, but when they are in the midst of men, they just don't speak up. But when you pull them aside, and then when you talk to them, they have wonderful ideas."

Female interviewee, PNG

Many interviewees, especially women, mentioned that having women role models in high-ranking leadership roles empowered them and motivated them to take on new challenges. It was also suggested that women in leadership roles had the potential to change the perception of boys and men toward women as leaders.

"So, for little girls to be able to see women holding leadership positions, not just in church, not just in sport, but everywhere. So, when they go to school...they look around and there's just no question that they can be whatever they want to be because they see it. And I wonder if the same is true for little boys, that if they see women in leadership roles that's their expectation that that's a normal thing."

Female interviewee, PNG

c. Training and Support

Many organizations and individuals included in the study had already implemented strategies aimed at boosting women's confidence to pursue leadership opportunities. Encouraging women to apply was cited by many interviewees as an effective strategy. However, they also emphasized the importance of complementing this with training, such as leadership or board readiness programs, and ongoing support to ensure success.

"I think women have a lot of confidence and a lot of potential. And, you know, to be honest, sometimes all they need is just some encouragement or just seeing other women as well doing things in their own space. That provides a lot of inspiration for a lot of other women."

Female interviewee, Tonga

"I think that lack of confidence comes from the lack of support. If you're not given the support, how are you going to bring that in confidence?"

Male interviewee, Solomon Islands

d. Ambition

The concept of ambition is heavily gendered and often equated with working long hours, which is incompatible with caring responsibilities. When women step back from work to manage these responsibilities, it is often interpreted as a lack of ambition (Simmons and Kortas 2024). A global study on women in the workplace debunked the myth that women lack ambition, showing that women are as committed to their careers as men and that women's ambition had increased since the COVID-19 pandemic (McKinsey 2023). Leadership Matters survey responses revealed a high level of ambition and a strong desire for career advancement and leadership roles among women in the Pacific. Among respondents, 42% had been promoted in the last 2 years, and 66% aspire to be promoted within the next 2 years. Of those recently promoted or harboring aspirations for promotion, 73% indicated a persistent determination to continue climbing the career ladder. The survey also revealed a strong desire to join boards, with 85% of those not yet on a board expressing their board ambitions.

Many interviewees highlighted a generational shift in women's career aspirations and expectations. Although they acknowledged that it would take time to see significant changes in leadership demographics, they also noted positive developments toward greater women's representation in leadership roles. These shifts were attributed to factors such as increased educational opportunities, exposure to global standards, and the creation of more inclusive workplaces.

"So, being part of a global village and having access to going to other countries or seeing it on the internet helps to influence, in particular for me, the younger generation. My kids all want to go offshore. The girls want to study in Australia. If they all come to Australia, they're going to see these empowered women everywhere. It's normal. That's the mindset they'll develop. Then hopefully they come back and bring all of that back with them."

Female Interviewee, PNG

2. REGIONAL AND COUNTRY PROFILES

A. PACIFIC REGIONAL PROFILE

i. Women in Business Leadership

The second edition of the Leadership Matters report reveals a positive trend in the representation of women in business leadership roles in the Pacific, particularly in board director positions. Despite social norms that traditionally limit women's roles and opportunities in the Pacific, women are increasingly breaking barriers and taking on leadership positions in business. In 2024, women accounted for 26% of all private sector board roles, marking a notable increase from 21% in the 2021 dataset. Women's representation as chief executive officers (CEOs) also increased, from 13% in 2021 to 20% in 2024 (Table A.1) These results not only reflect individual achievements by women in the Pacific but also indicate a broader societal change toward recognizing and valuing women's contributions in the business sector. However, there has been little change in women's representation in board chair and deputy chair positions, underscoring persistent barriers to women's advancement in leadership.

The sample for this study includes 397 organizations across 14 countries. The sample was restricted to locally registered industry associations, publicly listed companies (Fiji and Papua New Guinea [PNG] only), state-owned enterprises (SOEs), private non-listed companies with a board operating in the region, and the branch offices of larger regional or international corporations. Branch offices were not included in the 2021

sample. However, their inclusion in 2024 provides a more comprehensive view of business leadership within the Pacific region, as they play a pivotal role in the regional economy and business landscape.

The study has acknowledged limitations, described in the Appendix.

The Pacific is edging closer to the global calls for a minimum 30% target for women in all leadership but lacks progress in senior board roles.

The United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/15 calls for a minimum proportion of 30% women in leadership positions as a target in the broader pursuit of gender parity in leadership. This standard aims to promote gender equality and diversity in decision-making roles across various sectors, including the private sector, and an interim threshold of 30% is advocated as a minimum to ensure that women have a meaningful voice in shaping policies, strategies, and organizational priorities.

The 2024 dataset shows that, as a region, the Pacific is progressing closer to the 30% threshold, with 26% of all director positions held by women (Figure A.1). This suggests a growing recognition of the importance of gender diversity in decision-making roles and a willingness to welcome women leaders within corporate boardrooms. However, notable disparities across different leadership positions remain. The representation of women as board chairs (12%) and deputy board chairs (18%)

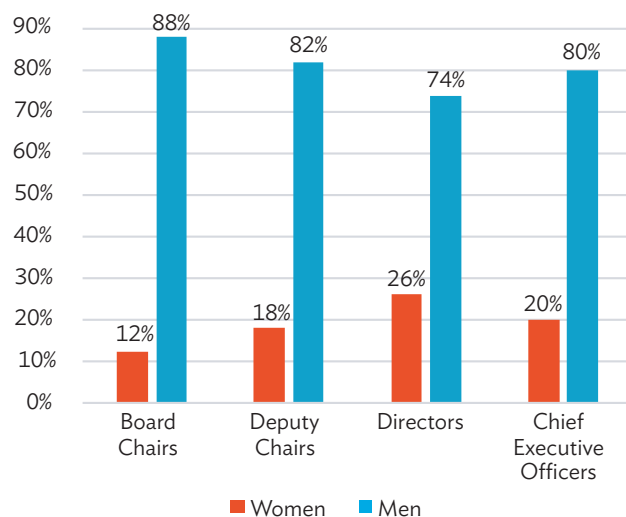
Table A.1 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in the Pacific, 2021 and 2024

Leadership Role	2024 Regional Average (women)	2021 Regional Average (women)	2021-2024 Regional (change)
Board Chairs	12% (n = 275)	11%	↑
Deputy Chairs	18% (n = 140)	19%	↓
Directors	26% (n = 1745)	21%	↑
Chief Executive Officers	20% (n = 354)	13%	↑

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific* (for 2021 data).

Figure A.1 Pacific Regional Average for Board Chairs, Directors, and Chief Executive Officers, 2024



Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

remains low. Similarly, women hold only 20% of CEO positions in the Pacific region. These figures indicate that there are still significant barriers to women's advancement into top leadership roles.

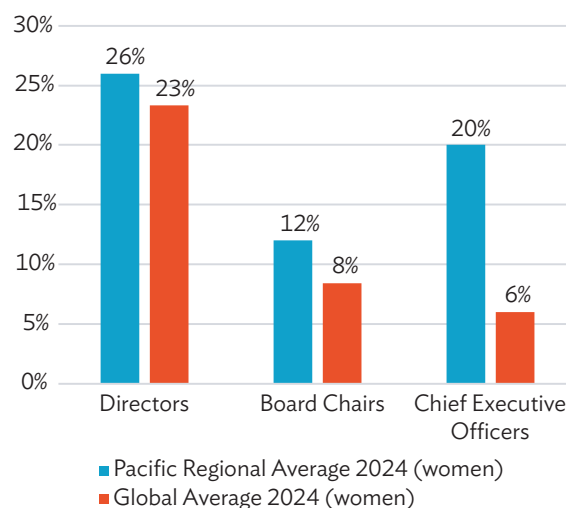
The proportion of women directors in the Pacific is above the global average.

In the Pacific region, women are increasing their presence in the landscape of business leadership and exceeding global averages. The higher representation of women as board directors, board chairs, and CEOs compared to global averages indicates an increasingly progressive environment in the Pacific, where women are challenging traditional gender norms and actively contributing to and shaping the future of business leadership.

On average, women comprise 26% of board directors in the Pacific, exceeding the global average of 23% (Figure A.2). Women comprise 12% of board chairs in the Pacific, which, while modest, is higher than the global average of 8%. Women also hold 20% of CEO positions across the sample in the Pacific, which is also notably higher than the global average of 6%.

The differences in averages can be partly attributed to the differences in the samples between the regional and global studies. While the global data only includes publicly listed companies, the regional data also includes private non-listed

Figure A.2 Global and Pacific Regional Averages for Board Chairs, Directors, and Chief Executive Officers, 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset; and Deloitte Insights. 2024. *Women in the Boardroom: A Global Perspective Eighth Edition*.

companies, SOEs, industry associations, and branch offices of regional or international organizations. The global data also includes a wide range of countries, including those in the Nordic and Western Europe regions that are known for progressive policies promoting gender equality and supportive initiatives such as board quotas, flexible working arrangements, and generous parental leave policies, as well as countries in the Middle East and certain parts of Asia, where social norms and traditional gender roles present particular challenges for women in business. Despite the variations in sample composition between regional and global studies, the Pacific's incremental progress signals an increasingly conducive environment for women's leadership.

The phenomenon of “golden skirts and shirts,” where one individual holds multiple directorships, is not particularly prevalent in the Pacific.

A 2015 report on the representation of women on the boards of SOEs in the Pacific concluded that “with a considerable number of women sitting on multiple boards, the actual number of women on the boards is not high enough” (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2015). Data on individual directors was collected for six countries (Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Tuvalu) representing almost 70% of all director positions in the study. Analysis of the data showed that 80%

Table A.2 Board Composition in the Pacific, 2021 and 2024

Composition	2024 (n = 287)	2021 (n = 234)
Boards with no women directors	24%	32%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	32%	41%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	28%	17%
Boards with gender parity or greater	15%	11%

n = number (sample size).
 Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset; and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific*.

of the positions are filled by individuals, with men far more likely than women to hold multiple directorships (13% of men compared to 2% of women). The phenomenon of “golden skirts and shirts” does not appear to be prevalent in the Pacific, with some countries not having any individuals holding multiple directorships. In other countries, there were examples of multiple directorships, but the majority were because of shared board structures, ex officio directorships, and individuals on corporate boards and the associated industry association.

In 2024, there are fewer boards with no women and more boards achieving gender parity or greater.

The 2024 dataset paints an encouraging picture of progress in gender diversity on corporate boards in the region, with fewer boards lacking any female representation and more boards achieving or approaching gender parity (Table A.2). The increase in the percentage of boards achieving at least 30% representation of women from 28% in 2021 to 43% in 2024 is a significant leap. This suggests a growing recognition among companies of the importance of gender diversity and a willingness to take concrete steps to address it. Similarly, the decline in the percentage of boards with no women directors, from 32% to 24%, signals a shift toward greater inclusivity and diversity in corporate decision-making.

It is encouraging to see that 15% of boards in 2024 have achieved gender parity or even exceeded it, with equal or greater numbers of women directors compared to men. This signals a departure from traditional board compositions dominated by men and indicates a more balanced and

representative leadership structure. However, despite these positive developments, there are still challenges to overcome. The fact that almost a quarter of all boards in the 2024 still have no women directors is concerning. Furthermore, a third of boards have fewer than 30% women directors, indicating that while progress has been made, there’s still room for improvement in terms of reaching more equitable gender representation.

ii. Women’s Representation in Business Leadership by Role

The regional average has increased for women holding board chair, director, and CEO roles.

When comparing the 2021 and 2024 regional averages, there has been a modest rise in the representation of women as board chairs, increasing from 11% to 12%. However, the increase in women directors and CEOs is more notable, with a 5 percentage point increase for directors and a 7 percentage point increase for CEOs. Conversely, the regional average for women in deputy chair roles saw a slight decrease from 19% to 18%. Notably, the sample size for each data point increased during 2021–2024, providing a more robust dataset for this report.

Despite progress, the regional average of about one woman for every three men directors highlights ongoing gender disparity in business leadership.

The 2024 Leadership Matters report shows positive advancements in women’s representation in boardrooms across the Pacific. While the regional average of women holding director seats is 26%, six countries now average more than 30% women directors on their boards, showcasing progress toward greater gender diversity in leadership roles (Figure A.3). Only two countries now average 20% or fewer women directors, compared to six countries in 2021, indicating a positive trend toward increased gender parity.

Despite these improvements, challenges persist in achieving full gender equality in boardrooms. Several countries, including the FSM, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu, continue to lag the regional average of 26% for women’s representation as board directors, highlighting the need for continued efforts to address the barriers that prevent women from fully participating in and contributing to decision-making and leadership in the private sector.

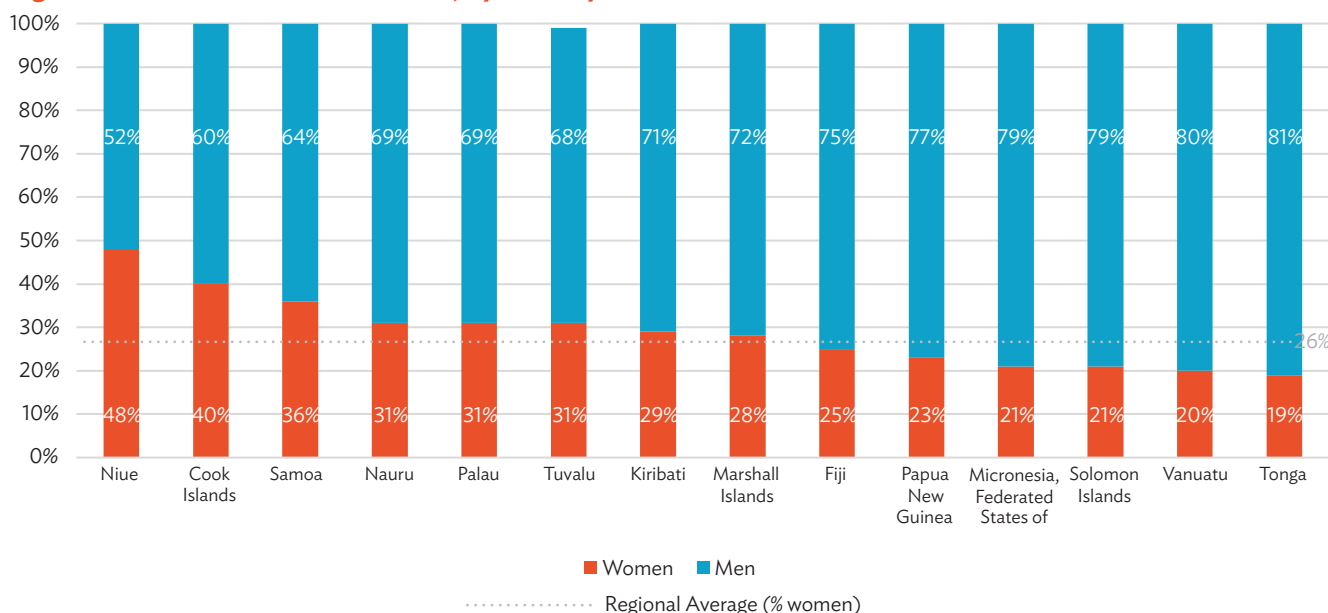
There is a significant gender imbalance in board chair and deputy chair positions across the Pacific.

Across the region, the disparity between the proportion of women serving on boards and women chairing boards is evident. Despite women holding 26% of board director positions, only 12% of the region’s private sector boards are chaired by women and only 18% of deputy chair positions

are held by women. This imbalance highlights the persistent challenges women encounter in ascending to top leadership roles within the private sector.

The disparity in chair positions is particularly striking in certain countries (Figure A.4). While Samoa stands out with women representing 41% of board chairs, countries like the Marshall Islands, Niue, and Vanuatu have no women at all in chair roles,

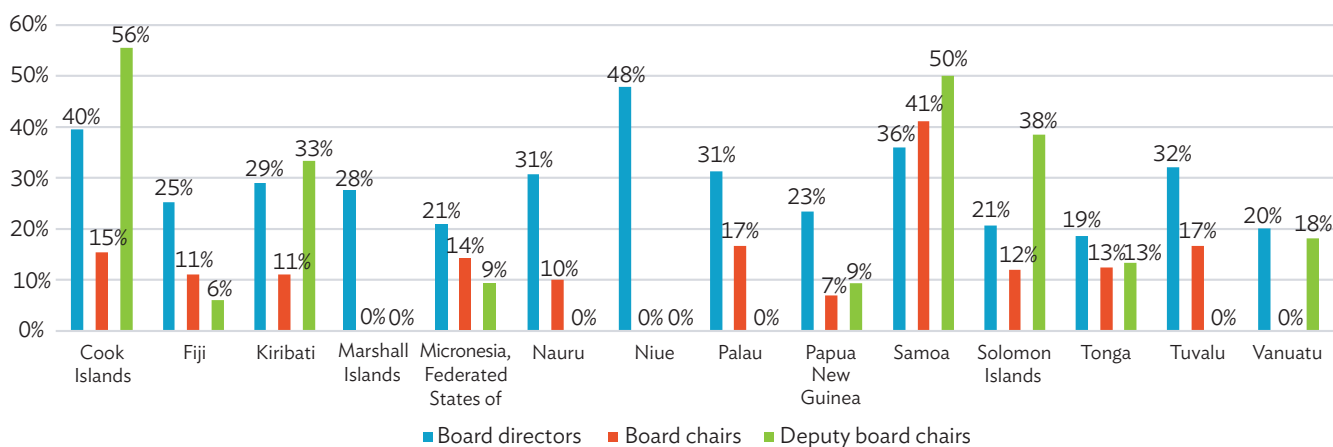
Figure A.3 Board Seats in the Pacific, by Country



Note: Sample size varies by country n = 23 (Niue), 81 (Cook Islands), 128 (Samoa), 52 (Nauru), 32 (Palau), 56 (Tuvalu) 107 (Kiribati), 82 (Republic of Marshall Islands), 340 (Fiji), 73 (Federated States of Micronesia), 189 (Solomon Islands), 124 (Vanuatu), 86 (Tonga).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

Figure A.4 Women’s Representation as Board Chairs, Deputy Board Chairs, and Board Directors in the Pacific by Country



Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

highlighting a clear need for targeted initiatives to address this imbalance. Six countries in the sample (Cook Islands, FSM, Palau, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu) sit above the regional average for the proportion of women board chairs, with 12%.

The available data for deputy chair positions was much more limited than for board chairs. Five countries have no women deputy chairs (Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, and Tuvalu). Six countries (Fiji, FSM, Kiribati, PNG, Solomon Islands, and Tonga) had deputy chair data available for 10 or more organizations. Of these, the proportion of women in deputy chair roles was higher compared to board chairs in Kiribati, PNG, and Solomon Islands. Kiribati had 33% women deputy chairs, PNG 9%, and Solomon Islands 38%. Given the limited data available, it is difficult to draw any conclusions on the representation of women as deputy chairs and any correlation with the representation of women as either directors or board chairs.

Overall, the underrepresentation of women in chair and deputy chair positions is concerning, as these roles are crucial for shaping board agendas, driving decision-making, and setting organizational direction. Deputy chair positions theoretically serve as a training ground and pipeline for women to advance to chair positions. However, the lower representation of women in these roles compared to overall board director roles in most countries suggests that there are specific barriers or biases hindering women's progression to top leadership positions.

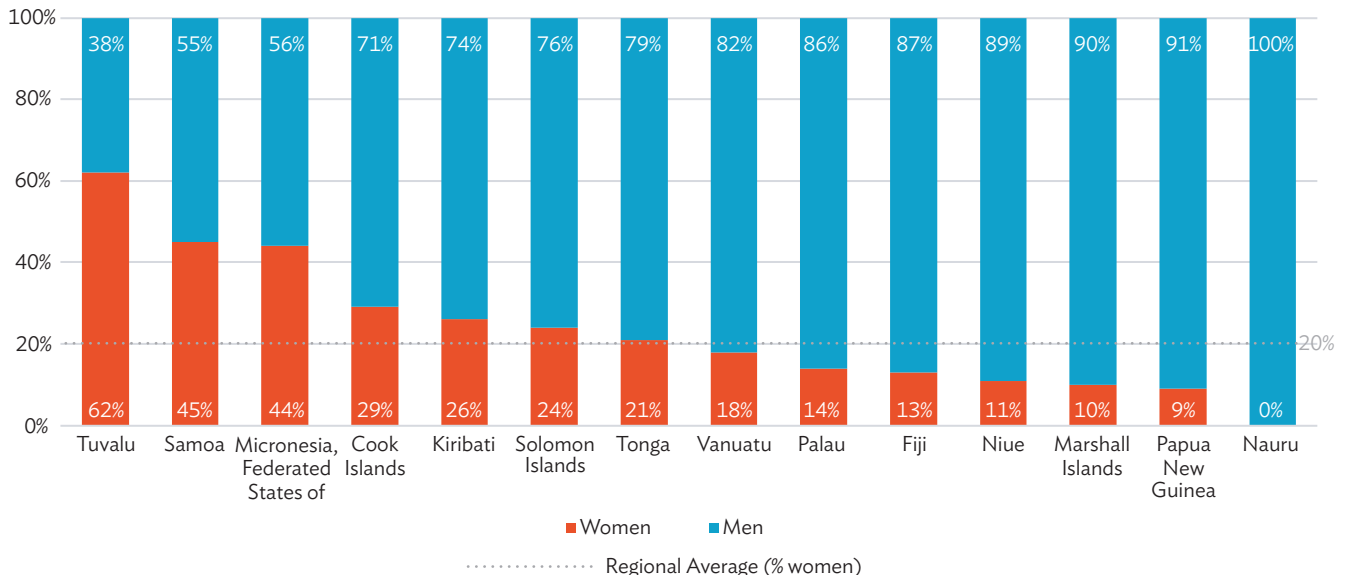
Women are far less likely to reach the chief executive officer position in some countries.

The data shows an overall gender disparity in CEO positions across the Pacific, with men occupying the vast majority (80%) of CEO roles (Figure A.5).

FSM, Samoa, and Tuvalu buck this trend. In Tuvalu, women hold 62% of CEO roles, Samoa continues to have a high representation of women CEOs at 45%, and FSM also stands out with women representing 44% of CEOs, indicating a more balanced gender distribution in executive leadership within these countries. In contrast, Fiji reflects a lower percentage of women CEOs at 13% along with PNG at only 9%. These differences can in part be attributed to the mix of organizations included in each country sample. In countries where there is a small private sector, women's above-average representation in industry associations can inflate the overall percentage representation.

Similarly, the overall increase in the regional average for proportion of women CEOs from 13% in 2021 to 20% in 2024 is partially attributed to a change in the sample rather than being solely indicative of progress. The 2024 dataset includes a greater number of industry associations, where women hold 47% of CEO positions, with branch offices added to the sample, where 20% of women are CEOs. These changes in the 2024

Figure A.5 Chief Executive Officers in the Pacific by Country, 2024



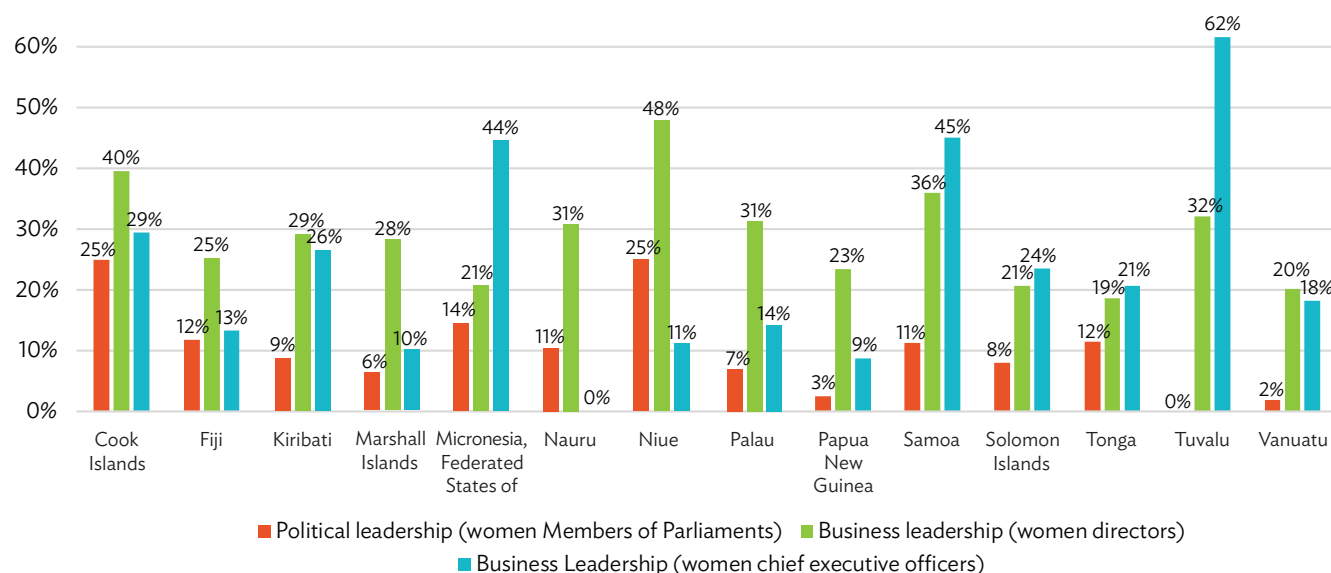
Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

Table A.3 Women's Representation in Senior Executive Positions in the Pacific, 2024

Leadership Role	Women	Men	Total	Women
Chief Executive Officers	70	284	354	20%
Chief Financial Officers	77	120	197	39%
Chief Operating Officers	41	81	122	34%

n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

Figure A.6 Comparison of Women's Political and Business Leadership in the Pacific

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

sample conceal the much lower representation of women as CEOs in publicly listed companies and SOEs.

When expanding analysis to also include data on other senior executive roles, there is a more positive picture of representation, with women accounting for 39% of chief financial officers and 34% of chief operating officers (Table A.3). This indicates that while women face challenges in reaching the CEO level, they are making significant inroads in other senior executive positions and potentially creating a pipeline of future CEO candidates. The higher representation of women in chief financial officer and chief operating officer roles may reflect broader acceptance and recognition of women's leadership capabilities in financial and operational areas, providing a foundation for increasing overall gender diversity in top leadership roles.

Women are better represented as board directors and CEOs than members of Parliament in the Pacific.

Consistent with the findings of the first Leadership Matters report in 2021, women are better represented in business leadership roles than politics (Figure A.6). Notably, in every single country, women are better represented as board directors than as members of Parliament. Of the 14 countries covered in this study, 12 have a higher proportion of women CEOs than members of Parliament.

These findings highlight a significant difference between political and business leadership in the Pacific. While political leadership remains a challenging domain for women in the Pacific, there has been comparatively more progress in the realm of business leadership. This suggests that while cultural and structural barriers persist in political spheres, there appears

to be more opportunities for women to advance and exert influence within the business realm.

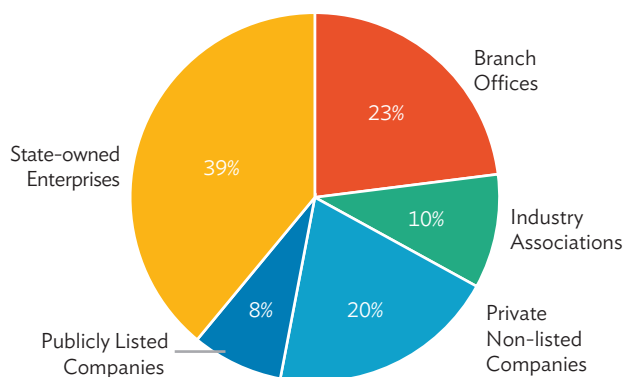
iii. Women’s representation in business leadership by organization type.

The second edition of Leadership Matters includes an expanded sample of 397 organizations across five categories:

1. Industry associations
2. Publicly listed companies
3. Private non-listed companies
4. Branch offices
5. SOEs

The number of organizations has increased from 247 in the 2021 sample and includes branch offices for the first time.

Figure A.7 Breakdown of 2024 Leadership Matters Sample by Organization Type, 2024



Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

Further details on the sample and categorization can be found in the Appendix (Methodology and Limitations).

To provide greater of the Pacific private sector landscape in this study, Figure A.7 presents a breakdown of the sample by organization type, providing greater insight into the scale of each type within the region.

a. Industry Associations

Industry associations comprise 10% of the overall sample, with data available on this organization type for all 14 countries in this study.

Industry associations emerge as front-runners in gender diversity in business leadership while other organization types face challenges in addressing gender disparities.

Within the 2024 dataset, 32% of all industry association boards had achieved gender parity, and a further 32% had achieved the 30% threshold for women’s representation. Industry associations stand out with the highest representation of women across all leadership levels. With 40% of board chairs, 29% of deputy chairs, and 35% of directors being women, industry associations lead the charge in gender diversity at the highest levels of governance (Table A.4). It is evident that industry associations are predominantly responsible for achieving the regional average of 12% board chairs, effectively masking the substantial underperformance of other organization types in terms of gender diversity at the highest levels of board leadership. Analysis by country shows that the trend of greater gender balance in the leadership of industry associations is consistent across most countries (Table A.5).

The significant presence of women in leadership positions within industry associations is consistent with 2021 data.

When comparing data between the 2021 and 2024 samples, the overall high representation of women in leadership roles in industry associations has been maintained. Moreover, the

Table A.4 Women’s Representation in Leadership in the Pacific by Organization Type, 2024

Leadership Role	Industry Associations	Branch Offices	Publicly Listed Companies	Private Non-Listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises
Board Chairs	40% (n = 40)	...	3% (n = 30)	4% (n = 70)	9% (n = 135)
Deputy Chairs	29% (n = 34)	...	0% (n = 5)	6% (n = 33)	19% (n = 68)
Directors	35% (n = 312)	...	27% (n = 181)	19% (n = 447)	26% (n = 805)
Chief Executive Officers	47% (n = 30)	20% (n = 88)	4% (n = 26)	21% (n = 72)	16% (n = 138)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

Table A.5 Women's Representation in Industry Associations in the Pacific, 2024

Country	Board Chairs	Directors	Chief Executive Officers
Regional average	40% (n = 40)	35% (n = 312)	47% (n = 30)
Cook Islands	50% (n = 2)	57% (n = 14)	100% (n = 1)
Fiji	33% (n = 3)	29% (n = 38)	50% (n = 2)
Kiribati	0% (n = 1)	33% (n = 15)	100% (n = 1)
Marshall Islands	0% (n = 1)	0% (n = 4)	...
Micronesia, Federated States of	0% (n = 2)	0% (n = 5)	50% (n = 2)
Nauru	0% (n = 1)	43% (n = 7)	...
Niue	0% (n = 1)	60% (n = 5)	100% (n = 1)
Palau	100% (n = 1)	33% (n = 9)	...
Papua New Guinea	30% (n = 10)	28% (n = 95)	25% (n = 8)
Samoa	100% (n = 3)	50% (n = 14)	100% (n = 1)
Solomon Islands	60% (n = 5)	55% (n = 40)	100% (n = 4)
Tonga	67% (n = 3)	44% (n = 16)	0% (n = 3)
Tuvalu	100% (n = 2)	40% (n = 10)	50% (n = 2)
Vanuatu	0% (n = 5)	25% (n = 40)	20% (n = 5)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

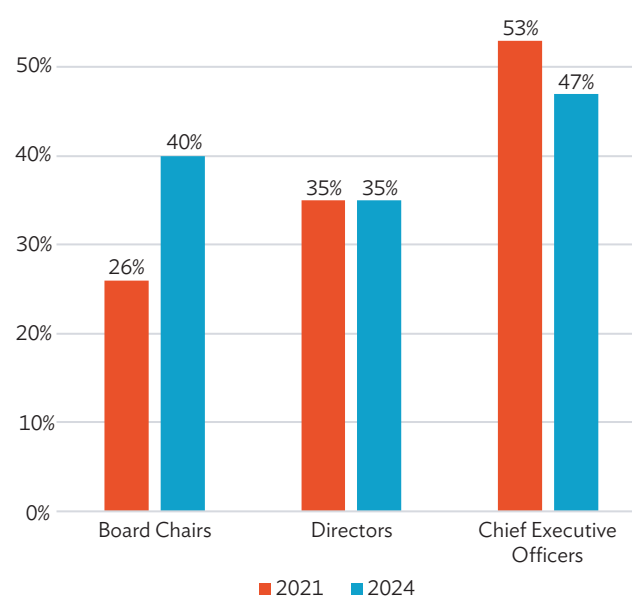
sample size for industry associations has increased during 2021–2024, enhancing the robustness of the data for analysis. During this period, there has been a notable rise in the regional average for women serving as board chairs in industry associations, increasing from 26% to 40% (Figure A.8). Although the proportion of women directors has stayed consistent between the two samples, it still exceeds the overall regional average for women directors, which stands at 26%. There has been a slight decline in the representation of women CEOs from 53% to 47%. Despite this decline, the figure remains well above the overall regional average for CEOs, which is 20%.

b. Publicly Listed Companies

Publicly listed companies comprise 10% of the overall sample, with data available on this organization type for two countries where there is a stock exchange, Fiji and PNG.

Publicly listed companies still appear to have a “glass ceiling” preventing women from attaining leadership positions at the highest level.

Across all organization types in the Pacific, publicly listed companies have the lowest representation of women in board chair and CEO positions, with only 3% of board chairs and 4% of

Figure A.8 Regional Average for Women's Representation in Industry Associations, 2021 and 2024

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific* (for 2021 data).

CEOs being women (Table A.6). Nonetheless, the proportion of women directors on the boards of publicly listed companies is 27%, which is slightly above the regional average. Of the 455 women that hold director positions in the Pacific, 11% sit on the boards of publicly listed companies. The public and shareholder scrutiny and profile that accompany such roles, coupled with cultural norms and expectations, may contribute to the low representation of women in executive roles within publicly listed companies.

When examining the data across different countries and time periods, a concerning pattern of gender underrepresentation emerges in CEO and board chair positions. In Fiji, as of 2024, women occupy only 7% of CEO roles and 5% of board chair positions (Table A.6). Notably, this 5% comprises just one woman serving as a board chair in Fiji. Both figures mark a decline from 2021, where women held 11% of board chair roles and 13% of CEO positions (Figure A.9). However, there is a more encouraging trend in the proportion of women serving as directors of publicly listed companies in Fiji, which has remained steady at 24%, slightly below the overall regional average.

In PNG, the situation remains unchanged as of 2024, with no women serving as board chairs or CEOs of publicly listed companies, consistent with the data from 2021. Conversely, the data on women directors presents a brighter picture, with the proportion of women on the boards of publicly listed companies in PNG increasing from 23% in 2021 to 31% in 2024, surpassing the overall regional average.

These findings suggest that initiatives aimed at enhancing gender diversity on boards of publicly listed companies are yielding positive outcomes, and similar strategies could be applied to bolster the representation of women in CEO and board chair roles.

Table A.6 Women's Representation in Leadership in Publicly Listed Companies in Fiji and Papua New Guinea, 2024

Country	Board Chairs (women)	Directors (women)	Chief Executive Officers (women)
Regional average	3% (n = 30)	27% (n = 181)	4% (n = 26)
Fiji	5% (n = 19)	24% (n = 107)	7% (n = 14)
Papua New Guinea	0% (n = 11)	31% (n = 74)	0% (n = 12)

n = number (sample size).
Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

c. Private Non-Listed Companies

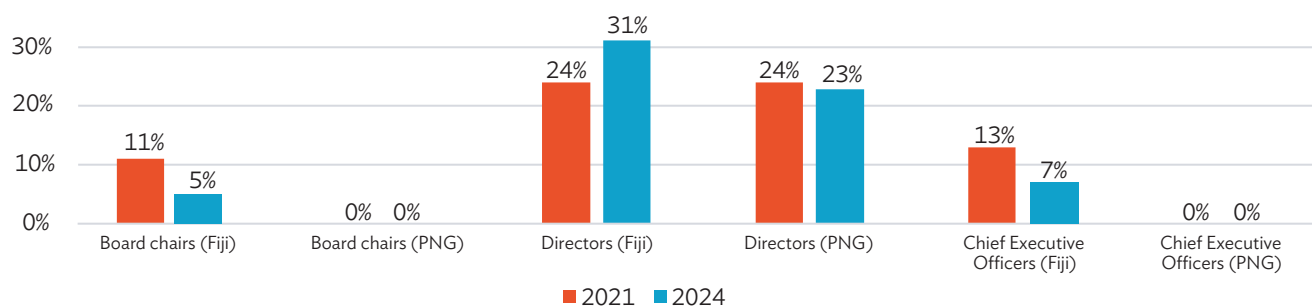
Private non-listed companies comprise 20% of the overall sample, with data available for 11 of the 14 countries in this sample.

The representation of women in leadership roles in private non-listed companies falls below the regional average for all leadership positions except CEOs.

The representation of women in leadership roles within private non-listed companies is below the regional average for board chairs (4%), deputy chairs (6%), and directors (19%) (Table A.7). However, the representation of women as CEOs in private non-listed companies stands at 21%, slightly above the regional average of 20%.

The representation of women in private non-listed companies varies across countries. Several countries, including Kiribati,

Figure A.9 Women's Representation in Leadership in Publicly Listed Companies in Fiji and Papua New Guinea, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific* (for 2021 data).

Marshall Islands, and Samoa, surpass the regional average for women directors (Table A.7). There is a greater number of countries where women CEOs in private non-listed companies exceed the regional average, including Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Palau, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu. However, the overall regional average for this organization type is lowered by the poor representation of women as CEOs in private non-listed companies in PNG, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu.

When comparing regional averages between the 2021 and 2024 samples, there appears to be a decrease in women board chairs from 7% to 4%, a relatively stable rate of women directors from 18% to 19%, and a notable increase in women CEOs from 9% in 2021 to 21% in 2024, slightly surpassing the regional average (Figure A.10). However, because of changes in the categorization of organizations and sample size, direct comparison of the two datasets it is not possible to confirm any trends.

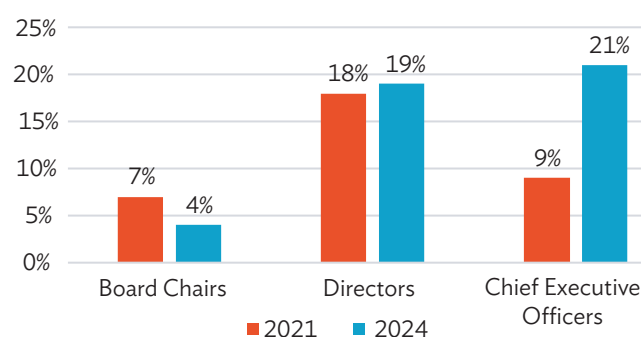
d. Branch Offices

Branch offices of regional and international organizations were included in 2024 for the first time because of their prevalence in many Pacific countries. They are present in 10 of the 14 countries and comprise almost a quarter (23%) of the total

sample. Data was only collected for CEO roles, with 25% of all CEO roles in the sample within branch offices.

Branch offices, with 20% of CEO roles held by women, demonstrate a similar level of representation of women in leadership positions as private non-listed companies, where 21% of CEOs are women (Table A.8). This suggests that there may be common challenges and that opportunities

Figure A.10 Women's Representation in Leadership in Private Non-Listed Companies in the Pacific, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific* (for 2021 data).

Table A.7 Women's Representation in Leadership in Private Non-Listed Companies in the Pacific, 2024

Country	Board Chairs	Directors	Chief Executive Officers
Regional average	4% (n = 70)	19% (n = 447)	21% (n = 72)
Cook Islands	0% (n = 2)	21% (n = 14)	50% (n = 2)
Fiji	9% (n = 11)	16% (n = 67)	33% (n = 12)
Kiribati	100% (n = 1)	33% (n = 6)	100% (n = 1)
Marshall Islands	0% (n = 1)	30% (n = 10)	100% (n = 1)
Micronesia, Federated States of	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nauru
Niue
Palau	0% (n = 1)	...	100% (n = 1)
Papua New Guinea	4% (n = 23)	19% (n = 123)	4% (n = 23)
Samoa	0% (n = 1)	31% (n = 42)	50% (n = 2)
Solomon Islands	0% (n = 13)	12% (n = 94)	7% (n = 14)
Tonga	0% (n = 8)	19% (n = 37)	29% (n = 7)
Tuvalu	0% (n = 2)	13% (n = 15)	50% (n = 2)
Vanuatu	0% (n = 8)	21% (n = 39)	14% (n = 7)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

Table A.8 Women's Representation as Chief Executive Officers in Branch Offices in the Pacific, 2024

Country	Chief Executive Officers (women)
Regional average	20% (n = 88)
Cook Islands	20% (n = 5)
Fiji	17% (n = 12)
Kiribati	0% (n = 1)
Marshall Islands	...
Micronesia, Federated States of	...
Nauru	...
Niue	...
Palau	0% (n = 2)
Papua New Guinea	14% (n = 36)
Samoa	50% (n = 2)
Solomon Islands	33% (n = 9)
Tonga	33% (n = 6)
Tuvalu	100% (n = 1)
Vanuatu	21% (n = 14)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

exist for women's advancement in both local and regional or international organizations operating at the executive level.

When analyzing the data by country, the proportion of women CEOs in branch offices is equal or greater than the regional averages for all countries where they operate, except for Fiji and PNG.

e. State-Owned Enterprises

SOEs comprise 39% of the overall sample, representing the largest organization category, with data available for all 14 countries in this sample.

Women are significantly underrepresented as board chairs and CEOs within SOEs, even though these entities offer nearly half of all leadership opportunities.

A significant gender imbalance is observed in the composition of board chairs for SOEs in the Pacific, with women holding only 9% of these positions (Table A.9). Women represent 17% of board chair positions in FSM, 14% in Fiji, and 31% in Samoa,

making these countries stand out. However, the absence of any women serving as SOE board chairs in Palau, PNG, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu signals a substantial gap in gender diversity at this level.

The regional average for women CEOs within SOEs stands at 16%, which is lower than the regional average for women CEOs overall at 20%. Like with board chairs, there are several countries where the proportion of women CEOs of SOEs surpasses the regional average, including Cook Islands (22%), FSM (43%), Samoa (40%), and Tuvalu (63%). However, this is counterbalanced by half of the countries having no women CEOs in their SOEs.

While women's representation on SOE boards has surged since 2021, there is still a long way to go.

Women's representation on SOE boards in the Pacific has shown a notable increase since 2021, marking a significant step forward in the quest for gender equality in leadership roles within these organizations. The data reveals that women occupy 26% of director positions on SOE boards in 2024, up from 18% in 2021 (Figure A.11). This surge in representation is particularly promising considering the prevalence of SOEs in most Pacific economies. It indicates progress toward achieving gender parity in leadership roles within these influential entities.

Despite the overall progress, the country-level data highlights disparities in women's representation on SOE boards across the Pacific. Countries such as PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu still exhibit low levels of women's representation. Of SOE boards across the Pacific, 22% lack women directors altogether, indicating the persistence of barriers to women's advancement in certain contexts.

Data collected by the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI) since 2012 for a subset of countries and SOEs (Figure A.12) underscores the volatility in women's representation on SOE boards, indicating that efforts to promote gender diversity have not always been consistently sustained. Despite national and regional commitments to support increased representation of women in leadership roles on SOE boards, there remains a risk that the gains seen in 2024 may be reversed if sustained efforts are not maintained.

iv. Women's Representation in Business Leadership by Sector

The 2024 sample includes 397 organizations categorized across 12 sectors. The categorization of sectors has changed since the

Table A.9 Women's Representation in Leadership in State-Owned Enterprises in the Pacific, 2024

Country	Board Chairs	Directors	Chief Executive Officers
Regional average	9% (n = 135)	26% (n = 805)	16% (n = 138)
Cook Islands	11% (n = 9)	40% (n = 53)	22% (n = 9)
Fiji	14% (n = 21)	30% (n = 128)	0% (n = 20)
Kiribati	6% (n = 16)	28% (n = 86)	19% (n = 16)
Marshall Islands	0% (n = 8)	29% (n = 68)	0% (n = 9)
Micronesia, Federated States of	17% (n = 12)	22% (n = 68)	43% (n = 7)
Nauru	11% (n = 9)	29% (n = 45)	0% (n = 2)
Niue	...	44% (n = 18)	0% (n = 8)
Palau	0% (n = 4)	30% (n = 23)	0% (n = 4)
Papua New Guinea	0% (n = 13)	18% (n = 80)	0% (n = 13)
Samoa	31% (n = 13)	36% (n = 72)	40% (n = 15)
Solomon Islands	0% (n = 9)	11% (n = 55)	0% (n = 7)
Tonga	0% (n = 5)	6% (n = 33)	15% (n = 13)
Tuvalu	0% (n = 2)	39% (n = 31)	63% (n = 8)
Vanuatu	0% (n = 7)	16% (n = 45)	14% (n = 7)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

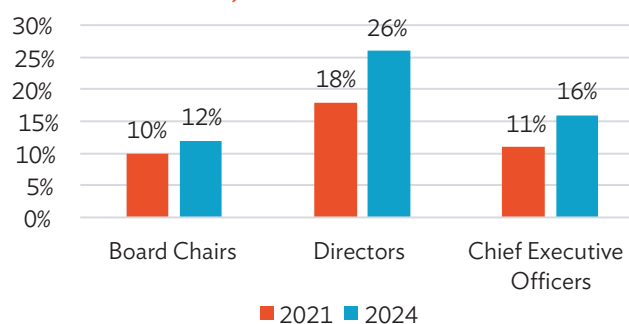
first edition of Leadership Matters (refer to the Appendix for further details).

The largest sector in the sample is finance and insurance, comprising 27% of all organizations, followed by diversified (13%), transport and infrastructure (11%), and utilities (10%) (Figure A.13). The remaining sectors comprised less than 10% of organizations, with information technology (IT) comprising just 0.1% of the total sample.

Across most sectors, women are conspicuously underrepresented as board chairs.

The diversified (accounting for 29% of women board chairs), IT (25%), manufacturing (33%), and tourism (22%) sectors are exceptions, as all are significantly above the regional average of 12% (Table A.10). In contrast, sectors such as resources and services have no women board chairs, while others, including agriculture and fisheries, finance and insurance, media and communications, transport and infrastructure, and utilities, show lower representation of women as board chairs, all sitting below the regional average.

This gender imbalance also persists in deputy chair positions, where women occupy only 18% of roles. Again, across sectors

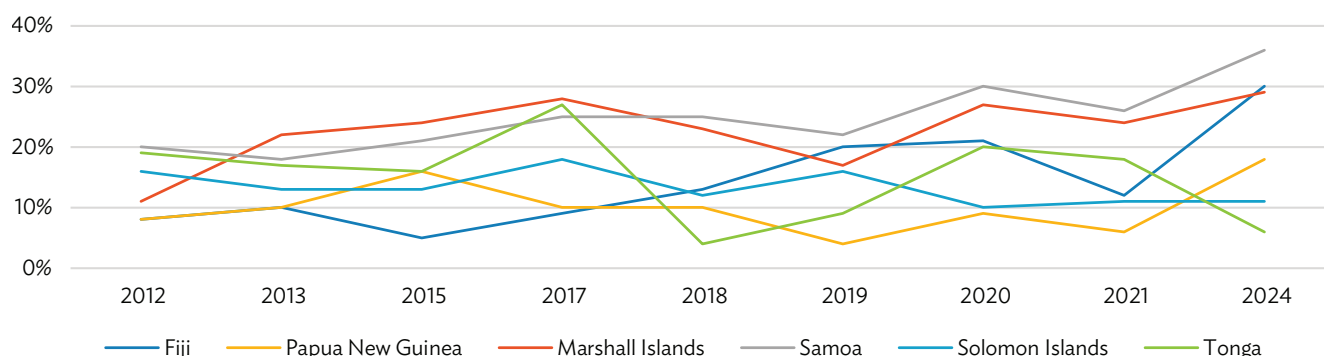
Figure A.11 Women's Representation in Leadership in State-Owned Enterprises in the Pacific, 2021 and 2024

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific* (for 2021 data).

there are widely varying levels of women's representation as deputy chairs, ranging from 0% to 50%. Overall, the sample size by of deputy chairs by sector is too small to detect any trends.

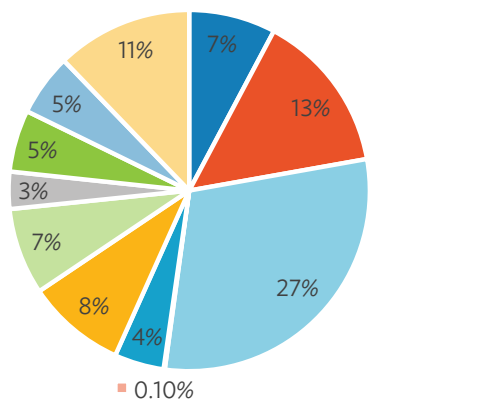
Women's representation as directors is close to the regional average across most sectors.

Figure A.12 Women's Representation as State-Owned Enterprise Directors by Country, 2012–2024



Note: Sample size varies by country and year. 2021 and 2024 data collection methodology differs from previous years.
 Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific* (for 2021 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (for 2012–2020 data).

Figure A.13 Breakdown of 2024 Leadership Matters Sample by Sector, 2024



- Agriculture and fisheries
- Finance and insurance
- Manufacturing
- Resources
- Services
- Transport and infrastructure
- Diversified
- Information technology
- Media and communications
- Retail
- Tourism

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

Women collectively hold 26% of all board director roles, with variations observed across different sectors. Industries where women are particularly well represented include the diversified sector, with 36% of board positions held by women, followed closely by retail at 33%, and the IT sector and the finance and insurance sector, both at 26% (Table A.10). Half of all board

roles held by women are concentrated within the finance and insurance sector, showing how significant this sector is in providing opportunities for women.

Women's representation as CEOs varies significantly across sectors.

The distribution of CEO roles across various industries underscores the prevailing gender gap in executive leadership positions in some sectors (Table A.10). It is concerning that in the 2024 study two sectors (IT and manufacturing) lack any women CEOs. While these sectors represent a small proportion of the total number of organizations sampled, it nonetheless signifies a glaring absence of women's leadership within these industries.

In contrast, sectors such as diversified, finance and insurance, retail, services, and tourism stand out for their relatively better representation of women as CEOs. Although women's representation as CEOs still hovers in the range of 25% to 29%, these higher-performing sectors account for about half of all CEO roles in the Pacific region and all sit above the regional average for CEOs of 20%.

The finance and insurance sector provides the most CEO opportunities for women.

Within the 2024 dataset, 28% of all CEO positions are situated within the finance and insurance sector. Women are reasonably well represented within this sector, holding 29% of CEO positions, above the regional average. With the inclusion of branch offices, which are mostly in this sector, the finance and insurance sector accounts for 41% of all CEO roles in the

Table A.10 Women's Representation in Business Leadership in the Pacific by Sector, 2024

Sector	Board Chairs	Deputy Chairs	Directors	Chief Executive Officers
Agriculture and fisheries	4% (n = 250)	0% (n = 10)	20% (n = 150)	17% (n = 24)
Diversified	29% (n = 45)	30% (n = 33)	36% (n = 342)	28% (n = 43)
Finance and insurance	11% (n = 66)	12% (n = 34)	26% (n = 420)	29% (n = 101)
Information technology	25% (n = 4)	50% (n = 2)	26% (n = 23)	0% (n = 3)
Manufacturing	33% (n = 6)	0% (n = 3)	32% (n = 31)	0% (n = 12)
Media and communications	5% (n = 20)	22% (n = 9)	23% (n = 128)	18% (n = 28)
Resources	0% (n = 20)	13% (n = 8)	16% (n = 118)	4% (n = 26)
Retail	14% (n = 7)	0% (n = 2)	33% (n = 43)	33% (n = 9)
Services	0% (n = 10)	0% (n = 2)	21% (n = 38)	29% (n = 17)
Tourism	22% (n = 9)	33% (n = 3)	26% (n = 76)	25% (n = 16)
Transport and infrastructure	6% (n = 31)	19% (n = 16)	23% (n = 176)	8% (n = 40)
Utilities	6% (n = 32)	17% (n = 18)	24% (n = 200)	11% (n = 35)

n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

Pacific. The concentration of leadership roles in the finance and insurance sector underscores the sector's role in providing opportunities and promoting gender equality in executive roles.

Sectors traditionally led by men continue to lag in appointing women CEOs.

In other sectors, however, there are still lags in recognizing women's leadership abilities. The next cohort of sectors with CEO rates of 4%–18% accounts for the balance of CEO roles; these sectors include resources, utilities, transport and infrastructure, agriculture and fisheries, and media and communications. These are sectors that have traditionally been led and dominated by men, and the low women's CEO representation figures in these sectors highlight the need for concerted efforts to address barriers and biases hindering women's advancement into leadership positions and to foster environments that embrace diversity and inclusivity in executive leadership.

B. COOK ISLANDS

i. Economic Context

The Cook Islands has a population of 19,200 across 15 small islands scattered over an exclusive economic zone of 1.8 million square kilometers (Asian Development Bank [ADB] n.d.). Despite its small population and vulnerability to climate change and external shocks, particularly disasters, the Cook Islands boasts the highest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita among ADB's Pacific developing member countries (ADB 2023).

Cook Islanders have open access to work and reside in Australia and New Zealand, and like many Pacific states, the Cook Islands faces the threat of population loss because of economic emigration, notably to New Zealand since January 2021 (Government of New Zealand, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade [MFAT] 2021). The steady movement of people from the outer islands to the main island of Rarotonga, paired with migration overseas, is having cultural, social, and economic impacts.

The Cook Islands' economy was profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because of its heavy reliance on tourism (Government of New Zealand, MFAT 2021). Nonetheless, signs of recovery are emerging as increased tourist arrivals drove strong growth—13.3%—in fiscal year (FY) 2023 (ended June 2023) (ADB 2024). Though the Cook Islands has experienced acute labor shortages, this has been somewhat mitigated by active recruitment of foreign workers (ADB 2023). Inflation during FY2023 was higher than expected, as global supply disruptions raised commodity prices, particularly food and fuel prices (ADB 2024). The significant cost of debt servicing, expected to exceed 50% of GDP in the medium term, adds pressure to the economic landscape (MFAT 2021). Despite these challenges, inflation is expected to fall back to trend in FY2024 and FY2025 (ADB 2024) and the GDP per capita growth forecast for 2024 is the second highest of all Pacific island countries (ADB 2024).

The Cook Islands recently finalized its Economic Development Strategy 2030, which focuses on equity and access, economic transformation, development of people and culture, investment, and greening of the economy (Government of New Zealand, MFAT 2021). Additionally, the Cook Islands E-Commerce Acceleration Work Plan, released on 23 August 2023, aims to drive economic growth, innovation, and job creation by supporting collaboration between

government and private sector stakeholders (PACER Plus Implementation Unit 2023).

ii. Women's Economic Participation

In the Cook Islands, a gender gap persists in labor force participation. The 2019 Labour Force Survey shows a participation rate of 63.4% for women and 77.8% for men nationwide (Government of the Cook Islands 2020). On Rarotonga, women's participation stands at 70%, compared to 49% in the Southern Group and 60% in the Northern Group, indicating a wider gap in the Pa Enua (outer islands), where traditional gender roles are entrenched and access to various services is often limited and challenging.

The private sector is the main sector in the Cook Islands, accounting for almost two-thirds of all jobs. On average, women have higher wages than men in the following occupations: managers; professionals; and skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers. In all other occupations, men have higher wages than women (Government of the Cook Islands 2020). However, economic challenges faced by the Cook Islands in recent years are expected to have had significant implications for women working in the private sector. Industries like accommodation, food service, and retail, where women are employed at higher rates than men, experienced a disproportionate impact because of the pandemic and high inflation. The results of the Labour Force Survey conducted in 2023 will provide greater insight into any changes in women's labor force participation, particularly following COVID-19 impacts (Cook Islands Statistics Office 2022; Cook Islands Statistics Office 2023).

According to public sector demographic data published in 2023 by the Government of the Cook Islands, about one-third of all jobs in the Cook Islands are in the public sector, where women account for 53% of the workforce (Cook Islands Office of the Public Service Commissioner n.d.). Generally, there are more women represented among the younger age groups, while men are more represented among older age groups (Cook Islands Office of the Public Service Commissioner n.d.). Unlike in most Pacific countries, women in the Cook Islands hold a slightly higher proportion of managerial roles compared to men (10.9% of female workers compared with 6.3% of male workers) (Government of the Cook Islands 2020).

Cook Island families typically blend full-time and part-time employment with small business ventures and agricultural

or marine food production activities. Women, especially in the Pa Enua, often engage in the informal sector and operate small businesses in markets, leveraging traditional skills like handicrafts and weaving to contribute to family income, while also catering to immediate family needs.

The close relationship between women's educational achievement and employment opportunity is evident in the Cook Islands. Among those who have completed tertiary education, workforce participation by men and women is almost the same at about 80% (Government of the Cook Islands 2020). A gender gap persists, however, among people who have finished high school, with many more men falling in this category working compared to women. The expectation for women to undertake unpaid caregiving duties constrains their access to professional careers, higher-skilled jobs, promotions, and entrepreneurship.

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

In 2021, the Government of the Cook Islands released the National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+, a 25-year generational strategy setting out the country's goals for sustainable development (Government of the Cook Islands 2021b). Within this framework, the Cook Islands aims to increase the representation of women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-plus; youth (15–25 years); and persons with disabilities in Parliament and local politics (Government of the Cook Islands 2021a). Legislation regarding gender equality in the Cook Islands is outlined in Table B.1.

Aligned with the current National Sustainable Development Agenda strategy, the Cook Islands Budget (2023–2024) lists policy measures intended to foster gender equality and promote women's representation in leadership roles (Brown 2023). This includes funding earmarked for the implementation of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and Action Plan, 2019–2024 and funding for

Table B.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in the Cook Islands

Enabling Legislation	In Place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✓	Employment Relations Act 2012, Section 55e
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✓	Employment Relations Act 2012, Section 56
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Family Protection and Support Act 2017, Part 6
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ (6 weeks for public and private sector employees)	Employment Relations Act 2012, Section 40
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✗	Employment Relations Act 2012, Section 41
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✓ (2 days for public and private sector employees)	Employment Relations Act 2012, Section 42
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✗	Employment Relations Act 2012, Section 44

Sources: Government of the Cook Islands. 2012. *Employment Relations Act 2012*. <https://www.intaff.gov.ck/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Employment-Relations-Act-2012-Final.pdf>; Government of the Cook Islands, Ministry of Internal Affairs. 2014. *Maternity Leave in the Cook Islands*. <https://www.intaff.gov.ck/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Maternity-Leave-Fact-Sheet-20140501.pdf>.

a full-time gender national coordinator under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Brown 2023), responsible for ensuring policy implementation, monitoring, and review (Government of the Cook Islands, Ministry of Internal Affairs 2020).

The relatively high workforce participation rate for women in the Cook Islands is likely attributable to several key initiatives. One of these is financial support provided to Cook Islanders to access formal tertiary education through a scholarship program, which provides support for students undertaking domestic and international studies. During 2015–2019, 75% of the graduates from the scholarship scheme were female, and in 2021, there were more female scholarship recipients than male (UN Women 2023b). The 2019 Labour Force Survey found that in total, 14.3% of people in the Cook Islands (15.7% of women and 13.0% of men) had a university level of education (UN Women 2023b). A government-funded maternity leave payment scheme that assists private sector employers in meeting paid maternity leave obligations likely contributes to women’s workforce participation. High outward migration may also have provided more opportunities for skilled workers, particularly women, to seek employment or education.

In the political sphere, six women candidates were elected in the 2022 election (Tangimetua 2022; UN Women 2023b), comprising 25% of Parliament seats, in line with the global average (UN Women 2023a). However, only one woman, Hon. Vainetutai Rose Toki-Brown, serves in the six-member cabinet. The ‘Are Ariki (parliamentary body composed of high chiefs), consisting of up to 24 Arikis (high chiefs), advises the legislative assembly of the Cook Islands on matters concerning the people’s welfare. While traditionally male dominated, women have previously held prestigious positions, like president of the ‘Are Ariki. Under Cook Islands law, both men and women have equal rights to own, rent, and inherit land (UN Women 2023b).

iv. Women in Business Leadership

The sample for the Cook Islands’ private sector analysis expanded to include 18 organizations, up from 13 in 2021. This includes five branch offices, none of which were included in 2021, providing a broader representation of the private sector.

Data shows that women in the Cook Islands hold significant leadership positions as directors and CEOs, surpassing regional averages.

Women are represented on all boards in the Cook Islands sample.

In the Cook Islands’ sample of 13 organizations with board data available, women are represented on all boards; 31% of boards have from 30% to 50% women directors; and 38% of boards have gender parity or greater, which means there are at least the same number of women and men on the board (Table B.2). This data makes the Cook Islands one of the highest-performing countries in the Pacific for women’s representation on boards.

The representation of women on boards in the Cook Islands is well above the regional average.

Women make up 40% of board directors in the Cook Islands sample, well above the regional average of 26% (Table B.3) and an increase from the 32% recorded in 2021. Women comprise 29% of CEOs, representing a marginal increase from 27% in 2021 and well above the regional average of 20%.

Women in the Cook Islands hold fewer board chair positions than in 2021 but have significantly increased their representation as deputy chairs.

Women’s representation as board chairs (15%) reflects a decrease since 2021 (Figure B.1), although this still sits above the regional average of 12%. This reflects both a decrease in

Table B.2 Board Composition in the Cook Islands

Composition	2024 (n =13)	2021 (n = 12)
Boards with no women directors	0%	17%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	31%	25%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	31%	42%
Boards with gender parity or greater	38%	17%

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table B.3 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in the Cook Islands

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021-2024
	Cook Islands	Regional average	Cook Islands	Cook Islands (change)
Board Chairs	15% (n = 13)	12%	25% (n = 12)	↓
Deputy Chairs	56% (n = 9)	18%	0% (n = 3)	↑
Directors	40% (n = 81)	26%	32% (n = 74)	↑
Chief Executive Officers	29% (n = 18)	20%	27% (n = 11)	↑

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

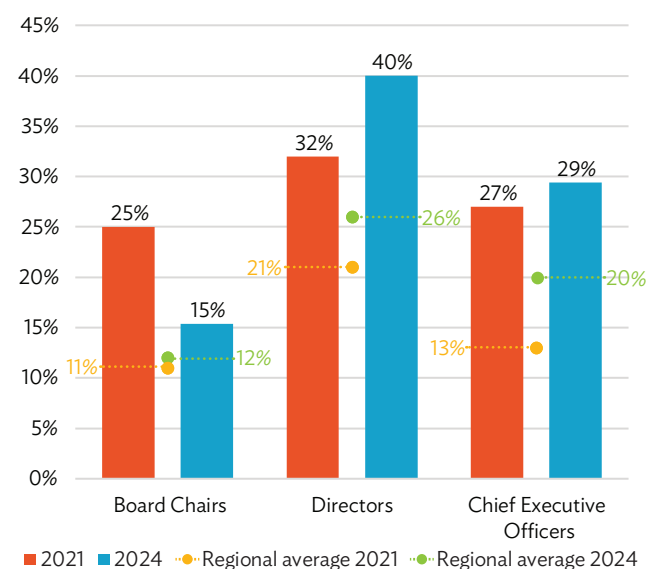
Table B.4 Women’s Representation in Leadership in the Cook Islands by Organization Type

Leadership Role	Industry Associations	Private Non-Listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises	Branch Offices
Board Chairs	50% (n = 2)	0% (n = 2)	11% (n = 9)	...
Directors	57% (n = 14)	21% (n = 14)	40% (n = 53)	...
Chief Executive Officers	100% (n = 1)	50% (n = 2)	22% (n = 9)	20% (n = 5)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

Figure B.1 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in the Cook Islands, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

absolute numbers and the proportion of women as board chairs between the 2021 and 2024 datasets. However, five women deputy chairs were recorded in this sample, a significant increase from no women in the 2021 sample and a positive signal that there are more women in the pipeline for board chair roles in the future.

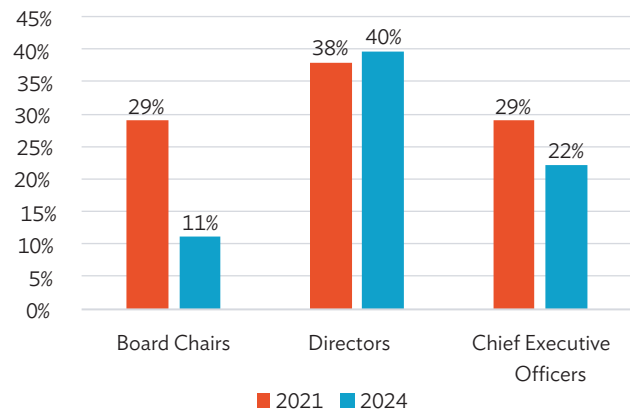
Women’s representation as directors is highest on boards of SOEs and industry associations in the Cook Islands.

In the Cook Islands, women enjoy strong representation on the boards of SOEs (40%), which constitute half the organizations in the sample (Table B.4). While the sample size for some organization types is small, the Cook Islands data show women are represented in business leadership across all organization types. SOEs and industry associations have the highest representation of women across all leadership roles, with the representation of women as directors notably higher than regional averages.

Women’s representation as CEOs is above the regional average for all organization types in the Cook Islands.

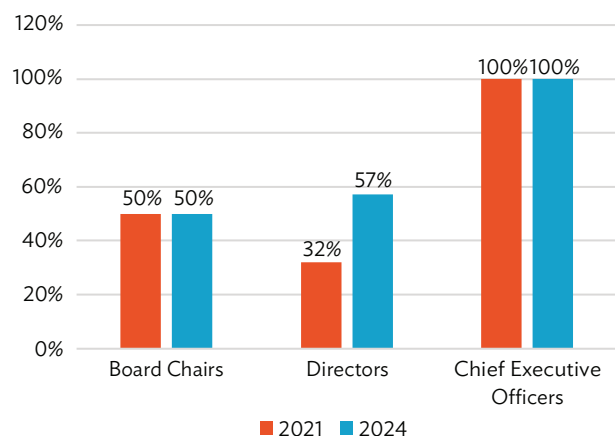
As noted above, the representation of women in business leadership is consistently high in the Cook Islands. The

Figure B.2 Women's Representation in State-Owned Enterprise Leadership in the Cook Islands, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Figure B.3 Women's Representation in Industry Association Leadership in the Cook Islands, 2021 and 2024

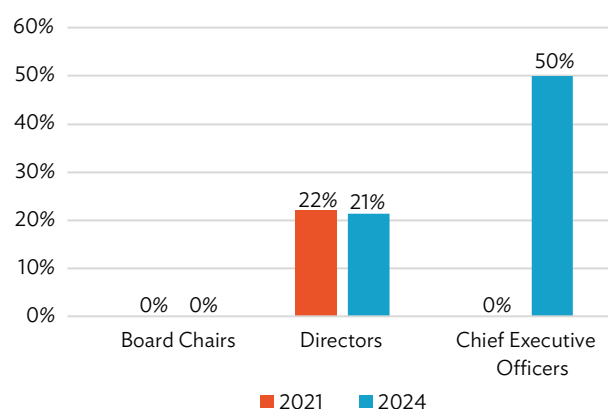


Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

proportion of women CEOs is greater than the regional average across all organization types. The rates are highest in industry associations and private non-listed companies. Branch offices have been included in the sample for this report, and women hold 20% (1 out of 5) of CEO positions in these organizations.

Women's representation as board chairs and CEOs of SOEs in the Cook Islands has decreased since 2021 but is still higher than the regional average.

Figure B.4 Women's Representation in Private Non-Listed Companies' Leadership in the Cook Islands, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Since 2021, there has been a small increase in the number of women directors in SOEs, although there has been a decline in the number of women as SOE board chairs and CEOs (Figure B.2). Nonetheless, the representation of women in these roles in the Cook Islands remains above the regional average.

Consistent with regional trends, women are well represented in the leadership of industry associations in the Cook Islands.

Women's representation as directors is also high for industry associations (57%), up from 32% in 2021 (Figure B.3). More than half of the directors of the two industry associations in the Cook Islands are women, with one industry association board chaired by a woman. The representation of women as board chairs and CEOs of industry associations has remained high since 2021.

Private non-listed companies lag in terms of women's representation on boards.

While the proportion of women directors remained steady from 2021 to 2024, it is promising to observe a woman CEO in a private non-listed company in the Cook Islands in this sample (Figure B.4). While the number of private non-listed companies in the Cook Islands is small, it would be good to see more women appointed both as directors and board chairs.

C. FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

i. Economic Context

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) has a population of about 105,015 people, spread across four states: Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap (Asian Development Bank [ADB] n.d.).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, FSM's economy was fully reopened by August 2022 when pandemic measures were lifted (ADB 2023) and economic growth returned in fiscal year (FY) 2023 (ended September 2023) (ADB 2024). Construction, transportation, hotels and restaurants, and retail trade drove this growth. In FY2024 and FY2025, the recovery of tourism and increased public investment—supported by the renewed Compacts of Free Association with the United States—is forecast to continue to drive construction, expand output, and stimulate other economic sectors (ADB 2024).

Key short-term risks are FSM's high dependence on imports and exposure to international commodity price volatility (ADB 2023). The reopening of international borders and the Compact of Free Association also both pose the risk of spurring out-migration, which may impact the FSM's labor market (ADB 2024).

After having declined during the pandemic, the fiscal surplus is expected to steadily increase (ADB 2023). The new Compact of Free Association—signed into law on 9 March 2024 by the United States (US) President—will provide substantial financial support to FSM, which should increase public investment. Enhanced public investment could attract private sector investment through improving connectivity and the business environment (ADB 2024).

ii. Women's Economic Participation

Data on labor force participation in FSM is scarce and outdated (UN Women 2022a). National estimates conducted in 2014 and reported by the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicate that the labor force participation rate among women is 46.2% and 67.8% among men (World Bank n.d.c).

Traditionally, women and men are assigned distinct responsibilities (UN Women 2022a). Women are typically responsible for homemaking and childcare, gathering food and drink, and manufacturing of traditional goods such as baskets (UN Women 2022a). Women also typically engage in agricultural food production, seafood collection, and artisan crafts (UN Women 2022a). In contrast, men are traditionally

responsible for fishing, tree-planting, wood carving, aquatic activities, and coconut tree cultivation (UN Women 2022a). In the private sector, men dominate employment across all sectors, and women often occupy junior and lower-paid positions, leaving them more vulnerable to poverty.

The 2013 Household Income and Expenditure Survey found that poverty incidence was higher in female-headed households (50.5%) than male-headed households (38.9%) (UN Women 2022a). If this pattern has persisted since 2013, it is likely that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted female-headed households.

Household surveys for a national census began in 2020, but work was delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results are in the process of final validation with final results still pending, but preliminary findings show a 30% decrease in the population as compared to the 2010 census. A household income and expenditure survey is planned for 2026.

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

The FSM has taken steps to promote gender equality. It has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and established the National Women's Council to monitor the implementation of the national gender policy. Its commitment to women's leadership and economic empowerment was reaffirmed during the 7th Meeting of Pacific Ministers for Women in 2021, with a focus on education, training, and employment opportunities for women in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

After endorsement by leaders at the 25th Micronesian Islands Forum conducted in 2023, forum member countries will develop a regional gender equality framework (Pacific Community 2023a). The Micronesian Gender Equality Framework will be developed with broad stakeholder engagement and consultation across the region, including with communities, civil society, government, development partners, and technical agencies (Pacific Community 2023a). The framework will be developed by 2025 and will be presented at the 27th Micronesian Islands Forum in 2025 (Pacific Community 2023a). At the 25th Micronesian Islands Forum, leaders also committed to more intentional efforts for gender mainstreaming in sectors including energy, maritime, and agriculture (Pacific Community 2023a).

The Government of the FSM is collaborating with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to manage the Strengthening FSM's Gender Machinery Project, which aims to engage women, girls, and key partners in policy advocacy, income generation, and access to essential small-scale infrastructures (United National Development Programme 2023). The project aims to improve women and girls' agency, access, and control over water and sanitation services (UNDP 2023). It also provides training and mentoring on business skills to improve women's leadership abilities (UNDP 2023). The project aims to develop a favorable enabling environment for women and girls to access the required capital and financial services for business (UNDP 2023). The project indicates government commitment to creating an enabling environment for gender equality, particularly in the private sector.

While FSM faces challenges in achieving women's economic empowerment and leadership, some progress is observed in political representation. In the 2023 elections, three women were elected to the FSM Congress, bringing women's parliamentary representation at the national level to 21.4% (Clark 2023), an increase from 7.1% in 2022 (World Bank n.d.d). A woman was elected to the FSM Congress for the first time in 2021, after receiving approval from her district's all-male legislators, municipal officers, and traditional leaders

to run (Puas and Oliver 2022). While the rate of women's parliamentary representation is still much lower than the average rate in lower-middle-income countries, this represents significant progress toward women's equal representation in politics.

An analysis of the 2021 elections conducted by researchers at the Australian National University observes that male dominance in FSM's national legislature "defies the true position of women in FSM," as most FSM island communities are matriarchal—women control economic resources and political influence (Puas and Oliver 2022). The authors contend that colonialism and the introduction of Christianity led to the emergence of a patriarchal order, which has since become normalized in FSM (Puas and Oliver 2022). The authors note that many local observers do not see the current gender imbalance as problematic, claiming that "gender relations had never been divisive until outsiders began to make it a problem" (Puas and Oliver 2022). As a result, there may be some apprehension toward measures designed to improve women's representation and, more broadly, foster an enabling environment for gender equality. Legislation regarding gender equality in the Federated States of Micronesia is outlined in Table C.1.

Table C.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in the Federated States of Micronesia

Enabling Legislation	In Place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Domestic Violence Act, 2017
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ (6 weeks for public sector employees)	National Public Service System Act – Title 52 Public Employment
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located

Source: World Bank. Women, Business and the Law. Micronesia, Fed. Sts. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/data/exploreeconomies/micronesia-fed-sts/2024> (accessed 26 April 2024).

iv. Women in Business Leadership

The 2024 sample for FSM was slightly larger than in 2021, comprising 14 organizations in total. This includes 12 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and 2 industry associations. Because of the small size of the economy and limited availability of data, the sample does not include any branch offices or private non-listed companies.

Many boards in FSM have no women directors.

Overall, the state of business leadership in FSM appears to be undergoing gradual improvements in terms of gender diversity. However, there remain some ongoing challenges. According to the 2024 data, more than half of the boards in FSM still lack any representation of women. However, there has been progress since 2021, with 38% of boards now meeting the 30% threshold for women’s representation, compared to only 14% achieving this threshold in 2021 (Table C.2).

Women’s equitable representation on boards in FSM is still a work in progress.

Women’s representation in FSM’s corporate governance landscape indicates both areas of improvement and relative strength compared to regional norms. The percentage of women directors (21%) falls below the regional average (26%), while women make up 14% of board chairs, slightly surpassing the regional average of 12% (Table C.3). However, the data indicates a very positive signal in gender diversity in chief executive officer (CEO) roles in FSM’s private sector, where women are well represented (44%) compared to the regional average (20%).

There appears to be good progress in gender diversity at the CEO level.

The strong results of women accounting for 44% of CEO roles in 2023 contrasts significantly with the 13% observed in 2021

Table C.2 Board Composition in the Federated States of Micronesia

Composition	2024 (n = 13)	2021 (n = 7)
Boards with no women directors	54%	43%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	8%	43%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	23%	0%
Boards with gender parity or greater	15%	14%

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

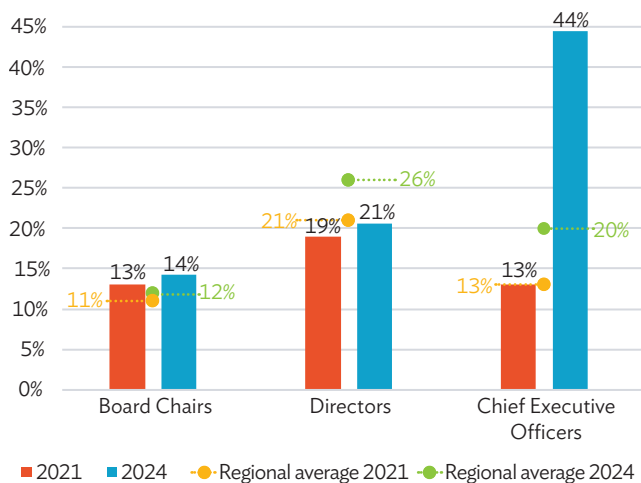
Table C.3 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in the Federated States of Micronesia

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021–2024
	FSM	Regional average	FSM	FSM (change)
Board Chairs	14% (n = 14)	12%	13% (n = 8)	↑
Deputy Chairs	9% (n = 11)	18%	0% (n = 5)	↑
Directors	21% (n = 73)	26%	19% (n = 43)	↑
Chief Executive Officers	44% (n = 9)	20%	13% (n = 8)	↑

FSM = Federated States of Micronesia, n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Figure C.1 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in the Federated States of Micronesia, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

from a similar sample size (Figure C.1). Change at the director level was less significant despite a larger sample, with women holding 21% of director roles in 2024, only a modest increase from 19% in 2021.

State-owned enterprises in FSM are providing leadership opportunities for women.

SOEs dominated the 2024 sample, reflecting the nature of the private sector in FSM (Table C.4).

As there were no branch offices or private non-listed companies in the sample, it is SOEs in FSM that are providing leadership opportunities for women. While there has been a slight decrease in the proportion of women serving as board chairs, there is a nominal increase in the percentage of women directors and a notable increase in CEO roles within SOEs (Figure C.2). One SOE in FSM had both a woman CEO and a woman board chair.

Low representation of women in industry associations in FSM contrasts with many other Pacific countries where women tend to be well represented in these organizations.

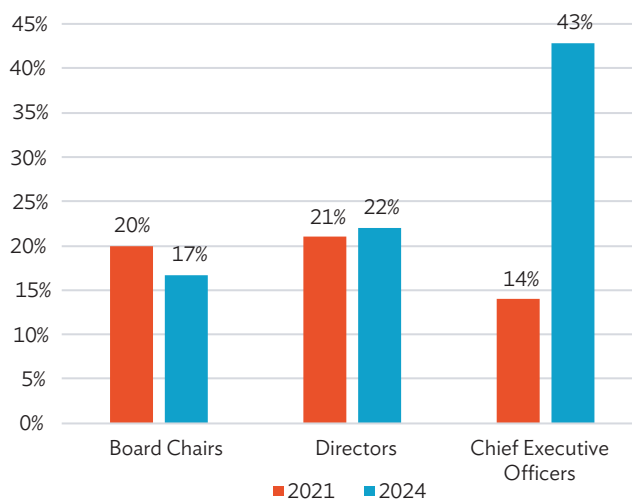
Among the two industry associations included in the sample, there was limited board data available, making it difficult to

Table C.4 Women's Representation in Leadership in Federated States of Micronesia by Organization Type

Leadership Role	Industry Associations	State-Owned Enterprises
Board Chairs	0% (n = 2)	17% (n = 12)
Directors	0% (n = 5)	22% (n = 68)
Chief Executive Officers	50% (n = 2)	43% (n = 7)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).
Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

Figure C.2 Women's Representation in State-Owned Enterprise Leadership in the Federated States of Micronesia, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

make overall observations about women's representation. However, of the two industry association CEOs in the sample, one was a woman. This representation of women as CEOs of industry associations in FSM is similar to many other Pacific countries where women tend to be well represented in these organizations. There was no comparable data on industry associations in 2021.

D. FIJI

i. Economic Context

Fiji is a small island nation in the Pacific Ocean with a population of 899,531 (Asian Development Bank [ADB] n.d.). Most of the population, about 85%, resides on the islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Despite its small size, Fiji is one of the most developed economies in the Pacific, characterized by high human development and upper-middle-income status (World Bank 2023a). The country has broad access to basic services, including education, health, water and sanitation, electricity, and solid waste management, which contribute to overall quality of life.

Fiji's economy is diverse but primarily driven by the services sector, which includes industries such as tourism, finance, and telecommunications, as well as agriculture and manufacturing. However, the nation faces significant challenges to development, including its geographical remoteness, exposure to natural hazards, and the adverse impacts of climate change. The intensity and frequency of extreme weather events—especially tropical cyclones, floods, and heavy rainfall—are expected to increase. Rising sea levels and heightened storm surges are expected to exacerbate impacts in highly vulnerable sectors such as transportation, water management, fisheries, and the environment and people's livelihoods, food sources, and water supply (World Bank 2023a).

Fiji's economy has made a strong return from the pandemic, thanks to increased government spending and a strong recovery in tourism (ADB 2023). However, visitor arrivals are expected to decelerate in 2024 and 2025, largely because of capacity constraints, particularly the number of hotel rooms available and the impact of migrating workers (ADB 2024).

In fiscal year (FY) 2024 (ending July 2024), the government has allocated higher spending, with notable increases in key infrastructure allocations, such as for road transport and hospitals (ADB 2023). Fiji allocates about 30% of its annual budget to public sector personnel, including spending on public sector wages, salaries, allowances, contributions to the national provident fund, pensions, and gratuities (World Bank 2023a), underscoring the government's commitment to investing in human capital and maintaining a robust public sector workforce to support the nation's development goals.

ii. Women's Economic Participation

A significant disparity between women's and men's economic participation persists in Fiji. As of 2023, only 39.1% of women were in the paid labor force, earning income and having the opportunity to accumulate wealth over time, such as in superannuation funds, bank savings, and properties. This is significantly lower than the labor force participation of men, at 76.8% (World Bank n.d.b). This substantial gap has persisted for several decades, with records dating back to at least 1990 reflecting similar disparities (World Bank 2023a). While there was a peak in women's labor force participation in 2011, reaching 45.6%, this rate has since declined steadily (World Bank n.d.b). The results of an updated labor force survey are expected in 2024 (Pacific Community 2023b).

According to the 2019 Annual Paid Employment Statistics,¹ traditionally male-dominated industries such as agriculture still experience low participation from women (Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2022). Although there have been increases in the number of women employed in sectors like mining, real estate, water supply, sewerage, and electricity, these gains have not been sufficient to achieve a balanced gender representation (Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2022).

Conversely, women outnumber men in professional occupations and are increasingly exploring new opportunities in emerging sectors such as the gig economy (Government of Fiji 2023). Women in rural and peri-urban areas are also diversifying beyond subsistence farming and fishing. They are increasingly actively involved in commercial production, processing, and marketing, showcasing their entrepreneurial spirit and contributing to economic growth at the grassroots level. Women are also well represented in Fiji's growing global outsourcing industry (Government of Fiji 2023). Overall, these trends indicate a shifting landscape in Fiji's labor market, with women making inroads into traditionally male-dominated fields while also capitalizing on opportunities in emerging sectors.

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

Fiji's commitment to gender equality is reflected in the 2013 Constitution, which explicitly prohibits discrimination based on gender. Additionally, the government has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

¹ These are the most recent employment statistics available for Fiji, published in January 2022.

against Women (CEDAW) and 9 of the 10 fundamental labor conventions, demonstrating its commitment to gender equality and upholding labor rights. These include conventions addressing forced labor, freedom of association, collective bargaining, equal remuneration, discrimination in employment, occupational safety and health, and the worst forms of child labor. Additionally, in 2020, Fiji became the second country to ratify the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), furthering its efforts to protect workers' rights. However, Fiji has not yet ratified the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), which has implications for the extent to which women can balance their work and caregiving responsibilities.

Workplace legislation in Fiji provides protections for women, addressing key areas such as nondiscrimination; equal remuneration; and provisions for maternity, paternity, and family care leave. The Employment Relations Act of 2007 prohibits discrimination based on various personal characteristics, including gender, and guarantees equal pay for equal work. It mandates paid maternity leave for eligible women employees, with expanded coverage and benefits under recent amendments. The legislation also addresses sexual harassment in the workplace with civil remedies available under the Employment Relations Act 2007 and the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Act 2009.

Promoting women's economic empowerment is a strategic priority of the Government of Fiji, as reflected in both the National Development Plan 2017 and the National Gender Policy 2014. In 2024, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection is leading the process of developing the Fiji Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan, 2024–2029. This whole-of-government national action plan intends to inform and guide Fiji's efforts to promote and advance the economic empowerment of all Fijian women and girls. It follows on from the 2023 Fiji Country Gender Assessment findings and policy recommendations and is supported by the Ministry of Economy, the Women's Economic Empowerment Task Force (under the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection), and leading local women's rights organizations.

At a whole-of-government level, initiatives such as the Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development Initiative aim to integrate gender-responsive budgeting into the annual budgetary process. This includes developing sector-specific gender analyses to inform the design and implementation of programs, developing gender-disaggregated budgeting frameworks, and establishing Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups to oversee the implementation of gender-responsive

budgeting principles and strengthen gender mainstreaming efforts across government initiatives. In FY2022, nine government agencies were mandated to develop gender-responsive budgeting for ongoing projects, and guidelines and methodologies for incorporating gender-responsive budgeting principles into budget submissions were provided to ensure consistency and coherence in budget allocation. In 2024, the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Protection will undertake a 5-year phase 2 of the Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development Initiative, working with all government ministries and agencies. Despite these significant and high-level commitments to gender equality, entrenched cultural and gender norms continue to impede women's full participation in the labor force. Traditional beliefs often confine women to domestic roles, prioritizing unpaid care work over their engagement in paid employment. These norms prevail despite Fiji having made significant educational progress, with higher secondary enrollment rates for adolescent girls surpassing those of boys. Women also represent a majority in tertiary education, benefiting from substantial support through scholarships and highly concessional loans.

A range of barriers persist for women in economic participation, including limited access to land and finance, compounded by unpaid care responsibilities. A significant portion of the workforce, particularly women, are engaged in vulnerable employment, lacking formal work arrangements, social protection, and safety nets, and making them more susceptible to poverty and economic shocks.

Gender-based violence also remains a critical concern, with substantial economic ramifications, costing an estimated 6.6% of GDP (Government of Fiji 2023). Fiji has taken proactive steps to address this issue, becoming the first Pacific island country to adopt an action plan (the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls) addressing the issue in 2023. Under this plan, employers are mandated to ensure workplace policies on sexual harassment are in place. This includes providing training on sexual harassment prevention and establishing a sexual harassment monitoring and evaluation system. Employees can file complaints through the employer grievance mechanism, the Fiji Human Rights Commission, or the courts, ensuring that victims have access to appropriate channels for reporting and resolution. Despite these legislative measures, challenges remain in reporting and prosecuting cases of sexual harassment, affecting about 20% of working women on average (Government of Fiji 2023).

Several efforts in the last decade have been made to improve women's representation in politics, including the Fiji Women's Forum, and women are "seemingly well-represented" in

senior party positions, including presidencies and general secretaryships (Kant and Baker 2023). However, women’s political representation at the national level in Fiji has dropped since 2018. Although the 2022 election was hailed as a “milestone” in Fiji’s democratic journey, the number of women in Parliament was reduced from 10 to only 5 out of 35 representatives (Kant and Baker 2023). The number of women contesting the election was also slightly lower than in 2018, despite a significant rise in the number of men standing for candidacy (Kant and Baker 2023). Analysis suggests that the decrease in women’s candidacy reflects “growing disengagement among aspiring women politicians” and fundamental flaws in Fiji’s open-list proportional representation electoral system (Kant and Baker 2023). 2022’s fragmented

election result, where more parties won seats in the Parliament than in the past, may have ultimately negatively impacted women candidates’ chances for election (Kant and Baker 2023).

In June 2022, Fiji hosted the first Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders meeting, where women leaders conducted a major review of the 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. The second meeting was held in August 2023 and a revised declaration was launched during the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders’ Meeting in Cook Islands in November 2023 (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2022). A breakdown of Fiji’s gender equality legislation is provided in Table D.1.

Table D.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in Fiji

Enabling Legislation	In Place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✓	Employment Relations Act 2007, Secs. 6(2) and 77(1)
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✓	Employment Relations Act 2007, Sec. 76; Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission Act 2009, Sec. 19(2)
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✓	Employment Relations Act 2007, Secs. 110(1)(b) and 230; Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission Act 2009, Sec. 50
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Domestic Violence Act 2009
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ (14 weeks for public and private sector employees)	Employment Relations Act 2007, Sec. 101; Employment Relations (Budget Amendment) Act 2018 (no. 23 of 2018), Sec. 6
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✗	Employment Relations Act 2007, Sec. 101
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✗	Employment Relations (Budget Amendment) Act 2021, Art. 3
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✓	Employment Relations Act 2007, Sec. 104

Source: World Bank. Women, Business and the Law. Fiji. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/data/exploreeconomies/fiji/2023> (accessed 23 April 2024).

iv. Women in Business Leadership

The 2024 sample comprised data from 69 organizations, an increase from the 50 organizations included in the 2021 dataset. This increase is primarily driven by the inclusion of 12 branch offices. The expanded 2024 Leadership Matters dataset provides a more comprehensive reflection of the private sector in Fiji than the 2021 dataset.

Fiji is making some progress on women’s board representation, but a majority of boards still have fewer than 30% women directors.

In 2024, 27% of boards had from 30% to 50% women’s representation, an increase from the 10% of boards in 2021 (Table D.2). The seven boards (13%) that have achieved gender parity in 2024 include five state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and two publicly listed companies. Twelve boards (22%) have no women directors, a reduction from 2021, when 13 boards (27%) had no women directors.

Fiji is in line with regional averages for women’s representation on boards, but lags behind the regional average for other leadership roles.

Women’s representation as directors on boards is 25%, which is very close to the regional average of 26% (Table D.3). Women hold 11% of board chair roles in Fiji, similar to the regional average of 12%. However, there are few women in deputy chair roles in Fiji, signaling low efforts to place women in pathway roles to becoming a board chair.

Women’s leadership at the chief executive officer (CEO) level continues to be below the regional average, where women hold only eight (13%) of the CEO positions in the sample. Three of these women lead branch offices, while another three lead private non-listed companies. While this represents progress from 10% in 2021, there is still a significant gap to be bridged in achieving gender parity in executive leadership in Fiji.

There is some progress in advancing gender diversity on boards and in executive roles in Fiji.

Women’s representation as directors increased from 20% in 2021 to 25% in 2024 (Figure D.1). Similarly, the number of women CEOs increased from 10% in 2021 to 13% in 2024. While modest, this increase indicates a positive shift toward more women taking on senior executive positions. However,

Table D.2 Board Composition in Fiji

Composition	2024 (n = 55)	2021 (n = 49)
Boards with no women directors	22%	27%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	38%	51%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	27%	10%
Boards with gender parity or greater	13%	12%

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership*.

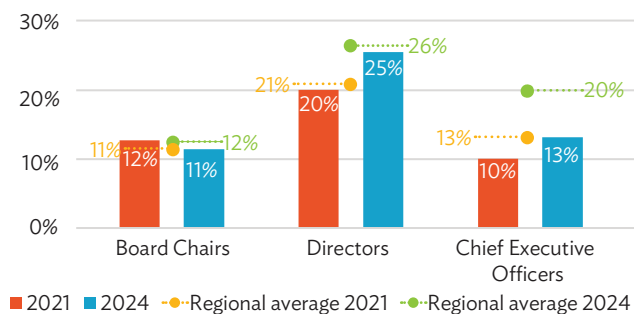
Table D.3 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Fiji

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021–2024
	Fiji	Regional Average	Fiji	Fiji (change)
Board Chairs	11% (n = 54)	12%	12% (n = 51)	↓
Deputy Chairs	6% (n = 17)	18%	20% (n = 10)	↓
Directors	25% (n = 340)	26%	20% (n = 282)	↑
Chief Executive Officers	13% (n = 60)	20%	10% (n = 42)	↑

n = number (sample size).

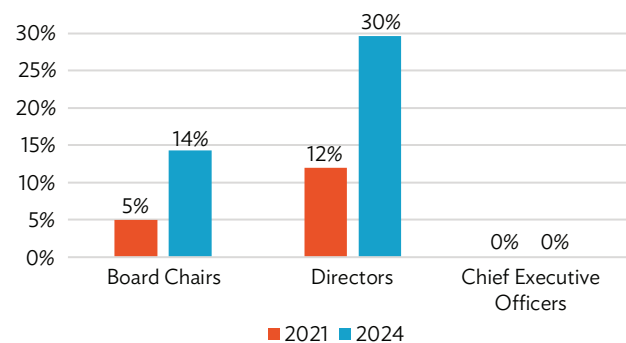
Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Figure D.1 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Fiji, 2021 and 2024



Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Figure D.2 Women’s Representation in State-Owned Enterprise Leadership in Fiji, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table D.4 Women’s Representation in Leadership in Fiji by Organization Type

Leadership Role	Industry Associations	Private non-Listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises	Branch Offices	Publicly Listed Companies
Board Chairs	33% (n = 3)	9% (n = 11)	14% (n = 21)	...	5% (n = 19)
Directors	29% (n = 38)	16% (n = 67)	30% (n = 128)	...	24% (n = 107)
Chief Executive Officers	50% (n = 2)	33% (n = 12)	0% (n = 20)	17% (n = 12)	7% (n = 14)

... = not available. n = number (sample size).
Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

there is still room for improvement, especially in achieving gender parity in board chair positions.

Women in Fiji face challenges reaching the highest levels of leadership.

While the percentages of women directors in industry associations, SOEs, and publicly listed companies are close to the country and regional averages, the percentage is much lower among private non-listed companies (Table D.4).

Women are particularly underrepresented in CEO positions in SOEs, publicly listed companies, and branch offices. Women are also underrepresented in board chair roles, particularly in publicly listed companies and private non-listed companies.

Efforts to increase the representation of women on SOE boards in Fiji are achieving results.

The changes in the representation of women in leadership roles in SOEs in Fiji from 2021 to 2024 indicate progress, but also highlight ongoing challenges. The Government of Fiji in 2017 introduced a director selection process that requires the

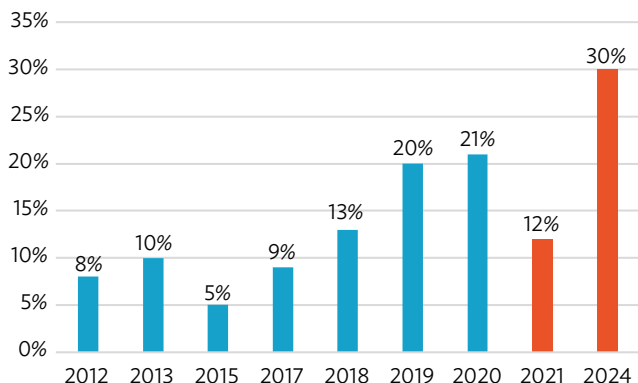
Ministry of Public Enterprises to keep a register of suitably qualified candidates from which to fill vacancies and ensure “as much as possible that there is proper gender balance” (Government of Fiji 2017). Fiji has seen a steady increase in women in SOE positions since.

The increase in women directors from 12% in 2021 to 30% in 2024 is also a significant improvement. However, three SOEs lack any women on their boards and nearly half of SOE boards do not meet the 30% threshold for women’s representation. Similarly, while the increase in women board chairs from 5% to 14% suggests a positive trend, in absolute numbers only 3 out of Fiji’s 21 SOEs have a woman board chair.

Continued efforts are required to increase the representation of women as CEOs in Fiji’s SOEs.

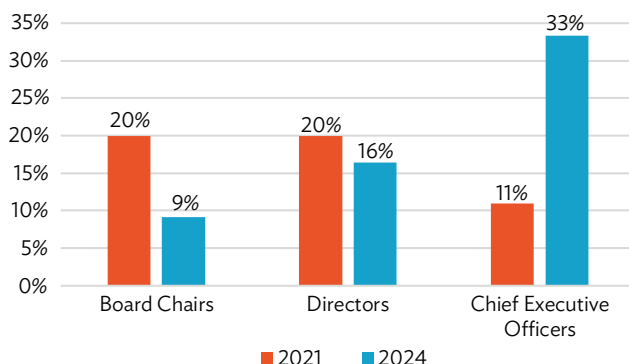
Of the 21 SOEs in the sample, none had a woman CEO in 2021 or in 2024 (Figure D.2). The lack of progress in women’s representation as CEOs demonstrates that while there has been an improvement in women’s representation on SOE boards,

Figure D.3 Women Directors on State-Owned Enterprise Boards in Fiji, 2012–2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (for 2012–2020 data).

Figure D.5 Women’s Representation in Private Non-Listed Company Leadership in Fiji, 2021 and 2024

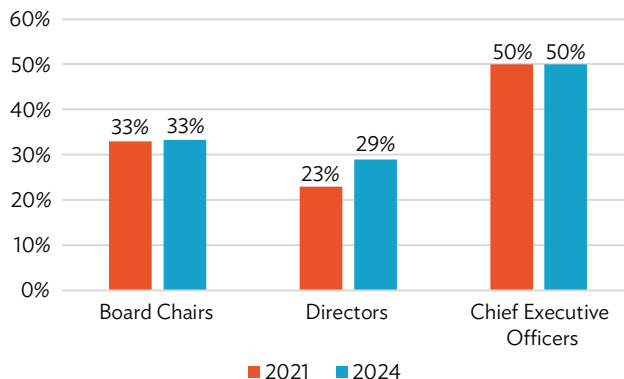


Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

there is still a long way to go in achieving gender parity in executive leadership.

There has been a fluctuation in the percentage of women directors on SOE boards in Fiji from 2012 to 2024, ranging from 5% to 30% (Figure D.3). However, an upward trend, particularly since 2019, indicates positive strides toward greater gender representation. Continued efforts will be crucial to ensuring these gains are maintained and to achieve further improvements.

Figure D.4 Women’s Representation in Industry Association Leadership in Fiji, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Industry associations in Fiji have maintained a relatively high level of gender diversity.

There has been a consistent representation of women in leadership roles in industry associations in Fiji from 2021 to 2024 (Figure D.4). The percentage of women board chairs is steady at 33%, and the percentage of women as CEOs is unchanged at 50%, highlighting the strong presence of women’s leadership in these associations. Women’s representation as directors increased from 23% in 2021 to 29% in 2024, showing a positive trend toward greater gender diversity in industry association board positions.

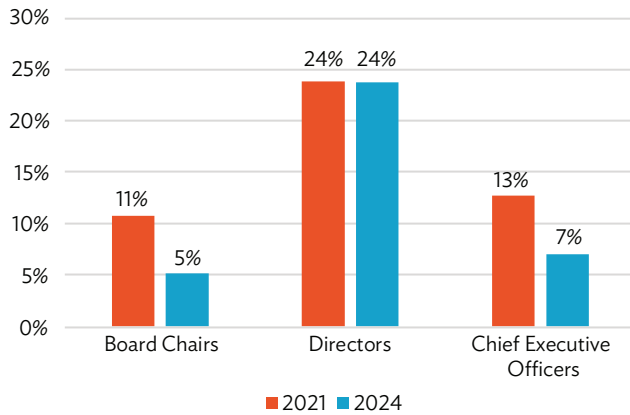
There is positive progress for women at the CEO level in private non-listed companies but representation on boards has declined.

In private non-listed companies, women’s representation as directors decreased from 20% in 2021 to 16% in 2024 (Figure D.5). The percentage of women board chairs also declined from 20% in 2021 to 9% in 2024. In contrast, the percentage of women CEOs saw a significant increase from 11% in 2021 to 33% in 2024, indicating progress toward greater gender diversity in executive positions.

Gains in women’s representation in publicly listed companies is at risk of slipping backwards.

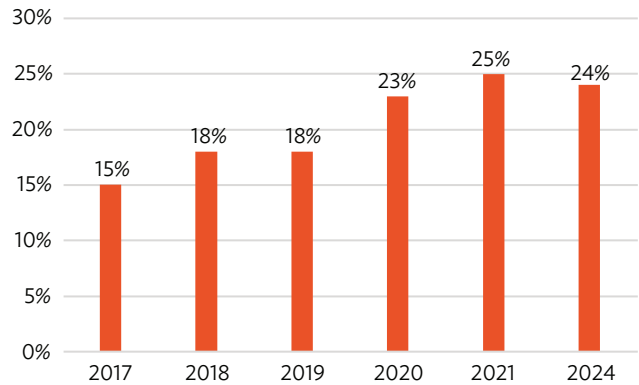
While the number of directors on publicly listed boards remains steady at 24%, a diminished focus on gender diversity may be reflected in publicly listed companies’ declining representation

Figure D.6 Women’s Representation in Publicly Listed Company Leadership in Fiji, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Figure D.7 Women’s Representation on Boards of Companies Listed on the South Pacific Stock Exchange, 2017–2024



Sources: South Pacific Stock Exchange (for 2017–2020 data); Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

of women as board chairs and CEOs (Figure D.6). While there were two women CEOs and two women board chairs of publicly listed companies in 2021, there is only one of each in 2024. This potentially signals reduced emphasis on gender diversity and women’s leadership at the highest levels within these organizations.

In 2019, the South Pacific Stock Exchange adopted its Corporate Governance Principles to promote gender diversity at the board level. This initiative initially led to positive changes, with women’s representation as directors of companies listed on the South Pacific Stock Exchange increasing steadily from 15% in 2017 to 25% in 2021 (Figure D.7). The proportion of women directors has experienced a slight drop in 2024, so it remains to be seen if the proportion of women will be sustained or increased in the coming years.

E. KIRIBATI

i. Economic Context

Kiribati is comprised of 33 islands in the Pacific Ocean, of which only 20 are inhabited (The Commonwealth n.d), with an exclusive economic zone of about 3.6 million square kilometers (World Bank 2021a). The population of Kiribati was 121,391 in 2021 (ADB 2023), with 57% residing in urban areas (World Bank 2021a). Kiribati's economy is dominated by the public sector and backed by revenues from fishing license fees and development aid flows (International Monetary Fund [IMF] Asia and Pacific Department 2023). The nation faces considerable obstacles, including geographical remoteness, elevated transportation costs, and limited natural resources. As a low-lying and extremely isolated island country, Kiribati is acutely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, facing considerable risk from sea-level rise and climate variability (World Bank 2021a).

Kiribati's economy was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated global lockdown because of its reliance on fishing revenues, access to markets, and remittances (Government of Australia 2020). Economic activity related to the rollout of energy, water, and transport projects continues to support Kiribati's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (ADB 2024). These projects, along with sustained social protection spending and increased wages for civil servants, are expected to drive economic growth to accelerate from 4.2% in fiscal year (FY) 2023 (ended December 2023) to 5.3% in FY2024 (ADB 2024). However, natural hazards and commodity price volatility pose a risk in delaying implementation of infrastructure projects (ADB 2024). However, government spending is forecast to outpace revenue because of a wage increase for civil servants and a decline in budget support from development aid partners (ADB 2024). Inflation is projected to moderate over the next 2 years because of lowering global commodity prices (ADB 2024).

ii. Women's Economic Participation

Although women have higher educational enrollment rates, their labor force participation remains notably lower, and they face higher risks of unemployment (IMF Asia and Pacific Department 2023). Women also account for a disproportionate share of unpaid labor, particularly domestic work; women typically do 3 to 8 hours of domestic labor each day, compared to men's "infrequent" assistance (IMF Asia and Pacific Department 2023).

According to the 2019–2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, the overall labor force participation rate in Kiribati was 35.8%, noticeably lower than the average Pacific regional rate of 62.7% (Kiribati National Statistics Office 2022). Men consistently exhibit higher labor force participation rates across all age groups, and rural women face heightened challenges, with their participation rates falling even further below the national average (Kiribati National Statistics Office 2022).

The 2020 Kiribati Census Report (Republic of Kiribati 2021) highlights a significant gender gap in labor force participation, with women trailing men by 14 percentage points (IMF Asia and Pacific Department 2023). The data indicate that women, particularly young women, are more likely to be unemployed than men. Women's relatively high rate of unemployment inflates their labor force participation rate (Pacific Community 2023c). Women dominate the administrative, education, and health sectors (IMF Asia and Pacific Department 2023), outnumbering men in the professional, clerical, and craft occupations (Pacific Community 2023c). Conversely, men dominate traditionally "male" sectors like fisheries and agriculture (IMF Asia and Pacific Department 2023; Pacific Community 2023c). Stigma and harassment of women in these industries may discourage women from pursuing careers in these sectors, contributing to the persistently low representation of women (International Finance Corporation [IFC] 2020). While slightly more women are employed in the public service, men continue to dominate the private sector (Pacific Community 2023c).

Women are reasonably well represented in managerial positions, holding 40.2% of these positions (Kiribati National Statistics Office 2022). The number of women operating businesses and employing staff increased between 2015 and 2020. However, the increase was larger for men as employers (Pacific Community 2023c). Women employed in the public sector are more likely to take on senior positions, comprising 61% of senior positions compared to 47% of these positions in the private sector (Pacific Community 2023c).

The labor force participation rate of women with tertiary education is three times that for women with lower educational attainment (Kiribati National Statistics Office 2022). Women with tertiary education also have a higher labor force participation rate than men with the same education level (Kiribati National Statistics Office 2022),

indicating that education has positive effects for women's economic participation.

Women were particularly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Female labor force participation was adversely affected because of women's overrepresentation in the service sector, particularly in retail sales (IMF Asia and Pacific Department 2023). Women-led businesses also suffered during the pandemic, with more women-led businesses experiencing temporary closures than those operated by men (IMF Asia and Pacific Department 2023).

Women face additional barriers to starting businesses, including limited access to finance, difficulty in accessing trainings, burdensome licensing and trade procedures, weak business infrastructures, and lack of available information regarding product demand (UN Women 2022b). To offset these barriers, in some villages, particularly in South Tarawa, women have created revolving fund schemes called *karekare*. Group members regularly contribute funds to support one another to buy items for their homes or businesses (UN Women 2022b).

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

The environment for promoting gender equality in Kiribati faces several challenges. Despite ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2004, Kiribati has not yet ratified the Optional Protocol, indicating a gap in legal frameworks supporting gender equality (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] n.d). The country's predominantly patriarchal societal structure presents barriers, with traditional customs often excluding women from decision-making processes and traditional family land inheritance customs and laws also favoring men (UN Women 2022b). Constitutional protection for the customs and traditions of Kiribati's indigenous population mean that women have no recourse if these infringe on gender equality, making advocacy difficult (Human Rights Council 2019). Legislation regarding gender equality in Kiribati is outlined in Table E.1.

Kiribati faces key challenges related to violence against women and intimate partner violence. During their lifetime, 58.5% of ever-partnered women have experienced physical violence

Table E.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in Kiribati

Enabling Legislation	In Place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✓	Employment and Industrial Relations Code 2015, Art. 107
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✓	Employment and Industrial Relations Code, Art. 112
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✓	Employment and Industrial Relations Code, Art. 112(4)(5)
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✓	Employment and Industrial Relations Code, Arts. 112 and 130
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✓	Employment and Industrial Relations Code 2015, Art. 114
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Family Peace Act 2014
Is paid leave of at least 14 weeks available to mothers?	✗ (12 weeks for public and private sector employees)	Employment and Industrial Relations Code 2015, Art. 95
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✗	Employment and Industrial Relations Code 2015, Art. 95
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✓	Employment and Industrial Relations Code 2015, Arts. 101 and 107

Source: World Bank. Women, Business and the Law. Kiribati. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/data/exploreeconomies/kiribati/2023> (accessed 29 April 2024).

from an intimate partner (UN Women 2022b). Although the Family Peace Act 2014 criminalizes domestic violence, implementation remains a concern as no case has been prosecuted under the act as of the most recent Universal Periodic Review (Human Rights Council 2019). Nonetheless, Kiribati has made some progress on implementing violence against women prevention programs, with financial assistance from the United Nations (Human Rights Council 2019).

In Kiribati, women fare better than their male peers in several human development indicators, including health outcomes, life expectancy, and educational attainment (IMF Asia and Pacific Department 2023). However, women remain more susceptible to poverty compared to men. For instance, female-headed households earned only half of what male-headed households earned on average in 2019–2020 (IMF Asia and Pacific Department 2023). As a result, male-headed households have higher per capita expenditure and savings (IMF Asia and Pacific Department 2023).

Data from the 2019–2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey indicates a significant gender wage gap, with men earning A\$548 per month on average, compared to A\$419 for women. The wage gap is particularly stark in male-dominated industries such as agriculture, forestry and fishery, and plant and machine operation and assembly, where men earn more than double women's monthly earnings (Kiribati National Statistics Office 2022).

At the national level, 6.7% of seats in Parliament were held by women in 2022 (World Bank n.d.e). While women's representation in Parliament has increased since 2010, the current rate is still lower than the average in lower-middle-income countries (World Bank n.d.e). Traditional perceptions of women's role in society limit women's capacity to be

elected (Human Rights Council 2019). Despite CEDAW's 2020 recommendation to adopt temporary special measures, including statutory quotas for women's representation in Parliament and government, these have not yet been implemented (UN Women 2022b).

Women have higher levels of representation in ministerial secretaryships. In 2018 in the Secretary to the Cabinet, 53% of permanent secretaries and 56% of deputy secretaries were women (UN Women 2022b).

iv. Women in Business Leadership

The 2024 sample of 19 organizations is broadly representative of the private sector in Kiribati and includes 1 private non-listed company, 16 state-owned enterprises (SOEs), 1 industry association, and 1 branch office. The composition of the 2024 sample reflects an increase in SOEs compared to 2021. There were fewer industry associations in the 2024 sample, mainly because of data availability.

While women are well represented on some boards, others are lagging.

The board landscape in Kiribati reflects a mixed picture of gender diversity. While more than 50% of boards have passed the threshold of 30% women's representation, indicating good progress, there are still challenges to overcome (Table E.2). Only 11% have reached gender parity and another 11% of boards have no women at all.

Overall, women's representation in business leadership in Kiribati surpasses regional averages.

Table E.2 Board composition in Kiribati

Composition	2024 (n = 18)	2021 (n = 3)
Boards with no women directors	11%	0%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	33%	100%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	44%	0%
Boards with gender parity or greater	11%	0%

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table E.3 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Kiribati

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021-2024
	Kiribati	Regional Average	Kiribati	Kiribati (change)
Board Chairs	11% (n = 18)	12%	0% (n = 5)	↑
Deputy Chairs	33% (n = 15)	18%	0% (n = 3)	↑
Directors	29% (n = 107)	26%	22% (n = 18)	↑
Chief Executive Officers	26% (n = 19)	20%	29% (n = 7)	↓

n = number (sample size).

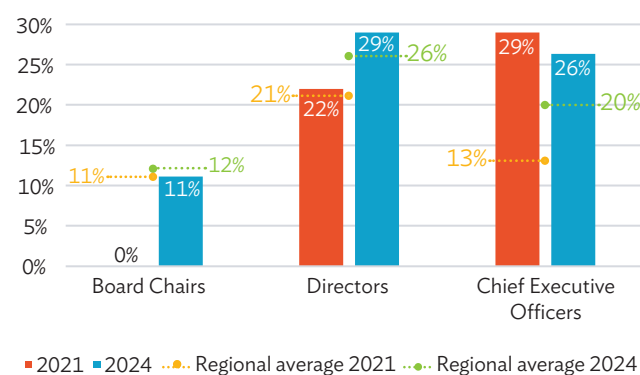
Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table E.4 Women's Representation in Leadership in Kiribati by Organization Type

Leadership Role	Industry Associations	Private Non-Listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises	Branch Offices
Board Chairs	0% (n = 1)	100% (n = 1)	6% (n = 16)	...
Directors	33% (n = 15)	33% (n = 6)	28% (n = 86)	...
Chief Executive Officers	100% (n = 1)	100% (n = 1)	19% (n = 16)	0% (n = 1)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

Figure E.1 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Kiribati, 2021 and 2024

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

In Kiribati, women hold a higher percentage of director, deputy chair, and chief executive officer (CEO) positions compared to regional averages (Table E.3). Specifically, women in Kiribati make up 29% of directors (compared to the regional average of 26%), 33% of deputy chairs (compared to the regional average

of 18%), and 26% of CEOs (compared to the regional average of 20%). Women's representation on board chairs in Kiribati is also close to the regional average, accounting for 11% of all board chairs (compared to the regional average of 12%).

Woman's representation as board directors has increased.

From 2021 to 2024, there was an increase in women's representation as board directors from 22% to 29% (Figure E.1). This could, in part, be attributed to the significant increase in the availability of director data in the 2024 sample. There has been a concurrent decrease in women's representation as CEOs from 29% to 26%. While the proportion of women as CEOs has decreased, in absolute numbers there are five women CEOs in the 2024 sample as compared to two in the 2021 sample. There has also been an increase in women in board chair roles from no women out of five roles in the 2021 sample to two women out of 18 roles in the 2024 sample.

SOEs offer the majority of board director opportunities in Kiribati.

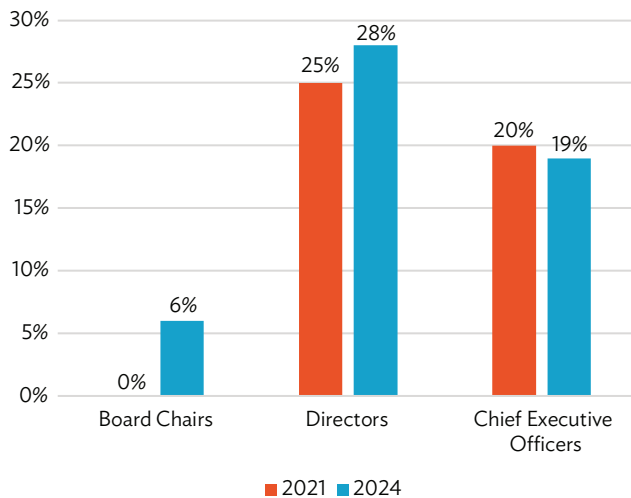
SOEs offer the majority of director roles in Kiribati, with 86 out of 107 positions in the 2024 dataset (Table E.4). Although

women's representation is higher in the private non-listed company and the industry association categories, it's important to note that each of these categories includes only one organization in the 2024 sample. Similarly, there is only one branch office included in the 2024 sample.

Women's representation on SOE boards increased from 2021 to 2024.

Women's representation in SOE director roles in Kiribati is 28%, an increase from 25% in 2021. Similarly, women's representation as SOE board chairs rose from 0% in 2021 to 6% in 2024. These increases indicate positive progress in gender diversity within these organizations (Figure E.2). The proportion of SOE women CEOs fell from 20% in 2021 to 19% in 2024. However, this could be because of changes in the sample. In 2021, the sample captured data on five SOE CEOs, of which one was a woman. However, in 2024, the dataset includes 16 SOE CEOs, of which three are women.

Figure E.2 Women's Representation on State-Owned Enterprise boards in Kiribati, 2021 and 2024



Note: Comparative data for 2021 to 2024 is not reported for industry organizations or private non-listed organizations because of very small numbers in 2021.
 Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

F. MARSHALL ISLANDS

i. Economic Context

The Republic of the Marshall Islands is composed of more than 1,200 islands and islets in the Pacific Ocean. In 2022, the islands had a total population of 55,437 (Asian Development Bank [ADB] 2023). The country's main sources of revenue are assistance from the United States (US) and lease payments for the Kwajalein Atoll as a US missile testing range (Moody's Analytics 2023a). Agricultural production and subsistence are principal economic activities (Moody's Analytics 2023a). Tourism also has some potential to drive revenue (Moody's Analytics 2023a). However, the Marshall Islands has few natural resources and rely heavily on imported goods, including processed foods, machinery and transport equipment, manufactured goods, and fuel (Moody's Analytics 2023a).

The Marshall Islands maintains free association with the US (Lum 2023). Although economic assistance pursuant to Title II of the Compacts of Free Association expired at the end of fiscal year (FY) 2023 (ended September 2023), the US signed a 20-year, \$2.3 billion economic assistance agreement with the Marshall Islands in October 2023 (Lum 2023).

The Marshall Islands is vulnerable to extreme weather events and the effects of climate change, with rising sea levels in the Marshall Islands' Exclusive Economic Zone (Marshall Islands National Weather Service Office and the Pacific Climate Change Science Program 2015). El Niño is affecting food prices because of water scarcity (ADB 2024).

The Marshall Islands economy is expanding, driven by revived fisheries, increased fishing transshipments, and construction output (ADB 2024). Construction for the 2024 Micronesian Games has also spurred economic activity (ADB 2024). As of the third quarter of 2023, government spending was growing faster than revenues because of higher prices and preparation for the Micronesian Games (ADB 2024).

ii. Women's Economic Participation

Workforce dynamics and gender participation have changed over recent years, with women's labor force participation rate increasing from 27.9% in 2019 to 37.3% in 2021, while the rate for men has remained relatively steady (62.1% in 2019 and 61.2% in 2021) (World Bank n.d.c). Further analysis of women's economic participation, such as representation as entrepreneurs in the informal and formal economies and in different industries, is hampered by a lack of data collection

and reporting. However, it has previously been documented that women in the Marshall Islands encounter obstacles to their economic engagement, especially in entrepreneurship, including limited access to finance, exacerbated by high interest rates for microcredit loans and the absence of dedicated microcredit programs aimed at fostering women entrepreneurs (Government of Marshall Islands 2019).

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

The Marshall Islands has ratified both the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (2006) and the Optional Protocol (2019) (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] n.d). The 1979 Constitution affirms equality of all persons under the law and prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of a number of characteristics, including gender and race (UN Women 2022g). The Marshall Islands has demonstrated some commitment to furthering the rights of people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics, having signed the United Nations Human Rights Council's 2011 Joint Statement on Ending Acts of Violence and Related Human Rights Violations Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (UN Women 2022c). Nonetheless, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity is still not explicitly prohibited by the Constitution (UN Women 2022c). A constitutional amendment to address this oversight was proposed in 2017 but was ultimately unsuccessful (UN Women 2022c).

Although the country has a traditionally matrilineal society in which women have considerable land rights, an increasing number of women now move away from their own land to live with their spouses' communities, where they may be isolated from their support systems (UN Women 2022c). Colonialism in the 20th century has been identified as a key factor contributing to the weakening of women's land rights (UN Women 2022c). Although women's authority is a feature of traditional structures of Marshallese society, women chiefs rarely exercise as much exclusive power and direct authority as men (UN Women 2022c). It is common for younger male relatives to assume leadership duties on behalf of their senior female relatives (UN Women 2022c).

The Marshall Islands does not have a gender quota for elections (International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2023).

Attempts to introduce electoral quotas to increase women’s political participation in 2017 ultimately failed because of concerns about foreign intervention and whether women politicians would be appropriately skilled (UN Women 2022c). In the 2023 elections, four women out of 33 positions were successfully elected, the highest number of women ever to be elected, including as President. Although the proportion of seats held by women has increased over time, as of 2024 the rate is still significantly lower than the average for upper-middle-income countries (World Bank n.d.f).

After endorsement by Leaders at the 25th Micronesian Islands Forum in February 2023, Forum member countries, including Marshall Islands, committed to developing a regional gender equality framework. Leaders committed to more intentional efforts for gender mainstreaming in sector areas such as energy, maritime, and agriculture. The Micronesian Gender Equality Framework will be developed with broad stakeholder engagement and consultation across the region, including communities, civil society, government, development partners, and technical agencies. The framework is under development and will be presented at the 26th Micronesian Leaders Forum in 2025 (Pacific Community 2023a). Legislation regarding gender equality in the Marshall Islands is outlined in Table F.1.

iv. Women In Business Leadership

Because of the small size of the economy in the Marshall Islands, only 11 organizations are included in the sample and nine of these are state-owned enterprises (SOEs). The sample also includes one industry association and one private non-listed company.

Women’s representation on boards in the Marshall Islands is varied.

Among the organizations in the sample that have boards in the Marshall Islands, half have reached or exceeded the 30% threshold for women directors, with one board achieving gender parity (Table F.2). One board in the sample lacks any women directors. In short, there is diverse practice across boards in the sample.

Despite progress on boards, women remain underrepresented in senior leadership.

In the Marshall Islands, women account for 28% of all board directors, which is slightly above the regional average of 26% (Table F.3). However, the representation of women in other

Table F.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in the Marshall Islands

Enabling Legislation	In Place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✓	Gender Equality Act 2019, Art. 714(1)
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✓	Gender Equality Act 2019, Art. 714(4)(d)
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act 2011
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ (4 weeks for public sector employees)	Public Service Regulations of the Republic of the Marshall Islands 2008, Sec. 58
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located

Source: World Bank. Women, Business and the Law. Marshall Islands. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/data/exploreeconomies/marshall-islands/2024> (accessed 30 April 2024).

senior leadership roles is much lower than regional averages, with only one woman chief executive officer (CEO) in the sample and no women board chairs or deputy chairs.

Women's representation as board chairs and deputy chairs has decreased from 2021 to 2024.

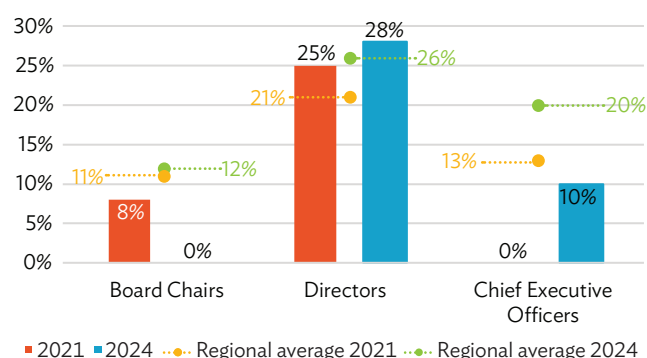
From 2021 to 2024 there has been a reduction in the representation of women as board chairs from 8% to 0% (Figure F.1). While this represents a change in only one position, it is surprising given that women comprised 27% of deputy chairs in the 2021 sample, normally considered to be a stepping stone to board chair roles. The representation of women as deputy chairs has also dropped from 27% in 2021 to 0% in 2024. However, data were available for only one deputy board chair position in 2024, compared to 11 positions in 2021.

SOEs are providing the main opportunity for women in governance.

As in other Pacific countries, SOEs represent the primary opportunity for women to gain board experience and take up business leadership roles in the Marshall Islands. SOEs dominated the 2024 sample, reflecting the nature of the

private sector in the Marshall Islands, offering 68 of the 82 director positions. Across all organization types, however, there are no women board chairs and only one woman in the

Figure F.1 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in the Marshall Islands, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table F.2 Board Composition in the Marshall Islands

Composition	2024 (n = 10)	2021 (n = 13)
Boards with no women directors	10%	0%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	40%	69%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	40%	23%
Boards with gender parity or greater	10%	8%

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table F.3 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in the Marshall Islands

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)		2021-2024 Marshall Islands (change)
	Marshall Islands	Regional Average	Marshall Islands	Marshall Islands	
Board Chairs	0% (n = 10)	12%	8% (n = 13)		↓
Deputy Chairs	0% (n = 1)	18%	27% (n = 11)		↓
Directors	28% (n = 82)	26%	25% (n = 105)		↑
Chief Executive Officers	10% (n = 10)	20%	0% (n = 12)		↑

n = number (sample size).

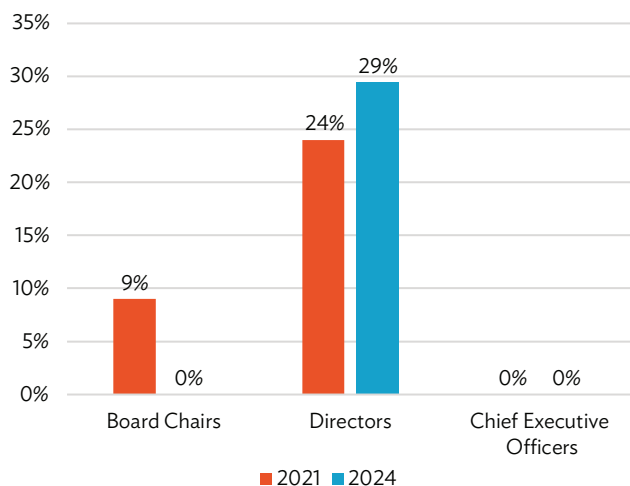
Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table F.4 Women's Representation in Leadership in Marshall Islands by Organization Type

Leadership Role	Industry Associations	Private Non-Listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises
Board Chairs	0% (n = 1)	0% (n = 1)	0% (n = 8)
Directors	0% (n = 4)	30% (n = 10)	29% (n = 68)
Chief Executive Officers	...	100% (n = 1)	0% (n = 9)

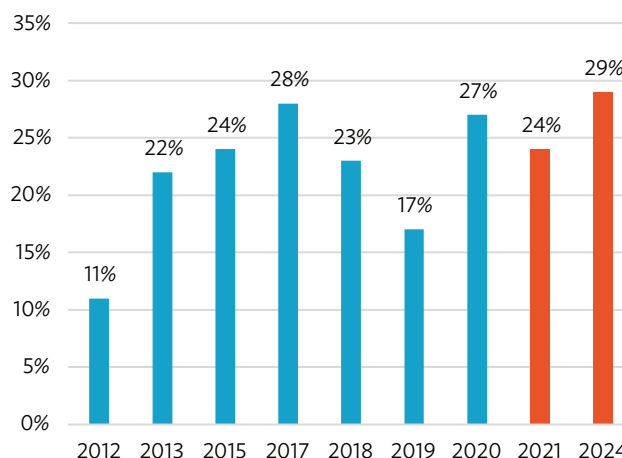
... = not available, n = number (sample size).
 Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

Figure F.2 Representation in State-Owned Enterprise Leadership in the Marshall Islands, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Figure F.3 Women Directors on State-Owned Enterprise Boards in the Marshall Islands, 2012-2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (for 2012-2020 data).

role of CEO (Table F.4). While there was only one private non-listed company in the sample, it was positive to see that this organization has met the 30% threshold for women's representation on the board.

It is unclear if the increase in women's representation on SOE boards will be sustained.

While women's representation as directors on SOEs in the Marshall Islands has increased from 2021 to 2024 (Figure F.2), there is great variability in women's representation since 2012 (Figure F.3). These improvements need to be sustained to be confident that women's roles in governance are a permanent feature of the SOE governance landscape in the Marshall Islands. This would be enhanced by the appointment of women as CEOs and board chairs in SOEs.

G. NAURU

i. Economic Context

Nauru is a small coral island in southeastern Micronesia. It comprises a total of 21 square kilometers and in 2022, its population was estimated to be 11,928 (ADB n.d.). Throughout the 20th century, the country was known for its phosphate mining assets. As a consequence of widespread phosphate mining, more than 80% of the island is now a wasteland, uninhabitable and unsuitable for farming (World Bank 2021b). Nauru has limited natural freshwater resources, and residents rely on rainwater tanks and desalination plants (Naisua 2023). As a result, the country now relies heavily on imports, with almost all food and water being imported into the country (United Nations Micronesia 2024).

In 2001, Australia established the Nauru Regional Processing Centre (RPC), an offshore immigration detention facility (Parliament of Australia 2015). From 2014 to 2021, the RPC was the country's second-biggest employer, but its operations have now been downscaled (ADB 2024). This reduction in operations has had an impact on the Nauruan economy (ADB 2023). RPC-related revenue fell from 64% in fiscal year (FY) 2022 (ended June 2022) to 53% in FY2023, while grants fell by 13% (ADB 2024). The FY2024 budget projects a 58% drop in revenue related to the RPC. One-off funding from the Government of Australia is intended to offset the impacts of the RPC's reduced operations (ADB 2023).

As Nauru relies heavily on imported goods, international price pressures were felt strongly in the domestic market in FY2023. Inflation increased from 1.5% in FY2022 to 5.2% in FY2023 (ADB 2024). High inflation is expected to peak in FY2024, reaching 10.3%, before decelerating to 3.5% in FY2025 (ADB 2024).

ii. Women's Economic Participation

In 2019, the Nauruan labor force comprised 4,580 workers (41% women) (Pacific Community n.d.). The labor force participation rate was 52% for women and 75% for men, indicating a significant gender gap (Pacific Community n.d.). The unemployment rate was marginally higher for women (19%) compared to men (18%) (Pacific Community n.d.).

Women are underrepresented in several traditionally male-dominated industries, including agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining, electricity, construction, and transportation (Pacific Community n.d.). Contrary to trends in other Pacific states,

women are also underrepresented in accommodation and food service activities (38.5% of all employees) (Pacific Community n.d.). Women comprise a minority of employees in the private sector (Pacific Community n.d.). The responsibility for housework falls predominantly on women's shoulders, with 29% of women taking care of the household or family compared to just 7% of men (Pacific Community n.d.). This indicates that the gendered division of labor continues to persist in Nauru.

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

Despite national and international commitments, key barriers to gender equality remain in Nauru. Nauru ratified CEDAW in 2011 but has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] n.d.). Nauru's 1968 Constitution affirms that all people in Nauru are entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms regardless of sex, race, place of origin, political opinion, color, or creed (UN Women 2022d). However, in practice, such rights are not always protected (UN Women 2022d). In 2021, Nauru was reviewed by the Universal Periodic Review process and 13% of the resulting recommendations were related to gender equality (OHCHR 2021a).

In 2015, Nauru developed the National Women's Policy to guide the government's efforts on gender equality. The policy focuses on six goals: improving women's participation in decision-making and leadership, eliminating violence against women, enhancing women's health, promoting equitable participation in education, improving the economic status of women (including workplace equality with men), and strengthening the Women's Affairs Department's and other government agencies' capacity for gender mainstreaming. While Nauru has not formally implemented gender-responsive budgeting, the National Women's Policy directs government ministries and departments to mainstream gender in their programs and activities. However, national policy documents lack sex-disaggregated data, and there are no evaluations of program impact disaggregated by gender, unless conducted by development partners. The Department of Women & Social Development was established in November 2020 as a stand-alone department with divisions for gender mainstreaming, child protection, and women's affairs.

Nauru's first National Women's Summit in 2019 led to the Tomano Declaration, outlining intentions to cooperate with international organizations on gender issues, develop a framework for social inclusion, and enhance the capabilities of

the Nauru Police Force’s Domestic Violence Unit and victim support services. The second National Women’s Summit in April 2022 produced recommendations on women and health, violence against women and girls, and education and training of women. Nauru has also expressed its commitment to gender equality through the Micronesian Islands Forum, which aims to develop a Micronesian Gender Equality Framework by 2025 (Pacific Community 2023a).

Although Nauru is traditionally a matrilineal society, women’s dominant role in decision-making and landownership has significantly diminished in modern times (UN Women 2022d). In the lead-up to the 2022 election, the Nauru Electoral Commission facilitated an outreach program for potential candidates, including a session specifically for women candidates conducted by the Women’s Empowerment Nauru Association (Nauru Electoral Commission 2023). As a result, 11 female candidates (out of 77 total candidates) declared their intention to be nominated, considered a new high in Nauruan politics and representing growth in women’s capacity to engage in the country’s democratic processes (Nauru Electoral Commission 2023). Two weeks before the election, the Nauru Electoral Commission distributed posters with positive

messaging about women as leaders to change the narrative about women in leadership and support the election of women candidates (Nauru Electoral Commission 2023). At the 2022 elections, two women were elected to Nauru’s Parliament. As a result, women comprise 10.5% of Nauru’s national Parliament (Nauru Electoral Commission 2023). There are no temporary special measures in place to improve women’s representation in political and leadership roles, because of reservations that it would unfairly advantage women candidates (UN Women 2022d).

Women play key roles in the community committees of Nauru’s 14 districts, and comprise the majority of Nauruan overseas missions, consulates, and ambassadors (UN Women 2022d). However, UN Women notes that available data on women’s leadership in Nauru can appear contradictory (UN Women 2022d).

Although Nauruan legislation guarantees parental provisions and equal remuneration for equal work for public service employees, there is no guarantee of parental leave for the private sector (UN Women 2022d). Dismissal of pregnant workers is similarly only prohibited in the public sector (UN

Table G.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in Nauru

Enabling Legislation	In Place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ (12 weeks for public sector employees)	Public Service Act Review 2011; Public Service Bill 2016, clause 59-62
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✓ (2 weeks for public sector employees)	Public Service Act Review 2011; Public Service Bill 2016, clause 64-66
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✘	Public Service Bill 2016, clause 63

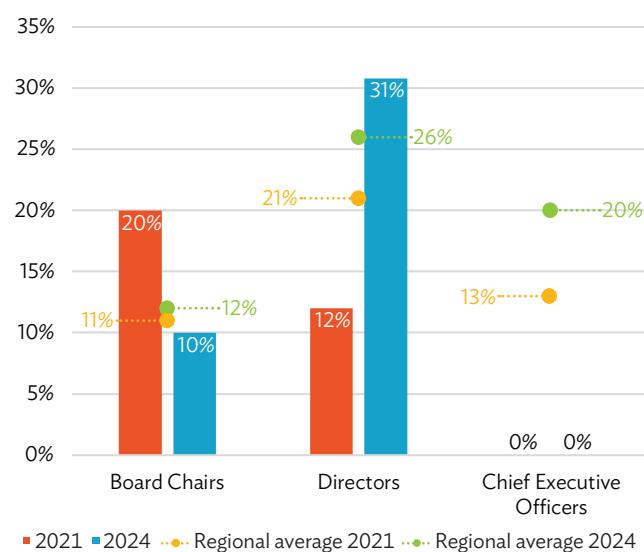
Sources: Government of Nauru. 2016. *Public Service Bill 2016 Explanatory Memorandum*. http://ronlaw.gov.nr/nauru_lpms/files/em/b52e318d4c38bbadd815e333710e0d00.pdf; and Government of the United States, Department of State. 2022. *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nauru*.

Table G.2 Board Composition in Nauru

Composition	2024 (n = 10)	2021 (n = 9)
Boards with no women directors	10%	67%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	40%	11%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	30%	22%
Boards with gender parity or greater	20%	0%

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2021 dataset (for 2021 data).

Figure G.1 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Nauru, 2021 and 2024

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Women 2022d). The lack of legal protections for women in the private sector leaves its 347 female employees particularly vulnerable (Pacific Community n.d.).

Despite the adoption of the Domestic Violence and Family Protection Act in 2017, domestic violence remains a key issue (Human Rights Council 2020). Despite frequent complaints of domestic violence to the police, families and communities continue to reconcile such problems informally (Human Rights Council 2020). Gender-based violence is likely underreported because of stigmatization of victims and lack of trust in the police (Human Rights Council 2020). Legislation regarding gender equality in Nauru is outlined in Table G.1.

iv. Women in Business Leadership

In 2024, the sample for the study included 10 organizations, dominated by state-owned enterprises (SOEs), with only one non-SOE, an industry association, included. Data on chief executive officers (CEOs) were very limited, and there was no information on branch offices or private non-listed companies for Nauru.

Most Boards in Nauru have significantly improved their representation of women.

In 2024, 50% of boards had 30% or greater women directors, a significant increase from the 22% of boards that met this threshold in 2021 (Table G.2). The 2024 dataset included two boards that have achieved gender parity, whereas none had achieved this in 2021. While 67% of boards had no women directors in 2021, this dropped to only 10% of boards in 2024. Overall, this signals a very positive trend toward greater gender diversity and inclusivity in boardrooms in Nauru.

Women are well represented on boards and yet remain underrepresented as board chairs and deputy chairs.

From 2021 to 2024, there has been significant progress, with women's representation on boards increasing from 12% in the 2021 sample to 31% in 2024 (Figure G.1), which is higher than the regional average of 26%. However, this positive representation does not translate equally across all leadership positions. Only one out of 10 board chairs were women, and none of the five deputy chairs were women. Both figures are lower than regional averages, indicating a significant gender disparity at the senior leadership levels. This suggests that while women have made strides in attaining board positions, there are still barriers preventing them from ascending to higher leadership roles.

Table G.3 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Nauru

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021-2024
	Nauru	Regional Average	Nauru	Nauru (change)
Board Chairs	10% (n = 10)	12%	20% (n = 10)	↓
Deputy Chairs	0% (n = 5)	18%	0% (n = 2)	No change
Directors	31% (n = 52)	26%	12% (n = 42)	↑
Chief Executive Officers	0% (n = 2)	20%	0% (n = 2)	No change

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table G.4 Women's Representation in Leadership in Nauru by Organization Type

Role	Industry Association	State-Owned Enterprises
Board Chairs	0% (n = 1)	11% (n = 9)
Directors	43% (n = 7)	29% (n = 45)
Chief Executive Officers	...	0% (n = 2)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

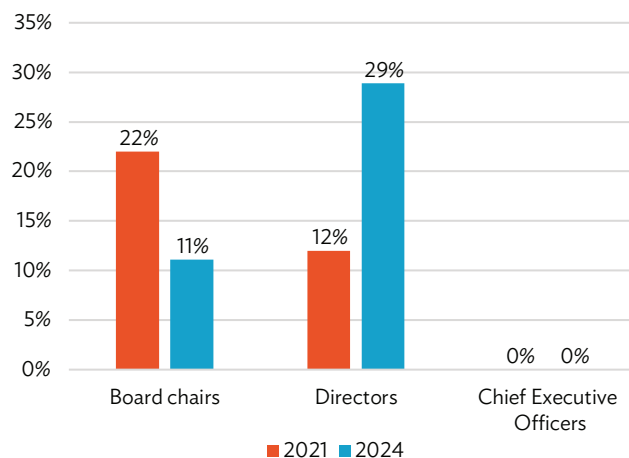
Women's representation on boards has experienced a surge, yet women's representation as CEO remains low.

Despite the positive trend toward greater gender diversity and inclusion in boardrooms (Table G.3), there is a lag in representation when it comes to senior executive roles. In both 2021 and 2024, there were no women serving as CEOs, highlighting the continued challenges women face in breaking into the highest levels of leadership. This disparity suggests that while there have been gains in board representation, there is still work to be done to ensure equal opportunities for women in leadership positions.

SOEs offer Nauru's best opportunity to increase women's business leadership.

As nine out of the 10 organizations in the sample are SOEs, they are accountable for the overall uplift in increased women's representation on boards in Nauru. It also worth noting that the one industry association in the sample has close to gender parity on its board, with three of its seven directors being women (Table G.4).

Figure G.2 Women's Representation in State-Owned Enterprise Leadership in Nauru, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Impressively, the percentage of women directors on SOE boards has increased from 12% in 2021 to 29% in 2024 (Figure G.2). This positive trend is consistent with the regional trend of increased representation of women on SOE boards. However, there are no women CEOs in any SOEs, and only 11% of board chair positions are held by women. This indicates that while SOEs have been instrumental in increasing women's representation on boards, there is still significant work to be done to ensure gender diversity in board leadership and senior executive positions within these organizations.

H. NIUE

i. Economic Context

Niue is an internally self-governing island state in the South Pacific Ocean, in free association with New Zealand (Government of New Zealand n.d.). Niue's population has considerably decreased over recent decades, mostly because of emigration to New Zealand (Government of New Zealand, n.d.). As of 2021, the population was estimated to be 1,684 (Asian Development Bank [ADB] n.d.). As of 2018, 30,867 people of Niuean ancestry lived in New Zealand (Government of New Zealand n.d.).

Niue faces significant challenges because of climate change (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] n.d.). It is particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels, which threaten its underground freshwater supplies (UNDP n.d.). Niue's location on the edge of the tropical cyclone belt also makes it vulnerable to increases in the incidence and severity of tropical cyclones (UNDP n.d.).

Like many Pacific countries, Niue's economy is affected by limited natural resources, geographic isolation, and a small population (Government of Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT] n.d.a). Niue relies on considerable administrative and economic assistance from New Zealand (DFAT n.d.a). Key sources of revenue also include fishing licenses, international leasing of Niue's four-digit telephone numbers, and remittances (DFAT n.d.). The tourism industry is also a key part of Niue's economy (DFAT n.d.a).

Prolonged border closures because of the COVID-19 pandemic stalled tourism and public investment spending and led to economic contraction in fiscal year (FY) 2020 (ended June 2020) and FY2021 (ADB 2023). The economy has improved since borders reopened and tourism returned. Flights doubled to two per week in late 2023, but visit arrivals remain below pre-pandemic levels (ADB 2024). Imported inflation rose by 9.6% in FY2023, nearly four times faster than domestic price growth. Global inflation rose to 8.6% in FY2023, primarily driven by elevated prices of frozen chicken, fuel, and imported beer (ADB 2024).

In the 2023 budget statement, Niue affirmed that it was undertaking taxation reforms, including the implementation of a new tax administration act, to support low-income families and small businesses (Government of Niue 2023a). The government expressed its desire to continue to support the private sector through sector support from the Government

of New Zealand and the introduction of a 4-day work week to enable government employees to undertake private sector activities on a Friday (Government of Niue 2023a). In doing so, the Government of Niue aims to build economic activities for economic growth (Government of Niue 2023a).

ii. Women's Economic Participation

In 2022, Niue's labor force participation rate was 71%, with 67% engaged in work and 4% describing themselves as unemployed (Niue Statistics Office 2022). The gender gap narrowed significantly from 17 percentage points in 2017 to just 4 percentage points in 2022. Women exhibited a labor force participation rate of 69% in 2022, compared to men at 73% (Niue Statistics Office 2022).

Among all women, 31% are not in the labor force, two-thirds of which cite reasons such as being too old or retired. Only 4.0% of women report their primary activity as home duties, compared to 3.8% of men (Niue Statistics Office 2022). Women are also more likely than men to hold paid secondary employment, while men were significantly more likely to be involved in unpaid secondary employment for the benefit of the family business or farm (Niue Statistics Office 2022).

Traditional gender norms in Niue influence the uptake of certain occupations by men and women. The overrepresentation of men in "professional" (18.7%) and "managers, legislators, and senior officials" (17.9%) roles, as well as in industries like agriculture (16.1%) and construction (12.5%), reflects entrenched stereotypes about male dominance in leadership and manual labor positions (Niue Statistics Office 2022). Similarly, women's higher representation in roles such as "technicians and associate professionals" (22.9%) and in industries like education (16.4%) and accommodation and food services (15.9%) aligns with societal perceptions of women's nurturing and service-oriented roles (Government of Niue 2022a).

As in most countries in the world, women in Niue experience a gender pay gap. Just more than two-fifths (41.9%) of the working population earned less than NZ\$20,000 a year. Of this group, 32% earned from NZ\$10,000 to NZ\$20,000, and 10% earned less than NZ\$10,000. Women were represented in lower earning categories at higher rates than men. This disparity persists at higher earning rates, where 10.9% of men earned more than NZ\$50,000, compared to only 5.5% of women (Government of Niue 2022a).

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

In Niue, there is limited policy and legislation supporting gender equality and women's empowerment. The 1974 Niue Constitution does not contain any provisions to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex or gender (UN Women 2022e), and there are no specific labor provisions for women or regulations and policies on sexual harassment in Niue. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has been ratified through New Zealand, but neither CEDAW nor the Optional Protocol have been independently ratified by Niue (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] n.d) and their provisions have not been incorporated into domestic law (UN Women 2022e).

Responsibility for Niue's gender equality policy and commitments rests with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Historically, the Niue Council of Women, a civil society organization, has worked with the government to address women's issues at the local level. There are no other specific mechanisms in the government to address gender equality

or women's empowerment, and no government resources are allocated for gender mainstreaming. The Niue National Strategic Plan, 2016–2026 does not include any references to gender or the empowerment of women. In 2016, Niue finalized a draft gender policy but there are no reports relating to its implementation.

Several international organizations have identified violence against women and girls as a significant problem on the island (UN Women 2022e). Domestic violence is considered a taboo subject among Niueans (UNICEF 2017), discouraging help-seeking among victims and survivors (UN Women 2022d). Norms about masculinity contribute to a culture of impunity and inaction on violence against women and girls (UN Women 2022e). In 2022, however, Niue introduced the Family Relationship Act, which recognizes no-fault divorce, provides legal recognition of de facto relationships, and introduces new law for the care and protection of children and the elderly. The act also includes provisions for a domestic violence law and repeals an old law that provided a marital defense to rape (Pavihi 2022). Legislation regarding gender equality in Niue is outlined in Table H.1.

Table H.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in Niue

Enabling legislation	In Place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Family Relations Bill 2022, Part 5
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ (12 weeks at full pay + 6 weeks at half pay for public sector employees)	Public Service Regulations 2004
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✓ (5 days for public sector employees)	Public Service Regulations 2004.
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located

Sources: Government of Niue. 2022. *Family Relationships Bill 2022*. <https://www.gov.nu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/family-relations-bills.pdf>; Government of Niue. Legislation. <https://www.gov.nu/legislation/>; and UN Women. 2022. *Gender Equality Brief for Niue*. https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/UN_WOMEN_NIUE.pdf.

Alongside Cook Islands, Niue has some of the highest representation of women in Parliament in the Pacific, with six out of Niue’s 20 elected parliamentary representatives being women (Government of Niue 2023b). Although social norms have been identified as a key barrier to women’s political participation, Niue does not have any temporary special measures in place to increase women’s political representation (UN Women 2022e).

iv. Women in Business Leadership

The 2024 sample for Niue is comprised of nine organizations and is heavily dominated by state-owned enterprises (SOEs), with only one non-SOE, an industry association, included in the dataset. This is reflective of the fact that SOEs play a significant role in the commercial landscape of Niue.

Women are well represented on most boards.

Of the six organizations with board data in the 2024 sample, 50% had achieved gender parity or greater on their boards,

meaning that the board consisted of at least an equal number of men and women (Table H.2). A further 33% of the organizations had achieved a 30% threshold, which is often considered the minimum level of women’s representation required for gender diversity. Only one organization in the sample had no women on its board at all.

Women in Niue are increasingly well represented in governance but underrepresented as board chairs.

Women in Niue are increasingly securing board director roles. In 2024, women accounted for 48% of all directors in the Niue dataset, an increase from 29% in 2021 and well above the regional average of 26% (Table H.3).

Data on board chairs and deputy chairs were very limited. Based on available data, it appears that when it comes to occupying the roles of board chairs, deputy chairs, and chief executive officers (CEOs), women remain underrepresented in Niue. Out of the nine CEOs in the Niue sample, only one is

Table H.2 Board Composition in Niue

Composition	2024 (n = 6)	2021 (n = 3)
Boards with no women directors	17%	33%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	0%	33%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	33%	33%
Boards with gender parity or greater	50%	0%

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table H.3 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Niue

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021-2024
	Niue	Regional Average	Niue	Niue (change)
Board Chairs	0% (n = 1)	12%	0% (n = 1)	No change.
Deputy Chairs	0% (n = 1)	18%	100% (n = 1)	↓
Directors	48% (n = 23)	26%	29% (n = 17)	↑
Chief Executive Officers	11% (n = 9)	20%	11% (n = 9)	No change.

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

a woman, indicating a gender gap at the senior executive level (Figure H.1).

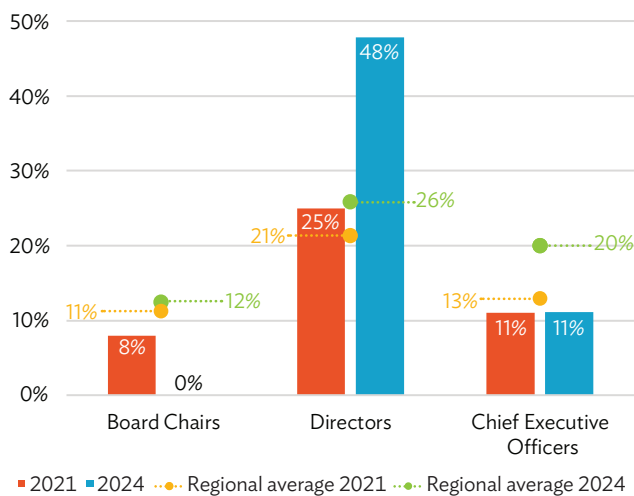
Women’s representation as directors is well above regional averages for both organization types in Niue.

Women’s representation as directors of industry associations (60%) and SOEs (44%) is well above the regional average of 26% (Table H.4). While the sample size is small, it is encouraging to see that the strong representation of women on boards is present across the various organization types operating in Niue.

Women achieve strong representation on Niue’s state-owned enterprise boards.

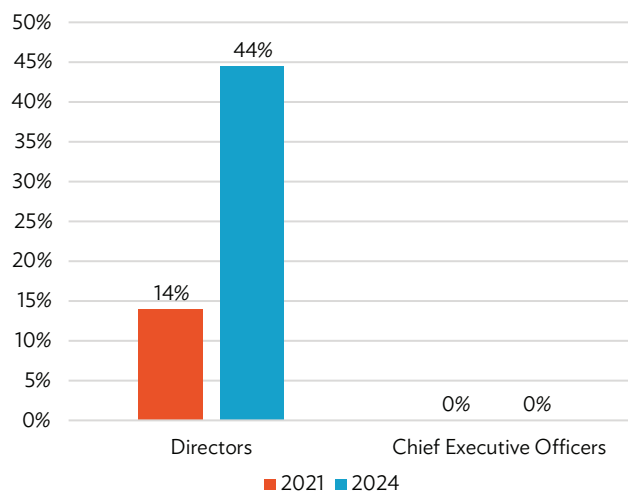
In 2024, 44% of board directors in Niue’s SOEs are women, well above the 14% recorded in 2021 (Figure H.2) and the 3% recorded in 2016 (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2015). Although the sample has increased in size from 2021 to 2024, it appears that steady progress is being made in women’s representation. Despite this progress in board director positions, there is a notable lack of gender diversity in senior executive positions within SOEs—none of the eight CEO roles was held by a woman. While the increase in women’s representation as board directors is a positive development, there is still work to

Figure H.1 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Niue, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Figure H.2 Women’s Representation in State-Owned Enterprise Leadership in Niue, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table H.4 Women’s Representation in Leadership in Niue by Organization Type

Role	Industry Associations	State-Owned Enterprises
Board Chairs	0% (n = 1)	...
Directors	60% (n = 5)	44% (n = 18)
Chief Executive Officers	100% (n = 1)	0% (n = 8)

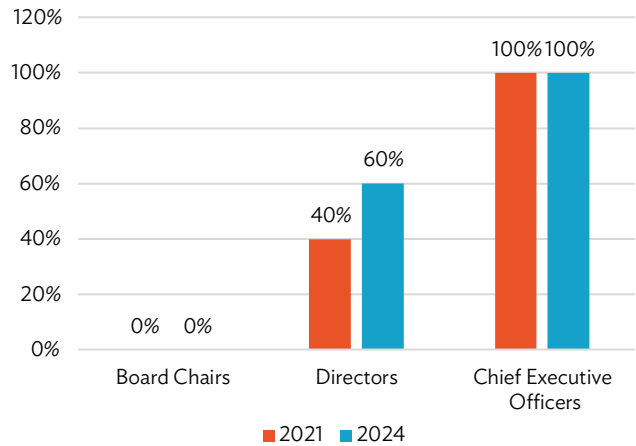
... = not available, n = number (sample size).
Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

be done to achieve gender parity in all levels of leadership in Niue’s SOEs. No data was available for board chairs or deputy chairs for SOEs in Niue.

Women play important roles in business in Niue.

In the one industry association in the sample the representation of women as board directors has increased from 40% in 2021 to 60% in 2024 (Figure H.3). Given that industry associations are representative of the private sector, this sustained level of women’s representation underscores the pivotal contributions women make in business in Niue.

Figure H.3 Women’s Representation in Industry Association Leadership in Niue, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

I. PALAU

i. Economic Context

Palau is an archipelago of some 340 coral and volcanic islands on the Kyushu-Palau ridge in the western Pacific Ocean, with a population of 17,976 in 2022 (ADB n.d.). Although Palau's per capita income is one of the highest in the region, the country continues to rely heavily on financial assistance from the United States (US) (Government of Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT] n.d.b). Tourism, fishing, and subsistence agriculture dominate the Palauan economy (Moody's Analytics 2023b).

Palau faces structural challenges similar to many other Pacific island states, including small land area, lack of economy of scale, limited natural and human resources, poor infrastructure, remote location, and vulnerability to climate change (Lum 2023). In particular, rising sea levels and increased extreme weather events pose significant threats to the island nation, as the majority of Palau's population, infrastructure, and cultural sites are in coastal areas. The El Niño–Southern Oscillation and associated dry spells also pose a persistent risk (World Bank n.d.g).

Palau's pandemic recovery has been slow because of vulnerability to volatility in international prices and a slow return in tourism numbers (ADB 2023). International arrivals have continued to increase but remain substantially below pre-pandemic levels (ADB 2024). Tourism numbers are forecast to continue to rise, reaching pre-pandemic levels after fiscal year (FY) 2025 (ending September 2025) (ADB 2024).

The cost of living in Palau has recently increased. The introduction of value-added taxes in late 2022, along with high international prices for food and fuel, caused prices to grow by 12.4% in FY2023 (ADB 2024). The highest prices were for food, housing and utilities, and transport (ADB 2024). Inflation is forecast to moderate in FY2024 and fall to 1% in FY2025 (ADB 2024).

Palau is in free association with the United States (US) (Lum 2023). Economic assistance pursuant to Title II of the Compact of Free Association is set to expire at the end of fiscal year (FY) 2024 (Lum 2023). Compact provisions related to security, defense, migration, and other areas will continue unchanged (Lum 2023). In May 2023, the US signed an agreement with Palau to extend economic assistance for 20 years (Lum 2023). Although Compact of Free Association assistance under the current arrangement does not expire until the end

of FY2024, the US and Palau have agreed to start the next term of assistance at the beginning of FY2024, in line with the Compacts of Free Association for the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands (Lum 2023). The next phase will include greater support for health care, infrastructure, education, the environment, and climate change adaptation (Lum 2023). The agreement includes grant assistance and trust fund contributions totaling \$900 million (Lum 2023).

ii. Women's Economic Participation

According to national estimates, the labor force participation rate of the population aged 15 and above in 2020 was 59.2% for women and 73.6% for men (World Bank n.d.c; World Bank n.d.h; World Bank n.d.i).

Data from the 2020 Census of Population and Housing indicates that women are more likely to be engaged in unpaid employment or domestic duties, while men comprise the majority of employees working for wages in both the public and private sectors (Government of Palau 2022). Men continue to comprise the majority of employees in traditionally male-dominated industries, including agriculture, forestry and fishing, mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity, water supply, construction, and transportation. Men also dominate administrative and support service activities as well as public administration and defense. Women represent 45% of employees in the public sector and 36% of employees in the private sector (Government of Palau 2022).

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

Palau is a matrilineal society in which women traditionally hold positions of power and respect (Human Rights Council 2021b). Nonetheless, Palau continues to face key challenges related to gender equality.

Although equal rights are enshrined in Palau's Constitution, the country's ratification of international human rights treaties remains low (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] n.d). Despite having signed the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2011, Palau has still not yet ratified the convention and has taken no action on the Optional Protocol (OHCHR n.d). In Palau's most recent Universal Periodic Review, the government stated that it was continuing to work toward ratification, but faced challenges in terms of funding, capacity building, and resources (Human Rights Council 2021b).

During the Universal Periodic Review, 16% of all 142 recommendations received pertained to gender equality (OHCHR 2021b). Recommendations particularly focused on the need to ratify CEDAW, strengthen efforts against sexual and gender-based violence, formally prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and increase women's participation in decision-making (Human Rights Council 2021a). Legislation regarding gender equality in Palau is outlined in Table I.1.

The Palau National Gender Mainstreaming Policy, 2018–2023 was endorsed in 2018, with the purpose of promoting equal opportunity among women and men (Human Rights Council 2021b). It advocates for an accountability mechanism supported by the production of sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators that can be used to monitor the impacts of programs and services on women and men, and to be used in closing gender gaps when appropriate. In Palau's Office of the President, the Mechesil Belau (Traditional Women's Group) and Bureau of Aging, Disability and Gender are concerned with women's rights (Human Rights Council 2021b).

The Palau Development Plan, 2023–2026 refers to this policy but does not specify any clear plans or objectives to improve women's social, economic, or political opportunities. The

National Youth Policy, 2023–2027 recognizes that reporting levels for violence, abuse, and exploitation are quite low, particularly in the case of sexual and family violence, and there is limited coordination in referral and service provision. Despite the country's implementation of the Family Protection Act in 2012, gaps in support for survivors of domestic violence persist (Human Rights Council 2021a; Human Rights Council 2021b).

No laws prohibit or limit women's participation in the political process (Government of the US, Department of State 2021). In the November 2020 election, two women were elected—one to the 16-seat House of Delegates, and one to the 13-seat Senate (Government of the US, Department of State 2021). As a result, the percentage of seats held by women in national parliaments fell from 12.5% in 2019 to 6.3% in 2020 (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2023a; World Bank n.d.h). The vice president is elected separately from the President and is currently a woman (Government of the US, Department of State 2021). The next general election is scheduled for 12 November 2024 (Palau Election Commission 2023).

With the support of international organizations, Palau has recently invested in programs to support women's political representation (International Organization for Migration [IOM] 2023). In September 2023, IOM supported the first-

Table I.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in Palau

Enabling Legislation	In Place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Palau Family Protection Act
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ (4 weeks for public sector employees)	Rules and Regulations Public Service System Section 18.3 (h)
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located

Source: World Bank. Women, Business and the Law. Palau. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/data/exploreconomies/palau/2023> (accessed 7 May 2024).

ever Meeting of Women in Elected Leadership with elected women officials from various levels of government in Palau (IOM 2023). The meeting was intended to provide a space for reflection on issues of women’s political representation and to recommend actionable changes (IOM 2023). The meeting resulted in an agreement to establish a network of women-elected leaders in Palau (IOM 2023).

Palau is also a part of the Micronesian Islands Forum initiative to develop a Micronesian Gender Equality Framework, alongside the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Nauru (Pacific Community 2023a).

iv. Women in Business Leadership

The private sector is small in Palau and therefore the sample of organizations used to analyze data is also small. Of the eight organizations included, four of these are state-owned enterprises (SOEs), two are branch offices of international companies, one is a private non-listed company, and one is an industry association. While small, this sample reflects a balanced representation of the private sector in Palau.

Women are represented on all boards in the Palau sample.

Of the five organizations with board data, it is promising to note that women are represented on all boards, and 60% of boards have at least 30% women directors (Table I.2).

Palau exceeds the regional average for women’s representation on boards.

Although no board in the sample has achieved gender parity, the overall proportion of women as directors on boards in Palau is 31%, above the regional average of 26% (Table I.3). However, the profile of women as directors on boards has shifted since 2021, when 40% of boards had gender parity or greater (Table I.2) and the overall average was 38% (Table I.3). However, changes over time applied to such a small sample should be interpreted with caution.

Trends in women’s leadership are difficult to identify.

Because of the limited availability of data in Palau, identifying trends during 2021–2024 in senior leadership roles is

Table I.2 Board Composition in Palau

Composition	2024 (n = 5)	2021 (n = 5)
Boards with no women directors	0%	20%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	40%	20%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	60%	20%
Boards with gender parity or greater	0%	40%

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table I.3 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Palau

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021–2024
	Palau	Regional average	Palau	Palau (change)
Board Chairs	17% (n = 6)	12%	20% (n = 5)	↓
Deputy Chairs	0% (n = 2)	18%	33% (n = 3)	↓
Directors	31% (n = 32)	26%	38% (n = 24)	↓
Chief Executive Officers	14% (n = 7)	20%	29% (n = 7)	↓

n = number (sample size).

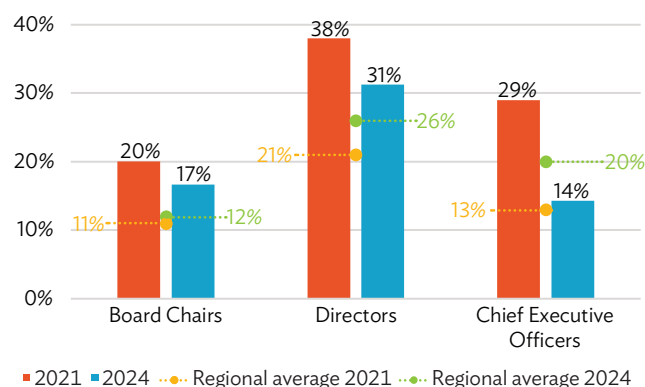
Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table I.4 Women's Representation in Leadership in Palau by Organization Type

Leadership Role	Industry Associations	Private Non-Listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises	Branch Offices
Board Chairs	100% (n = 1)	0% (n = 1)	0% (n = 4)	...
Directors	33% (n = 9)	...	30% (n = 23)	...
Chief Executive Officers	...	100% (n = 1)	0% (n = 4)	0% (n = 2)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

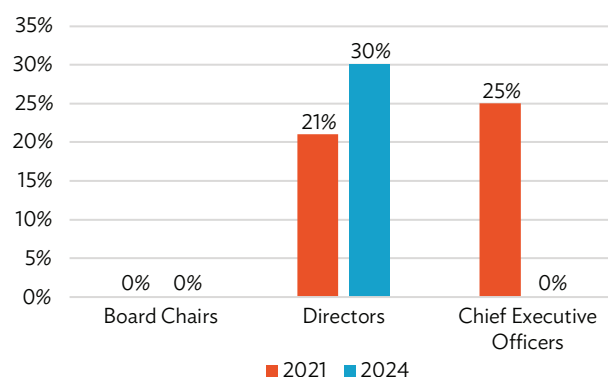
Figure I.1 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Palau, 2021 and 2024

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

challenging. While women were reasonably well represented in the 2021 sample, holding 20% of board chair positions and 33% of deputy chair positions, the 2024 dataset reveals a notable decline in women's representation (Figure I.1). In 2024, there is only one woman serving as chief executive officer (CEO) and one woman serving as a board chair. Although this appears to be a negative trend in women's representation, the small and fluctuating sample makes year-on-year comparisons difficult.

SOEs provide most of the director opportunities in Palau.

Most of the data in Palau comes from SOEs. Nonetheless, we can observe that women are well represented on the industry association included in the sample, with more than 30% women directors and the only woman chair in the sample (Table I.4). The representation of women in branch offices in Palau is low, with both led by men CEOs.

Figure I.2 Women's Representation in State-Owned Enterprise Leadership in Palau, 2021 and 2024

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Women make up 30% of directors on the boards of SOEs.

When looking at women's representation on SOE boards, the data suggest a potential increase in their presence on boards. In 2021, women held 21% of SOE director roles, whereas by 2024, the data reflect 30% representation (Figure I.2). However, it's important to note that the size of the sample has changed over time, potentially influencing these figures. As with 2021, there are no women board chairs of SOEs in 2024 and there has been a decrease in the representation of women as SOE CEOs, from 25% to 0%.

J. PAPUA NEW GUINEA

i. Economic Context

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the largest economy in the Pacific. Its population is estimated at 10.2 million (Asian Development Bank [ADB] n.d.) with about 80% residing in rural areas, a majority of whom make their living from subsistence production and cash crops (Government of Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT] 2022). The population is expected to grow, reaching 14.2 million by 2050 and 19.8 million by 2100 (World Population Review n.d).

The economy is primarily driven by the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sectors, which employ the majority of the labor force (Government of Australia, DFAT 2022). However, the capital-intensive minerals and energy extraction sector, including gold, copper, oil, and natural gas, contributes significantly to export earnings and gross domestic product (GDP) (Government of Australia, DFAT 2022). There is considerable scope to grow tourism in PNG. However, the country's strengths, including good international connectivity and unique natural beauty, are matched by major challenges, particularly unreliable infrastructure and a perception that PNG is unsafe for travelers (Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative [PSDI] 2021b).

Poverty remains a significant challenge, with an estimated 37.5% of the population living below the poverty line, especially in rural areas (ADB 2021). Vulnerable groups such as rural women, children, and people living with disabilities are particularly affected by poverty, insecurity, and violence.

PNG also grapples with a "youth bulge," with 50% of the population under the age of 25 years (World Population Review n.d). High youth unemployment is fueled by a small private sector, limited formal business opportunities, and a decline in the extractive resource sectors, which is heavily relied on to generate government revenue streams and create employment (Government of the United States [US], Department of State 2023).

PNG's economy has largely recovered from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic but shipping costs, fuel fluctuations, and food insecurity are still major concerns (Government of the US, Department of State 2023). However, growth slowed to an estimated 2.0% in 2023 on lower resource output, while business impediments, including foreign exchange restrictions, frequent Air Niugini flight cancellations, and power and water supply disruptions, stifled non-resource economic activity (ADB 2024). Several favorable developments, including the reopening of the Porgera gold mine, a boost in cocoa and copra

oil production, continued government spending in construction, upcoming new additions to Air Niugini's fleet, and a new airport in Lae, should all generate positive economic outcomes (ADB 2024). However, the civil unrest of January 2024 and ongoing challenges such as power supply disruption cloud the outlook (ADB 2024).

Climate change exacerbates PNG's vulnerability to various natural hazards such as droughts, floods, earthquakes, volcanic activity, tsunamis, and sea-level rise, posing risks to both livelihoods and infrastructure (World Bank n.d.i).

To address economic challenges, the government initiated a macroeconomic reform agenda, supported by an International Monetary Fund (IMF) program approved in March 2023 (ADB 2023). Among other goals, the reforms are intended to create the fiscal space needed to meet critical social demands (ADB 2023). The first review report by the IMF in December 2023 indicated that the government was fulfilling all criteria set for the end of June 2023 and making progress on its structural goals (ADB 2024).

ii. Women's Economic Participation

In PNG, gender disparities persist in labor force participation and entrepreneurship. Despite nearly equal labor force participation rates between men (53.1%) and women (50.6%) (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA] PNG 2022), substantial differences exist in employment sectors. Men are almost twice as likely to secure formal wage jobs, while women are three times more prevalent in the informal sector. This trend has remained consistent since 2010, following a 10-year period of steady decline in labor force participation rates for both genders (World Bank n.d.j). A large portion of employed women, about 84%, are engaged in vulnerable forms of employment, such as own-account or contributing family work, which offer less predictable earnings and lower productivity. Only 25% of about 49,500 small to medium-sized enterprises are owned by women (ADB 2018a), predominantly operating in the informal sector (Human Rights Council 2021c).

The formal private sector job market remains limited, creating challenges for both men and women, with fewer than 10,000 formal sector jobs created annually and a skills mismatch between available job opportunities and the labor force. Occupational segregation is evident, with women primarily working in services and being underrepresented in the industry sector, particularly in manufacturing, construction, and mining, where they often hold lower-skilled positions. Additionally,

legal barriers, such as restrictions on certain types of work deemed physically arduous or involving nighttime hours, further limit women's access to well-paid industries like mining and manufacturing, with PNG being one of the few countries in the Pacific region to have such discriminatory clauses in its laws.

Because of COVID-19 disruptions, the 2021 National Population and Housing Census was deferred to 2024 (PNG National Statistics Office 2021). As such, updated data on women's participation by industry are expected in the next 2 years.

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

Although PNG's Constitution guarantees equality of rights, privileges, obligations, and duties irrespective of sex (Government of PNG 2016), significant barriers to gender equality persist (UNFPA PNG 2024). Traditional cultural norms often confer power and authority to men, leading to disparities in decision-making and resource control, with women frequently denied basic rights (UNFPA PNG 2024). Women and girls also have substantially less access to health care and education (UNFPA PNG 2024).

PNG has developed legislation and policy to support gender equality and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995. Under the Medium-Term Development Plan IV, 2023–2027, the government aims to increase opportunities for women and girls in education, employment, and business. The strategies for women's empowerment include increasing women's access to economic opportunities and awareness of their rights; increasing awareness of population management that incorporates gender issues throughout the country; supporting and strengthening the Meri Seif Haus (women's safe house) initiative; promoting women's access to education opportunities; and promoting women in leadership and business. An investment projection of K148.7 million is needed to deliver the priorities by 2027 (Government of PNG 2023).

On 1 December 2022, the 11th Parliament established the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, which was designed to take over the work of the former Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence and to broaden its efforts to improve the lives of women and girls across PNG. The committee has the power to hold public hearings and make reports back to the National Parliament. The committee held its first public hearings during the 11th Parliament from 24 to 26 May 2023. Among its recommendations to Parliament was that consideration be given to creating a separate ministry for women and youth, with proper funding and qualified staff, and

that the government immediately commence the process of developing a national gender equality and women's policy to replace the National Women's and Gender Equality Policy, 2011–2015 (PNG Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2023).

The government has committed to reducing the prevalence of gender-based violence, which is pervasive in PNG, with high prevalence rates of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence as well as violence resulting from accusations of sorcery. The economic impact of gender-based violence is substantial, with significant productivity losses. The International Finance Corporation (IFC) estimates that companies lose nearly 10 working days per worker annually because of absenteeism, presenteeism (when workers come to work despite being physically, mentally, or emotionally unwell), and time spent supporting colleagues to respond to family and sexual violence; gender-based violence-related work absenteeism alone amounted to an estimated 0.5% of PNG's 2020 GDP (IFC 2021). Initiatives like the Family Protection Act 2013 and the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, 2016–2025 aim to address this issue, but challenges such as lack of support, funding, and coordination hinder their effectiveness. There is also no comprehensive legislation to address workplace sexual harassment for public and private sector workers. Despite underreporting, evidence suggests that women continue to experience high levels of sexual harassment in the workplace and in educational establishments in PNG (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2016).

In 2023, the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission commenced a review of this legislation (Libitino 2023). The National Public Service Gender Orders (4th Edition) provides for 12 weeks of paid maternity leave for public sector employees. Maternity leave for those in the private sector is generally without pay. Limited access to early childhood education further hampers women's ability to balance household responsibilities with employment, particularly in urban areas where affordable early education centers are scarce (World Bank 2023b).

In 2023, the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment highlighted the economic benefits of addressing gender inequality, recommending reforms to the Employment Act, strengthened enforcement of existing legislation, and expanded programs to support women's employment. Similar recommendations were made in a special World Bank report in 2023 focusing on accelerating gender equality in economic opportunity, emphasizing the need for concerted efforts to unlock PNG's economic potential by

empowering women (World Bank 2023b). Legislation regarding gender equality in Papua New Guinea is outlined in Table J.1.

iv. Women in Business Leadership

The sample size for women’s business leadership in PNG has grown substantially from 50 organizations in 2021 to 95 in 2024, comprised of 10 industry associations, 23 private non-listed companies, 12 publicly listed companies, 14 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and 36 branch offices, providing a more comprehensive understanding of women’s representation in the private sector in PNG. This increase is mainly because of the inclusion of branch offices, which constitute over a third of the expanded sample.

The findings show that, despite similar levels of workforce participation in PNG, women are underrepresented in business leadership—consistent with women’s lower levels of participation in the formal economy. However, the extent of women’s underrepresentation is not as profound as in politics.

Women are underrepresented on boards in PNG.

The data reveal a clear underrepresentation of women on boards in PNG. A quarter of PNG’s boards have no women directors, and only 7% have achieved gender parity or greater (Table J.2). Most boards in the sample (69%) have fewer than 30% women directors, indicating prevalent low representation. While there has been some improvement in gender diversity from 2021 to 2024, such as a decrease in the number of boards with no women directors, progress appears incremental rather than transformative.

Table J.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in Papua New Guinea

Enabling Legislation	In Place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✓	Employment Act 1978, Sec. 97
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Family Protection Act 2013, Secs. 5 and 6; Family Protection (Amendment) Act 2022
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ (12 weeks for public sector employees)	Public Services (Management) Act 1995, National Public Service General Orders (4th Edition)
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located

Source: World Bank. Women, Business and the Law. Papua New Guinea. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/data/exploreconomies/papua-new-guinea/2023> (accessed 1 May 2024).

Table J.2 Board Composition in Papua New Guinea

Composition	2024 (n = 55)	2021 (n = 45)
Boards with no women directors	25%	44%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	44%	29%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	24%	18%
Boards with gender parity or greater	7%	9%

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table J.3 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Papua New Guinea

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021–2024
	PNG	Regional Average	PNG	PNG (change)
Board Chairs	7% (n = 57)	12%	4% (n = 46)	↑
Deputy Chairs	9% (n = 32)	18%	18% (n = 11)	↓
Directors	23% (n = 372)	26%	19% (n = 284)	↑
Chief Executive Officers	9% (n = 92)	20%	5% (n = 44)	↑

n = number (sample size), PNG = Papua New Guinea.

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table J.4 Women’s Representation in Leadership in Papua New Guinea by Organization Type

Leadership Role	Industry Associations	Private Non-Listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises	Branch Offices	Publicly Listed Companies
Board Chairs	30% (n = 10)	4% (n = 23)	0% (n = 13)	...	0% (n = 11)
Directors	28% (n = 95)	19% (n = 123)	18% (n = 80)	...	31% (n = 74)
Chief Executive Officers	25% (n = 8)	4% (n = 23)	0% (n = 13)	14% (n = 36)	0% (n = 12)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

Women’s representation on boards and in senior executive positions in PNG remains lower than regional averages.

Women are particularly underrepresented in board chair positions; the country has only 7% of board chairs occupied by women, which falls below the regional average of 12% (Table J.3). Women’s representation is also limited among chief executive officer (CEO) roles, where only 9% are held by women, well below the regional average of 20%.

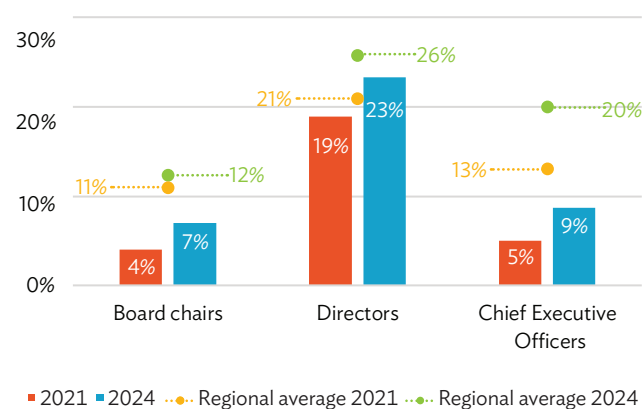
Despite being below regional averages, women’s representation on boards and in senior executive positions is increasing in PNG.

From 2021 to 2024, there has been an uplift of women’s representation as board chairs, directors, and CEOs in PNG (Figure J.1).

Gender gaps persist in board leadership in every organization type.

Analysis of women’s representation by organization type highlights stubborn gaps in women’s representation, particularly as board chairs and CEOs of publicly listed companies and SOEs (Table J.4). Only four women hold board chair roles, three

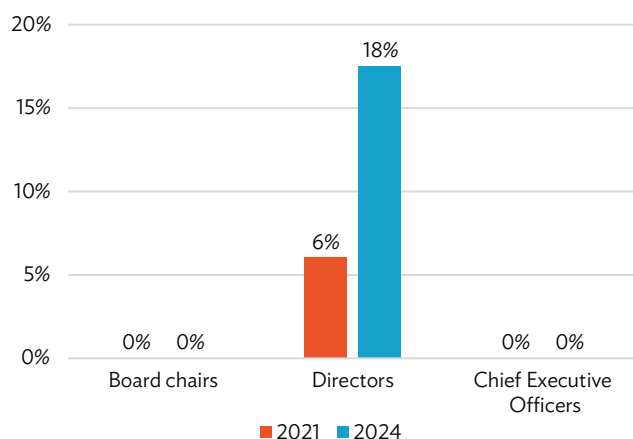
Figure J.1 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Papua New Guinea, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

at the helm of industry associations, while one leads a private non-listed company. No boards of publicly listed companies or SOEs are chaired by a woman in PNG.

Figure J.2 Women's Representation in State-Owned Enterprise Leadership in Papua New Guinea, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Of the eight women CEOs, five oversee branch offices, two lead industry associations and one leads a private non-listed company. Similar to the findings for board chairs, there are no women CEOs in PNG's publicly listed companies or SOEs.

There is a positive trajectory toward greater representation of women on SOE boards in PNG.

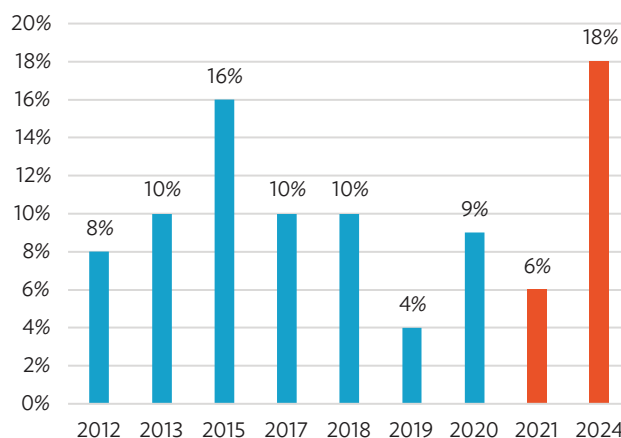
Unlike other Pacific countries where a high proportion of board roles are with SOEs, in PNG SOEs represent just one-fifth of director positions. Women have historically been underrepresented on SOE boards in PNG, consistent with trends across the Pacific. However, there has been an encouraging increase in women's representation on SOE boards in PNG from 6% in the 2021 sample to 18% in 2024 (Figure J.2).

The proportion of women on SOE boards in PNG has remained stubbornly low since 2012 (Figure J.3). A small peak of 16% women SOE directors in 2015 was not maintained. However, current efforts to increase women's participation in SOE governance in PNG may produce sustainable results.

While there has been some progress in increasing the proportion of women holding director roles, there are still no women serving as board chairs or CEOs of SOEs.

Consistent with the 2021 sample, all board chair and CEO positions in PNG's SOEs are held by men. Publicly listed

Figure J.3 Women Directors on State-Owned Enterprise Boards in Papua New Guinea, 2012-2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (for 2012-2020 data).

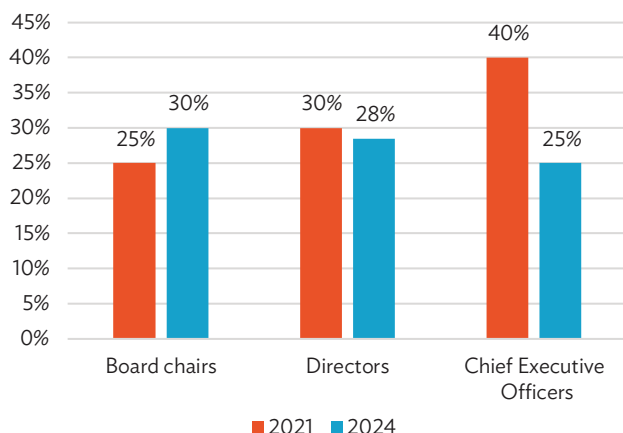
companies are the only other entity type in PNG to have no women represented in either role. The trend of male dominance in board leadership roles is expected to persist, as evidenced by the fact that the position of deputy chair, often seen as a stepping stone to board chair positions, is also exclusively held by men in PNG.

Women are better represented in industry associations than other organization types.

Overall, the data show that there is stronger representation of women in industry associations than other organization types at all levels of leadership, with 30% women board chairs, 28% women directors, and 25% women CEOs. These rates are higher than for other entity types despite the decrease in women's representation as directors and CEOs. Notably, two industry associations have a woman in both the board chair and CEO positions. These organizations are the only two in the PNG sample with women in both leadership roles. The representation of women on the boards of industry associations has remained relatively stable from 2021 to 2024 but there has been a decrease in the representation of women as CEOs (Figure J.4).

Women hold director positions in private non-listed companies but have limited representation in other leadership roles.

Figure J.4 Women’s Representation in Industry Associations in Papua New Guinea, 2021 and 2024



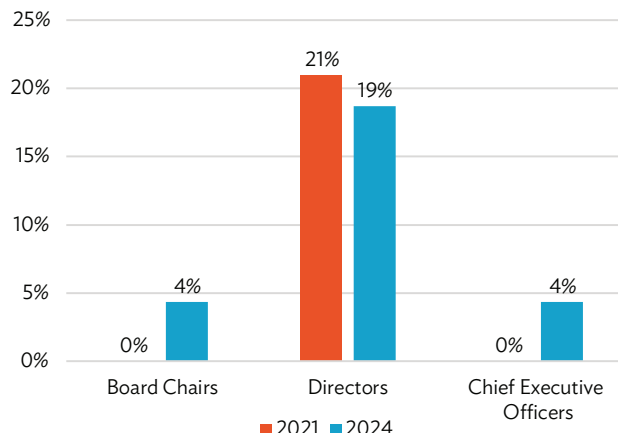
Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Private non-listed companies offer the largest number of director opportunities of all organization types in the PNG sample, constituting 123 out of a total of 372 director roles (33%). Women hold 19% of director roles in private non-listed companies in PNG, a slight decrease from 21% in the 2021 sample (Figure J.5). This places these companies behind industry associations and publicly listed companies for women’s representation as directors. There has been a slight increase in women’s representation as board chairs in private non-listed companies from 0% in 2021 to 4% in 2024, but this reflects the appointment of just one woman. Similarly, women’s representation as CEOs in private non-listed companies has risen from 0% in 2021 to 5% in 2024. Again, this reflects the appointment of one woman as CEO.

There are no women board chairs or CEOs in PNG’s publicly listed companies.

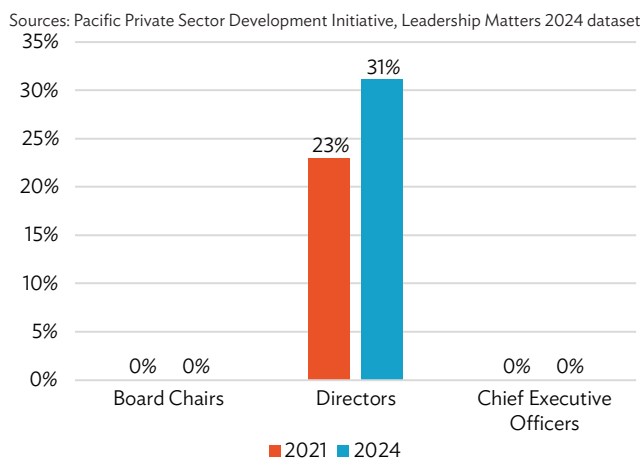
There are no women serving as board chairs or CEOs of publicly listed companies in PNG. This remains unchanged from the 2021 sample and is a concerning trend. There has been, however, an uplift in the proportion of women directors from 23% in 2021 to 31% in 2024 (Figure J.6). The representation of women as directors of publicly listed companies is second only to industry associations.

Figure J.5 Women’s Representation in Private Non-listed Companies in Papua New Guinea, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Figure J.6 Women’s Representation in Publicly Listed Companies in Papua New Guinea, 2021 and 2024



(for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

K. SAMOA

i. Economic Context

Samoa is a Polynesian island nation in the central South Pacific Ocean, with an estimated population of 207,077 in 2022 (ADB n.d.). The islands of Upolu and Savai'i account for 99% of Samoa's population (Government of Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT] n.d.c).

Key industries include agricultural exports, tourism services, and services (Government of Australia, DFAT n.d.c). Remittances from Samoans living abroad and foreign development assistance in the form of grants and loans are important sources of revenue (Government of Australia, DFAT n.d.c). About 60% of Samoa's population works in the informal sector, primarily in subsistence agriculture or local commercial ventures (Government of Australia, DFAT n.d.c).

Samoa's economy faces significant risks from climate change in its key sectors of agriculture and tourism. Tourism, which contributes 20% to gross domestic product (GDP) relies heavily on marine and terrestrial resources, as well as infrastructure such as airports and hotels (International Monetary Fund [IMF] 2022). The agriculture sector in Samoa uses largely traditional farming practices and crop types. This makes both sectors extremely vulnerable to climate change impacts, such as tropical cyclones, coastal erosion, and droughts (Government of Australia, DFAT 2023a).

Samoa's economic landscape is recovering from a prolonged period of negative growth stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2023). The resurgence, driven by the reopening of international borders, development activities, and a boost in tourism, has translated into positive employment trends (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2023). Key sectors, especially those most affected by the pandemic, have experienced substantial growth (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2023). Industries experiencing the most growth in 2023 compared to the previous year include accommodation (88.3%), education (57.9%), other services (12.5%), restaurants (8.9%), and public administration (8.6%). This broad-based growth suggests a diverse economic recovery (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2023).

ii. Women's Economic Participation

The labor force participation rate of women in 2022 was 44%, and of men, it was 70% (World Bank n.d.c; World Bank n.d.k). In Samoa, women bear the primary responsibility for managing

households and meeting familial, communal, and church expectations. Even unmarried women shoulder responsibilities within their families and communities. The tightly woven fabric of Samoan society imposes numerous societal obligations, particularly toward the village and church. Women actively engage in various facets of village life, participating in both extended family activities and village-wide structures, such as women's committees, where participation is often expected from all adult women in certain villages (Government of Samoa n.d.).

Women comprise 41% of the formal workforce overall but represent 74% of the public service (Samoa Public Service Commission 2021). Women hold 62.5% of executive positions in the public service and comprise the majority of public sector employees at all salary classification levels (Samoa Public Service Commission 2021).

In the private sector, industries like electricity, water, food, manufacturing, and construction, where women are a minority, actually show the highest wages for women (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2023). Women's representation in sectors like business services has also increased over the last couple of years, showcasing a positive shift in traditionally male-dominated fields (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2023).

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

Samoa ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1992 but has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] n.d.). Article 15 of Samoa's Constitution guarantees equality and equal protection under the law, and prohibits discrimination based on descent, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, social origin, place of birth, or family status (UN Women 2022e). The article explicitly states that measures to advance the rights of women and other vulnerable groups are not prohibited under this article (UN Women 2022f).

The National Policy on Gender Equality and Rights of Women and Girls, 2021–2031 is aligned with commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals, CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Pacific Platform for Advancing Gender Equality and the Rights of Women (Government of Samoa, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development 2021). It outlines seven strategic policy priorities, including economic development, and leadership and decision-making.

The policy commits the government to increase the economic empowerment of women by addressing the burden of unpaid labor, extending maternity leave provisions, and increasing access to affordable childcare. Under the leadership and decision-making priority area, the policy also commits to increasing measures for affirmative action encouraging women to apply for director positions on boards in both the public and private sectors. Legislation regarding gender equality in Samoa is outlined in Table K.1.

The Social Development Division of the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development is responsible for implementing and monitoring gender equality commitments and policies. In the fiscal year 2024 budget (ending 30 June 2024), the biggest funding boost went to the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, with its budget going up by \$14 million.

The 2019–2020 Samoa Demographic and Health Survey–Multiple Indicator Cluster offers quantitative evidence of a shift in the dynamics surrounding violence against women and girls. The data reveal a significant rise in the percentage of women aged 15–49 seeking help after experiencing physical or sexual violence—from 11% in the 2017 Samoa Prevalence Family Safety

Survey to 41% in 2020 (Samoa Bureau of Statistics et al. 2020). This substantial increase in the reporting of domestic violence indicates a change to the long-standing “culture of silence” that had shrouded such incidents in secrecy. Traditionally perceived as private and shameful matters, domestic violence and violence against women are now being brought to light as more individuals find the courage to speak out (Roy 2019). The National Policy on Family Safety: Elimination of Family Violence, 2021–2031 aims to eliminate family violence through prevention, early intervention, and response (and is supported by the Family Safety Act 2013).

The Samoan proverb “*E au le ina’ilau a tama’itai*” encapsulates the invaluable contributions by women, that if they are given the opportunity, they excel and exemplify as leaders at all levels. Women in Samoa can hold the title of *matai* (chief), but customary practices in some villages continue to prohibit women from holding the title, and women who marry outside their home village may be excluded from decision-making in the home and community (UN Women 2022f).

Women are well represented in leadership roles in the public service. In 2021 and 2022, 59.1% of senior executives were women and 40.9% were men, maintaining the same pattern

Table K.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in Samoa

Enabling Legislation	In Place	Relevant Legislation
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✓	Labor and Employment Relations Act 2013, Secs. 2, 19 and 20
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✓	Labor and Employment Relations Act, Secs. 2 and 57
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✓	Labor and Employment Relations Act, Sec. 78(3)
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✓	Labor and Employment Relations Act, Sec. 78(3)
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Family Safety Act 2013
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ (12 weeks for public sector and 4 weeks for private sector)	Samoa Public Service Determinations (public) Labor and Employment Relations Act 2013, Sec. 44 (private)
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✗	Labor and Employment Relations Act 2013, Sec. 44
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✓ (5 days for both public and private sector employees)	Labor and Employment Relations Act 2013, Sec. 46
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✓	Labor and Employment Relations Act 2013, Sec. 45

Source: World Bank. Women, Business and the Law. Samoa. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/data/exploreeconomies/samoa/2023> (accessed 7 May 2024).

in gender from previous years where women are dominant at the senior executive level (Samoa Public Service Commission 2021; Samoa Public Service Commission 2023). At the chief executive officer (CEO) level, the number of women is higher than men, comprising eight women compared to three men of filled positions² (Samoa Public Service Commission 2023).

The representation of women in Samoan public governance roles has also witnessed a positive trend. In 2019, the Ministry of Public Enterprises disclosed that 23.7% of directors on public body boards were women, with 22% of directorship applications originating from women (UN Women 2022f). This figure increased to 29% in 2020 and further to 33% in 2021, attributed in part to a program aimed at expanding the pool of potential applicants through a director training initiative. Remarkably, 60% of women who applied in 2021 successfully secured positions as board members, marking a significant stride in gender diversity (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] and UN Women 2022). During 2022 two women also took up board chair roles on state-owned enterprises (SOEs). These appointments underscore a continued trend toward more gender-inclusive leadership in Samoa's public enterprises.

The 2021 elections marked a historic moment for Samoa, with the election of the first woman Prime Minister in the country and only the second woman to lead a government in the Pacific Islands region (Baker 2021). This was particularly meaningful in a region known for its historically low levels of women's political representation (Baker 2021). In 2023, three out of 12 cabinet ministers were women, holding the key positions of minister of women, community, and social development; minister of justice and courts administration; and the Prime Minister of Samoa.

Samoa achieved a second milestone in the 2021 elections by securing the highest number of women members of Parliament

ever in Samoan political history (World Bank n.d.n). Out of a total of 53 members, six (11%) are women (Government of Samoa n.d.). Notably, this accomplishment is the first of its kind since a change in the Constitution in 2013 (Pacific Women in Politics 2023a), which was amended to include a clause mandating that women constitute at least 10% of all members of Parliament (Keck 2022). While the success of the 2021 election in meeting the mandated 10% representation for women is a significant stride forward, Samoa still lags behind the global average for women's representation in legislative bodies, where women typically make up more than a quarter of all members (Inter-Parliamentary Union n.d.b).

iv. Women in Business Leadership

2024 data for Samoa is drawn from an expanded sample of 29 organizations comprised of 3 industry associations, 8 private non-listed companies, 16 SOEs, and also two branch offices. The sample provides a good basis for analyzing women's representation in business leadership. The findings show that Samoa has some of the highest rates of women's representation in business leadership among the Pacific countries included in this study, with women represented across all levels and organization types.

Samoa has among the highest representation of women directors in the Pacific region.

In 2024, 68% of boards have met or surpassed the threshold of having at least 30% representation of women and seven boards (28%) have achieved gender parity or greater (Table K.2). While 16% of organizations still have no representation of women on their boards, the number of boards that are recognizing the important role women have to play is indicative of a positive

² Out of 18 ministries, there were only 11 CEOs filled with six CEO positions under recruitment.

Table K.2 Board Composition in Samoa

Composition	2024 (n=25)	2021 (n=21)
Boards with no women directors	16%	10%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	16%	43%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	40%	24%
Boards with gender parity or greater	28%	24%

n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table K.3 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Samoa

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021–2024
	Samoa	Regional average	Samoa	Samoa (change)
Board Chairs	41% (n = 17)	12%	19% (n = 21)	↑
Deputy Chairs	50% (n = 2)	18%	100% (n = 1)	↓
Directors	36% (n = 128)	26%	33% (n = 122)	↑
Chief Executive Officers	45% (n = 20)	20%	25% (n = 20)	↑

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table K.4 Women's Representation in Leadership in Samoa by Organization Type, 2024

Leadership Role	Industry Associations	Private Non-Listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises	Branch Offices
Board Chairs	100% (n = 3)	0% (n = 1)	31% (n = 13)	...
Directors	50% (n = 14)	31% (n = 42)	36% (n = 72)	...
Chief Executive Officers	100% (n = 1)	50% (n = 2)	40% (n = 15)	50% (n = 2)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

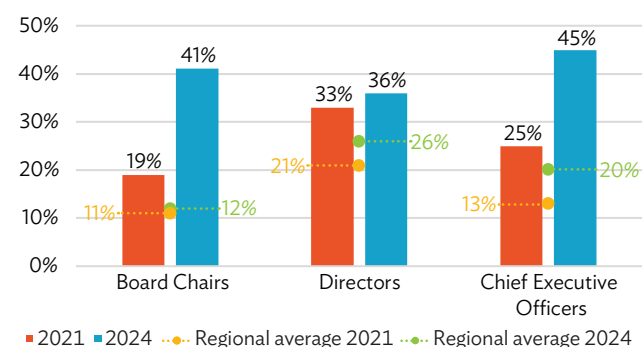
trend toward greater gender diversity and inclusion in Samoa's business landscape.

Women have attained the highest levels of leadership in Samoa, with significant representation as board chairs and CEOs.

Overall, women account for 36% of the directors in the Samoa dataset, well above the 26% regional average (Table K.3). The most impressive finding from the 2024 dataset is the high representation of women as board chairs, standing at 41%, well above the regional average of 12%. Women also hold 45% of the CEO positions in the sample, well above the regional average of 20%.

The high level of representation of women as board chairs and CEOs has increased substantially since 2021.

There have been substantial increases in the number of women board chairs and CEOs in Samoa from 2021 to 2024. Women held 19% of board chair positions in 2021, increasing to 41% in 2024 (Figure K.1). There was a similar increase for CEOs, with the proportion of women increasing from 25% in 2021 to 45% in 2024.

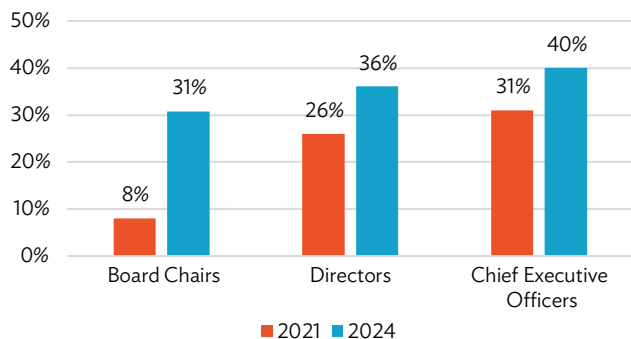
Figure K.1 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Samoa 2021 and 2024

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Women in Samoa are attaining leadership roles across all organization types.

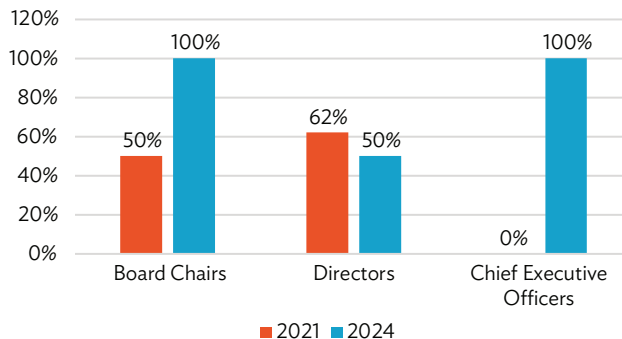
The highest proportion of women directors in Samoa are in industry associations, where women hold 50% of director roles, and SOEs, where women hold 36% (Table K.4). Private non-listed companies also show potential for women in leadership,

Figure K.2 Women's Representation in State-owned Enterprise Leadership in Samoa, 2021 and 2024



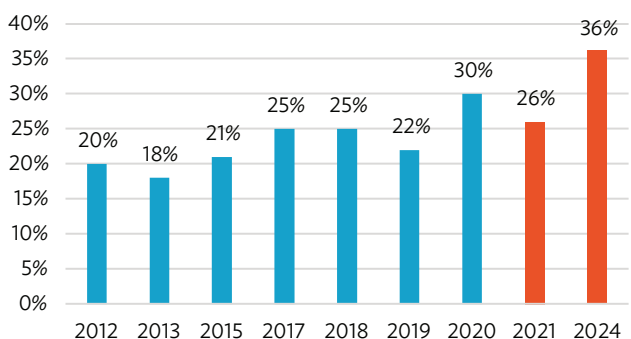
Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Figure K.4 Women's Representation in Industry Association Leadership in Samoa, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Figure K.3 Women Directors on State-Owned Enterprise Boards in Samoa, 2012–2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (for 2012–2020 data).

as they offer one-third of director opportunities in Samoa. In 2024, 31% of director positions are held by women out of the 42 positions available. Though a small portion of the sample, women accounted for half of the CEOs of branch offices in Samoa. Across all organization types, women's representation at the CEO level is strong, with 45% of CEO roles held by women. This indicates a relatively strong presence of women in senior executive positions in Samoa regardless of the organization type.

Women's representation in SOE leadership is improving.

The data from 2021 to 2024 show a significant improvement in women's representation in leadership roles SOEs in Samoa (Figure K.2). In 2021, women held 8% of SOE board chair positions, 26% of SOE director positions, and 31% of SOE CEO

roles. As of 2024, these figures have increased significantly, with women holding 31% of board chair positions, 36% of director positions, and 40% of CEO roles in SOEs (Figure K.2). The notable increase in the representation of women as board chairs suggests a growing acceptance and recognition of women's leadership capabilities within SOEs in Samoa.

A review of the data on women's representation on SOE boards since 2012 shows some volatility, making it challenging to identify a clear and consistent trend in women's representation (Figure K.3). However, the 36% rate in 2024 is the highest rate achieved over the last 12 years.

Women's representation in leadership is highest in Samoa's industry associations.

In Samoa, women's representation in leadership roles is highest within industry associations compared to other types of organizations, although the size of the sample and the amount of data available is limited and should be interpreted accordingly. Data from the 2024 sample indicate that women hold half of all director positions and all three board chair roles in industry associations. Additionally, the proportion of women serving as board chairs and CEOs in the 2024 sample is higher than in 2021, suggesting a positive trend toward greater representation of women in leadership over time (Figure K.4).

L. SOLOMON ISLANDS

i. Economic Context

Solomon Islands comprises a double chain of volcanic islands and coral atolls in Melanesia, in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. With an estimated population of 722,392 in 2022 (ADB n.d.), it remains one of the Pacific's most economically challenged nations (Government of Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT] n.d.d). It is primarily dependent on subsistence and cash crop agriculture (Government of Australia, DFAT n.d.d) and the service sector is a key employer, contributing almost half of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank n.d.o). The major industries are timber, seafood, cocoa, and palm oil.

In the 2021 World Risk Report (Aleksandrova, Balasko, and Kaltenborn 2021), Solomon Islands has the second-highest disaster risk globally, exceeded only by Vanuatu. Solomon Islands was categorized as having very high exposure, susceptibility, and lack of adaptive capacities, as well as having high vulnerability and lack of coping capacities.

After 3 years of economic contraction because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Solomon Islands' economy rebounded with growth of 2.5% in 2023 as economic activity normalized following COVID-19, boosted by construction for the 2023 Pacific Games (ADB 2024). Fishing and logging outputs also increased in 2023 and the country welcomed 26,030 international visitors, a 255% increase from 2022 (ADB 2024) and only slightly below the pre-pandemic level of 28,930 in 2019 (Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative [PSDI] 2021). Remittances from seasonal work programs are expected to grow as the programs expand. The Government of Solomon Islands expects the number of workers participating in these programs to grow from 6,800 in 2023 to up to 16,000 in 2028. In total, remittances contributed \$85 million to the economy in 2023 (ADB 2024).

ii. Women's Economic Participation

Labor force participation in Solomon Islands is close to gender parity, with a female-to-male ratio of 95.9% as of 2023 (Pacific Community, Statistics for Development Division n.d.). The labor force participation rate is 82.7% among women and 86.2% among men (World Bank n.d.p). These rates have remained steady since at least the 1990s (World Bank n.d.p). However, in paid employment, there are two men for every woman earning monetary compensation for their labor, according to the most recent census in 2019 (Government of Solomon Islands 2019).

According to that census, there are more women (55.6%) than men (44.4%) engaged in unpaid work. Men dominate in semiskilled jobs such as craft, trade, and machine operation, and in high-skilled occupations such as professional jobs. In contrast, women are outnumbered in low-skilled elementary occupations (66.4%), with housework (61.3%) being the predominant occupation for women (Government of Solomon Islands 2019). Solomon Islands is scheduled to conduct its next labor force survey in 2026, which will provide updated insights into the dynamics of women's economic participation in the country.

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

Solomon Islands has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Optional Protocol (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] n.d.), emphasizing the commitment to individual rights and freedoms as outlined in the 1978 Constitution (UN Women 2022f). Regionally, Solomon Islands has also committed to the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. National commitments include the Family Protection Act, 2014; National Development Strategy, 2016–2035; National Policy on Eliminating Violence against Women, 2016–2020; Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan, 2017–2021; and National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy, 2016–2020. The National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls, 2020–2023 reflects Solomon Islands' commitment to improving women's economic participation. The strategy aims to improve women and girls' access and control over economic resources through strategic areas like gender mainstreaming in the resources sector, financial inclusion, enterprise development, legislation, and institutional strengthening (Government of Solomon Islands 2020). Legislation regarding gender equality in Solomon Islands is outlined in Table L.1.

However, the pluralistic legal system, influenced by customary law operating at the national and local levels, limits women's opportunities. For example, in some instances, customary law dictates women's exclusion from decision-making regarding land rights, limiting women's equal opportunity to acquire land (UN Women 2022g). Domestic violence remains a pressing concern in Solomon Islands. Despite commendable strides in increasing community awareness, enforcement of measures against domestic violence continues to lag the escalating need for intervention (United Nations Development Programme

Table L.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in Solomon Islands

Enabling Legislation	In Place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Family Protection Act 2014
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ 12 weeks for public sector (full pay) 12 weeks for private sector (25% pay)	Labour Act, 1996 Sec. 42
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✗	Labour Act 1996, Sec. 42
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located

Source: World Bank. Women, Business and the Law. Solomon Islands. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/data/exploreconomies/solomonislands/2023> (accessed 1 May 2024).

[UNDP] 2019). Domestic violence is often exacerbated by consumption of alcohol and *kwaso* (illegal homemade brew), amplifying the complexity of the problem (UNDP 2019). UNDP found that while 32% of participants reported domestic violence incidents immediately to police, others first sought assistance from local figures such as the village chief, family, or church leaders (UNDP 2019). Women were more likely to report incidents to the police than men, fearing the repercussions to their family of reporting chiefs, elders, and even church pastors because they are men (UNDP 2019).

Only three of the 50 parliamentary seats are held by women (6% of seats). This represents a decrease in the number of women members of Parliament from four (8%) prior to the April 2024 general election. The country's first-past-the-post system makes it challenging for women to be elected (Pacific Women in Politics n.d.). Following the 2010 elections, the new government indicated in its policy statement that it would explore options for women's reserved seats as part of a broader review of electoral boundaries (Pacific Women in Politics n.d.). In 2023, the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission launched the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy, 2022–2024 and Action Plan, which aims to uphold the government's commitment to enhance gender equality and social inclusion in elections (UNDP Pacific Office 2023). Despite these commitments, only 6% of candidates for the 2024 election

were women, down from the 2019 elections (Solomon Islands Electoral Commission n.d.).

iv. Women in Business Leadership

The sample for Solomon Islands includes data from 38 organizations, featuring a mix of 9 state-owned enterprises (SOEs), 15 private non-listed companies, 5 industry associations, and 9 branch offices. This represents an increase from the 30 organizations in the 2021 sample and a change in composition, as branch offices were not previously included. The 2024 data indicate persistently low levels of women in all areas of business leadership, particularly among SOEs and private non-listed companies.

Just under half of Solomon Islands boards have no women directors.

Despite national policies toward gender equality and women's economic empowerment, there is still a significant gender disparity in board representation. Although boards have increased their representation of women since 2021, a substantial number of boards (45%) still have no women directors, 28% have more than 0% but fewer than 30% women directors, and only 27% have at least 30% women (Table L.2).

Table L.2 Board Composition in Solomon Islands

Composition	2024 (n = 29)	2021 (n = 30)
Boards with no women directors	45%	57%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	28%	37%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	17%	3%
Boards with gender parity or greater	10%	3%

n = number (sample size).

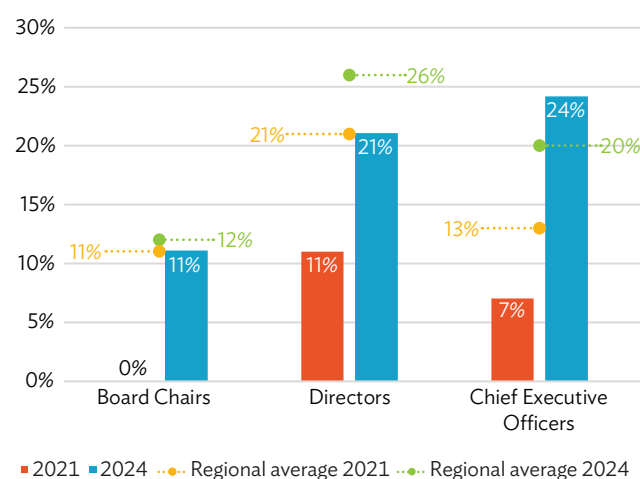
Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table L.3 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Solomon Islands

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021–2024
	Solomon Islands	Regional Average	Solomon Islands	Solomon Islands (change)
Board Chairs	11% (n = 27)	12%	0% (n = 19)	↑
Deputy Chairs	38% (n = 13)	18%	33% (n = 6)	↑
Directors	21% (n = 189)	26%	11% (n = 172)	↑
Chief Executive Officers	24% (n = 34)	20%	7% (n = 15)	↑

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Figure L.1 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Solomon Islands, 2021 and 2024

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

There is a strong pipeline of women ready for board chair roles.

While the proportion of women in board director positions in Solomon Islands is 21%, below the regional average of 26%, the representation of women as board chairs is just under the regional average of 12% (Table L.3). However, there is a significantly higher proportion of women as deputy chairs in Solomon Islands, accounting for 38% compared to the regional average of 18%. This suggests a strong pipeline of women ready for board chair roles in the future.

Women's representation as CEOs surpasses the regional average.

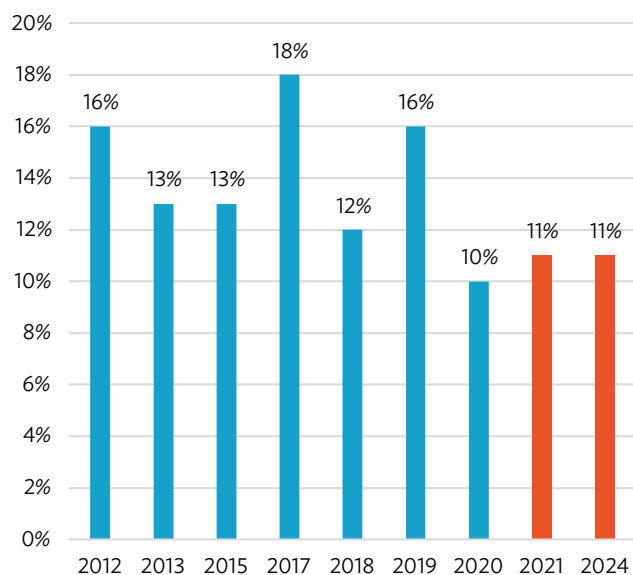
Another positive signal is the higher-than-average representation of women as chief executive officers (CEOs) in Solomon Islands. Women account for 24% of CEOs in Solomon Islands, exceeding the regional average of 20%. This is a significant increase from 2021, when only 7% of CEOs in Solomon Islands were women (Figure L.1). This reflects women's higher representation as CEOs in industry associations

Table L.4 Women’s Representation in Leadership in Solomon Islands by Organization Type

Leadership Role	Industry Associations	Private Non-Listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises	Branch Offices
Board Chairs	60% (n = 5)	0% (n = 13)	0% (n = 9)	...
Directors	55% (n = 40)	12% (n = 94)	11% (n = 55)	...
Chief Executive Officers	100% (n = 4)	7% (n = 14)	0% (n = 7)	33% (n = 9)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).
 Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

Figure L.2 Women Directors on State-Owned Enterprise Boards in Solomon Islands, 2012-2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership*. (for 2021 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (for 2012–2020 data).

and the inclusion of branch offices of regional and international organizations in the 2024 sample.

There has also been a significant uplift in the representation of women on boards.

Women’s representation as both directors and board chairs has improved since 2021. The representation of women as directors rose from 11% in 2021 to 21% in 2024. In the 2021 sample, no women were serving as board chairs, but in 2024 their representation is 12%.

Industry associations achieved gender parity in leadership in 2024.

In Solomon Islands, women are significantly better represented in industry associations compared to private non-listed companies and SOEs. Industry associations stand out as the only organizations in the 2024 sample to have achieved gender parity for board directors. They also have 100% of CEOs as women and 60% of board chairs as women (Table L.4). In contrast, women are poorly represented in private non-listed companies and SOEs, with the representation of women at each leadership level falling well below regional averages.

Branch offices in Solomon Islands provide more opportunities for women to take on senior executive positions.

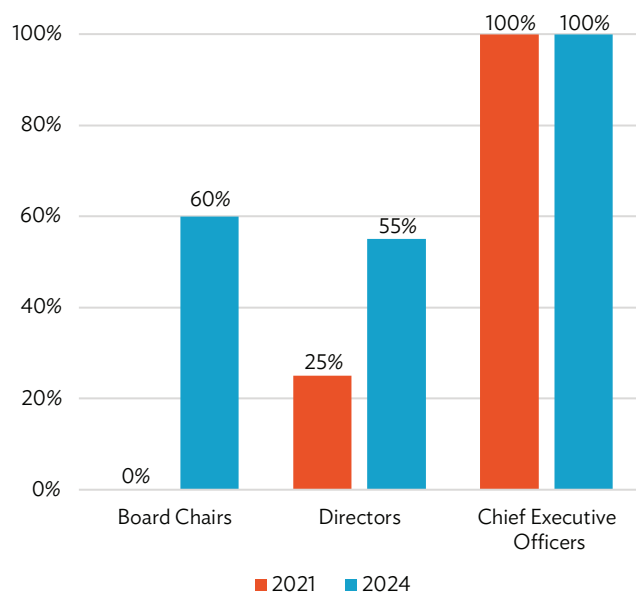
When looking at CEO positions across organization types, it is significant to note that no SOEs and only one private non-listed company has a woman CEO, compared to 33% of CEO roles in branch offices held by women. The disparity between women’s leadership as CEOs for local private non-listed companies (0%) and branch offices (33%) suggests that global standards and diversity initiatives may be playing a role in promoting gender diversity in leadership positions.

It is notable that there are no women board chairs of any SOE or private non-listed company in the 2024 dataset. The only three women board chairs in the Solomon Islands dataset are all leading industry associations.

Women’s representation on SOE boards remains stubbornly low.

There has been no change in the representation of women in leadership roles in SOEs from 2021 to 2024. The data show that in both years, there were no women serving as either board chairs or CEOs in SOEs. The representation of women as directors also remains unchanged at 11% (Figure L.2). These

Figure L.3 Women’s Representation in Industry Association Leadership in Solomon Islands, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

figures indicate a lack of progress in promoting gender diversity and inclusion in senior leadership positions within SOEs.

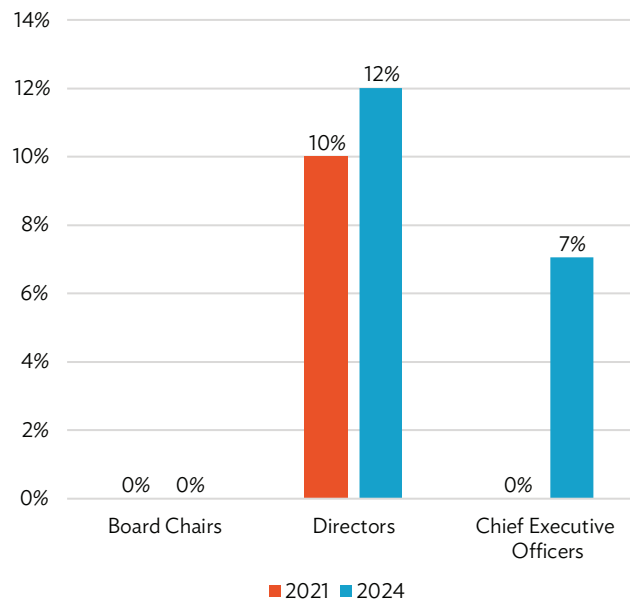
There is a positive trend toward greater gender diversity and inclusion in leadership positions within industry associations in Solomon Islands.

In both 2021 and 2024, 100% of CEOs in industry associations were women, revealing the strong presence of women in the top leadership roles of these organizations. This trend is also reflected in the leadership of industry association boards, with 60% of board chairs being women in 2024, up from none in 2021 (Figure L.3). Additionally, the representation of women as industry association directors increased substantially from 25% in 2021 to 55% in 2024. These figures suggest a positive shift toward gender parity and greater representation of women in leadership roles within industry associations in Solomon Islands.

Women’s leadership in private companies is lagging.

The data for private non-listed companies in Solomon Islands show a less favorable picture for gender diversity and inclusion in leadership positions. Of the 14 CEO positions in private non-listed companies in the 2024 dataset, only one is a woman

Figure L.4 Women’s Representation in Private Non-Listed Organization Leadership in Solomon Islands, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

(7%), a slight increase from no women CEOs in 2021. There are no woman board chairs or deputy chairs in these organizations (Table L.4). The representation of women as directors increased slightly from 10% in 2021 to 12% in 2024, which, while an improvement, still falls below the regional average (26%) and well below the 30% threshold (Figure L.4).

M. TONGA

i. Economic Context

Tonga is a constitutional monarchy situated in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, comprising 171 islands grouped into three main clusters, with only 45 inhabited. Most of the population, estimated at 100,085 in 2022 (ADB n.d.), resides on the main island of Tongatapu.

Tonga's small economy is driven primarily by remittances, tourism, agriculture, and foreign aid. Tongans working or living abroad in the United States (US) are the primary source of remittances, followed by New Zealand and Australia (Government of Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT] n.d.e). Economic growth is also supported by construction projects, largely financed by donor loans and grants. Overseas development assistance forms another important aspect of the Tonga economy (Government of Australia, DFAT n.d.e).

Natural disasters pose a significant threat to Tonga, affecting more than 40% of the population in a typical disaster year, resulting in economic losses equivalent to 14% of gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank n.d.q). Climate change is expected to exacerbate these challenges (World Bank n.d.q). The COVID-19 pandemic led to a recession, impacting spending, remittances, and tourism (Government of Australia, DFAT 2020) and the economy is still recovering from the January 2022 Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption and tsunami. However, the economy rebounded in 2023, growing by 2.8% after 2 years of contraction (ADB 2024). This was largely because of the resumption of tourism and public investment projects (ADB 2024). Visitor arrivals remain at less than 70% of pre-pandemic levels and are not expected to grow in the short term, because of limited flight connections and low accommodation supply (ADB 2024). Skilled labor supply shortages also constrain economic growth (ADB 2024).

ii. Women's Economic Participation

In Tonga, the modeled labor force participation rate was 42.3% among women and 65.1% among men (World Bank n.d.a). Although women's labor force participation has increased since 1990, the gender gap persists (World Bank n.d.a). While the number of women in formal employment over the last 35 years has increased almost fourfold, most are still employed in unskilled menial work or subordinate positions and are consequently paid at the lower end of the scale. There has been little shift in the types of occupations that men and women participate in

(Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review 2023b). The Tonga Labour Mobility Policy, initiated on 4 February 2021, aims to increase women's participation in labor mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand, spanning horticulture, meat processing, construction, tourism, and hospitality (Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review 2023a).

The 2021 Census of Population and Housing found that 25.75% of all households are headed by women (Tonga Statistics Department 2022). Tongan ethnic origin households are more likely to be headed by women than those of non-Tongan ethnic origin (Tonga Statistics Department 2022).

The 2018 Tonga Labour Force Survey highlighted women's underrepresentation in agriculture, forestry, and fishery (Government of Tonga 2019), possibly influenced by traditional attitudes (Tonga Civil Society Organisation, Human Rights Task Force 2022). Women are more likely than men to be employers and professionals but are underrepresented in the construction, transportation, and storage industries (Government of Tonga 2019). The most common occupation among women is craft and related trades, whereas for men it is agriculture, forestry, and fishery (Government of Tonga 2019). The results of the 2023 Tonga Labour Force Survey are anticipated to provide updated insights, when available.

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

Tonga's Constitution prohibits discrimination based on class, religion, and race but does not explicitly address sex or gender discrimination (Tonga Civil Society Organisation, Human Rights Task Force 2022). Ratification of major international human rights treaties is limited (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] n.d.). Despite this, efforts have been made to integrate the objectives of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) into national law (Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review 2023a).

Tonga has long recognized the importance of promoting gender equality to achieve sustainable development outcomes. The Women's Affairs Division is a government agency within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, responsible for coordinating, monitoring, and providing advisory services to the development of gender and gender equality in Tonga.

The Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality Tonga National Policy and Strategic Plan of Action, 2019–2025 outlines a set of priorities and guidelines for the government and civil society to improve capacity to address gender issues and integrate a gender perspective in the process of developing laws, policies, and programs (Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review 2023a). The policy is also consistent with Tonga’s Strategic Development Framework, 2015–2025, national outcome 3 for a more inclusive sustainable and empowering human development with gender equality. Legislation regarding gender equality in Tonga is outlined in Table M.1.

Women’s political representation in Tonga is limited, with only 3.7% of seats in the national Parliament held by women (World Bank 2023v). Although most of those turning out to vote at all general elections since 2005 have been women, research shows that deeply entrenched perceptions of leadership have led to women’s poor electoral success (Guttenbeil-Likiliki 2021). Many people still believe that decision-making and leadership are better left to men, while women should be responsible for housework and child-rearing (Guttenbeil-Likiliki 2021). Women are excluded from certain campaign and decision-making spaces, including *kapulu* (club where kava is

drunk), ultimately limiting their capacity to be successful leaders (Tausisila and Palmieri 2022).

There is little official support for women workers, particularly in the private sector (Tonga Civil Society Organisation, Human Rights Task Force 2022). Provisions for maternity and paternity leave do not apply equally to employees in the private and public sectors (Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review 2023a). Although the Public Service Commission allows civil servants 3 months maternity leave and 5 days paternity leave, challenges persist where many employees are only offered up to 1 month maternity leave (Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review 2023a). In March 2021, the cabinet approved the Sexual Harassment Policy of Tonga for 20 government ministries under its schedule 1 of ministries and agencies. However, several agencies are excluded, including the Tonga Police, military, legislative offices, ministers, and others (Tonga Civil Society Organisation, Human Rights Task Force 2022), and the policy does not apply to the private sector (Government of Tonga 2021).

Table M.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in Tonga

Enabling legislation	In place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located ^a
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Family Protection Act, 2020 (Revised)
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ 12 weeks for public sector employees)	Public Services Policy Manual 2016
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✓ (5 days for public sector employees)	Public Services Policy Manual 2016
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located

^a The Employment Relations Bill (2020) includes provisions on sexual harassment and other provisions relating to women’s rights in employment but has not been passed by parliament and may be subject to considerable review or be rejected.

Source: World Bank. Women, Business and the Law. Tonga. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/data/exploreeconomies/tonga/2023> (accessed 1 May 2024).

iv. Women in Business Leadership

The 2024 sample for Tonga includes 30 organizations, almost doubling the 2021 sample. It includes more state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (13) and considerably more private non-listed companies (eight) than the 2021 sample. It also includes three industry associations and six branch offices, which were not in the 2021 sample, and is likely to be a more accurate representation of the private sector. Overall, the data highlights the underrepresentation of women on boards in Tonga, as well as in senior executive positions.

Gender diversity in Tongan boardrooms is improving, but most boards still have fewer than 30% women directors.

Despite some improvement, most boards in Tonga still have fewer than 30% women directors, with 31% of boards lacking any women directors in the 2024 sample (Table M.2). While there has been progress since 2021, with more boards achieving at least 30% women directors, only two out of 16 organizations in the sample (13%) have achieved gender balance on their boards.

Women continue to be underrepresented in business leadership roles.

The data from 2024 shows that women account for only 19% of the 86 directors in the dataset, below the regional average of 26% (Table M.3). While women in Tonga are better represented in senior executive roles compared to regional averages, with six women chief executive officers (CEOs) (21% of the 29 CEO positions included in the Tonga sample, compared to the regional average of 20%), there is still progress to be made.

Of the 16 boards examined in Tonga, only two have women board chairs, reflecting 13% of all board chairs, above the regional average of 12%. This highlights the need for continued efforts to promote gender diversity and equality in leadership positions in Tonga.

Women's representation as board directors has remained steady.

The 2024 data show that the overall proportion of women directors on boards in Tonga remains unchanged at 19%, this

Table M.2 Board Composition in Tonga

Composition	2024 (n = 16)	2021 (n = 9)
Boards with no women directors	31%	22%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	38%	56%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	19%	11%
Boards with gender parity or greater	13%	11%

n = number (sample size).

Source: 2024: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset. 2021: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership*. Sydney.

Table M.3 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Tonga

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021-2024
	Tonga	Regional Average	Tonga	Tonga (change)
Board Chairs	13% (n = 16)	12%	10% (n = 10)	↑
Deputy Chairs	13% (n = 15)	18%	17% (n = 6)	↓
Directors	19% (n = 86)	26%	19% (n = 52)	No change.
Chief Executive Officers	21% (n = 29)	20%	18% (n = 17)	↑

n = number (sample size).

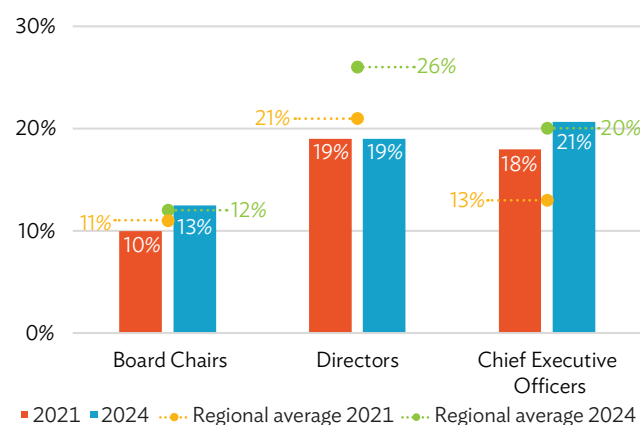
Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table M.4 Women’s Representation in Leadership in Tonga by Organization Type

Role	Industry Associations	Private Non-Listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises	Branch Offices
Board Chairs	67% (n = 3)	0% (n = 8)	0% (n = 5)	...
Directors	44% (n = 16)	19% (n = 37)	6% (n = 33)	...
Chief Executive Officers	0% (n = 3)	29% (n = 7)	15% (n = 13)	33% (n = 6)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).
 Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

Figure M.1 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Tonga, 2021 and 2024



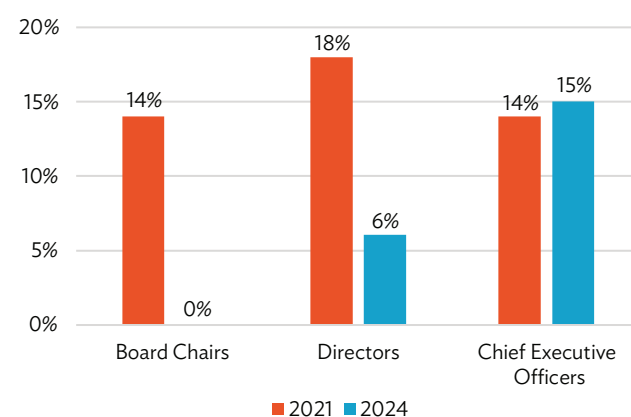
Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

is despite a significant drop in the representation of women on SOE boards. This can be largely attributed to an increase in the availability of director data for industry associations in the 2024 sample. The 2024 data shows that there has been a slight increase in the proportion of women represented as board chairs and CEOs (Figure M.1). Nonetheless, the data shows that while some women are attaining leadership roles at the highest levels, the proportion of women holding director positions in Tonga sits below the regional average (26%).

Women are well represented on industry association boards.

The data from Tonga reveal a mixed landscape for women in leadership positions. Women are well represented on the boards of industry associations, accounting for 44% of all director roles (Table M.4). However, women’s presence is much lower on the boards of private non-listed companies,

Figure M.2 Women’s Representation in State-Owned Enterprise Leadership in Tonga, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

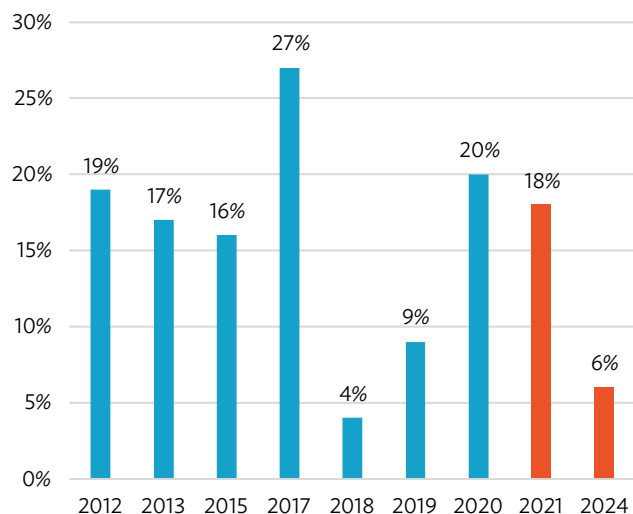
accounting for only 19% of directors, and only 6% of directors on SOE boards. Similarly, while two out of three (67%) board chairs of industry associations are women, there are no women board chairs of private non-listed companies or SOEs.

When looking at senior executive positions, the six women holding CEO positions are distributed across different organization types, suggesting that women are accessing top leadership positions and being recognized for their leadership abilities in the different organizational structures.

Women’s representation on SOE boards continues to fluctuate.

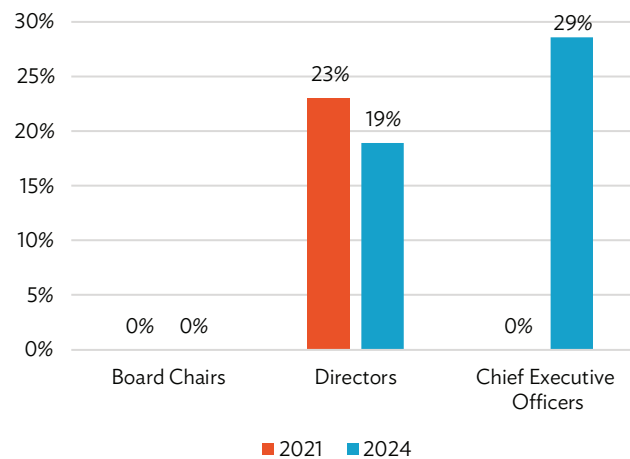
The data show a significant drop from 18% in 2021 to 6% in 2024 (Figure M.2). This decline is stark, with just two director roles held by women on SOEs in Tonga, compared to 31 roles held by men. It should be noted that there is a shared board

Figure M.3 Women Directors on State-Owned Enterprise Boards in Tonga, 2012–2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (for 2012–2020 data).

Figure M.4 Women’s Representation in Private Non-Listed Company Leadership in Tonga, 2021 and 2024



Note: Comparison of industry association leadership data between the 2021 and 2024 dataset is not possible because of limited data available in 2021.

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

system in Tonga’s SOEs that reduces the overall number of director positions compared to other countries. There are also no women board chairs of SOEs in 2024, while there were 14% in 2021.

There has been great fluctuation in women’s representation on SOE boards, with a peak in 2017, followed by a steep drop in 2018 (Figure M.3) This disparity underscores the need for targeted efforts to increase women’s representation in SOE leadership roles in a more systematic and way.

Private non-listed companies are also lagging in their appointment of women directors and board chairs.

Private non-listed companies in Tonga are also falling behind in achieving gender balance for directors and board chairs. The sample size and composition of private non-listed companies have changed and the number of organizations increased significantly from just two in 2021 to eight in 2024. Therefore, comparisons between years should be approached with caution. However, the data indicate that the proportion of women directors decreased over this larger sample of companies, while the proportion of women CEOs increased (Figure M.4).

N. TUVALU

i. Economic Context

Tuvalu comprises nine coral islands in the west-central Pacific Ocean, including atolls and reef islands. In 2022, the estimated population was 9,938 (Asian Development Bank [ADB] n.d.), with Funafuti, the capital city, hosting about half of the population (Government of Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT] n.d.f). Of the total population, 26.3% was estimated to be below the poverty line in 2010 (World Bank n.d.r). About 66.2% of the population resides in urban areas (World Bank n.d.r). Many residents work abroad on short-term contracts or live abroad permanently. Remittances from Tuvaluans living outside Tuvalu make up as much as 30% of the gross national income (World Bank 2021c). Tuvalu is part of the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme, which provides overseas work opportunities for Tuvalu citizens (DFAT n.d.f).

Tuvaluans live in communal households as part of an extended family setting, and like on many Pacific islands, caring for and supporting the community's livelihoods is part of Tuvaluan culture. Most Tuvaluans live in villages of a few hundred people and engage in traditional activities, including fishing and gardening, although agricultural activity is constrained by porous soil (Government of Tuvalu, Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment, Agriculture and Lands 2007). With few natural resources other than fish, economic activity is dominated by the public sector. Economic performance is driven by projects funded by development partners, including capital expenditure on infrastructure such as airports, ports, roads, and electricity. Subsistence farming and remittances, along with revenue sources like copra exports, stamp sales, fees from foreign fishing fleets, and marketing of Tuvalu's internet domain name ".tv" are the other drivers of the economy (DFAT n.d.f). Because of its small domestic market and remoteness, Tuvalu increasingly depends on imports for food, fuel, and manufactured goods.

Tuvalu experienced significant economic fallout because of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in delays in climate adaptation projects and fiscal pressures (Cerdeiro, Merga, and Redl 2023). As of April 2024, economic activity had revived, particularly in construction, as infrastructure projects resume, trade, and hospitality (ADB 2024). Overall revenue increased by 1.5% in 2023, with development partner grants rising by 52.8% (ADB 2024). However, expenditure increased by 8.4% and the fiscal balance is expected to move into deficit by 2025.

Tuvalu confronts existential threats because of being comprised of low-lying and narrow coral atolls, with the entirety of its

territory situated less than 5 meters above sea level. It is at significant risk of climate change impacts, with permanent inundation and wave-driven flooding likely to make many of its low-lying islands uninhabitable within this century (World Bank 2021c). In November 2023, Tuvalu signed an agreement with Australia, allowing Tuvaluan residents facing climate change-induced displacement to legally reside in Australia (Dziedzic and Sas 2023). This agreement also grants Australia effective veto power over Tuvalu's security arrangements with other nations (Dziedzic and Sas 2023).

The Government of Tuvalu aims for macro-fiscal stability, increased economic and trade integration, improved public financial management, strengthened financial services, and enhanced climate and disaster resilience. The Tuvalu Trust Fund is a sovereign wealth fund established in 1987 to ensure long-term financial viability through an international agreement with Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Despite the Tuvalu Trust Fund being valued at A\$202.8 million in 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has flagged Tuvalu as being at high risk for debt distress.

ii. Women's Economic Participation

Tuvalu's labor force participation rate has been low compared to global and Pacific regional rates, and was at 48.5% in 2017 (World Bank n.d.l). This could be attributed to insufficient job opportunities and emigration.

As in other Pacific island countries, Tuvalu's private sector mostly comprises microenterprises owned by individuals or families. Most Tuvaluans are engaged in subsistence fishing (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO] 2018). Men and women traditionally have separate roles: men fish from canoes or boats, while women glean and collect on the reef flats (FAO 2018). Male-headed households are more likely to be engaged in growing food crops (Government of Tuvalu, Central Statistics Division 2021). The 2017 Population and Housing Census found that men considerably outnumber women in agriculture, forestry, fishing, manufacturing, construction, transportation, and storage (Government of Tuvalu, Central Statistics Division 2021).

According to the 2017 Population and Housing Census, 28.2% of households are female headed (Government of Tuvalu, Central Statistics Division 2021). In some outer islands, women are more involved in tasks such as net fishing, crab collection, shell collecting, and night fishing using knives (FAO 2018). Of people over the age of 15, 30% are economically inactive and

undertaking full-time home duties (Government of Tuvalu, Central Statistics Division 2017).

The labor force participation rate in 2017 was 58.5% for men and 39.5% for women (Government of Tuvalu, Central Statistics Division 2017). This 19-percentage point gap in the labor force participation rate between women and men is likely attributed to the cultural expectation for women to take on domestic responsibilities. However, it is not clear why the participation of women in the labor force, both formal and informal, declined from 51% in 2012 to about 40% in 2017.

The Development Bank of Tuvalu acknowledges that women are disadvantaged with respect to starting a business because of bank loan requirements depending on the husband's salary as loan security (International Organization for Migration [IOM] Fiji, 2021). Because of cultural land ownership and inheritance practices in Tuvalu, women cannot offer land as financing collateral.

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

Tuvalu has ratified Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) but has yet to

ratify the Optional Protocol (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] n.d). The Constitution guarantees that every person in Tuvalu is entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms regardless of race, place of origin, political opinions, color, religious beliefs or lack thereof, or sex (Government of Tuvalu 2008). However, article 27, part 1 of the Constitution does not specify sex or gender as a relevant ground under the definition of discrimination (Government of Tuvalu 2008). In 2015, the CEDAW Committee highlighted that sex-discriminatory provisions remained in the Constitution, the Penal Code of 1978, the Native Lands Act of 1956, the Marriage Act (Cap. 29), the Tuvalu Lands Code of 1962, the Falekaupule Act of 1997, and the Employment Act of 1966 (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women 2015). Legislation regarding gender equality in Tuvalu is outlined in Table N.1.

The Constitution was revised in 2023. However, the proposal to amend the Constitution to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, or gender identity was unsuccessful. The reason cited by opponents was that it would conflict with Tuvaluan culture and values relating to land rights and marriage (ADB 2023b) Under existing legislation, customary laws, and

Table N.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in Tuvalu

Enabling Legislation	In Place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✓	Labour and Employment Relations Act 2017, Sec. 50(2)(b)
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✓	Labour and Employment Relations Act 2017, Sec. 53
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✗	No applicable provisions could be located
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✓	Labour and Employment Relations Act 2017, Sec. 54
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act 2014; Family Protection and Domestic Violence (Amendment) Act 2015
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ (12 weeks for public and private sector employees)	Labour and Employment Relations Act 2017, Sec. 30
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✗	Labour and Employment Relations Act 2017, Sec. 30(2)
Is there paid paternity leave available to fathers?	✓ (10 days for public and private sector employees)	Labour and Employment Relations Act 2017, Sec. 32
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✓	Labour and Employment Relations Act 2017, Sec. 50(2)(b)

Sources: Government of Tuvalu. 2014. *Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act 2014*; Government of Tuvalu. 2015. *Family Protection and Domestic Violence (Amendment) Act 2015*; and Government of Tuvalu. 2017. *Labour and Employment Relations Act 2017*.

cultural systems, women are not guaranteed equal rights to land ownership (UN Women 2022h). Many Tuvaluans believe that women should not inherit land because they will acquire rights to their husbands' land (UN Women 2022h).

Tuvalu has signed the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (UN Women 2022h). It also developed the Tuvalu National Gender Policy, which provided a framework to operationalize the government's commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment over a 5-year period from 2014–2019 (Government of Tuvalu n.d.). In 2019, Tuvalu held its first National Women and Youth Forum bringing together 70 women and youth leaders in Funafuti. The forum culminated in the development of a series of recommendations on the economic empowerment of women and youth in key areas including access to information and services on reproductive and sexual health, ending violence against women and girls and increasing the participation of women in decision-making (Government of Tuvalu 2020).

Only three women have been elected to Parliament since the country's independence in 1978. In 2023, Tuvalu had just one woman parliamentarian, constituting only 6.25% of total seats (Inter-Parliamentary Union n.d.c) however this fell to zero women after the January 2024 election, in which only one woman ran. The absence of an electoral quota highlights the imperative for targeted measures to amplify women's political voices (Inter-Parliamentary Union n.d.c).

Tuvalu lacks political parties, so candidates contest seats as independents (UN Women 2022h). Election campaigns are largely based on family ties and reputation, with the lack of political parties considered to have a negative effect on women's political representation (UN Women 2022h). Cultural norms about leadership and decision-making and traditional attitudes about women's role in society also negatively impact women's political representation (Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review 2023c; UN Women 2022h).

In the local government system, decisions are made by a traditional assembly of elders called the Falekaupule (UN Women 2022h). Traditionally, women's presence and participation in decision-making bodies are considered unnecessary, as men are believed to represent women as heads of household (UN Women 2022h). Although the Falekaupule Act 1997 allows for women's community workers to be officers and staff of Kaupule (the executive arm of the Falekaupule and the primary advisors for each island), women are still largely excluded from decision-making (UN Women 2022h).

Men dominate senior positions within the public service in Tuvalu. A UN Women (2022h) brief found that women held just 22% of public service leadership positions from 2009 to 2013.

Despite the Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act 2014, sexual and gender-based violence remains a key issue (Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review 2023c). In Tuvalu's 2023 Universal Periodic Review, 44.2% of ever-married women reported experiencing intimate partner violence in their lifetime (Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review 2023c). Under the Penal Code, marital rape is not specifically criminalized, and the offense of rape can only be committed against a woman or girl (Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review 2023c).

iv. Women in Business Leadership

The sample for Tuvalu includes data from 13 organizations, including 1 branch office, 2 private non-listed companies, 2 industry associations, and 8 state-owned enterprises (SOEs). This is an increase from the six organizations in the 2021 sample and provides an improved representation of Tuvalu's small private sector.

Despite the small size of the private sector in Tuvalu, there is a notable presence of women in leadership roles, particularly in chief executive officer (CEO) positions.

While some boards have achieved gender parity, there is more work to be done to ensure that all boards in Tuvalu are inclusive of women.

More than half of the boards in the 2024 sample have achieved a 30% threshold of women directors and a third have achieved gender parity or greater (Table N.2), suggesting a positive trend

Table N.2 Board Composition in Tuvalu

Composition	2024 (n = 12)	2021 (n = 6)
Boards with no women directors	25%	17%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	8%	33%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	33%	33%
Boards with gender parity or greater	33%	17%

n = number (sample size).
Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2021 dataset (for 2021 data).

Table N.3 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Tuvalu

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021-2024
	Tuvalu	Regional Average	Tuvalu	Tuvalu (change)
Board Chairs	17% (n = 12)	12%	29% (n = 7)	↓
Deputy Chairs	0% (n = 6)	18%	...	No change.
Directors	32% (n = 56)	26%	29% (n = 31)	↑
Chief Executive Officers	62% (n = 13)	20%	29% (n = 7)	↑

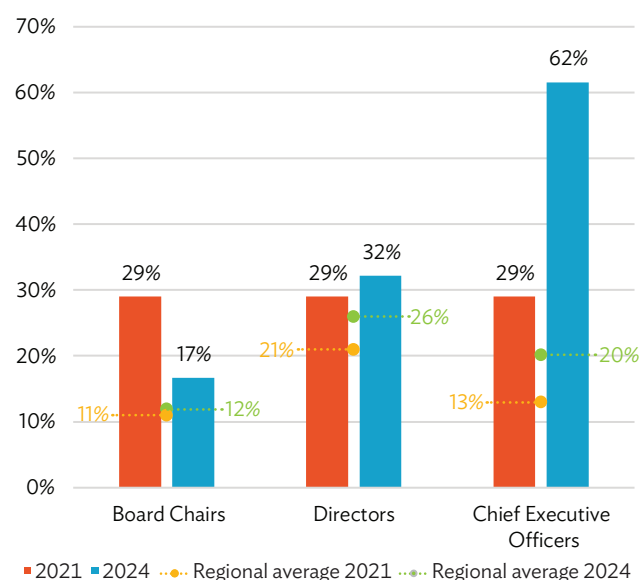
... = not available, n = number (sample size).
 Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific* (for 2021 data).

Table N.4 Women’s Representation in Leadership in Tuvalu by Organization Type

Leadership Role	Industry Associations	Private Non-listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises	Branch Offices
Board Chairs	100% (n = 2)	0% (n = 2)	0% (n = 8)	...
Directors	40% (n = 10)	13% (n = 15)	39% (n = 31)	...
Chief Executive Officers	50% (n = 2)	50% (n = 2)	63% (n = 8)	100% (n = 1)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).
 Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific* (for 2021 data).

Figure N.1 Women’s Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Tuvalu, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific* (for 2021 data).

toward greater gender diversity. However, a quarter of boards have no women at all, highlighting that there are gaps remaining.

Women are generally well represented in leadership roles in Tuvalu.

Since 2021, Tuvalu appears to have made some strides forward in gender diversity in business leadership. In 2024, 62% of organizations have a woman CEO (Table N.3), a doubling of CEO representation from 2021 (Figure N.1). While this increase is noteworthy, it's important to note that the sample size has changed between 2021 and 2024, which could potentially influence the apparent increase in the proportion of women CEOs. In any case the representation of women as directors and CEOs surpasses regional averages.

In the 2024 sample, two women (17%) are serving as board chairs—both in leading industry associations—and there are no women deputy chairs. This represents an overall decrease in the percentage of women as board chairs, which dropped from 29% in 2021 to only 17% in 2024. Despite the decrease since 2021, the representation of women board chairs in Tuvalu is higher than the regional average.

Although women’s representation as CEOs is high, women are underrepresented as board chairs.

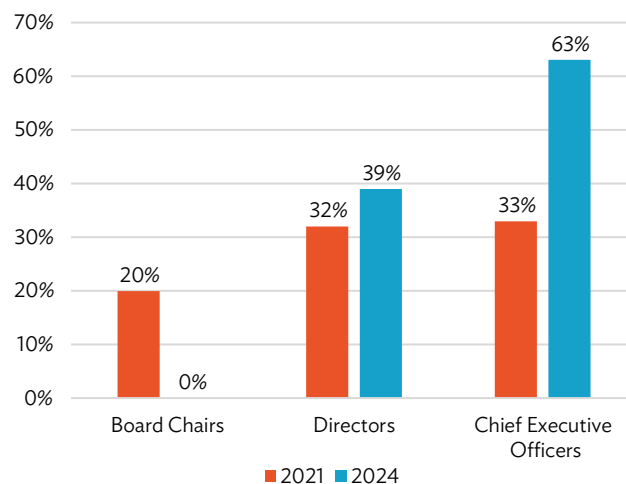
Women’s representation varies significantly across different types of organizations in Tuvalu. While women are well represented in leadership positions at all levels in industry associations, they are underrepresented in private non-listed companies (Table N.4). While women’s representation as CEOs is generally high across all organization types, including branch offices, women are notably underrepresented in board chair roles, with no women occupying these positions in private non-listed companies or SOEs.

There is a positive trend toward greater gender balance in SOEs.

In Tuvalu, there is a particularly notable and positive trend in women’s representation within the leadership of SOEs. The proportion of women directors on SOE boards increased from 32% in 2021 to 39% in 2024. Women’s representation is higher on boards of SOEs than on those of other organization types, highlighting a distinctive feature of the country’s governance landscape. This follows a regional pattern where women are increasingly being appointed to SOE boards.

In Tuvalu this extends to women’s representation in CEO roles within SOEs, which increased from 33% in 2021 to 63% in 2024 (Figure N.2). Interestingly, this contrasts with women’s representation as SOE board chairs, which was 20% in 2021 but fell to 0% in 2024, indicating a fluctuation in this specific leadership role. The small sample size is also a factor where there are significant differences between datasets.

Figure N.2 Women’s Representation in State-Owned Enterprise Leadership in Tuvalu, 2021 and 2024



Note: Comparative data for 2021 to 2024 is not reported for industry organizations or private non-listed organizations because of very small numbers in 2021.

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific* (for 2021 data).

O. VANUATU

i. Economic Context

Vanuatu is a chain of more than 80 islands in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. In 2022, it had an estimated population of 314,000 (ADB n.d.), three-quarters of which lives in rural areas (World Bank 2022). The economy is based predominantly on the service sector (67% of gross domestic product [GDP]), followed by agriculture (22%) and industry (11%) (World Bank n.d.s).

Most ni-Vanuatu live in small rural villages and rely on subsistence agriculture and fishing, as well as the cultivation of cash crops, such as kava, coconut, and cocoa, for their livelihoods. These crops, along with beef, are also the country's primary exports (Pacific Horticultural and Market Access Program 2018).

Vanuatu is one of the most vulnerable nations in the world to climate change (World Bank 2021c). The country is prone to tropical cyclones from December to April, and earthquakes and tsunamis caused by volcanic activity, with disasters costing an estimated 6% of GDP each year (World Bank Group 2021d). Six villages have already been relocated because of rising sea levels and increased water salinity (Sengupta 2023).

Economic growth slowed to 1.0% in 2023 as tropical cyclones Judy, Kevin, and Lola damaged agriculture and infrastructure, and pushed up inflation (ADB 2024). GDP growth of 3.1% in 2024 and 3.6% in 2025 is expected, dependent mainly on tourism growth and construction as the government undertakes required reconstruction (ADB 2024). Remittances, mainly from seasonal workers in Australia and New Zealand, also provided some economic relief, growing to the equivalent of 17.9% of GDP in 2023 (ADB 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant adverse socioeconomic impacts (World Bank 2021d). Despite lifting pandemic restrictions, the implementation of infrastructure projects has still not fully recovered (ADB 2023). Although arrivals by air increased from 30,000 in 2022 to 82,000 in 2023, they slowed after the cyclones, remaining just 70% of the pre-pandemic average of 2018 and 2019 (ADB 2024).

ii. Women's Economic Participation

In 2022, the labor force participation rate was 60.5% among women and 78.0% among men (World Bank n.d.c; World Bank n.d.k). Women's labor force participation has remained

roughly the same at least since the 1990s (World Bank n.d.c). The 2020 Census found that women are more likely to be engaged in home duties than men (Vanuatu Bureau of Statistics et al. 2022). Women are underrepresented in construction, electricity, mining and quarrying, public administration and defense, transportation and storage, and water supply (Vanuatu Bureau of Statistics et al. 2022). Women are more likely to be employed in elementary occupations as professionals, clerical support workers, and service and sales workers (Vanuatu Bureau of Statistics et al. 2022). Men are more likely to work for money overseas (Vanuatu Bureau of Statistics et al. 2022).

In Vanuatu, the law prohibits discrimination in access to credit based on gender, and women can sign contracts, register a business, and open a bank account in the same way as men (World Bank 2023c). Despite these provisions, a survey of women entrepreneurs in 2023 found that access to capital was a key challenge women faced when starting and running their business, followed by family obligations, which caused them to struggle to find enough time to work in the business. The main challenges with the registration process are the costs of the registration process and the complicated and bureaucratic nature of the process (Voigt-Graf 2023).

iii. Enabling Environment for Gender Equality

The Constitution recognizes that all persons are entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms regardless of race, place of origin, religious or traditional beliefs, political opinions, language, or sex (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu 2006). Nonetheless, the Constitution also contains commitments to preserving customary law practices, which may pose potential barriers to women's equal enjoyment of rights (UN Women 2022i). Vanuatu has ratified both the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1995) and the Optional Protocol (2007) (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] n.d). It has also signed the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (UN Women 2022i). At Vanuatu's most recent Universal Periodic Review, concerns were noted about persistent discriminatory gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes (Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review 2018). Legislation regarding gender equality in Vanuatu is outlined in Table O.1.

Kastom (custom) holds significant importance in ni-Vanuatu society (UN Women 2022j). Broadly defined, *kastom* refers to

Table O.1 Legislation Regarding Gender Equality in Vanuatu

Enabling legislation	In Place	Relevant Act
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Are there civil penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	✓	Family Protection Act, Sec. 10
Is paid maternity leave available?	✓ (12 weeks for public sector and private sector employees ^a)	Employment Act 2006, Sec. 36
Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?	✘	Employment Act 2006, Sec. 36(2)
Is there paid paternity leave available?	✓ (10 days for public and private sector employees)	Employment Act 2006, Sec. 36
Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	✘	No applicable provisions could be located

^a Private sector employee maternity leave is at 66% pay.

Source: World Bank. 2023. Women, Business and the Law. Vanuatu. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/data/exploreconomies/vanuatu/2023> (accessed 10 May 2024).

indigenous knowledge, beliefs, values, and practices (UN Women 2022i). *Kastom* practices vary throughout Vanuatu (UN Women 2022i). Many aspects of gender inequalities in Vanuatu are tied to these traditional social structures that favor segregation of roles (UN Women 2022j). Women are typically primary caregivers while men hold political power and provide shelter and food (UN Women 2022j). *Kastom* law can sometimes prevent or discourage women's participation in decision-making, especially pertaining to land management and tenure (UN Women 2022i). In some ni-Vanuatu groups, *kastom* requires a bride price to be paid upon marriage, contributing to women's commodification (UN Women 2022i). Attempts to change *kastom* are frequently met with claims of neocolonialism and foreign interference from many ni-Vanuatu (UN Women 2022j).

During snap elections in 2022, one woman was elected to Vanuatu's national Parliament for the first time since 2012 and became the third woman to be deputy speaker (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2022). As a result, 1.9% of seats in Parliament are held by women (World Bank n.d.t). Women's

lack of money and necessary resources to contest incumbent seats disadvantage women candidates (UN Women 2022i). There are no temporary special measures in place to improve women's representation at the national level (UN Women 2022i). However, at the municipal level, a special quota for women (30%–34%) has been introduced, which has enabled more women to contest local government elections (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu 2021). In the matriarchal and graded societies of central Vanuatu, women can hold chiefly titles. However, there is a lack of national data on the proportion of traditional leadership roles held by women (UN Women 2022i).

In August 2021, the government launched the National Gender Equality Policy, 2020–2030 (UN Women 2022j). It outlines the need for further focus and investment to confront and eliminate the underlying factors that contribute to discrimination against women and girls (UN Women 2022j). The policy has five strategic areas: (i) eliminating discrimination and violence against women and girls, (ii) enhancing women's economic empowerment and skills development, (iii) advancing women's

Table O.2 Board Composition in Vanuatu

Composition	2024 (n = 20)	2021 (n = 14)
Boards with no women directors	35%	50%
Boards with more than 0% and fewer than 30% women directors	35%	29%
Boards with at least 30% and fewer than 50% women directors	20%	14%
Boards with gender parity or greater or greater	10%	7%

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Table O.3 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Vanuatu, 2021 and 2024

Leadership Role	2024 (women)		2021 (women)	2021–2024
	Vanuatu	Regional Average	Vanuatu	Vanuatu (change)
Board Chairs	0% (n = 20)	12%	8% (n = 13)	↓
Deputy Chairs	18% (n = 11)	18%	25% (n = 4)	↓
Directors	20% (n = 124)	26%	18% (n = 85)	↑
Chief Executive Officers	18% (n = 33)	20%	15% (n = 13)	↑

n = number (sample size).

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

leadership and political participation, (iv) strengthening the foundation for gender mainstreaming, and (v) fostering gender-responsive and community-driven solutions to climate and disaster resilience (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu 2021; UN Women 2022j). The strategy also “acknowledges the role of *kastom* in being both a support and barrier to women’s advancement in Vanuatu” (UN Women 2022j). Vanuatu has also introduced six Provincial Gender Equality Action Plans, 2020–2024, outlining prioritized activities designed for nationwide implementation (Toara and Tahaun 2023).

Gender-based violence is a key issue, with high rates of physical, sexual, and emotional violence (UN Women 2022i). The bride price and witchcraft accusations against women increase women’s vulnerability to violence (Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review 2018). Court fees, transport, and medical costs pose barriers for survivors to access formal justice institutional services (UN Women 2022i).

iv. Women in Business Leadership

The Vanuatu sample for this study includes 34 organizations—14 branch offices, 8 private non-listed companies, 5 industry

associations, and 7 state-owned enterprises (SOEs). This represents 16 additional organizations from the 2021 sample. The inclusion of branch offices means the sample is likely to be more representative of the private sector.

The findings show that, despite government efforts to promote women in leadership positions in politics and the public service, their representation in business leadership in Vanuatu is still low and trails regional averages.

Women’s representation on boards in Vanuatu is gradually improving but remains low.

Women’s representation on boards in Vanuatu is gradually improving. While the number of boards without any women directors decreased in 2024, most boards still fall short of achieving a 30% threshold for women’s representation (Table O.2). Only 30% of boards in the Vanuatu sample have more than 30% women directors, with just 10% achieving gender parity or greater.

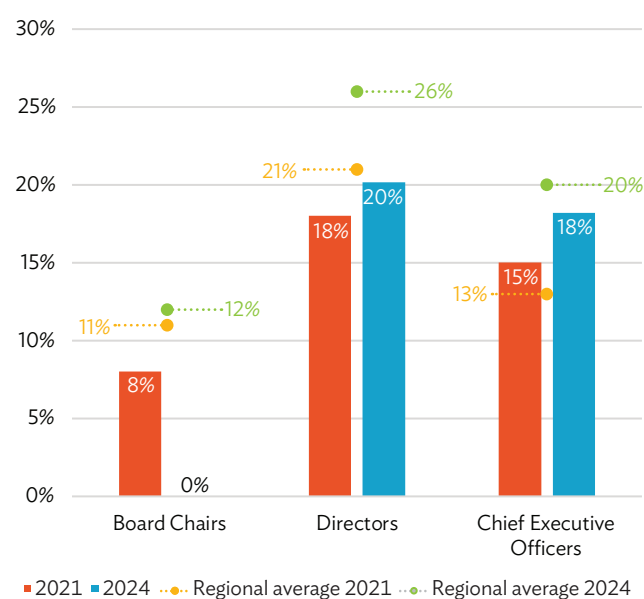
Women remain underrepresented at all levels of business leadership of business leadership in Vanuatu.

Table O.4 Women's Representation in Leadership in Vanuatu by Organization Type, 2024

Role	Industry Associations	Private Non-Listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises	Branch Offices
Board Chairs	0% (n = 5)	0% (n = 8)	0% (n = 7)	...
Directors	25% (n = 40)	21% (n = 39)	16% (n = 45)	...
Chief Executive Officers	20% (n = 5)	14% (n = 7)	14% (n = 7)	21% (n = 14)

... = not available, n = number (sample size).

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset.

Figure O.1 Women's Representation in Board and Senior Executive Positions in Vanuatu, 2021 and 2024

Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Gender disparity in leadership roles within Vanuatu's private sector is reflected in the relatively low representation of women as directors. In Vanuatu, women account for only 20% of directors, lower than the regional average of 26% (Table O.3). Women are also significantly underrepresented in top leadership positions on boards, with no women serving as board chairs and only two women (18%) deputy chairs among the sampled boards in 2024. Representation at the chief executive officer (CEO) level is also low, with women accounting for 18% of CEOs, slightly below the regional average (20%). These data underscore the need for greater gender diversity and inclusion in leadership roles at all levels within Vanuatu's private sector.

Improvements in women's representation in business leadership are nominal but encouraging.

During 2021–2024, there has been a decrease in the representation of women as board chairs in Vanuatu, with a single woman board chair from 2021 being replaced by a man. However, the increase in the proportion of women directors from 18% to 20% is small but encouraging (Figure O.1). The representation of women as CEOs has also increased slightly from 15% in 2021 to 18% in 2024. This change is partly because of the inclusion of branch offices, where women are represented as CEOs at a relatively higher rate compared to other organization types in Vanuatu.

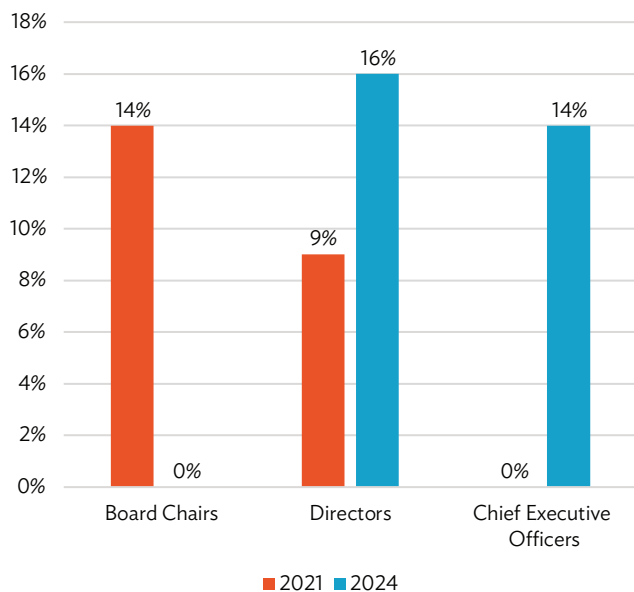
While there have been some improvements at the director and CEO levels, the number of women leading businesses across the various organization types remains low.

The data show that women's representation as directors on SOEs lags their representation on industry associations and private non-listed companies. Specifically, women account for 25% of directors in industry associations, 21% in private non-listed companies, and only 16% in SOEs (Table O.4). Women are also relatively better represented as CEOs of industry associations (20%) and branch offices of international organizations (21%) than SOEs (14%). Concerningly, there are no women serving as board chairs in any organization type in the Vanuatu sample.

There is still a long way to go to achieve gender diversity in leadership positions within SOEs in Vanuatu.

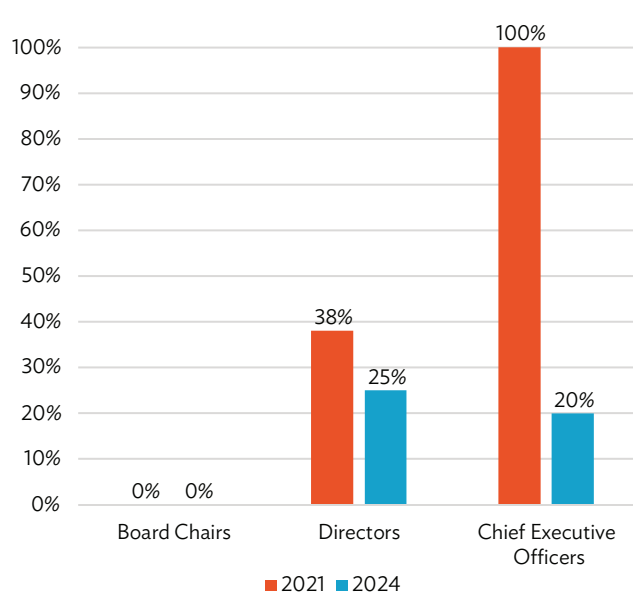
Overall, the representation of women in leadership roles within SOEs in Vanuatu has improved from 2021 to 2024 (Figure O.2). The proportion of women serving as directors has increased from 9% to 16%, indicating a positive trend. However, the absence of women as board chairs in 2024 highlights the ongoing need for efforts to promote gender diversity and inclusion at the highest levels of governance. While the appointment of one woman as a CEO since 2021 is promising,

Figure 0.2 Women's Representation in State-Owned Enterprise Leadership in Vanuatu, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

Figure 0.3 Women's Representation in Industry Association Leadership in Vanuatu, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

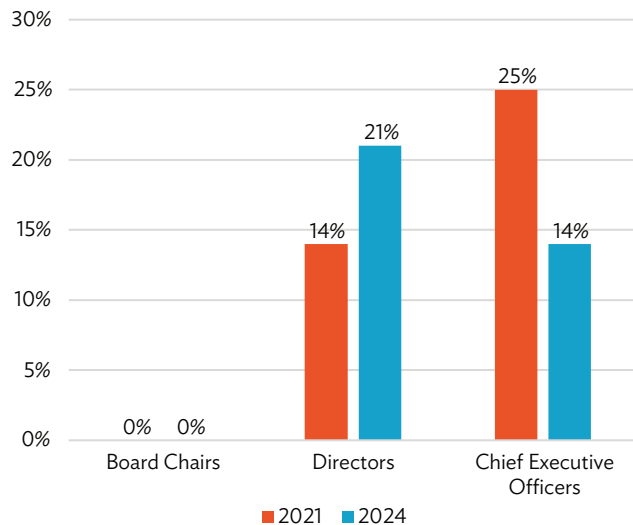
more actions are needed to increase the number of women in senior executive positions within SOEs.

In the 2021 sample, only one industry association was included, resulting in the woman CEO of that organization being shown as 100% of CEOs. However, in 2024, the sample size increased to five CEO roles, with one being held by a woman. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting apparent changes in representation because of differences in sample size between the two datasets (see Figure 0.3).

The representation of women in the leadership of private non-listed companies varies across the different roles.

In the expanded sample in 2024, women account for 21% of directors and 14% of CEOs for private non-listed companies. This indicates a slight increase in the representation of women as directors compared to 2021, but a decrease in the representation of women as CEOs (Figure 0.4).

Figure 0.4 Women's Representation in Private Non-Listed Entities in Vanuatu, 2021 and 2024



Sources: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Leadership Matters 2024 dataset (for 2024 data); and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership* (for 2021 data).

3. KEY FINDINGS

1. Pacific women are increasingly represented in business leadership positions, with many countries edging closer to global targets.

The second edition of Leadership Matters reveals a positive trend in the representation of women in business leadership in the Pacific. The regional averages for women's representation as chief executive officers (CEOs) and board directors have both increased. In 2021, women comprised 13% of CEOs in Pacific private sector organizations but in 2024 represent 20% of all CEOs in the sample, moving closer to the 30% global target for women's representation in leadership.

Similarly, women are increasingly being appointed to board director roles, with the regional average increasing from 21% in 2021 to 26% in 2024. While almost a quarter of boards still have no women directors, the proportion has dropped from 32% to 24% during the same period. Across the Pacific, the proportion of boards with 30% or greater women directors now sits at 43%, with 15% of boards having achieved gender parity or greater.

The top-performing countries are similar to the 2021 report, with the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Niue, Palau, and Samoa continuing to have strong representation of women in business leadership. A notable exception is Nauru, which has had a significant increase in the proportion of women in director positions and is now placed in the top five countries. Conversely, certain countries consistently have the lowest proportion of women in business leadership, such as the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. There have also been notable shifts, such as in Tonga, where the proportion of women directors has declined markedly, resulting in Tonga having the lowest proportion of women directors of all 14 countries in 2024.

The underrepresentation of women in business leadership is a global issue, but the Pacific region is showing promising progress. For the second time, Pacific regional averages for women's representation in business leadership have surpassed global averages. Globally, women hold 23% of board director positions and only 6% of CEO roles. In contrast, in the Pacific region, 26% of board director positions and 20% of CEO roles are held by women.

2. However, Pacific women remain underrepresented as board chairs and deputy chairs.

In the first edition of Leadership Matters, women comprised 11% of board chairs and 19% of deputy chairs. In the second edition, the proportion of women holding these positions has barely budged. In fact, the proportion of deputy chair roles held by women has decreased slightly, to 18%, while the proportion of board chair roles held by women has risen slightly to 12%.

The lower representation of women in these roles compared to overall board director roles suggests that there are specific barriers or biases hindering women's progression to top leadership positions. The underrepresentation of women in chair and deputy chair positions is concerning, as these roles are crucial for shaping board agendas, driving decision-making, and setting organizational direction.

3. In the Pacific, women are more likely to attain leadership positions in industry associations and less likely to do so in publicly listed companies. The sector they work in also plays a significant role.

Consistent with the first edition, industry associations have higher representation of women across all leadership roles in 2024: women comprise 40% of board chairs, 29% of deputy chairs, 35% of directors, and 47% of CEO roles in these organizations. This higher representation of women is observed across most Pacific countries.

For publicly listed companies (only operating in Fiji and PNG), women's representation as directors (19%) is slightly below the regional average (26%). However, the proportion of women CEOs is very poor relative to the regional average (20%), at just 4%. This aligns with global research that shows women struggle to attain CEO roles in publicly listed companies. Many of these companies in the region are investing heavily in diversity and inclusion, but this has not yet translated into more women in the most senior leadership roles.

There are similar rates of women CEOs at private non-listed companies (21%) and branch offices (20%), in line with the regional average. However, the representation of women as directors, board chairs, and deputy chairs for private non-listed companies is below the regional average for each role.

State-owned enterprises (SOEs) continue to present the largest number of leadership opportunities across the Pacific, comprising 39% of all organizations in the sample. The proportion of women CEOs of SOEs has increased from 11% to 16%, whereas there has been a slight decrease in women board

chairs from 10% to 9% from 2021 to 2024. Solomon Islands and Tonga have notably low representation of women on SOE boards, with the proportion of women directors well below the regional of 11% and the SOE average of 6%.

By sector, the largest number of leadership roles are within the finance and insurance sector, comprising 27% of the sample. Consistent with the first edition, women are well represented within this sector, where women comprise 11% of board chairs, 12% of deputy chairs, 26% of directors, and 29% of CEOs. By comparison, industries traditionally dominated by men continue to lag in the appointment of women CEOs, with no women CEOs in the information technology or manufacturing sectors.

4. Pacific women are ambitious, are increasingly well educated, and are building networks to support each other to attain leadership positions.

A lack of ambition is frequently cited as a barrier to women's leadership opportunities. However, Pacific women demonstrate a high level of ambition. Responses to the Leadership Matters Survey of women business leaders in the Pacific shows that 42% of respondents had been promoted in the past 2 years and 66% aspire to be promoted within the next 2 years. Increased access to education was frequently cited as a key driver of change for women's representation in leadership, with 87% of women business leaders surveyed holding a tertiary qualification. Regional data shows that women are enrolling in tertiary education at greater rates than men. However, the significant uptake of educational opportunities by women is not yet translating into a greater representation of women in the workforce in general or in equitable representation in leadership positions.

As more women ascend to leadership positions, they recognize the importance of serving as role models and creating opportunities for other women. In the Leadership Matters survey, 90% of respondents said they acted as a sponsor or mentor to other women. Sponsorship and advocacy for other women are on the rise as women leaders understand that with increased influence, power, and legitimacy, they have more opportunities to support others. Traditionally, this role has been primarily fulfilled by men, who have held positions of power and influence to advocate for others. Now, women are increasingly seizing the opportunity to do the same for other women. Their approach to sponsorship is often voluntary, informal, and not time bound, creating a flexible and personalized support system.

Pacific women are building support networks as a crucial method of supporting each other in the Pacific, a strategy that has long been successful for men. Of survey respondents, 59% reported that they actively participate in professional networks and 45% reported that sponsors have helped them advance in their careers. However, unlike traditional notions of professional networks, which typically occur in formal settings characterized by structured, often competitive business interactions, women in the Pacific often network in more informal settings. Relationships are cultivated in a more relaxed and supportive atmosphere, fostering a more collaborative and nurturing environment. These networks provide a sense of community and solidarity, essential for women navigating challenges and accessing opportunities in a male-dominated society.

5. Increasingly, Pacific businesses value women as both workers and leaders and are investing in measures to attract and retain them.

In interviews, many Pacific business leaders validated global research that suggests that having women in leadership roles contributes to improved performance and profitability, affirming that it aligns with their own experiences. These leaders highlighted various benefits of diversity in leadership, such as increased innovation, enhanced decision-making, and improved efficiency. Companies also acknowledged the importance of competing for talent from a limited pool in most Pacific countries, particularly in the face of current out-migration trends. This includes efforts to attract women back into the workforce after having children.

The recognition of the advantages of women as both workers and leaders has led to concrete strategies aimed at attracting, retaining, and promoting women, with non-salary benefits playing a crucial role. Examples include offering flexible work arrangements, improving maternity and other leave policies, providing safe transportation and school pick-up services, and implementing training and mentoring programs. Workplace flexibility was particularly highly prized by women, with the majority of survey respondents noting its positive impact on their career advancement.

Interviews with business leaders indicated that attitudes toward women in the workplace are changing, translating into more women being promoted and playing key and influential roles in business. This shift was particularly evident in interviews with leaders from international businesses, who are influenced by global policies and expectations related to diversity and inclusion. However, to effectively address the underrepresentation of women in business leadership in the

Pacific, successful strategies and policies must be embraced by organizations of all types and across all sectors.

6. Social norms still strongly shape Pacific women’s aspirations for leadership, with entrenched gender roles around caring responsibilities posing a significant challenge.

Deeply ingrained gender roles and cultural expectations influence all aspects of life in the Pacific, often constraining women’s opportunities for leadership. These include the perception that certain roles are reserved for men, while women are expected to fulfill domestic duties. Such cultural norms not only dictate the roles men and women are expected to play, but also shape expectations regarding behavioral traits, such as humility and assertiveness. In interviews, women business leaders frequently expressed feeling pressured to downplay their accomplishments and exhibit humility, impacting their confidence and willingness to pursue leadership positions.

Women continue to face bias and discrimination in the workplace, with 44% of survey respondents reporting that they have encountered gender bias and stereotypes. Echoing sentiments from global research, Pacific women expressed feeling the need to work even harder to be seen as worthy of the role. For many, gender stereotypes begin in school and persist throughout their career, creating additional barriers in the workplace.

The double burden of managing both paid and unpaid work remains a persistent challenge for women in the Pacific. As women advance in their careers, their domestic responsibilities often remain unchanged, with women shouldering increasing workloads while maintaining their roles at home. Of survey respondents, 60% indicated they were expected to maintain the same level of household and family responsibilities.

Despite these challenges, 70% of women emphasize the importance of family and partner support for career advancement. Although many women have partners who are supportive of their career aspirations, they often still carry significant domestic burdens. However, there are signs of men gradually assuming more domestic responsibilities. About 30% of survey respondents reported that their partner or family have taken on some of these responsibilities, with an additional 10% stating that their partner or family have assumed many of these responsibilities. These signals of cultural change at the household level were also evident in interviews, where women and men often indicated that social norms are changing, as evidenced by increasing family expectations for girls to pursue a career and more women attaining tertiary qualifications.

7. Gender-inclusive legislation and policies are crucial to increasing and sustaining women’s workforce participation and creating conditions for women to take on leadership roles.

Realizing the full potential of women in leadership requires targeted action to address the specific challenges women encounter at the societal, institutional, and household levels. Despite the long-standing recognition of the importance of women in leadership, both global and Pacific data on women’s representation in business leadership indicate that commitments to enhance women’s representation have only resulted in modest progress.

The Pacific region shows considerable variation in the legislative and policy environment supporting women’s leadership. Several countries have laws prohibiting gender-based discrimination in employment, with notable exceptions including FSM, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu. However, the protection of pregnant workers is less widespread, with only Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu prohibiting dismissal because of pregnancy. Sexual harassment legislation is present in only a few countries, with Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, and Tuvalu having such laws; even fewer countries have laws that include civil penalties. Maternity leave provisions also vary, with Fiji being the only country meeting the International Labour Organization (ILO) standard of 14 weeks of paid leave. Paternity leave is rare and typically limited to the public sector, with Fiji rescinding its paternity leave entirely in 2022. Equal pay legislation is scarce, found only in Kiribati, Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu.

Pacific governments have a particular opportunity to increase women’s representation as leaders through SOEs, with evidence suggesting that targets combined with meaningful actions achieve results. Encouragingly, there has been an increase in the representation of women as SOE directors from 18% in 2021 to 26% in 2024. This increase can be, in part, attributed to national efforts to improve SOE director appointment processes, including through setting targets for women’s representation such as in PNG.

8. Women will only have equal opportunity to take on business leadership roles when the persistent barriers they face at the household, institutional and societal level are addressed.

Initiatives to improve women’s representation as leaders often focus on building individual women’s skills and knowledge while ignoring the significant and persistent barriers they face at home, in the workplace, and in broader society. Support for women’s leadership must recognize the gendered nature of

leadership dynamics and the nuanced challenges women face in exercising authority across different spheres.

Many factors influence women's leadership opportunities, including global trends and standards that shape Pacific economies as well as the Pacific culture and norms that inform all aspects of life for Pacific men and women. These cultural perceptions of leadership often favor men, and they burden women with managing domestic responsibilities. Gender bias resulting from deeply entrenched cultural norms permeates organizational culture, recruitment, and promotion practices. Addressing these biases through changes in workplace policy and practice is essential for harnessing the full potential of the workforce.

Support systems, including professional and personal networks, are also essential for women to be considered for and succeed in leadership roles. Providing limited or no training or support to women transitioning into leadership greatly reduces their chances of success. One of the most significant barriers to Pacific women's leadership aspirations and opportunities is domestic responsibilities and unpaid care work. While women are still expected to take full responsibility for this work in their homes and communities, they are less likely to take on the additional responsibilities associated with leadership roles without incurring a significant personal cost.

Recognizing and addressing the intersectionality of these influences can create an environment where Pacific women are empowered to lead, contribute, and thrive.

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific* study measures women's representation in business leadership roles in the Pacific. This 2024 edition, following the inaugural 2021 publication, builds on the initial baseline data collected on women as board directors, board chairs, chief executive officers (CEOs), and senior management personnel. The updated report aims to provide insights into the state of women's leadership in the Pacific as of 2024, identify key changes since the first edition, and capture the voices of men and women business leaders on their experience of women's leadership in the private sector.

This edition also includes interviews with business leaders (men and women) and survey results from women in business across the region, offering a multidimensional perspective on women's business leadership. Together with organizational data, the survey and interview responses provide deeper insights into enablers, challenges, and emerging trends. This comprehensive approach significantly enriches the second edition of the *Leadership Matters* report by providing a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics influencing women's leadership in the Pacific.

A. ORGANIZATIONAL DATA

i. Organizations Covered

The study seeks to document women's leadership in business in the Pacific. This includes the number and proportion of women as board directors, board chairs, and CEOs of (i) industry associations, (ii) publicly listed companies, (iii) private non-listed companies, (iv) branch offices, and (v) state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Government-owned and controlled SOEs are included in the study as they are among the largest commercial entities in most Pacific countries and are important as employers. Industry associations are included because of their significant role representing business interests. Branch offices of regional or international organizations are also included as they play an important role in providing senior management opportunities in the private sector and for demonstrating global standards in diversity and inclusion.³ This inclusion marks a change from the 2021 report, which only considered organizations with a board operating in the Pacific.

ii. Definition of Organization Types

1. Industry association.

- An industry association refers to an organization that represents and serves the interests of a specific industry, group of businesses, or employers and/or employees. These bodies are established to promote cooperation, collaboration, and advocacy among their member organizations. This category includes chambers of commerce as well as sector-specific organizations in sectors such as manufacturing, resources, and tourism.

2. Publicly listed company.

- A publicly listed company, also known as a publicly traded company, is an organization whose ownership is divided into shares, and those shares are traded on a public stock exchange. Publicly listed companies are subject to strict regulatory requirements, financial reporting obligations, and governance standards to ensure transparency and protect the interests of shareholders. In the Pacific, only Fiji and Papua New Guinea (PNG) have a stock exchange and, therefore, publicly listed companies.

3. Private non-listed companies.

- Private non-listed companies refer to private sector entities that are not publicly traded on stock exchanges. They are typically owned by individuals, families, or other private entities and may operate in a wide range of industries. In some cases, governments, provident funds, or superannuation funds can be shareholders. Private non-listed companies are not subject to the same regulatory requirements and disclosure obligations as publicly listed companies.
- This entity type includes provident funds and other businesses that are established and operate under national legislation but have senior management teams and boards in place.
- This entity type also includes branch offices of internationally incorporated entities such as professional services firms or telecommunication companies if they are registered in a Pacific country and have a local board.

³ Where branch offices of a regional or international organisation have a local board in the Pacific country of operation, they are classified as private non-listed companies and their board data is included in the 2024 dataset.

Table Appendix 1 Number of Organizations in the Study Sample, by Country

Country	Number of organizations in sample
Cook Islands	17
Fiji	86
Kiribati	22
Marshall Islands	13
Micronesia, Federated States of	23
Nauru	13
Niue	10
Palau	10
Papua New Guinea	100
Samoa	37
Solomon Islands	38
Tonga	28
Tuvalu	13
Vanuatu	36

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

- Regulatory bodies will not be included: this includes central banks and regulatory statutory organizations.

4. Branch office.

- A branch office is an extension of the parent company and operates under the legal framework, guidelines, and governance structure set by the parent company but does not have a separate legal existence as an incorporated entity with a local board. The parent company is incorporated in the country of its headquarters or where it is legally established.

5. SOE.

- An SOE is a business entity that is owned by the government and is usually created to provide essential services to the public. The government typically exercises

control over the operations, management, and strategic decisions of the SOE. These entities are established by the government to undertake commercial activities in various sectors, such as energy, telecommunications, transportation, or natural resources. The names of these entities vary between countries and include public enterprises and public trading bodies.

iii. Development of Sample

In collaboration with local consultants and partners, and nationally based Asian Development Bank (ADB) staff, the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI) compiled a sample of organizations from ADB's 14 Pacific developing member countries (Table Appendix 1). This was achieved through a desk-based review, evaluating organizations against the study's criteria.

Despite all registered companies needing to have directors, the study intentionally focused only on those organizations that have multiple directors, including at least one independent director, and a formal governance function. This means the study did not include single-director or family companies or those without structured governance processes. This approach aligns with the established definition of boards as collectives responsible for the governance, management, and strategic direction of an organization.⁴

To be included in the sample, organizations must meet the following criteria:

- Formal registration.** Must be a formally registered entity in one of the 14 ADB Pacific developing member countries.
- Multiple directors.** Must have a minimum of three directors, including at least one independent director.
- Active governance.** The board must play a formal governance role⁵ and convene at least twice per year.

The verification process involved entity searches using the available company directories or registries to confirm local incorporation. Eligibility required a minimum of three directors, confirmed through official documents such as annual reports, corporate governance guidelines, or company websites. The determination that a board fulfilled a formal governance role was based on evidence from meeting minutes, annual reports, or governance policies, emphasizing the board's decision-making authority, strategic oversight, and accountability to

4 Australian Institute of Company Directors. 2020. Role of the Board. <https://www.aicd.com.au/content/dam/aicd/pdf/tools-resources/director-tools/board/role-of-board-director-tool.pdf>.

5 As per the Australian Institute of Company Directors definition of a board as a group of individuals responsible for the governance, management and strategic direction of an organization.

stakeholders. Researchers utilized publicly available data and their local insights to confirm that the board is actively involved in governance, typically indicated by the board’s authority in strategic decisions and accountability practices. Additionally, the frequency of board meetings—at least twice a year—was verified as a measure of active governance engagement, often evidenced by the requirement to produce an annual report. Following this rigorous process, 446 organizations were identified and included in the sample (Table Appendix 1).

Once the sample was confirmed, researchers began collecting data on these organizations. Despite meeting the selection criteria, data was not available for some organizations, reducing the number in the dataset to 397. A full list of the number of organizations included in the dataset, by country and organization type, is shown in Table Appendix 2.

Table Appendix 2 Number of Organizations in the Study Dataset, by Country and Organization Type

Country	Industry Associations	Private Non-Listed Companies	Publicly Listed Companies	State-Owned Enterprises	Branch Offices	Total
Cook Islands	2	2	0	9	5	18
Fiji	3	12	19	21	14	69
Kiribati	1	1	0	16	1	19
Marshall Islands	1	1	0	0	9	11
Micronesia, Federated States of	2	0	0	12	0	14
Nauru	1	0	0	9	0	10
Niue	1	0	0	8	0	9
Palau	1	1	0	4	2	8
Papua New Guinea	10	23	12	14	36	95
Samoa	3	8	0	16	2	29
Solomon Islands	5	15	0	9	9	38
Tonga	3	8	0	13	6	30
Tuvalu	2	2	0	8	1	13
Vanuatu	5	8	0	7	14	34
Total	40	81	31	146	99	397

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2024 Leadership Matters dataset.

iv. Data collection and verification

Table Appendix 3 summarizes the data points collected for each organization.

Data was collected by local partners and consultants, Pacific-based ADB staff, and PSDI. Key sources included legislation, company webpages, organizational charts, annual reports, LinkedIn, Facebook, and news media. In some cases, organizations were contacted directly to request information or validate data.

To ensure comprehensive coverage and accuracy, PSDI used multiple sources to maximize data coverage and triangulate findings. In cases where data discrepancies occurred, preference was given to the most recent source available. The complete dataset is available on request.

The data collection process was rigorously validated by locally based experts, including consultants and partners, as well as by staff from ADB's Pacific country offices. These experts collaborated with relevant ministries and organizations to confirm

that the information was both current and accurate. Relevant PSDI experts also reviewed and validated the sample data.

While the data collected was reasonably comprehensive for organizational details and board composition, it was more variable for senior management composition, workforce composition, and gender diversity measures.

v. Notes on Analysis

Total board seats and the sum of men and women directors do not always align because of vacancies. In this instance, the sum of occupied seats is used as a basis for calculating women's representation on boards. Individuals in acting roles are captured in the dataset.

In cases where a subsidiary organization has its own board that shares members with the board of the parent organization or there are shared board arrangements between SOEs, these directors are counted only once. They are attributed to the country of origin of the parent organization or one of the

Table Appendix 3 Data Points Included in the Study Sample

Organization details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country • Organization name • Entity type (industry association, publicly listed company, state-owned enterprise, other private sector organization or branch office) • Sector
Board composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total number of board members • Number of board members who are men, number of board members who are women, and number of vacant board seats • Gender of board chair • Gender of deputy chair • Director remuneration (remunerated or voluntary) • Appointment process • Term • Maximum tenure
Senior management composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size of management team • Number of men in management, number of women in management, number of vacant management roles • Gender of chief executive officer, general manager or equivalent • Gender of chief financial officer and/or chief operating officer • Other key management personnel
Workforce composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of employees, number of employees who are men, and number of employees who are women
Gender diversity measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of nondiscrimination policies, flexible work arrangements, leadership development programs, mentorship or coaching programs, diversity and inclusion policies, performance evaluation and feedback systems • Description of measures where they exist

Source: Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative.

organizations for shared boards to prevent the duplication of board member counts and ensure an accurate representation of board opportunities.

The data was accurate, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, as of 17 January 2024. No changes were made to the data after this time even when new appointments were made.

B. ADDITIONAL DATA

In addition to the organizational data, analysis on women's representation in business leadership in the 2024 edition of *Leadership Matters* was supplemented by qualitative research, including key informant interviews with 54 business leaders (men and women) and survey responses from 285 women business leaders.

i. Interviews

Interviewees for this study were nominated by ADB offices, national researchers, and survey respondents, which gathered views from a diverse group of 54 business leaders from various countries across the Pacific. The interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online, depending on the location and availability of the participants and researchers. A structured interview format was used, consisting of predefined questions that explored perspectives and experiences related to women's leadership in the business sector. These questions were designed to delve into the challenges, successes, and nuances of gender dynamics in leadership roles.

ii. Survey

A targeted survey reached 285 women business leaders throughout the Pacific. This was an online survey, distributed through networks and actively promoted on the PSDI Facebook page to reach as many people as possible. The survey included both multiple-choice and narrative response questions, allowing respondents to provide quantitative data and richer qualitative insights into their experiences. The multiple-choice questions aimed to gather specific data points on demographics, roles, and perceptions, while the narrative response questions offered participants the opportunity to share more detailed personal experiences and views on women's leadership.

iii. Analysis

The interviews and surveys provided qualitative and quantitative insights into the dynamics of women's leadership. The interview data, collected through structured questions, was

systematically coded and analyzed to identify common themes and unique insights regarding the challenges and enablers of women's leadership.

Survey responses were analyzed to quantify the prevalence of certain views and experiences among women leaders. In cases where survey respondents did not complete certain questions, those responses were simply excluded from the analysis rather than estimated or imputed. This method ensures that the findings and conclusions drawn are directly representative of the data provided by respondents, maintaining transparency and accuracy without assuming responses for incomplete data.

C. STUDY LIMITATIONS

i. The Sample Is Not Necessarily Representative

The list of organizations included in the dataset was developed iteratively and may not be fully representative of the entire Pacific private sector. The assessment of whether organizations met the inclusion criteria was based on publicly available information, supplemented by local knowledge and direct information from organizations, where possible. It is plausible that there are organizations that meet the inclusion criteria but were not identified through desk-based research and consultations. The data that would be required to develop a statistically representative sample frame is not readily available.

Similarly, the survey and interview responses included in the study do not represent all countries or business leaders in the Pacific, but rather provide insights from a select group of participants. These participants were chosen based on nominations from PSDI networks and country representatives, national researchers, and survey respondents, which may introduce selection bias. This method limits the diversity and range of perspectives captured, potentially skewing the insights toward those more visible or actively engaged in certain networks. The responses also reflect the specific experiences and opinions of those who chose to participate, which are not necessarily indicative of broader trends across different sectors or cultural contexts in the region.

ii. Data Completeness and Accuracy

While efforts were made to collect the most recent and complete information possible, comprehensive data was not available for all organizations in the sample. For some, only partial data could be collected. In addition, any inaccuracies in publicly available information are likely reflected in the

study's dataset. The methodology included data collection and/or validation with nationally based experts to enhance the accuracy and completeness of the data. However, changes in organizational leadership and management are continuous, making the dataset a snapshot of women's leadership in 2024.

Due to the variable nature and verification challenges of data on senior management composition, workforce composition, and gender diversity measures, this data has not been analyzed and presented in this report. In some cases, survey respondents did not fully complete the surveys or opted not to answer specific questions. This incomplete data collection affects the representativeness of the findings, as it may not accurately reflect the views or experiences of the entire group targeted by the study. Similarly, the quality of data collected through interviews varied, as interviewees provided responses with differing levels of detail and reliability. This variability in response quality could potentially skew the analysis and interpretation of the data.

iii. Comparability Across Countries

Efforts were made to maximize comparability across countries; however, there are some inherent limitations. The variability in the size and scale of the private sector, as well as other context specific factors, affects data comparability. For example, the definition of senior leadership roles may vary across companies, industries, or countries, which can impact the consistency of the data collected.

The Pacific region is highly diverse in terms of culture and economic development. Interview and survey responses have not been analyzed by country and, as such, the aggregated results do not reflect the nuanced views of all cultural contexts. This aggregation can obscure significant regional differences and cultural variations that might influence women's experience of leadership dynamics and gender roles. Additionally, the lack of country-specific analysis prevents a deeper understanding of localized challenges and opportunities. Recognizing these limitations is important for interpreting the findings accurately and for guiding future research to address these gaps.

iv. Application of a Binary Approach to Gender

The dataset applies a binary approach to gender categorization. The authors recognize that this binary approach to gender does not reflect the full spectrum of people's experiences or identities; gender is a complex and multifaceted dimension of identity that interacts with other personal characteristics such as race, age, and religion. In recognizing these limitations, the authors recommend that future studies on leadership in the

Pacific expand their scope to include a broader understanding of experiences, acknowledging various gender expressions and intersectionality to provide a more comprehensive and inclusive analysis of leadership dynamics.

v. Limited Picture of the Private Sector

The important role of family-run businesses and informal business activity for Pacific economies and women's economic empowerment is acknowledged. These sectors are integral to economic resilience and innovation and serve as important avenues for livelihoods, particularly for women. However, family-owned businesses and business activity in the informal sector are not included in this study. This exclusion is based on the specific selection criteria that prioritize formal registration and structured governance mechanisms that are typically absent in family-run and informal businesses. Further, the study is focused on identifying opportunities for women's leadership within organizations and therefore excludes family-owned businesses that generally appoint leadership positions from within the family. This focus aligns with the study's objective to examine formal governance structures and leadership roles that are clearly defined within registered organizations and are open to men and women in each country.

vi. Longitudinal Data and Change over Time

The sample of organizations in the 2024 study does not completely align with the 2021 sample because of several factors:

- The criteria for selecting organizations have been refined since the previous study. For example, statutory authorities such as central banks are no longer included in the study, and branch offices have been added.
- The 2021 study included regional private sector organizations as its own category but these have been merged into other categories in the 2024 report.
- Some organizations included in the 2021 study no longer exist. Additionally, data that was available in 2021 was not always attainable for all the same organizations in 2024.
- New organizations that meet the study's criteria have been included. Also, since the last report, some existing organizations, such as some SOEs, have undergone significant changes, including merging of organizations.
- The 2024 sample development and data collection approach included a greater role for nationally based researchers, which led to additional organizations being

identified and resulted in more comprehensive data collection.

- The 2024 sample classified organizations using a slightly different sector list to the one used in 2021. In 2024, the finance sector was recategorized as the finance and insurance sector in line with global classifications, and the information technology (IT) sector was added to reflect the growing importance of technology services. For organizations where the sector was unknown, the “unspecified” category was recategorized as “diversified” in this edition (see definitions below).

Given the inconsistency in samples between the two study periods, it can be challenging to determine whether changes in results reflect actual shifts in women’s representation or are merely because of variations in the sample composition. The researchers have made concerted efforts to interpret the results while considering potential changes in the sample and have acknowledged alternative explanations for the observed changes.

D. DEFINITION OF SECTORS

- **Agriculture and fisheries.** Businesses that are mainly engaged in growing crops, raising animals, growing and harvesting timber, and harvesting fish or other animals.
- **Diversified.** Businesses that do not have one main activity but participate in multiple activities from this list. This includes chambers of commerce.
- **Finance and insurance.** Businesses that are involved in the creation, liquidation, or change in ownership of financial assets, or the facilitation of financial transactions.
- **Manufacturing.** Businesses that are mainly engaged in the physical or chemical transformation of materials, substances, or components into new products. This includes the production of new goods in a factory and the production of new products by hand or in a home. It also includes businesses where selling the products takes place at the same location as the manufacture, such as a custom tailor or bakery.
- **Media and communications.** Businesses that are mainly engaged in creating, enhancing, or storing information products; transmitting information; or providing services to allow others to transmit or store information products.
- **IT.** Businesses that provide specialized computer services such as programming and systems design.
- **Resources.** Businesses that extract naturally occurring mineral solids, such as coal, ores, liquid minerals (such as petroleum), and gases.
- **Retail.** Businesses engaged in the purchase and/or on selling of goods, without significant transformation of those goods, to other businesses or to the general public.
- **Services.** Businesses that sell their expertise, including to provide health care and social assistance services, or administration and support services.
- **Tourism (accommodation, hospitality, food services and tours).** Businesses that sell their goods and services to tourists (both domestic and international).
- **Transport and infrastructure.** Businesses that are mainly involved in providing transport of passengers or freight by road, water, or air; or businesses that are mainly involved in the construction, repair, or alteration of buildings and other structures.
- **Utilities.** Organizations that provide electricity, gas, water, drainage, and sewage services, or that remove and treat waste.

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LEADERSHIP MATTERS 2024

BENCHMARKING WOMEN IN BUSINESS LEADERSHIP IN THE PACIFIC

Leadership Matters 2024: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific is the second edition of the *Leadership Matters* series, which collects and analyzes data on women's representation on boards and in senior management in the 14 Pacific developing member countries of the Asian Development Bank. The 2024 report builds on the foundational data of the 2021 report, offering fresh insights from an expanded dataset and new surveys and interviews with women and men business leaders across the Pacific.

The 2024 report finds that women's representation in business leadership across the Pacific has grown and the Pacific continues to compare favorably with global averages for women's representation on boards and in senior executive leadership.




About PSDI

PSDI is an Asian Development Bank (ADB) technical assistance program undertaken in partnership with the Government of Australia and the Government of New Zealand. PSDI supports ADB's 14 Pacific developing member countries to improve the enabling environment for business and to support inclusive, private-sector led economic growth. The support of the Australian and New Zealand governments and ADB has enabled PSDI to operate in the region for more than 15 years and assist with more than 300 reforms.



Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative
Asian Development Bank
Pacific Liaison and Coordination Office
Level 20, 45 Clarence St, Sydney 2000 Australia

Ph: +61 2 8270 9444
Fax: +61 2 8270 9445

 /adbpsdi
 @ADB_Sydney_PSDI
 @ADB_Pacific_PSDI

www.adbpsdi.org
info@adbpsdi.org