* **Population Sex Disaggregation: 51% male to 49% female[[1]](#endnote-1)**
* **Population Age Disaggregation: <5yrs 10% (5% female and 5% male); 5-19yrs 29% (14% female and 15% male); 19-64yrs 57% (28% female and 29% male); >65yrs 5% (3% female and 2 % male)[[2]](#endnote-2)**
* **Average household size: 4.6 (i-Taukei 5.1; Indo-Fijian 4.0; Other 4.7)[[3]](#endnote-3)**
* **Female headed households: 11-12%[[4]](#endnote-4)**
* **Under 5 Mortality rates: 17 per 1000 live births** [[5]](#endnote-5)
* **Maternal Mortality rate: 26 per 100,000 live births [[6]](#endnote-6)**
* **Rate of Domestic Violence: 72%[[7]](#endnote-7)**
* **Proportion of the population with a disability: 1.4%[[8]](#endnote-8)**

# Gender in Brief

**Introduction:** Similar to other Pacific Island countries, gender equality in Fiji is complex and multi-dimensional due to colonial and religious history, different ethnicities, socially and culturally assigned gender roles, the country’s geography, and a turbulent political context of four coups between 1987 and 2006. Fiji’s two largest islands – Viti Levu and Vanua Levu – constitute 87% of the land. The population of Fiji was 837,300 as of 2007, spread across four divisions and 14 provinces, with more than three quarters of the population living on Viti Levu. The population is made up mainly of two ethnic groups, i-Taukei (indigenous Fijians, 57% of the total population), and Indo-Fijians (37%). The demographic profile is changing due to migration and variations in fertility rates among different groups. In recent years there has been an increase in outmigration from Fiji as well as an increase in rural to urban migration. An estimated 49% of the population lives in rural areas[[9]](#endnote-9), 44% of whom live in poverty[[10]](#endnote-10). A report on poverty and household incomes shows a dramatic drop in available income in rural areas – that of -14% between 2002 and 2008.[[11]](#endnote-11) Fiji can be characterised as a patriarchal society (although there are some matrilineal societies such as on the island of Rotuma) in which women continue to face inequalities in all spheres of life: social, cultural, economic and political. Fiji has a 2016 Human Development Index Report rating of of 91/188 countries in comparison with Solomon Islands at 156, Timor-Leste at 133, Vanuatu at 134, and PNG at 154.[[12]](#endnote-12) The Gender Development Index ranking is not available for Fiji.

**Gender Roles and Responsibilities**: In Fijian households women and men work together to achieve shared goals but usually perform different tasks in the household and community, according to their gender. Many of these socially pre-determined gender roles were influenced by colonial authorities and Christian missionaries. Employment for both men and women is mainly in the informal sector: 57% of employed men and 64% of women hold informal-sector jobs, such as subsistence farmers, sugar cane growers, and house cleaners.[[13]](#endnote-13) In addition, women are largely responsible for caring of children, elderly and the ill, cooking, and preparation of food and gifts for ceremonial, religious and community occasions. Men play a larger role in community decision-making and are more involved in cash crops including sugar cane and kava. In both urban and rural households, women and girls do the vast majority of unpaid domestic work. The Asia-Pacific Human Development Report cites recent research that puts the value of unpaid household work at almost FJD480 million (US $237 million).[[14]](#endnote-14) During emergencies, time becomes a precious resource and tensions often arise from women having to support family needs almost single-handedly while men concentrate on activities such as house building and wider community work.

**Education and Economic Empowerment:** Women in Fiji earn less than men in the formal sector and hold fewer positions than men across all occupational categories, except for clerical jobs. Gender inequalities are evident in relation to economic opportunities such as women’s difficulty in accessing bank loans as many do not own land or property required for security. Underemployment tends to be much higher for women (74%) than men (28%) although women’s participation in higher skilled professions and the public sector has increased[[15]](#endnote-15). The number of women involved in private enterprises as business owners is almost on par with men[[16]](#endnote-16). Many Fijian women sell prepared foods and baked goods, and run small shops. Women are increasingly engaged in self-employment, but make up only 20% of the registered micro and small businesses in Fiji[[17]](#endnote-17). Informal businesses can be attractive to women because they provide flexible working arrangements and have lower entrance requirements. However, the unregulated nature of these businesses also poses risks to women’s personal safety, job and food security. Fiji has a high youth literacy rate (99.5%) with universal access to primary and lower secondary education[[18]](#endnote-18). Fiji has succeeded in achieving gender equality in primary and secondary school enrolments and completion rates. Women and men tend to be channeled into different tracks at the secondary level and in technical and vocational training and gender segregation also occurs in the fields of study at the tertiary level.

**Participation and Policy:** Fiji’s governance structures generally follow patriarchal patterns and regardless of ethnicity men tend to dominate leadership and decision-making across various levels of society. During the period of interim government (2006–2014), there was only one woman on the 12-member ruling council of ministers.[[19]](#endnote-19) Following the 2014 elections there are eight women in the 50-member Parliament, holding 14% of seats including the Speaker of the House. This can be compared to 11%, 7% and 11% after the 2006, 2001, and 1999 elections respectively. Fiji has multiple local governance structures including municipal and provincial councils, district committees and rural local authorities. Women’s representation and participation in formal local government planning and decision-making is extremely low resulting in services largely designed and managed by men[[20]](#endnote-20). Women are unequally represented in the workforce of local government and the majority hold support positions such as administration, clerical, and finance. As of 2009, less than 25% of local government employees were women, and on two councils women’s percentages were as low as 7.6%. For senior management positions in the local government workforce, women represented less than 8%.[[21]](#endnote-21)The *iTaukei* chiefly system within villages is generally patriarchal with limited roles in decision-making for women. Chiefs are predominantly male, with 7% female chiefs and 8% of women positions holding landowning units[[22]](#endnote-22). Wives of chiefs often play key roles in the community. But numbers of women on village governance committees are generally low. There is considerable variation among households decision-making practices in Fiji, which are the result of a complex interplay of factors including age, education, ethnicity, geographic location, and income level. In many families men are considered the head of the household and decision-making is largely based on traditional gender roles with men making most key decisions and women’s decision-making limited to the care of children, domestic concerns or for management of particular natural resources. However, in some families shared decision-making is the norm.

**Gender Based Violence and Protection:** Fiji has one of the highest levels of domestic violence in the world. Studies show that up to 72% of women aged 18-64 years have experienced at least one or more form of physical, sexual, or emotional violence, by their husband or partner in their lifetime[[23]](#endnote-23). The most prevalent form of sexual violence is child sexual abuse with 16% of all women sexually abused when they were children under the age of 15[[24]](#endnote-24). In 2010 the Government of Fiji, to eliminating violence against women, has established Zero Tolerance Violence Free Communities Program and implemented a Women's Plan of Action (2010-2019), including a component on violence against women, aiming at eradicating it[[25]](#endnote-25). The formal justice system includes a number of mechanisms to respond to violence against women. The police has a ‘no drop’ policy for domestic violence complaints, designed to ensure that complaints of domestic violence are investigated and proceed to court, and to remove possible pressure on women to drop complaints. However, women in rural areas have difficulty accessing the formal justice system, which is largely urban based[[26]](#endnote-26). While the legal system in Fiji offers protection to women, it often fails to enforce women’s rights. Fiji reported to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2000 & 2010 expressing continuing concern in the area of gender-based violence. Across Melanesia, violence against women and girls and perceptions of male masculinity result in high incidences of gender based violence[[27]](#endnote-27). This also affects trans people who face harassment, discrimination and violence but feel unable to report this to a homophobic and transphobic police force and the small scale island social space makes it difficult for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people to be open and challenge social discriminatory norms and violence.[[28]](#endnote-28)

**Gender in Emergencies**: Women and girls in areas affected by disasters usually face greater challenges related to WASH, protection, shelter and food security and livelihood. Following Cyclone Winston (2016), women looked after the sick and elderly, they helped one another source food and water, and provided one another with support[[29]](#endnote-29). [Cyclone Winston created greater financial uncertainty for women](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-21/fiji-extends-state-of-disaster-in-wake-of-cyclone-winston/7264482), with many now left in charge of the household as men went off to work to rebuild in the aftermath.

1. 2007 Population and Housing Census <http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/latest-releases/key-stats> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. 2007 Population and Housing Census <http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/latest-releases/key-stats> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Poverty and Household Incomes in Fiji in 2008-09 <http://www.spc.int/nmdi/reports/Fiji_HIES_2008-09.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Fiji Poverty Trends, Profiles and Small Area Estimation (2003-2009) <http://www.spc.int/nmdi/Reports/Fiji_Poverty_Report_2011.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Fiji Poverty Trends, Profiles and Small Area Estimation (2003-2009) <http://www.spc.int/nmdi/Reports/Fiji_Poverty_Report_2011.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. [UNICEF Tracking Progress in Maternal and Child Survival, Case Study Report for Fiji, July 2013](http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/14_-_02-2014_Fiji_Case_Study_For_Delivery_to_UNICEF_8-29-2013_conversion_%281%29.pdf) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. *Somebody’s Life, Everybody’s Business*! National Research on Women's Health and Life Experiences in Fiji (2010/2011) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Children in Fiji 2011: An Atlas of Social Indicator <http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/Fiji_Equity_Atlas_Web_version.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. 2007 Population and Housing Census <http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/latest-releases/key-stats> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. 2007 Population and Housing Census <http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/latest-releases/key-stats> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Narsey, W.; Raikoti, T. & Waqavonovono, E. *Preliminary report: poverty and household incomes in Fiji in 2008-09*. Fiji Statistics, 2010 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. 2016 Human Developments Report <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Asian Development Bank, (2016), Fiji Country Gender Assessment 2015, p. xiv. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Asia-Pacific Human Development Report, UNDP 2010: p. 63 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Fiji Gov of, Ministry of National Planning Suva MDGs: 2nd Report, 1990–2009. Report for the Fiji Islands 2010 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. *Fiji Markets Profile,* UNWomen 2009 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Fiji Gov, Ministry of National Planning Suva MDGs: 2nd Report, 1990–2009. Report for the Fiji Islands. 2010, viii, 30-31 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. UNDP Human Development report 2011 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Asian Development Bank, (2016), Fiji Country Gender Assessment 2015, p. 65 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. ‘*Local Government: Servicing Whom?’* Fiji Strengthening Women in Municipal Governance Project Position Paper [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. IWDA, UNDEF, and CLGF. 2010. *Creating Space on the Mat.* in Asian Development Bank, (2016), Fiji Country Gender Assessment 2015, p. 67 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Asian Development Bank, (2016), Fiji Country Gender Assessment 2015, p. 67 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. *Somebody’s Life, Everybody’s Business!* [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid and Live and Learn-CARE Rapid Gender Analysis – TC Winston, Fiji, 2016 [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. UN WOMEN, Global Database on Violence against Women [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. DFAT Fiji country report [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19588605> [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. http://ilga.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Shadow-report-12.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. OCHA, March 2016, Women’s voices in Humanitarian Action [↑](#endnote-ref-29)