

TWO YEARS ON

THE LINGERING GENDERED EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA



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 Papua New Guinea 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 3,089 adults (ages 18 and over).² Of these, 44 per cent were women and 56 per cent were men (annex I).

At the time of data collection, the COVID-19 caseload in Papua New Guinea was high. At the beginning (5 October 2021), there were 19,278 reported cases, and by the end of fieldwork (6 December 2021), there were 35,571 reported cases. Mobility restrictions were in place in the country to some extent. This included requirements for controller's approval for entering the country, COVID-19 testing and quarantine. Furthermore, Western Province, Eastern Highlands Province and Saudan (West Sepik) Province were declared high-risk provinces during the time of data collection, and only essential travel was permitted.

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>.

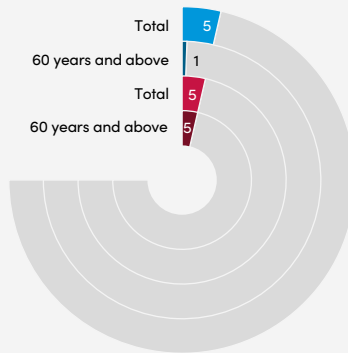
KEY FINDINGS

COVID-19 VACCINATION RATES IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA ARE LOW, WITH OLDER WOMEN AT A DISADVANTAGE

The Government-led vaccination programme in Papua New Guinea began on 13 April 2021 with the vaccination of health-care workers first. Only an estimated 5 per cent of both women and men self-reported having received

two doses of COVID-19 inoculation as of November 2021, with gender gaps among older people (ages 60 and over) (figure 1) and in rural areas (figure 2).

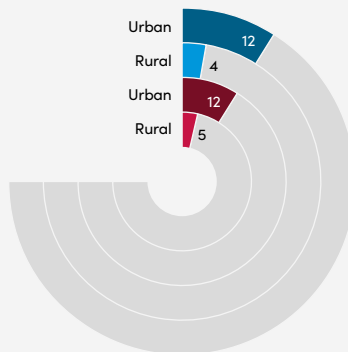
Figure 1: Proportion of people who completed two doses of COVID-19 inoculation as of November 2021, by sex and age group (percentage) (n=3,089)



■ Women ■ Men

Note: Estimates for women and men aged 60 and above in Papua New Guinea should be interpreted with caution as the number of respondents is less than 25. 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.

Figure 2: Proportion of people who completed two doses of COVID-19 inoculation as of November 2021, by sex and location (percentage) (n=3,089)



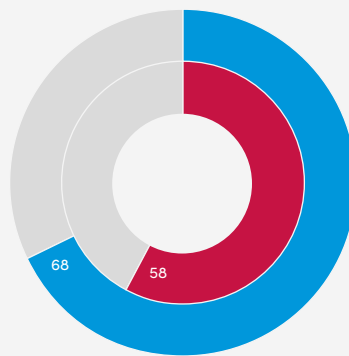
■ Women ■ Men

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.

The majority of respondents who had not received two doses of COVID-19 inoculation cited “being afraid of the side effects” as the main reason. This was more the case among women than men (68 per cent women and 58 per cent men) (figure 3). Fears of contagion and overwhelmed health care facilities affected access to health, globally. In Papua New Guinea, most people noted difficulties accessing medical supplies and hygiene products (figures 4 and 5). Furthermore, about 30 per cent of people also noted they had seen an increase in teenage pregnancies. In a context where access to health care is limited, challenges to access reproductive care may put the health of both mothers and newborns at risk.

Misinformation played a critical role during the pandemic and protection measures to avoid contagion requires access to accurate information. When asked about the main source of information on COVID-19, most people indicated radio, television or the news, with women (43 per cent) less likely than men (55 per cent) to use these sources. More women than men relied on public services announcements (25 per cent women and 20 per cent men), internet and social media (11 per cent women and 9 per cent men) and the community, including family and friends (15 per cent women and 9 per cent men) (figure 6). Gender gaps exist in relation to the clarity of information received, with more women than men finding this information confusing and/or contradictory (figure 7).

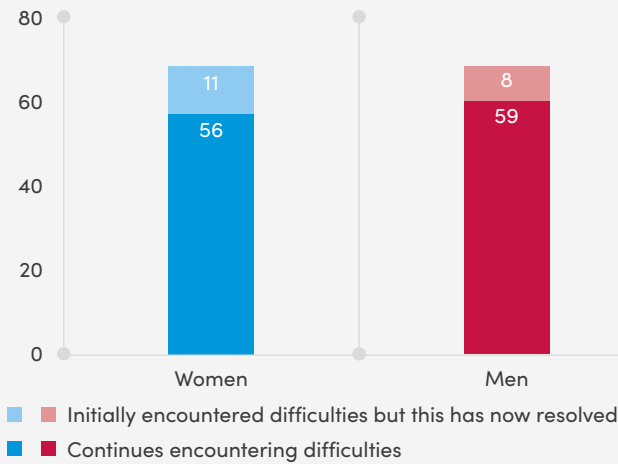
Figure 3: Proportion of people who cited side effects as the main reason for not having received two doses of COVID-19 inoculation as of November 2021, by sex (percentage) (n=2,523)



■ Women ■ Men

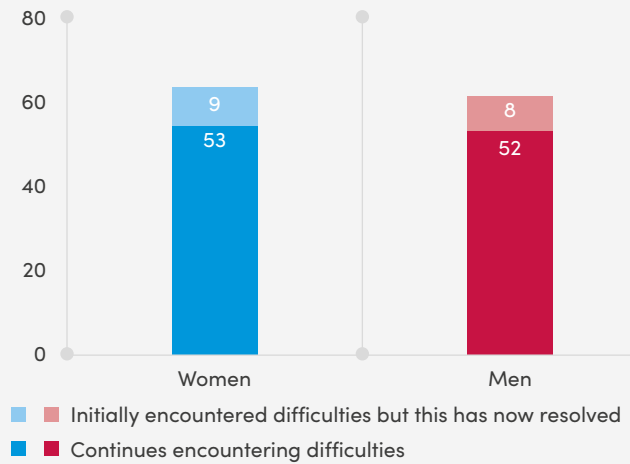
Note: The responses “Other”, “I do not know” and “Refuse to answer” have not been depicted in the analysis. Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for Papua New Guinea ($p = 0.01$).

Figure 4: Proportion of people who encountered difficulties accessing medical supplies, by sex (percentage) (n=3,089)



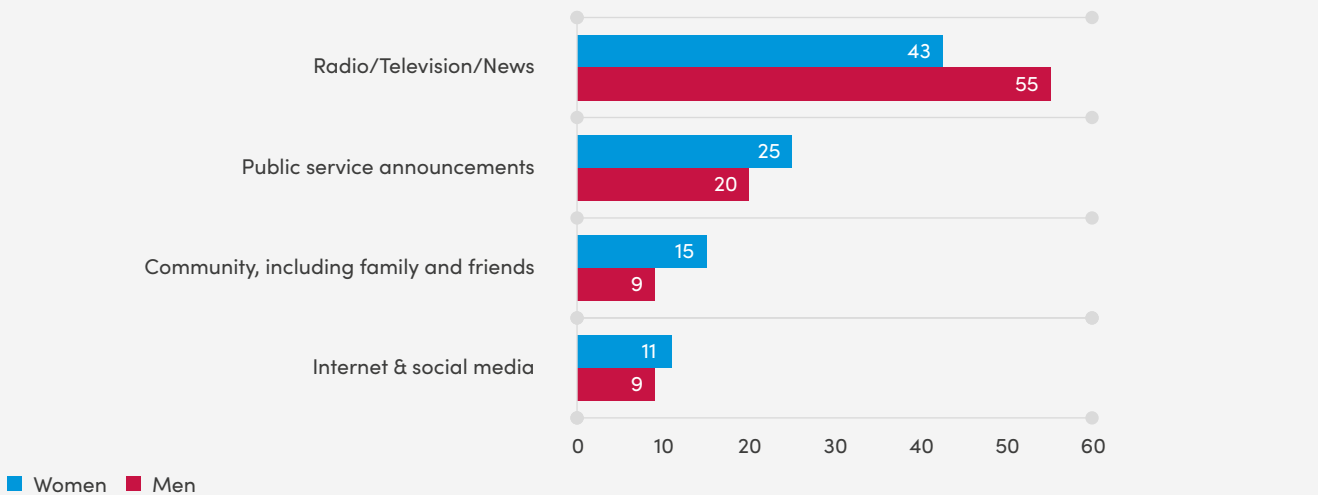
Note: Respondents who indicated they did not know or who refused to answer have been considered as not having encountered difficulties accessing medical supplies. Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for "Initially encountered difficulties but this has now resolved" in Papua New Guinea ($p = 0.00$).

Figure 5: Proportion of people who encountered difficulties accessing hygiene products, by sex (percentage) (n=3,089)



Note: Respondents who indicated they did not know or who refused to answer have been considered as not having encountered difficulties accessing hygiene products. Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for "Initially encountered difficulties but this has now resolved" in Papua New Guinea ($p = 0.001$).

Figure 6: Proportion of people that received information on COVID-19, by sex and means (percentage) (n=3,089)



Note: Less than 2 per cent of respondents received information on COVID-19 via official government websites, phone and other means, thus they have not been depicted in the analysis. Respondents who indicated they did not receive any information on COVID-19 or who indicated they did not know have not been depicted in the analysis. Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for all means of information (except public service announcements).

Figure 7: Proportion of people that received information on COVID-19, by sex and quality of information (percentage) (n=3,070)



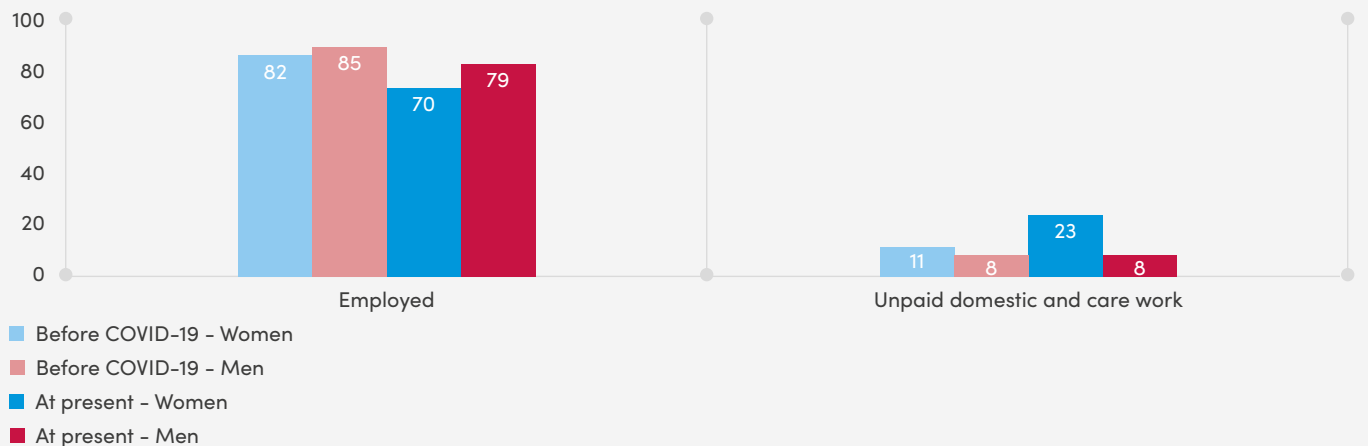
Note: Respondents who indicated they did not know have not been depicted in the analysis. Gender differences are statistically significant for all types of information quality except for “Clear but it came too late for me to prepare”.

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

Prior to COVID-19, fewer women than men engaged in gainful employment. The pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities and pushed more women out of the labour market to take on additional unpaid work at home (figure 8). COVID-19 has also pushed workers

into informal jobs, with slightly more men than women noting shifts from formal to informal jobs. Nevertheless, women are still more likely than men to engage in informal employment overall (figure 9).³

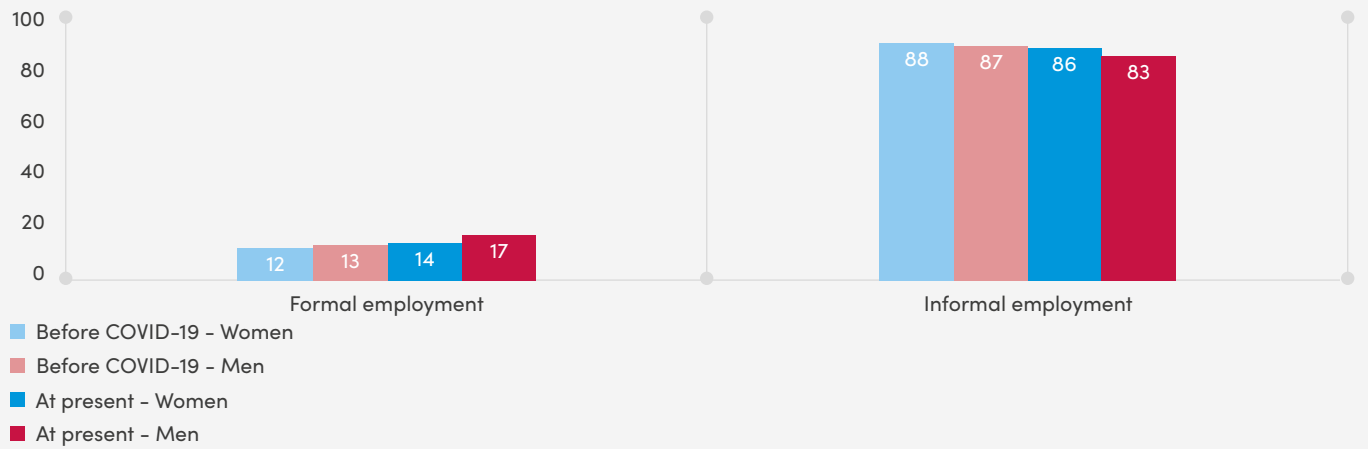
Figure 8: Proportion of people in employment and performing unpaid domestic and care work before COVID-19 and at present, by sex (percentage) (n=727 current employment; n=727 previous employment)



Note: Estimates for men who perform unpaid domestic and care work at present and before COVID-19 in Papua New Guinea 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 women and men in unpaid domestic and care work before COVID-19 ($p = 0.01$) and at present ($p = 0.00$).

3 The Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Papua New Guinea, conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), included 6,000 households across the 89 districts of the country. It was carried out around two months after the COVID-19 state of emergency was declared. Approximately 60 per cent of household respondents reported a reduction of approximately 15-20 per cent in household income. This was largely due to travel restrictions and/or restricted operation of markets. At the same time, 68 per cent of households reported increased expenditure due to the state of emergency, with an increase in debt incurred to meet basic needs. Half of respondents reported a decrease in food consumption. Approximately 25 per cent of those previously working had become unemployed, with similar impacts for men and women, however there were more severe economic impacts for female headed households, with 38 per cent of female heads of households having stopped work. Around two thirds of female headed households expected to see further decline in household income. Methods of coping with reduced income included selling assets and increasing debt (16 per cent). The survey report is available at www.undp.org/papua-new-guinea/publications/socio-economic-impact-assessment-covid-19-papua-new-guinea.

Figure 9: Proportion of people engaged in informal and formal employment, before COVID-19 and at present, by sex (percentage) (n= 544 current employment; n=573 previous employment)

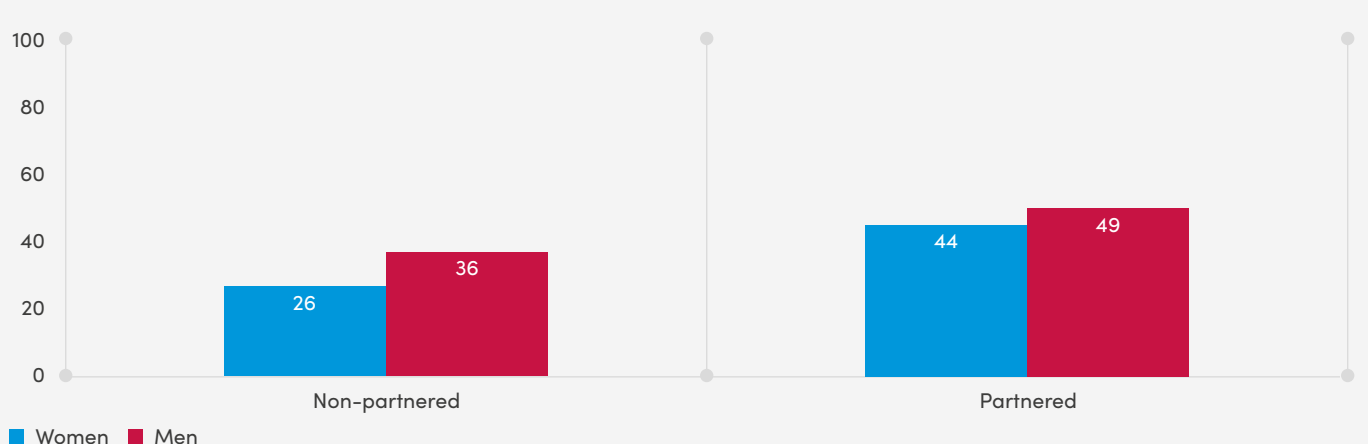


THE PANDEMIC IS WORSENING GENDER POVERTY GAPS, AS WOMEN ARE LESS LIKELY TO HAVE AN INCOME AND MORE LIKELY TO LOSE IT WHEN THEY DO

In Papua New Guinea, 37 per cent of women and 45 per cent of men noted having a source of personal income at the time of the survey. Gender gaps in this regard are large, with both non-partnered and partnered women at

a disadvantage (figure 10).⁴ As a result of the economic recession triggered by the pandemic, 94 per cent of women and 89 per cent of men who noted changes in their income saw it decrease (figure 11).

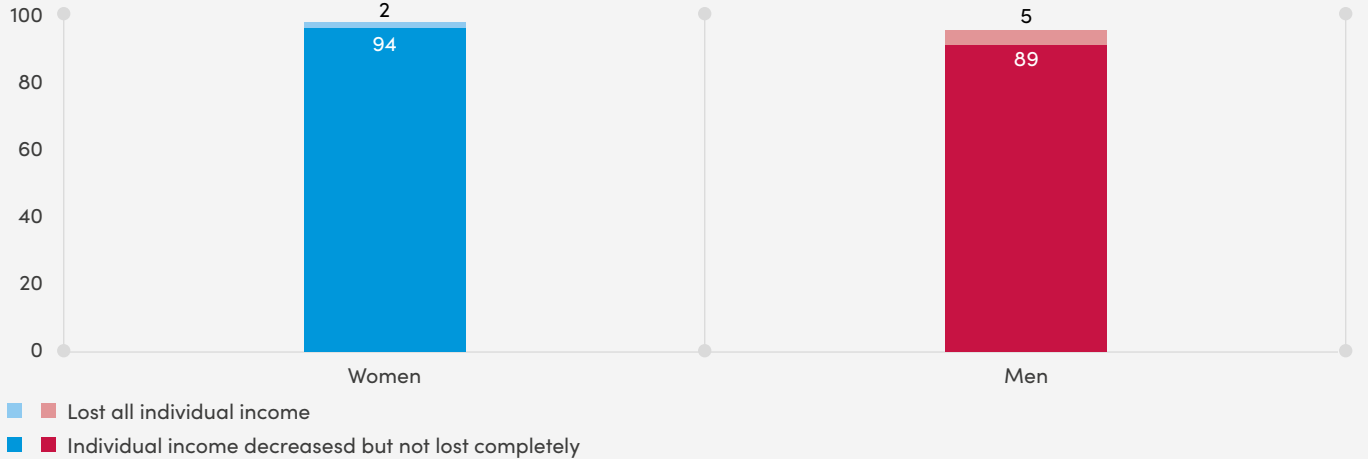
Figure 10: Proportion of people who have a source of personal income, by sex and partnership status (percentage) (n=3,083)



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 response "I do not know" and "Refuse to answer" have not been depicted in the figure. All gender differences are statistically significant (p<0.05) for partnered women and men in Papua New Guinea.

⁴ Non-partnered women and men tend to be younger and are less likely to earn an income.

Figure 11: Proportion of people who saw decreases or losses of personal income among those who noted changes since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and type of change (percentage) (n=754)



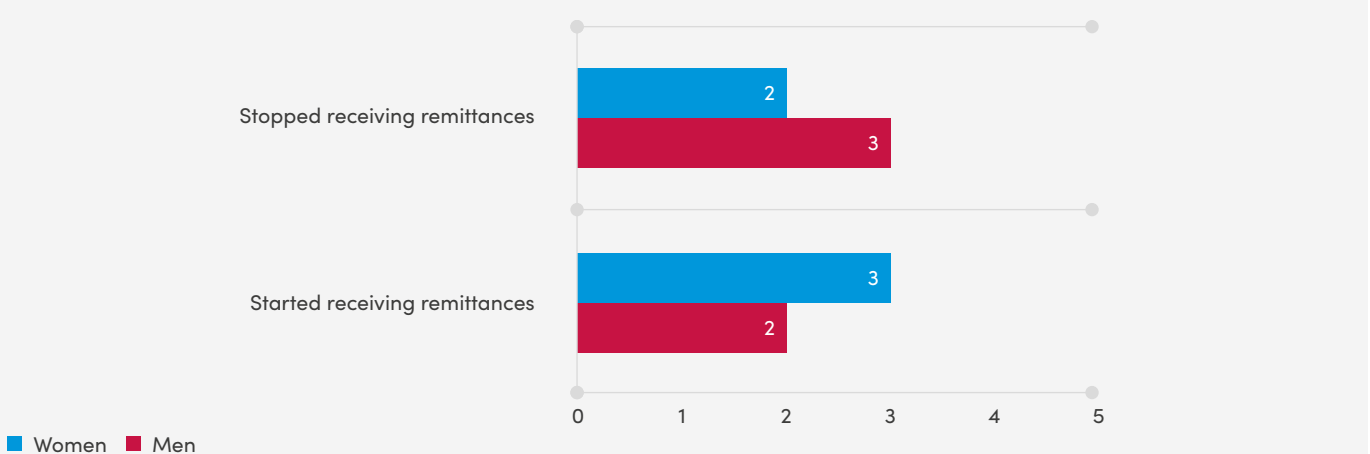
Note: Estimates for “Lost all individual income” for women and men in Papua New Guinea should be interpreted with caution as the number of respondents that chose this response category is less than 25. The response “I do not know” and “Refuse to answer” have not been depicted in the analysis. The proportion of people who saw increases in their income was only 5 per cent of the sample and thus have not been depicted. Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for “Individual income decreased but not lost completely” in Papua New Guinea ($p = 0.02$).

REMITTANCE FLOWS HAVE DECREASED, BUT SHIFTED SLIGHTLY TOWARDS WOMEN

In Papua New Guinea, about 6 per cent of both women and men receive remittances from family or friends living abroad. Women are more likely to note they have started receiving remittances since the onset of COVID-19, while men are slightly more likely to have stopped receiving

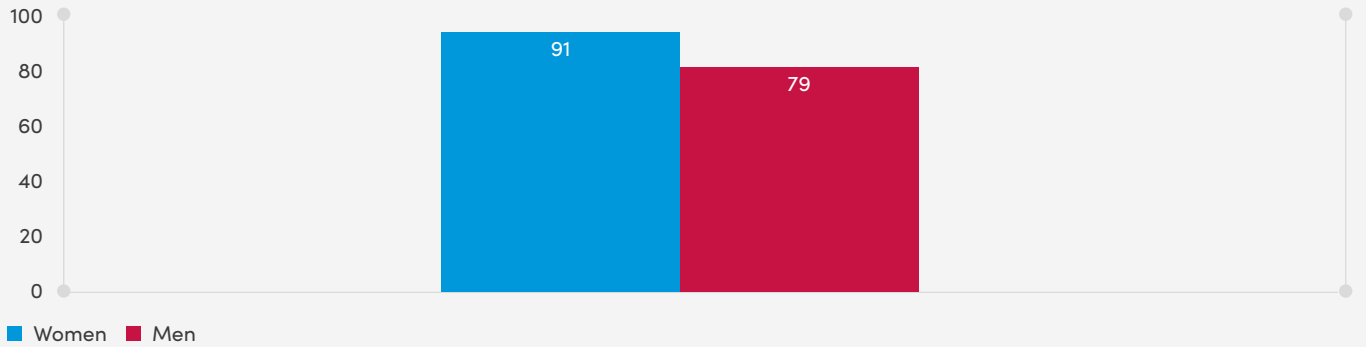
remittances (figure 12). Among those who received remittances prior to the pandemic and continue to do so, most have seen drops in the amount received, with women more likely than men to note these reductions (figure 13).

Figure 12: Proportion of people who stopped/started receiving remittances since the onset of COVID-19, by sex (percentage) (n=3,084)



Note: The responses “I do not know” and “Refuse to answer” have not been depicted in the analysis.

Figure 13: Proportion of people who received remittances prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and noted a decrease in the amount received, by sex (percentage) (n=77)



Note: The responses "I do not know" and "Refuse to answer" have not been depicted in the analysis. Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for Papua New Guinea.

CHANGES IN HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND OTHER FACTORS ARE RENDERING WOMEN MORE VULNERABLE TO FOOD HARDSHIP

Most people who experienced a change in household income saw it fall since the onset of the pandemic (99 per cent of women and 98 per cent of men). Of those whose income fell, 56 per cent of women had no personal income compared to 43 per cent of men. Drops in household income, in many cases, were accompanied by food hardship, which measures the lack of access to food in enough quantity or quality. In Papua New

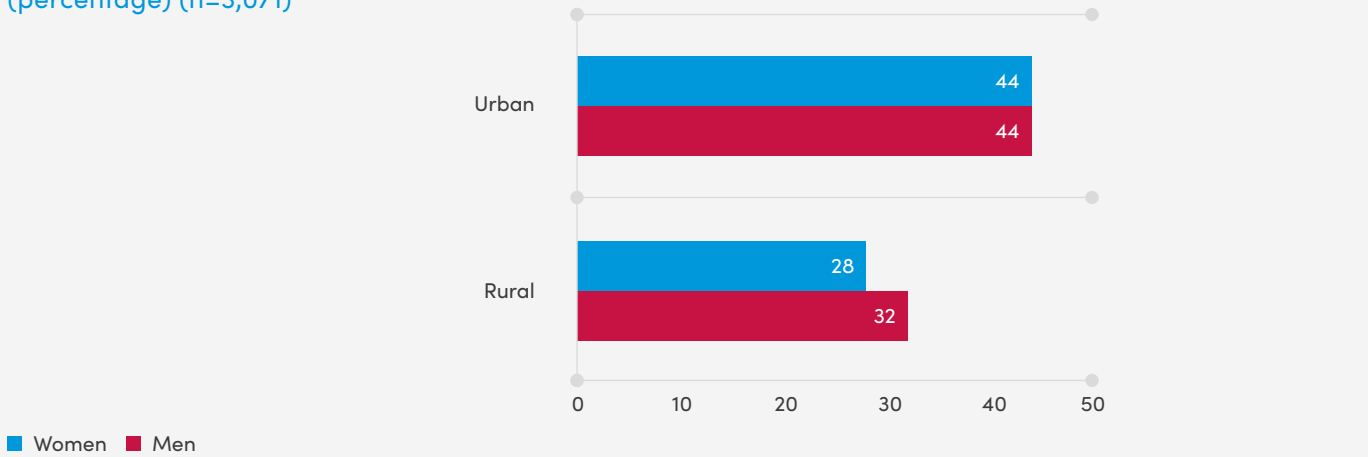
Guinea, roughly 30 per cent of adults are experiencing moderate or severe food hardship. While no gender gaps are obvious in urban settings, in rural areas the proportion of women experiencing this challenge is lower than that of men (figure 14).⁵ Women in rural settings are more likely than men to engage in agriculture and fishing, making women less vulnerable to food hardship.

Infographic 1: Severe food hardship in Papua New Guinea



FACED SEVERE FOOD HARDSHIP SINCE THE ONSET OF THE PANDEMIC.

Figure 14: Proportion of people experiencing moderate or severe food hardship, by sex and location (percentage) (n=3,071)



Note: 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.

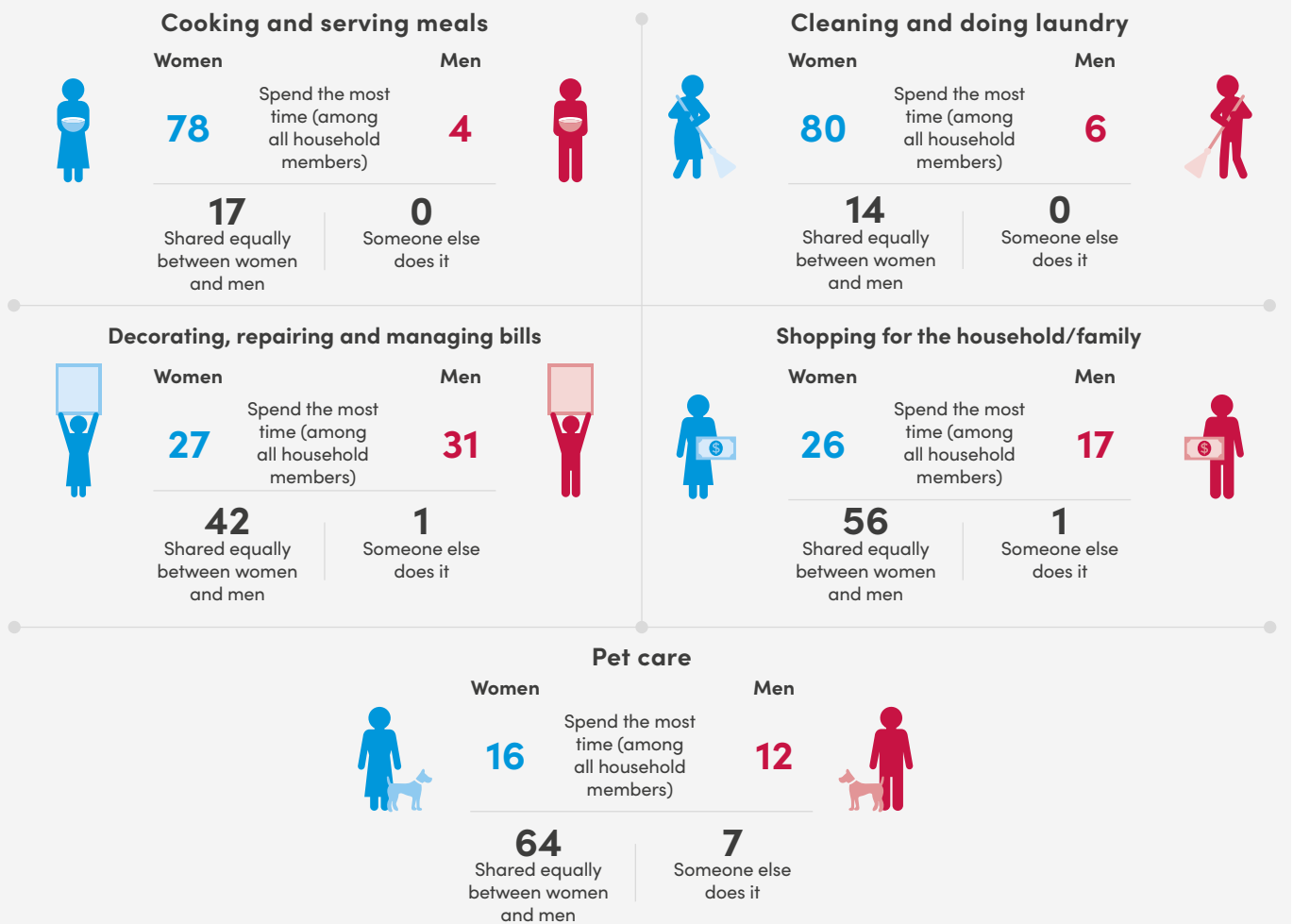
5 Before the pandemic, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reported that agriculture in Papua New Guinea is mainly dominated by smallholder farming systems engaged in both cash crop production, most notably coffee and cocoa, and subsistence production. Women’s labour force participation rate in Papua New Guinea (70 per cent), including employment and entrepreneurship, is slightly less than men’s (71 per cent), according to UNDP. Although more than 50 per cent of the female labour force is engaged in agriculture, women comprise approximately 35 per cent of the economically active population in agriculture. Rural women play a prominent role in subsistence food production, agricultural value chains and rural livelihoods, and they participate in livestock and poultry production and in fish farming. They sell their surplus produce, generally at local markets, to generate income for their families. Women participate in the activities of small and medium-sized enterprises and they own and operate a wide range of farm and non-farm microenterprises, mostly in the informal economy, which enable rural households to diversify and secure their income sources. See [FAO Country gender assessment of agriculture and the rural sector in Papua New Guinea \(2019\)](#).

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 (figures 15 and 16). In Papua New Guinea, women take on most of the cooking, cleaning and supervising of children. When it comes to care work, however, many households share the tasks between women and men. The onset of the pandemic multiplied these responsibilities, with 19 per cent of women and 16 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 16). When asked whether children missed school because they lacked access to remote learning technologies or were unable to pay for schooling, an estimated 61 per cent of people noted that was the case (figure 17).⁶

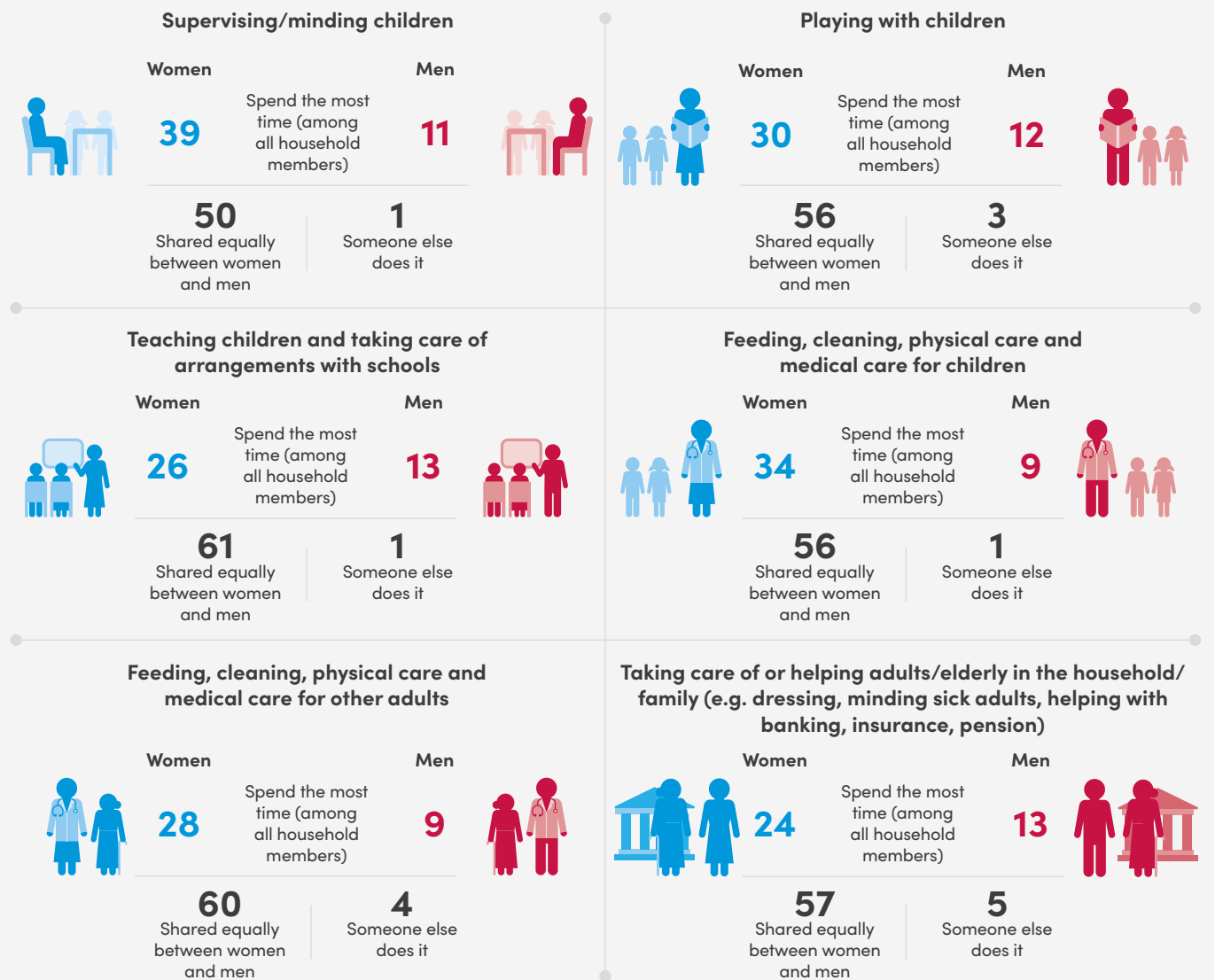
Figure 15: Proportion of people who noted women/men in the household spend the most time performing different unpaid domestic work activities (percentage)



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 responses is less than 25, including respondents who indicated "Someone else does it" in the analysis of: 1) decorating, repairing and managing bills; and 2) shopping for family. Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for all unpaid domestic work activities.

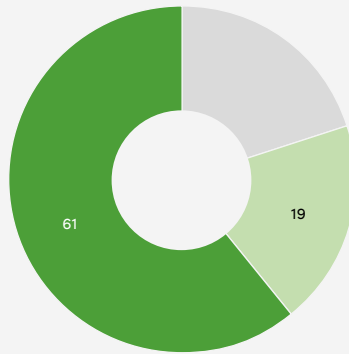
⁶ This question did not explicitly disaggregate by educational level or urban/rural location.

Figure 16: 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. All gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for all unpaid care activities.

Figure 17: Proportion of people who noted that children living in the household missed schooling due to a 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=2,716)



■ Children missed school ■ Initially missed school but has now resolved

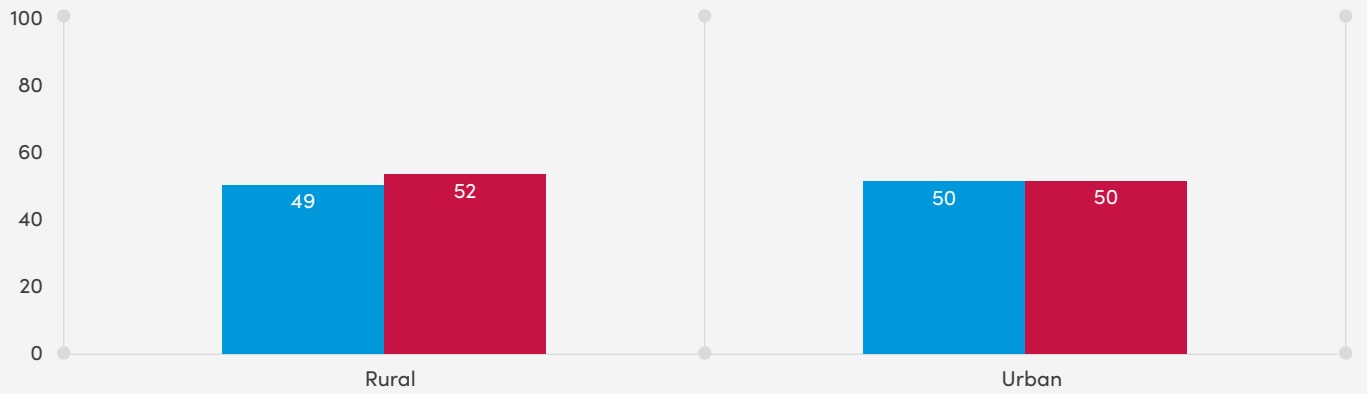
Note: The responses “Children did not miss school”, “I do not know” and “Refuse to answer” have not been included in the analysis.

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

Environmental crises such as rising sea levels, earthquakes, other extreme weather events, and tribal conflicts have overlapped with the pandemic. This, coupled with changes in the availability of public transportation (figure 18), affected access to natural resources for women and men. In Papua New Guinea, an estimated 10 per cent of women and 12 per cent of men noted that their access to water sources was compromised since the onset of COVID-19, with urban areas being more

affected than rural areas (figure 19). In most households in Papua New Guinea, water collection chores are shared between women and men (figure 20). Due to COVID-19 lockdowns and job losses, the burdens of harvesting seafood, gardening and gathering fuelwood have fallen both on women and men’s shoulders. In addition, 14 per cent of people noted losing access to power since the onset of the pandemic. Fuel collection, for the most part, falls to men (figure 21).

Figure 18: Proportion of people who lost access to public transportation since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and location (percentage) (n=3,087)



■ Women ■ Men

Note: Respondents who refused to answer have been excluded from the analysis.

Figure 19: Proportion of people whose water source was compromised since the onset of COVID-19 and continues to be, by sex and location (percentage) (n=3,026)

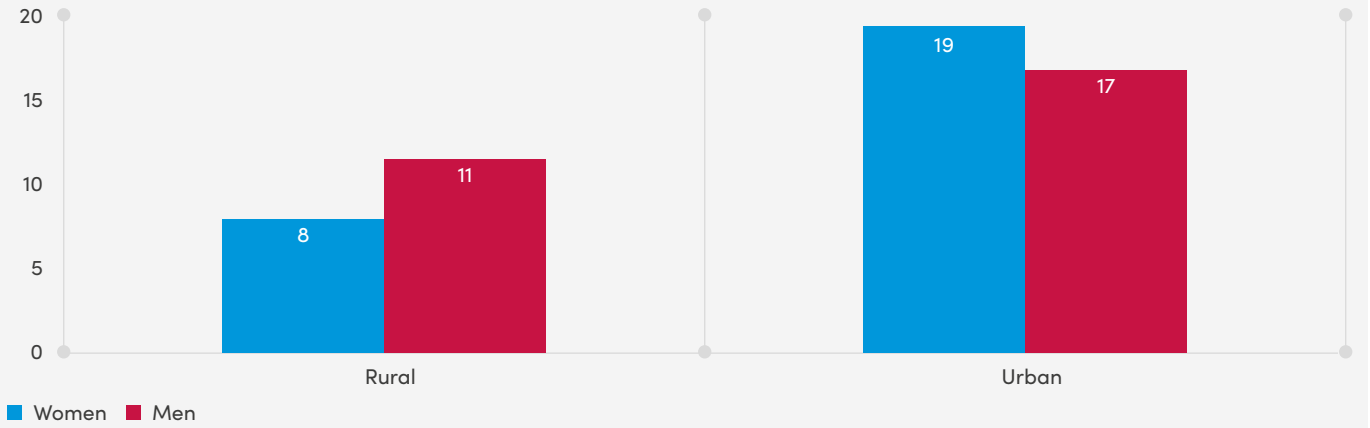
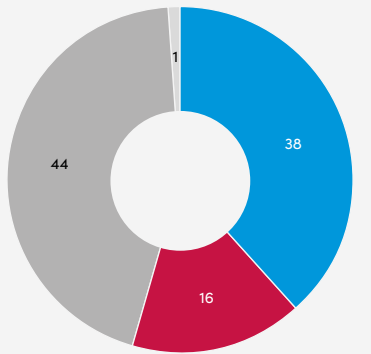
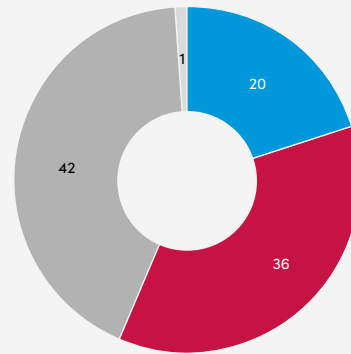


Figure 20: Proportion of people who noted women/men spend the most time fetching water (percentage) (n=2,880)



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

Figure 21: Proportion of people who noted women/men spend the most time collecting fuel/firewood (percentage) (n=2,884)



■ 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. Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for both activities for Papua New Guinea.

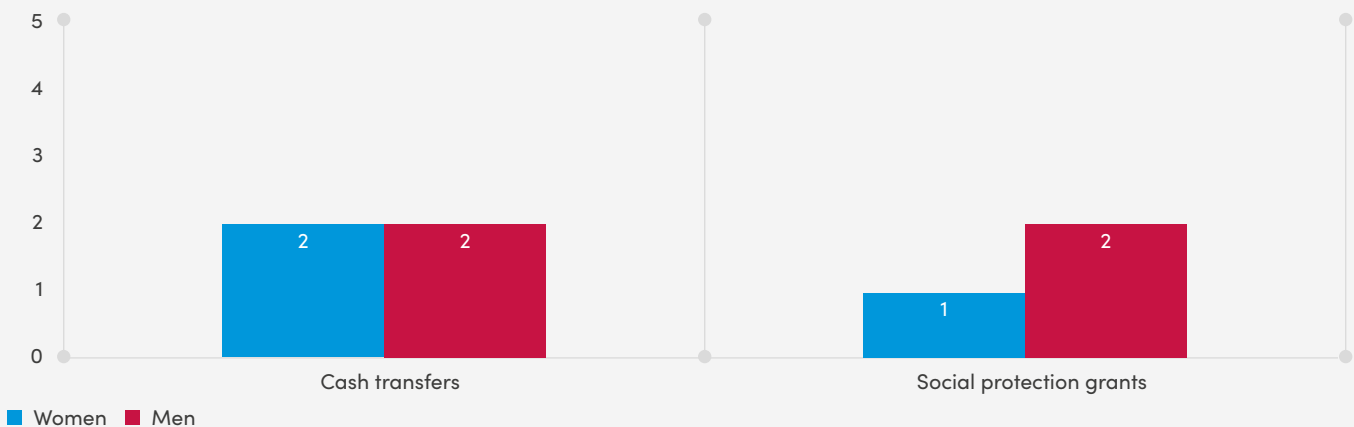
GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES AND OTHER SUPPORT ARE INACCESSIBLE TO MANY

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the livelihoods of people around the world, including in countries where the virus did not spread substantially. In response to the pandemic, the Government of Papua New Guinea set up subsidies for both businesses and individuals. In October 2020, the first 100 million kina (half of the 200 million recovery package for small and medium-sized enterprises) was disbursed to Bank South Pacific to loan to enterprises at a competitive rate. Further tranches were expected to go to the National Development Bank (40 per cent) and the Department of Commerce and Industry (10 per cent). The National Development Bank plan included support to MSME agriculture projects (40 million kina), youth and small business loans (24 million kina), women in business loans (8 million kina) and Bougainville enterprises (8 million kina).⁷ No disaggregated data has been released on the beneficiaries of the programmes, with Bank South Pacific reporting in

2021 that 548 loans had been issued with a total value of 69 million kina. Other measures included distribution of food rations.

Among all forms of government support at the individual level, the furthest reaching were cash transfers and social protection grants, although these reached less than 2 per cent of the population (figure 22). 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 have benefitted less than men, although women with secondary education have been the least likely to benefit (figure 23). Other measures, such as the distribution of food or agricultural inputs, supplies of personal protective equipment, and distribution of hygiene products, have reached very few in Papua New Guinea (figure 24).

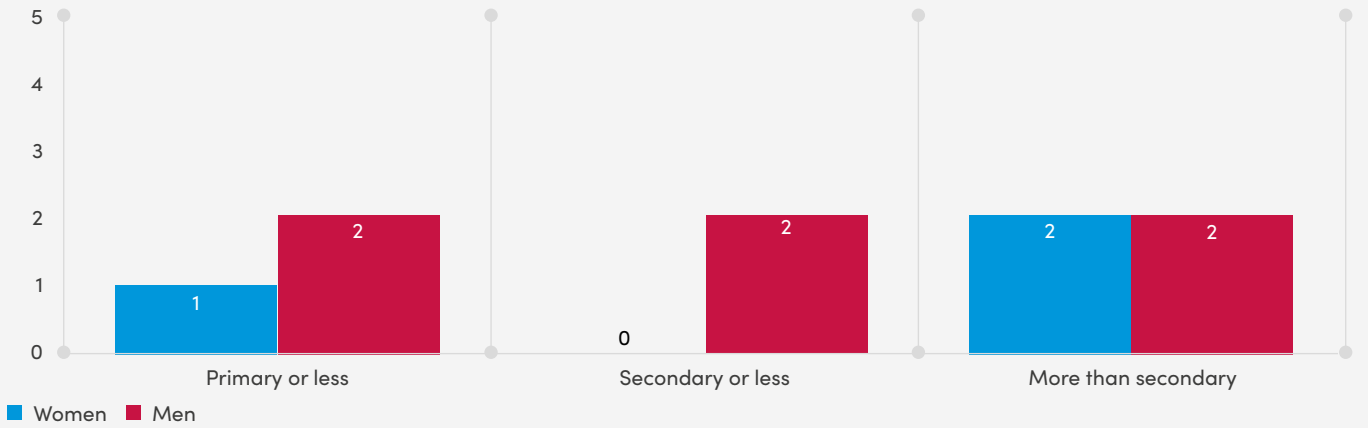
Figure 22: Proportion of people who received government support since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and type of support (percentage) (n=3,069 social protection grant; n=3,044 cash transfer)



Note: Estimates for women in Papua New Guinea in the analysis of “Social protection grants” 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.

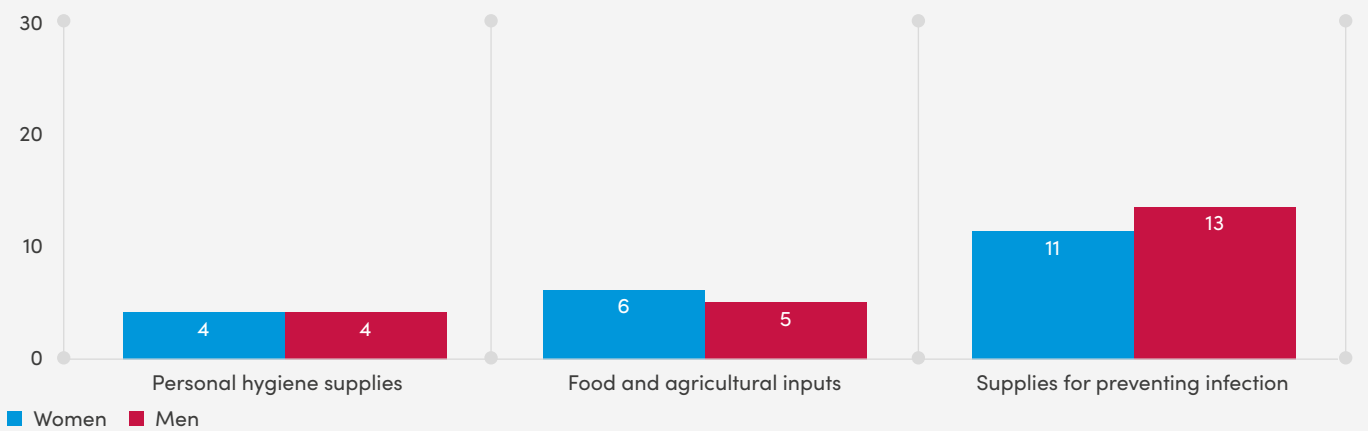
⁷ See www.businessadvantagepng.com/package-delivered-government-gives-first-k100m-to-help-papua-new-guinea-smes/.

Figure 23: Proportion of people who received social protection grants since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and education level (percentage) (n=3,060)



Note: Estimates should be interpreted with caution as the number of respondents is less than 25. 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 have been excluded from the analysis.

Figure 24: Proportion of people who received government support in the form of personal hygiene supplies (n=3,041), food or agricultural inputs (n=3,076) and supplies for preventing infection (n=3,075), by sex (percentage)



Note: Respondents who indicated they did not know or refused to answer have been excluded from the analysis. Gender differences for personal hygiene supplies are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for Papua New Guinea ($p = 0.01$).

ANNEX I: UNWEIGHTED SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION (PERCENTAGE) (N=3,089)

	Women	Men
Total	44	56
Location⁸		
Urban	63	58
Rural	37	42
Age group⁹		
18–28	41	36
29–39	32	30
40–50	18	21
51–61	6	10
62+	2	4
Marital status		
Married	57	63
Married but separated	4	2
Widowed	3	1
Divorced	1	1
Single (never married)	35	33
Education¹⁰		
Less than primary education	17	18
Primary education	12	12
Secondary education	40	34
Vocational/ college	22	26
Tertiary education	9	9
Disability		
Self-reported	15	18

8 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 Papua New Guinea.

9 Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100

10 Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100