

TWO YEARS ON

THE LINGERING GENDERED EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN KIRIBATI



BACKGROUND

Evidence shows that the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis span well beyond its direct health effects, impacting access to health care, employment and income, among other outcomes, and women are often at a disadvantage.¹ To measure these concerns and design effective responses to the crisis, UN Women partnered with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of Kiribati to implement a Rapid Gender Assessment Survey (RGA) utilizing Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). This lasted eight weeks and began

in September 2021. The sample was large and balanced, including 2,032 adults (age 18 and over), with 49 per cent women and 51 per cent men² (annex I).

At the time of data collection, Kiribati was declared free of COVID-19, with no recorded cases. However, curfew orders mandated lockdowns from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. daily. The borders have remained closed since 2020, except for essential items for food and health.

1 For further references on the gendered effects of COVID-19, see <https://data.unwomen.org/resources/covid-19-emerging-gender-data-and-why-it-matters>.
2 Methodological details are provided in the regional report, available at <https://data.unwomen.org>.

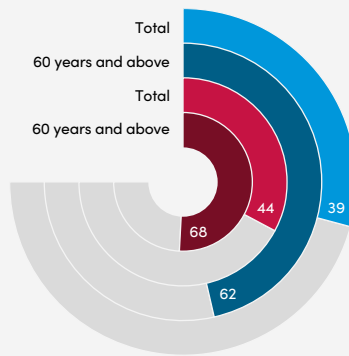
KEY FINDINGS

COVID-19 VACCINATION RATES IN KIRIBATI ARE RELATIVELY LOW, WITH WOMEN AT A DISADVANTAGE

The Government-led vaccination programme in Kiribati was first rolled out in May 2021. An estimated 39 per cent of women and 44 per cent of men self-reported having received two doses of COVID-19 inoculation as of November 2021 (figure 1). Older people are one of

the most vulnerable population groups to the health effects of COVID-19, and gender gaps exist between older women and men (60 years and over) (figure 1), as well as among women and men residing in urban settings (figure 2), with women at a disadvantage.

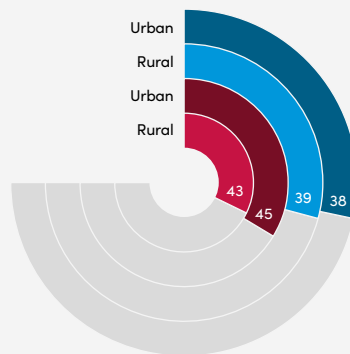
Figure 1: Proportion of people who completed two doses of COVID-19 inoculation as of November 2021, by sex and age group (percentage) (n=2,032)



■ Women ■ Men

Note: Respondents who indicated they did not know if they had been vaccinated, or who refused to answer, have been considered as non-receivers of two-dose inoculation. Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for all age groups (total) ($p = 0.01$).

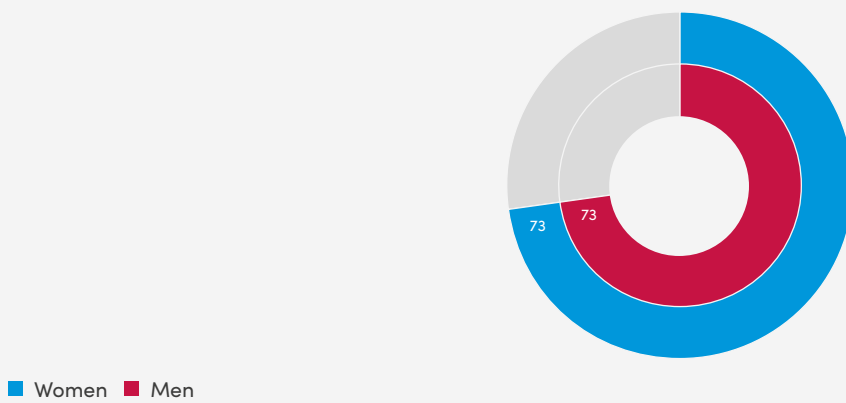
Figure 2: Proportion of people who completed two doses of COVID-19 inoculation as of November 2021, by sex and location (percentage) (n=2,031)



■ Women ■ Men

Note: Respondents who indicated they did not know if they had been vaccinated or who refused to answer have been considered as non-receivers of two-dose inoculation. Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for the urban population ($p = 0.02$).

Figure 3: Proportion of people who cited “waiting to be called” as the main reason for not receiving two doses of COVID-19 inoculation as of November 2021, by sex (percentage) (n=1,167)

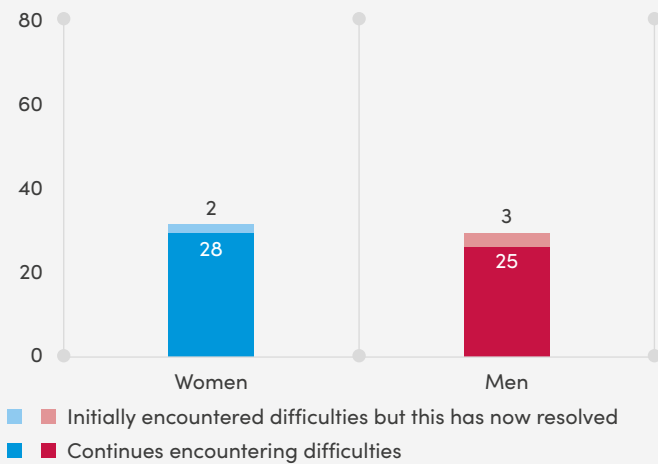


Note: The responses “Other”, “I do not know” and “Refuse to answer” were not included in the analysis.

The majority of respondents who had not received two doses of COVID-19 inoculation cited “waiting to be called for receiving the second job” as the main reason (73 per cent), with no gender differences in this regard (figure 3). Fears about the side effects of vaccines were cited as main reasons by 5 per cent of women and 4

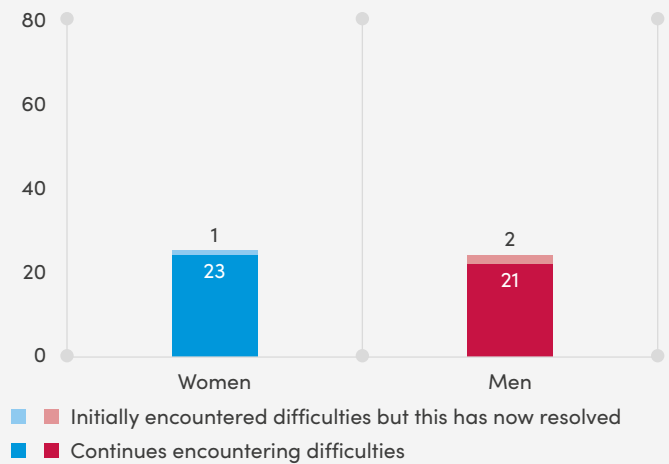
per cent of men who had not completed two doses. Concerns about contagion and overwhelmed health care facilities affected access to health, globally. In Kiribati, about 24 per cent of people noted difficulties accessing medical supplies and hygiene products since the onset of the pandemic (figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4: Proportion of people who encountered difficulties accessing medical supplies, by sex (percentage) (n=2,032)



Note: Respondents who indicated they did not know or who refused to answer have been considered as not having encountered difficulties accessing medical supplies.

Figure 5: Proportion of people who encountered difficulties accessing hygiene products, by sex (percentage) (n=2,032)



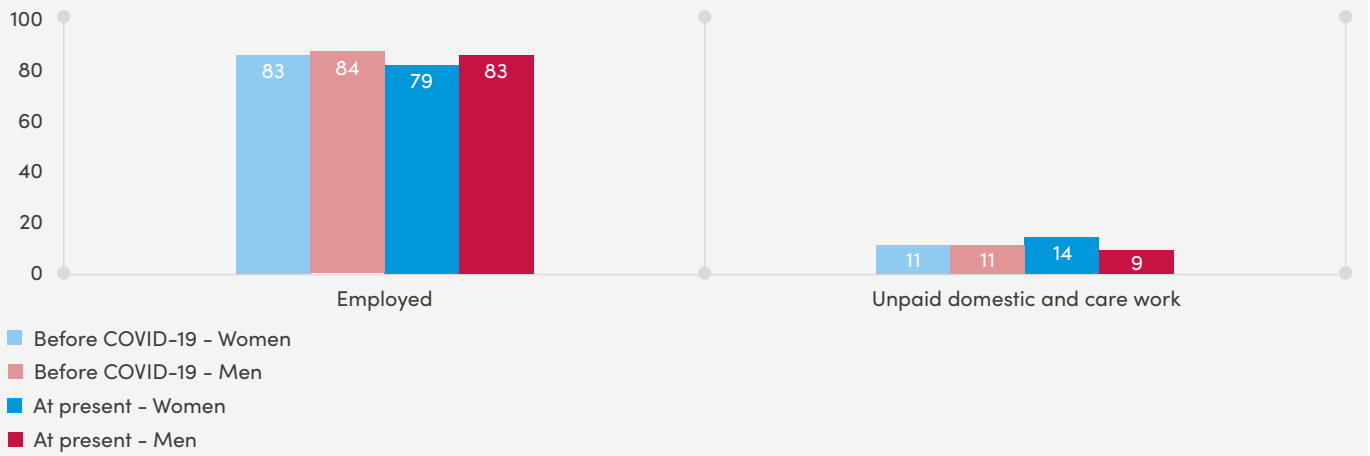
Note: Estimates for women and men in Kiribati for “Initially encountered difficulties but this has now resolved” should be interpreted with caution as the number of respondents that chose this response category is less than 25. Respondents who indicated they did not know or who refused to answer have been considered as not having encountered difficulties accessing hygiene products.

MORE WOMEN ARE LEAVING THE LABOUR MARKET TO TAKE ON ADDITIONAL HOUSEHOLD CHORES

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, fewer women than men engaged in gainful employment. The pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities and pushed some

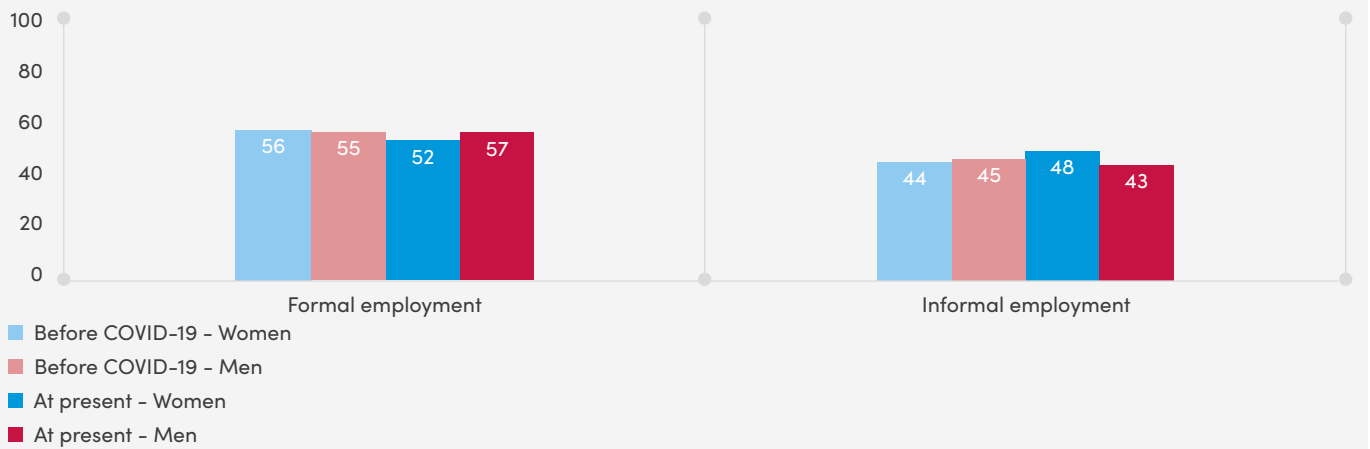
women out of the labour market to take on additional unpaid work at home (figure 6). Women are still more likely than men to engage in informal employment (figure 7).

Figure 6: Proportion of people in employment and performing unpaid domestic and care work before COVID-19 and at present, by sex (percentage) (n=170 current employment; n=170 previous employment)



Note: Estimate for unpaid domestic and care work for women and men in Kiribati should be interpreted with caution as the number of responses is less than 25 each.

Figure 7: Proportion of people engaged in formal and informal employment, before COVID-19 and at present, by sex (percentage) (n=145 current employment; n=150 previous employment)

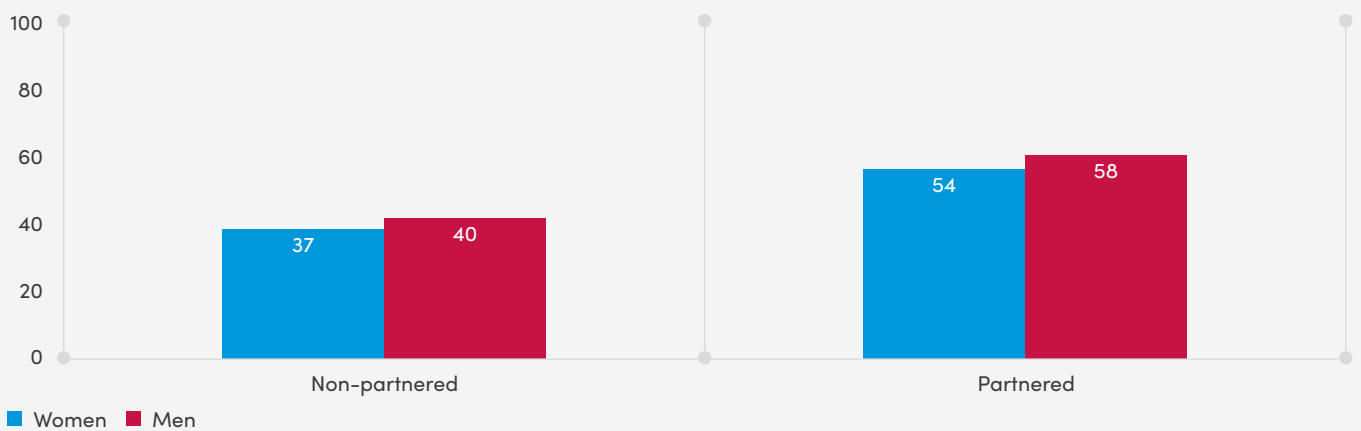


THE PANDEMIC IS WORSENING GENDER POVERTY GAPS, AS WOMEN ARE LESS LIKELY TO HAVE AN INCOME AND MORE LIKELY TO LOSE IT WHEN THEY DO

In Kiribati, 50 per cent of women and 53 per cent of men noted having a source of personal income at the time of the survey. Differences between partnered and non-partnered people are large, with non-partnered women

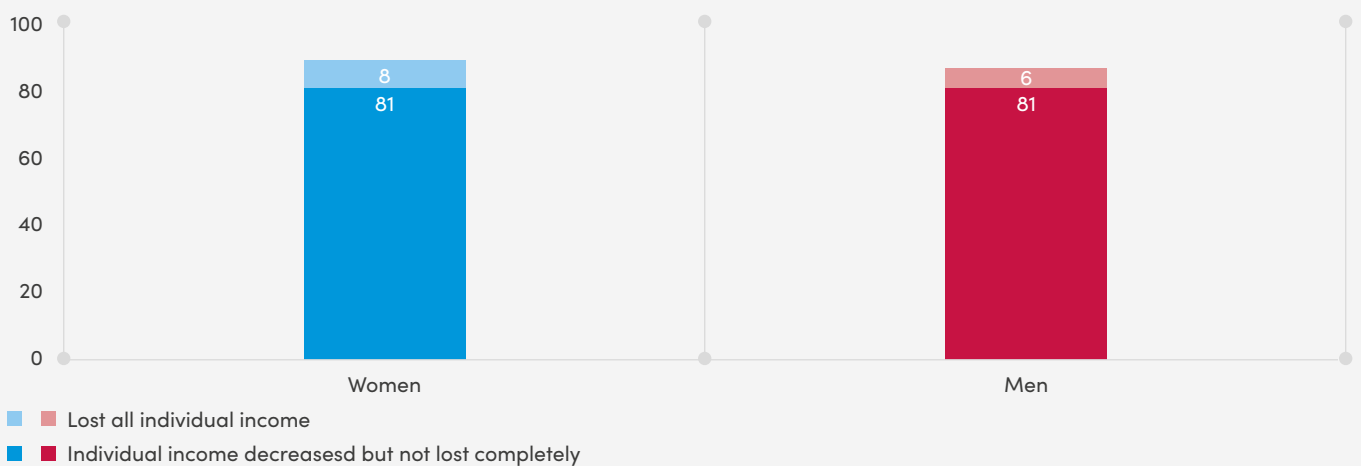
at a disadvantage (figure 8).³ As a result of the economic recession triggered by the pandemic, 81 per cent of women and men saw drops in their income (figure 9).

Figure 8: Proportion of people who have a source of personal income, by sex and partnership status (percentage) (n=2,032)



Note: Partnership status has been classified as partnered if respondents were married and non-partnered if respondents were separated, widowed, divorced or single (never married). The responses "I do not know" and "Refuse to answer" were not depicted in the figure.

Figure 9: Proportion of people who saw changes in personal income since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and type of change (percentage) (n=281)



Note: The figure depicts the proportion of people who saw decreases, among those who noted any change in their personal income. People who noted their income did not change were not considered for this calculation. The proportion of people who saw increases in their income was only 12 per cent of the sample and thus are not depicted. The number of respondents in Kiribati that lost all individual income is less than 25, and thus estimates should be interpreted with caution.

3 Non-partnered women and men tend to be younger and are less likely to earn an income.

REMITTANCES ARE A LIFELINE FOR MANY, BUT THE PANDEMIC HAS SHIFTED THESE FLOWS TOWARDS MEN

In Kiribati, 18 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men receive remittances as of November 2021. Women were slightly more likely than men to note

changes in remittance flows since the onset of COVID-19 (figure 10), whereas slightly more men than women noted a reduction in the amount received (figure 11).

Figure 10: Proportion of people who stopped/started receiving remittances since the onset of COVID-19, by sex (percentage) (n=2,032)

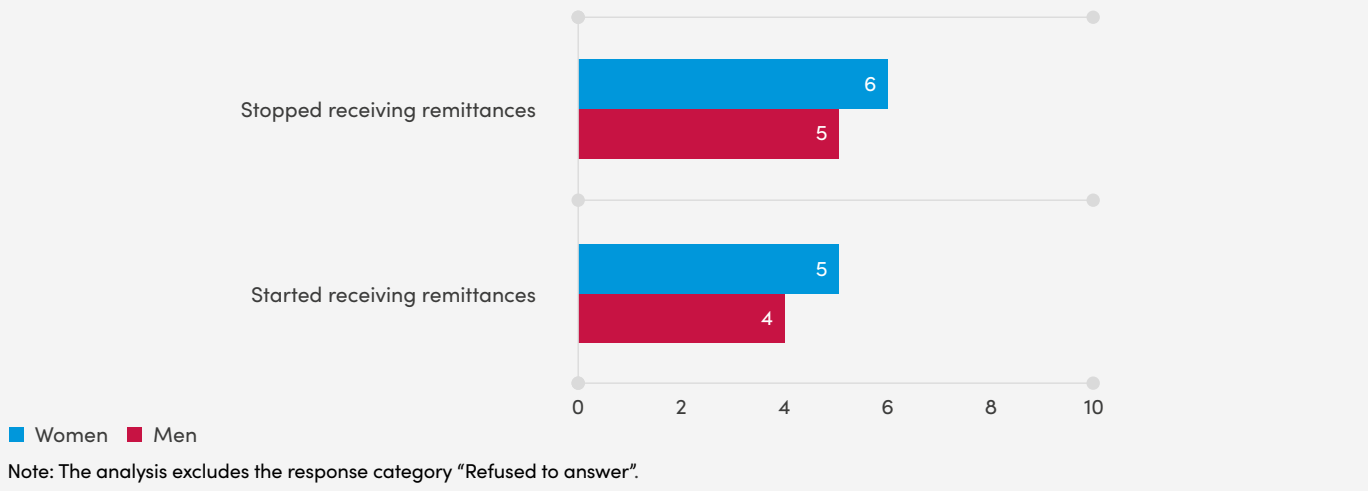
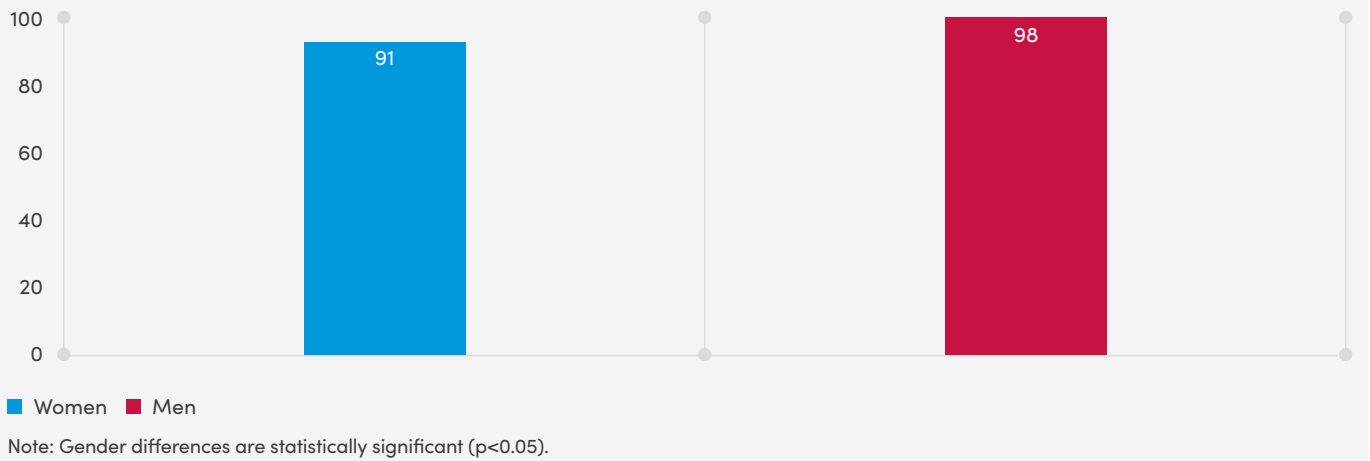


Figure 11: Proportion of people who received remittances prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and noted a decrease in the amount received, by sex (percentage) (n=106)



CHANGES IN HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND OTHER FACTORS ARE INCREASING VULNERABILITY TO FOOD HARDSHIP

Among people in Kiribati that experienced a change in household income since the onset of the pandemic (23 per cent), most saw it decrease (85 per cent of women and 90 per cent of men). Of these people, 46 per cent of women had no personal income compared to 38

per cent of men. Drops in household income, in many cases, were accompanied by food hardship. In Kiribati, approximately 35 per cent of adults experienced food hardship, with more men than women in rural areas experiencing this challenge (figure 12).

Infographic 1: Severe food hardship in Kiribati

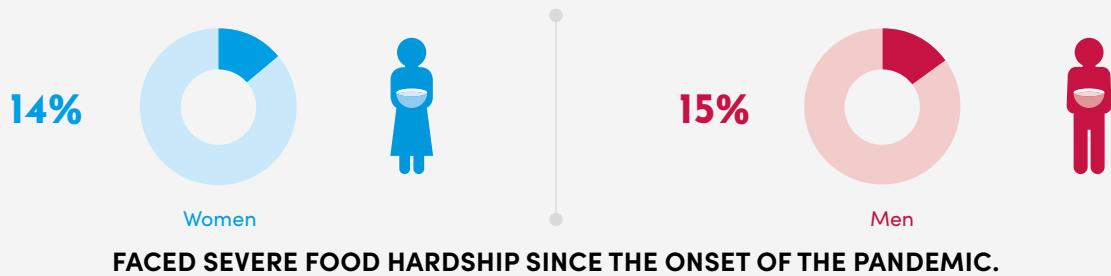
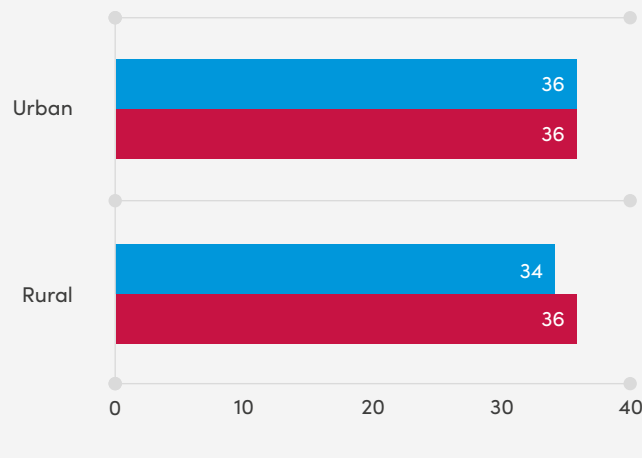


Figure 12: Proportion of people experiencing moderate or severe food hardship, by sex and location (percentage) (n=2,028)



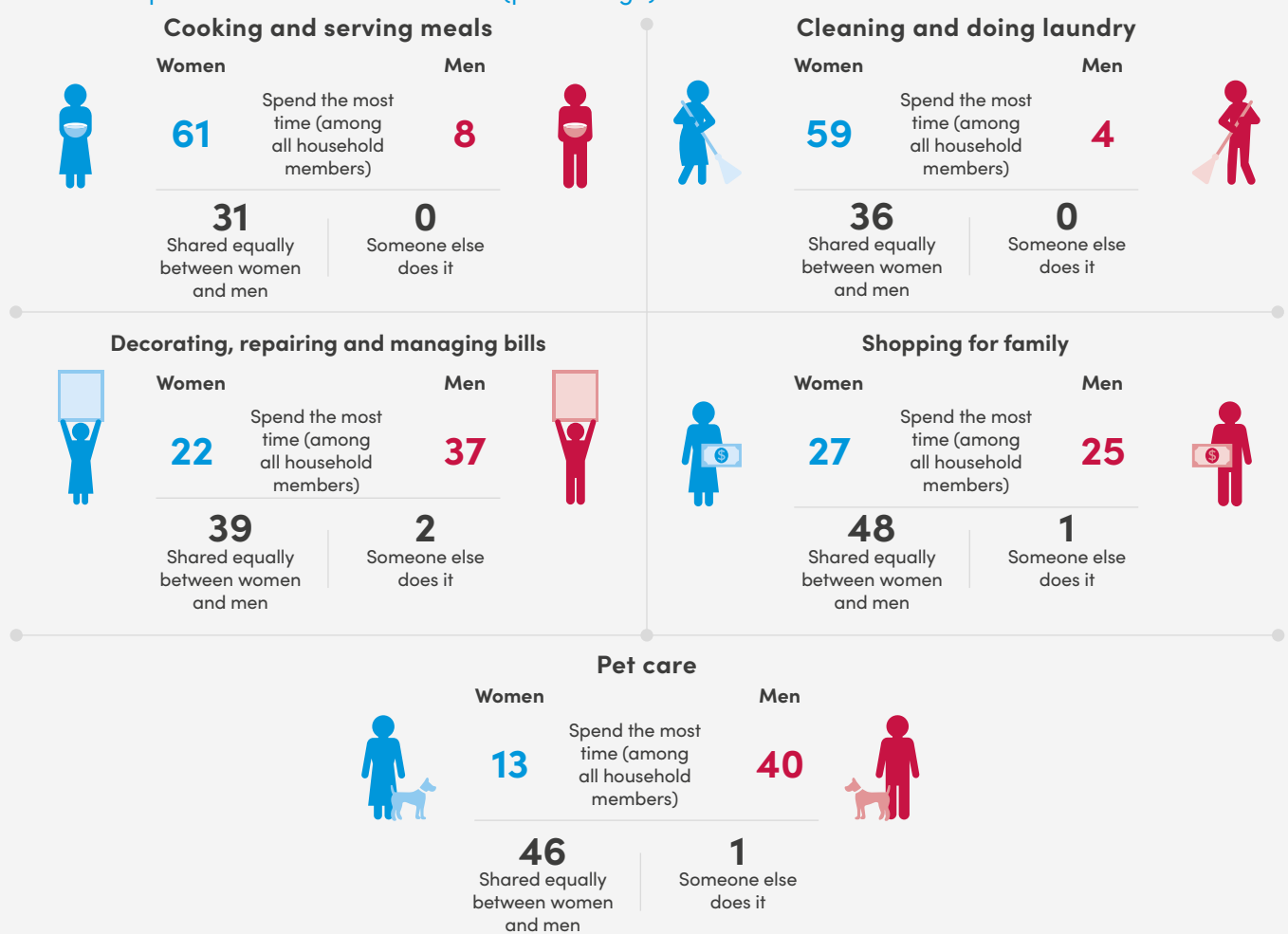
Note: Food hardship measures the lack of access to food in enough quantity or quality. Data collected utilizing FAO FIES questionnaire sequence were analysed using the Rash model to assess the performance of the scale. The data passed the statistical validation tests, and the raw score (the number of affirmative answers to the eight questions) can be considered as an ordinal measure of food security. Therefore, an individual is considered as experiencing food hardship if the raw score is four or higher. At this raw score the probability of experiencing food hardship is higher than 50 per cent.

COVID-19 MULTIPLIED UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORKLOADS, BUT REDISTRIBUTION OF TASKS DID NOT TAKE PLACE

Women, overall, are more likely to take on domestic and care chores at home (figures 13 and 14). In Kiribati, women take on most of the cooking and cleaning. The onset of the pandemic multiplied care responsibilities, with 27 per cent of women and 22 per cent of men noting an increase in time spent feeding, washing and providing physical and medical care for children.

More women than men are in charge of teaching children and managing related arrangements with schools (figure 14). An estimated 57 per cent of people noted that children missed school because they lacked access to remote learning technologies or they were unable to pay for schooling (figure 15).⁴

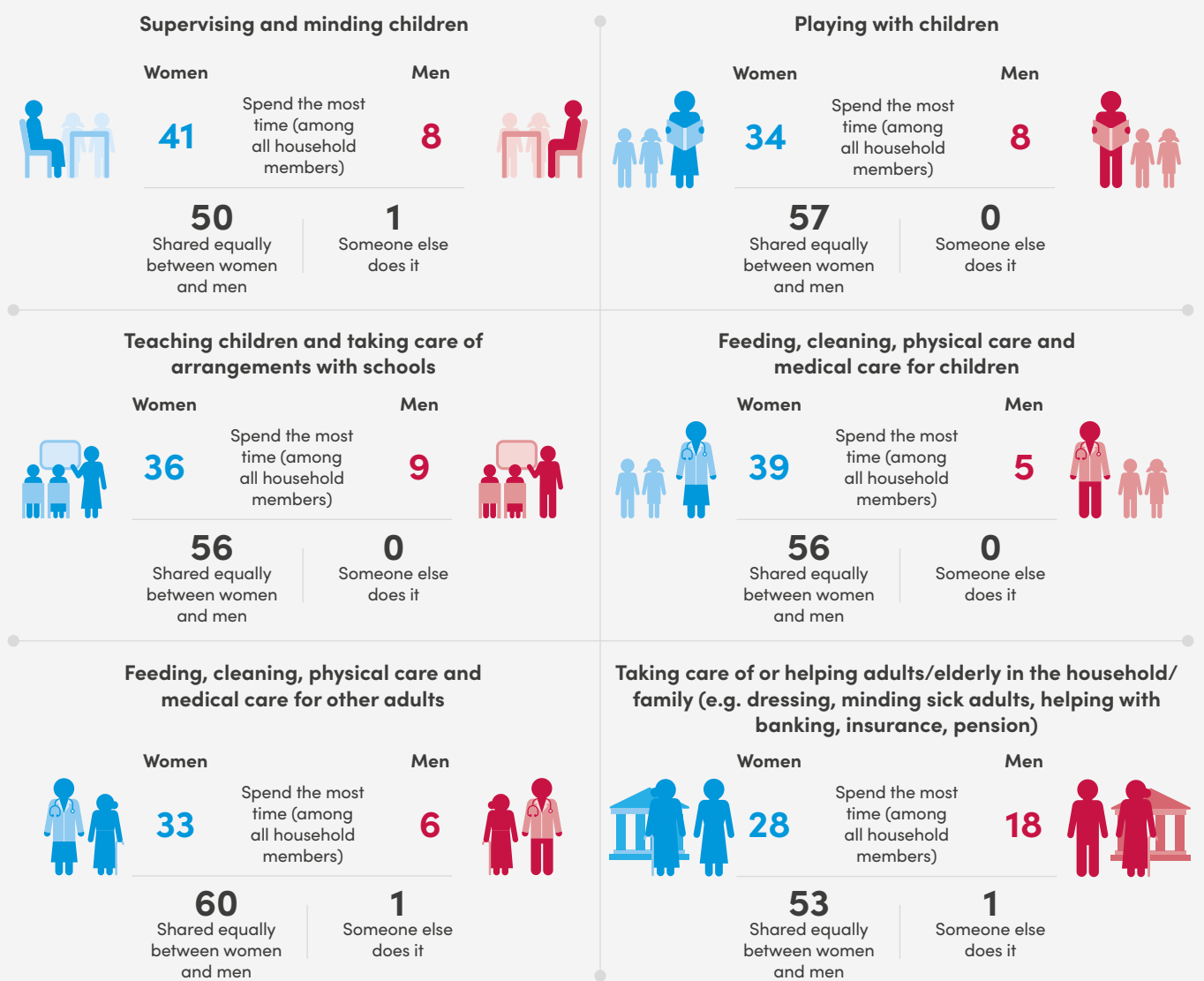
Figure 13: Proportion of people who noted women/men in the household spend the most time performing different unpaid domestic work activities (percentage)



Note: "Women in the household" refers to a clustered category of women respondents who reported being primarily in charge of the activity and respondents of any sex who reported a female household member was primarily in charge of the activity. "Men in the household" refers to a clustered category of men respondents who reported being primarily in charge of the activity and respondents of any sex who reported a male household member was primarily in charge of the activity. "Shared equally between women and men" refers to respondents who reported an activity is equally undertaken by women and men in the household. Respondents who reported that the activity does not take place in the household, indicated they did not know or refused to answer were excluded from the analysis. Estimates should be interpreted with caution when the number of respondents that chose the response category is less than 25. This includes respondents in Kiribati who indicated "Someone else does it" in the analyses of: 1) cooking and serving meals and cleaning and doing laundry; 2) shopping for family; and 3) pet care. All gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for cooking and serving meals, cleaning and doing laundry; decorating, repairing and managing bills; and pet care.

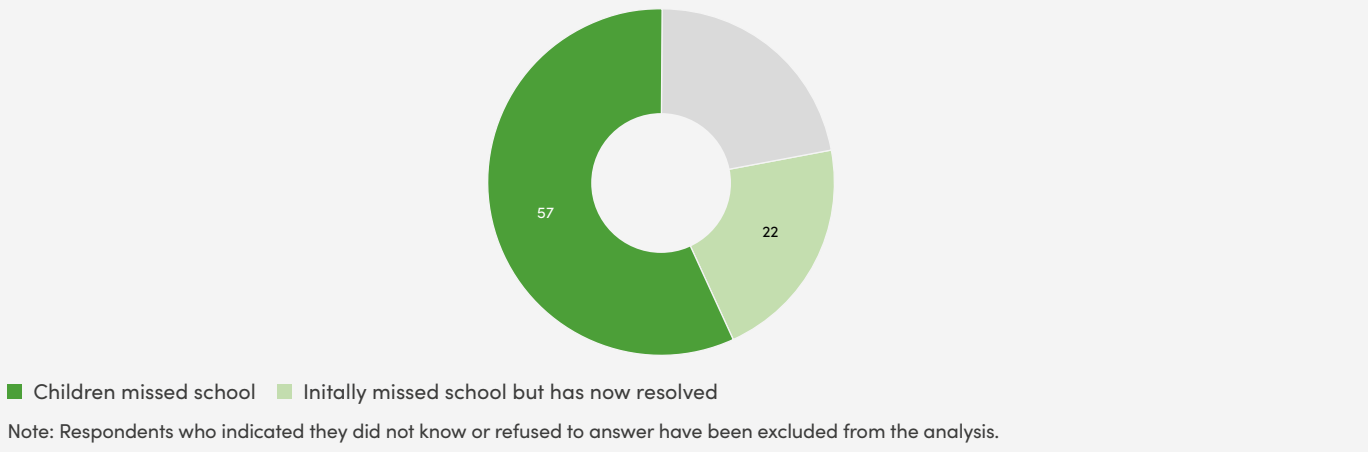
⁴ Schools closed on a temporary basis in 2020. Teachers were initially not prepared to teach remotely, and there are low levels of access to the Internet. See www.unicef.org/pacificislands/stories/teachers-kiribati-well-prepared-future-school-closures.

Figure 14: Proportion of people who noted women/men in the household spend the most time performing different unpaid care work activities (percentage)



Note: "Women in the household" refers to a clustered category of women respondents who reported being primarily in charge of the activity and respondents of any sex who reported a female household member was primarily in charge of the activity. "Men in the household" refers to a clustered category of men respondents who reported being primarily in charge of the activity and respondents of any sex who reported a male household member was primarily in charge of the activity. "Shared equally between women and men" refers to respondents who reported an activity is equally undertaken by women and men in the household. Respondents who reported that the activity does not take place in the household, indicated they did not know or refused to answer were excluded from the analysis. Estimates should be interpreted with caution when the number of respondents that chose the response category is less than 25. This includes respondents in Kiribati who indicated 'Someone else does it' in the analyses of: 1) supervising and minding children, playing with children and taking care of or helping adults/ older people (own household of family) ; 2) teaching children and taking care of arrangements with schools and feeding, cleaning, physical care and medical care for dependent and non-dependent adults; 3) feeding, cleaning, physical care and medical care for children. All gender differences are statistically significant (p<0.05).

Figure 15: Proportion of people who noted that children living in the household missed schooling due to the lack of access to remote learning technologies or inability to pay for schooling (e.g. fees/supplies) since the onset of COVID-19 (percentage) (n=1,834)



THE PANDEMIC HAS OVERLAPPED WITH ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES, MAKING IT HARDER FOR WOMEN AND MEN TO COPE

Natural hazards such as droughts have overlapped with the pandemic. This, coupled with changes in the availability of public transportation (figure 16), affected access to natural resources for women and men. In Kiribati, an estimated 21 per cent of women and 20 per cent of men noted that their access to water sources was compromised since the onset of COVID-19, with both urban and rural areas being affected (figure 17). In most households in Kiribati, the unpaid chores

of water and fuel collection fall on men’s shoulders (figure 18 and figure 19). However, more women than men noted an increase in time spent fetching water since the onset of the pandemic (11 per cent of women and 6 per cent of men). Similarly, 9 per cent of women and 5 per cent of men noted an increase in time spent collecting firewood. In addition, 24 per cent of people noted losing access to power.

Figure 16: Proportion of people who lost access to public transportation since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and location (percentage) (n=2,031)

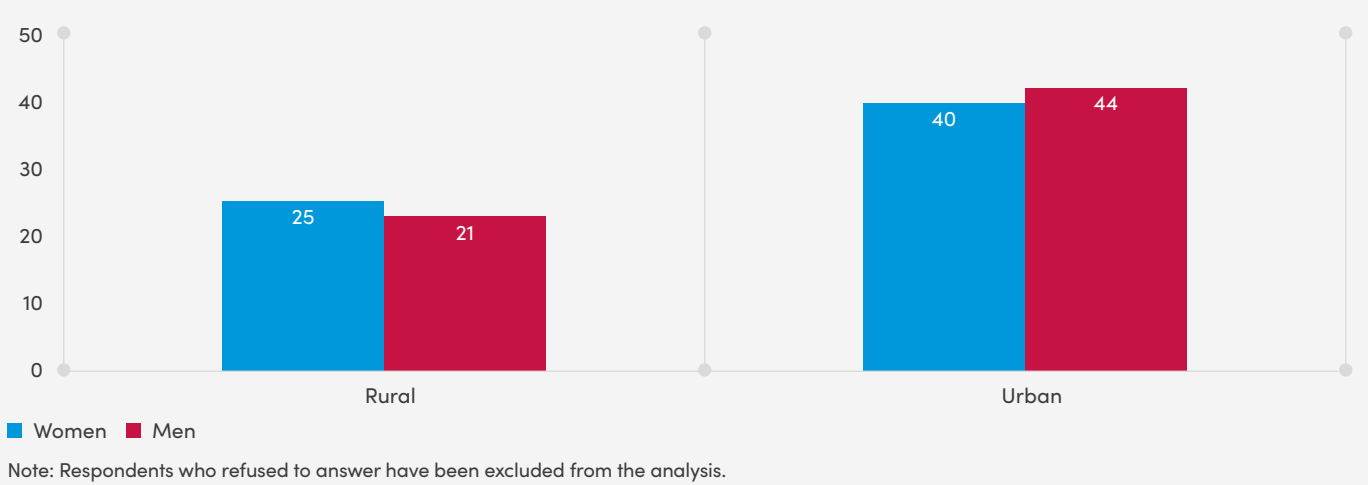


Figure 17: Proportion of people whose water source was compromised since the onset of COVID-19 and continues to be, by sex and location (percentage) (n=2,021)

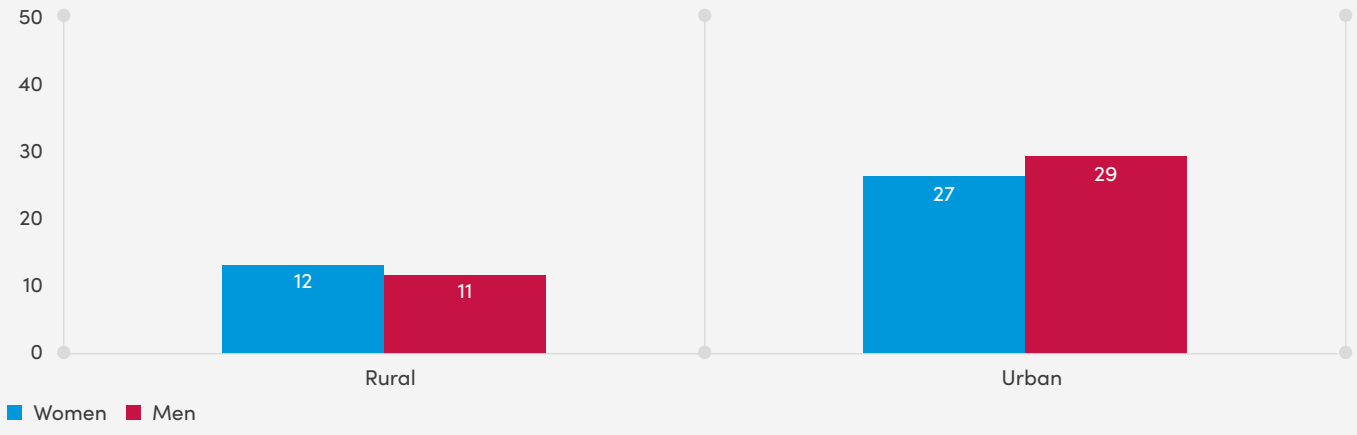
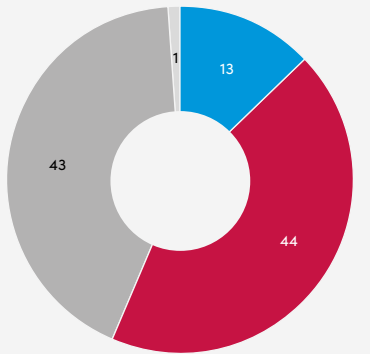
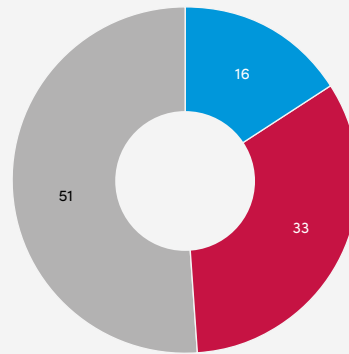


Figure 18: Proportion of people who noted women/men in the household spend the most time fetching water (percentage) (n=1,896)



■ Women in the household ■ Men in the household
 ■ Shared equally between women and men
 ■ Someone else does it

Figure 19: Proportion of people who noted women/men spend the most time collecting fuel/firewood for the household (percentage) (n=1,919)



■ Women in the household ■ Men in the household
 ■ Shared equally between women and men
 ■ Someone else does it

Note: "Women in the household" refers to a clustered category of women respondents who reported being primarily in charge of the activity and respondents of any sex who reported a female household member was primarily in charge of the activity. "Men in the household" refers to a clustered category of men respondents who reported being primarily in charge of the activity and respondents of any sex who reported a male household member was primarily in charge of the activity. "Shared equally between women and men" refers to respondents who reported an activity is equally undertaken by women and men in the household. Respondents who reported that the activity does not take place in the household, indicated they did not know or refused to answer were excluded from the analysis. Estimates for "Someone else does it" in Kiribati should be interpreted with caution as the number of respondents that chose this response category is less than 25. Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for both activities.

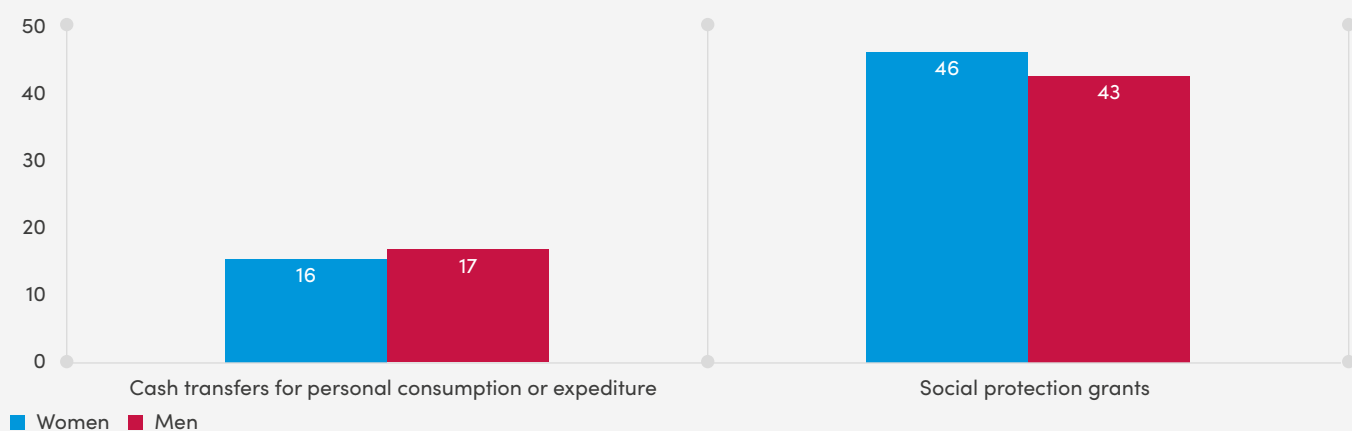
GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES AND OTHER SUPPORT ARE INACCESSIBLE TO MANY

COVID-19 affected the livelihoods of people around the world, including in countries where the virus did not spread substantially. In response to the pandemic, in May 2021 the Government of Kiribati approved funds for citizens affected by COVID-19 restrictions to travel back to Kiribati and also provided funds for the private sector to build back better, but access to these benefits has been limited to half the adult population, with some gender differences.⁵

Among all forms of government support, social protection grants have had the furthest reach, whereas cash

transfers have not been widely disbursed. Women are more likely to report receiving social protection grants whereas men are slightly more likely to report receiving cash transfers (figure 20). In the absence of wealth data, analysis by educational attainment shows how people in different groups have accessed these resources. Women with lower levels of education benefitted slightly more than men (figure 21). Other social protection measures, such as the distribution of personal protective equipment, reached about 34 per cent of people in Kiribati, but very few people received personal hygiene supplies or food and agricultural inputs (figure 22).

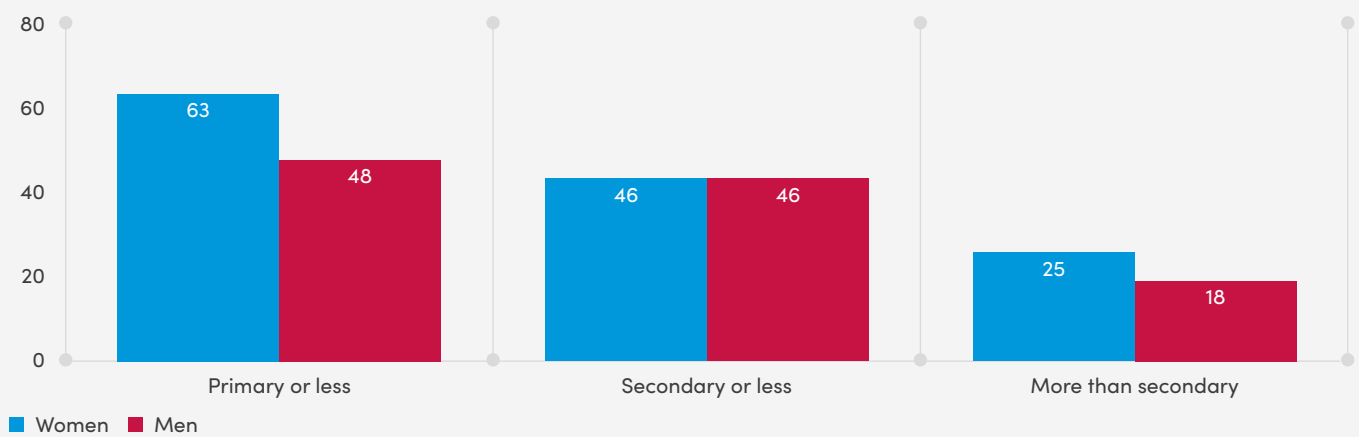
Figure 20: Proportion of people who received government support since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and type of support (percentage) (n=2023 cash transfer; n=2,022 social protection grant)



Note: Respondents who indicated they did not know or refused to answer were excluded from the analysis.

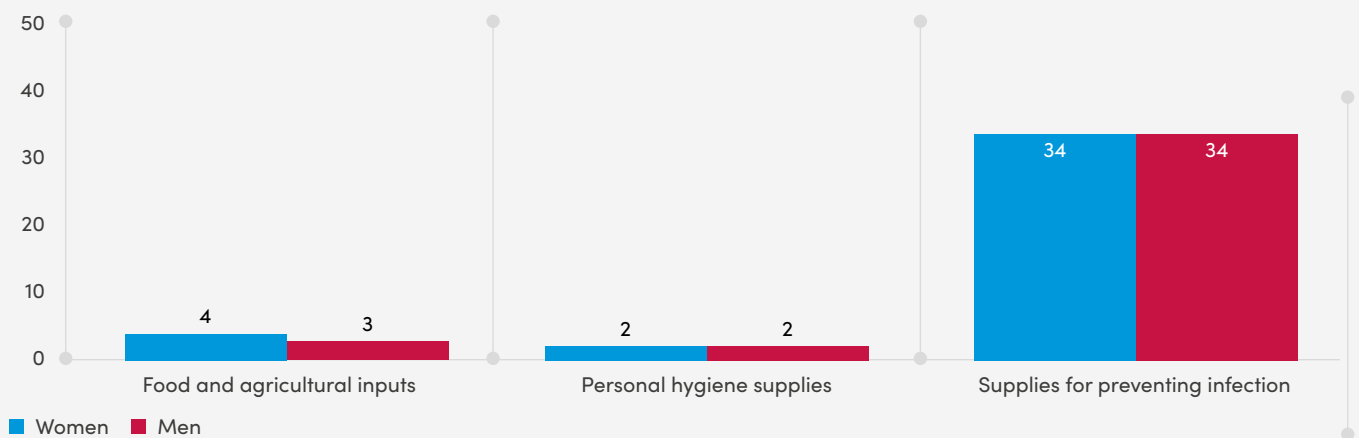
⁵ Summaries of interventions are available here: <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/> and also at <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19#K>

Figure 21: Proportion of people who received social protection grants since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and education level (percentage) (n=2,020)



Note: Education levels have been classified into three categories, "Primary or less" includes all respondents who received no formal education, some primary education and those who completed primary school. "Secondary or less" includes all respondents who received some secondary education and those who completed secondary school. "More than secondary" includes all individuals who received technical and vocational training, some university/college education, some post-graduate education and those who completed university/college education and post graduate education. Respondents who indicated they did not know or refused to answer were excluded from the analysis.

Figure 22: Proportion of people who received government support in the form of personal hygiene supplies (n=2,014), food or agricultural inputs (n=2,009) and supplies for preventing infection (n=2,018), by sex (percentage)



Note: Estimates for women and men in Kiribati who reported having received personal hygiene supplies as government support should be interpreted with caution as the number of respondents that chose this response category is less than 25. Respondents who indicated they did not know or refused to answer have been excluded from the analysis.

ANNEX I: UNWEIGHTED SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION (PERCENTAGE) (N=2,032)

	Women	Men
Total	49	51
Location⁶		
Urban	71	66
Rural	29	34
Age group⁷		
18–28	38	38
29–39	29	27
40–50	19	18
51–61	10	12
62+	4	6
Marital status		
Married	72	71
Married but separated	2	1
Widowed	3	1
Divorced	1	1
Single (never married)	22	26
Education⁸		
Some primary education	4	7
Primary education	3	5
Secondary education	79	75
Vocational/ college	11	11
Tertiary education	3	3
Disability		
Self-reported	23	23

6 Urban/rural location is self-declared. Population who noted they reside in cities or towns have been considered urban dwellers for the purpose of this analysis. This classification may differ from that used in official statistics in Kiribati.

7 Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100.

8 Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100