

TWO YEARS ON

THE LINGERING GENDERED EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN SOLOMON ISLANDS



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 Solomon Islands to implement a second round of a Rapid Gender Assessment Survey (RGA) utilizing Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI).² This lasted eight

weeks and began in September 2021. The sample was large and balanced, including 2,315 adults (age 18 and over) with 1,027 women (44 per cent) and 1,288 men (56 per cent)³ (annex I).

At the time of data collection, the COVID-19 caseload in Solomon Islands was low. At the beginning (30 September 2021), there were 20 reported cases. Similarly, at the end of fieldwork (8 December 2021), there were 20 reported cases. No lockdown was in place.

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 For an overview of results from the first round of the Rapid Gender Assessment Survey, see <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/unlocking-lockdown-gendered-effects-covid-19-achieving-sdgs-asia-and-pacific>.

3 Methodological details are provided in the regional report, available at <https://data.unwomen.org>.

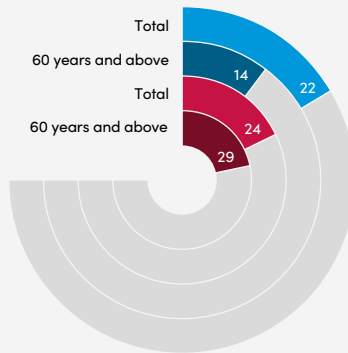
KEY FINDINGS

COVID-19 VACCINATION RATES IN SOLOMON ISLANDS ARE LOW, WITH OLDER WOMEN AT A DISADVANTAGE

The Government-led vaccination programme in Solomon Islands was first rolled out on 24 March 2021. An estimated 22 per cent of women and 24 per cent of men self-reported having received two doses of

COVID-19 inoculation as of November 2021 (figure 1). Women in older age groups (60 years and over) and women living in rural areas were at a disadvantage compared to men (figure 2).

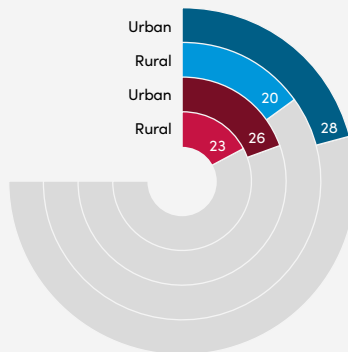
Figure 1: Proportion of people who completed two doses of COVID-19 inoculation as of November 2021, by sex and age group (percentage) (n=2,315)



■ Women ■ Men

Note: For women aged 60 and above in Solomon Islands, estimates 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 if they had been vaccinated or who refused to answer were 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=2,314)



■ Women ■ Men

Note: Respondents who indicated they did not know if they had been vaccinated or who refused to answer were considered as non-receivers of two-dose inoculation.

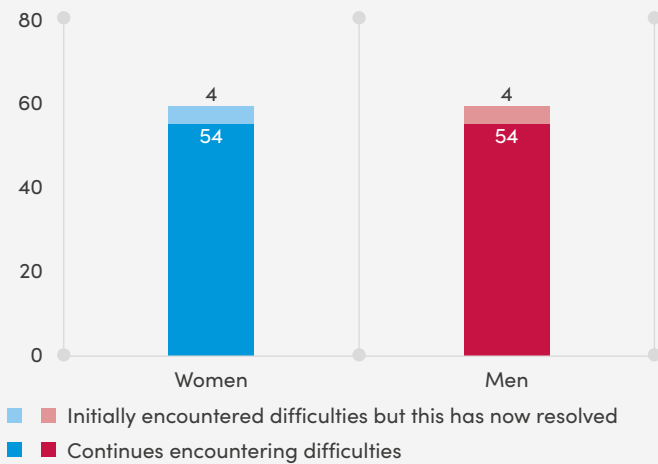
The majority of respondents who had not received two doses of COVID-19 inoculation cited “waiting to be called for receiving the second jab” as the main reason. This was the case among roughly 40 per cent of people (figure 3). Fears about the side effects of vaccines were cited as main reasons by 24 per cent of women and 22 per cent

of men who had not completed two doses. Concerns about contagion and overwhelmed health care facilities affected access to health, globally. In Solomons Islands, about 55 per cent of people noted difficulties accessing medical supplies and hygiene products (figures 4 and 5).

Figure 3: Proportion of people who cited “waiting to be called” as the main reason for not having received two doses of COVID-19 inoculation as of November 2021, by sex (percentage) (n=1,570)

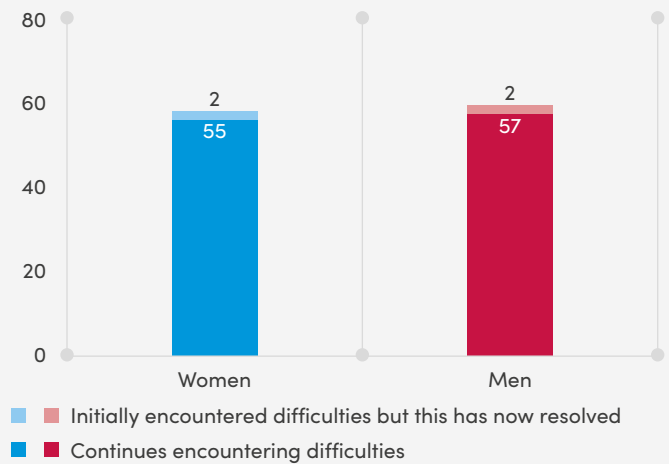


Figure 4: Proportion of people who encountered difficulties accessing medical supplies, by sex (percentage) (n=2,315)



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

Figure 5: Proportion of people who encountered difficulties accessing hygiene products, by sex (percentage) (n=2,315)



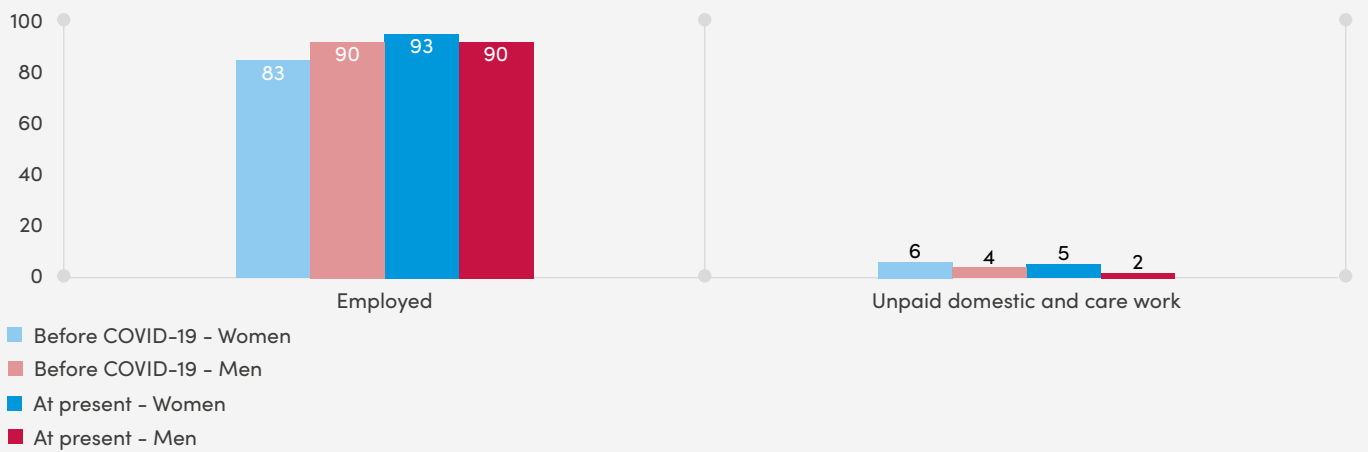
Note: Estimates for women in Solomon Islands for “Initially encountered difficulties but this has now resolved” should be interpreted with caution as the number of respondents that chose this response category is less than 25. Respondents who indicated they did not know or who refused to answer were 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” ($p = 0.03$).

COVID-19 IS TRIGGERING CHANGES IN THE WORLD OF WORK, WITH MORE WOMEN IN VULNERABLE EMPLOYMENT

Prior to the pandemic, fewer women than men engaged in gainful employment. In Solomon Islands, the pandemic has triggered a shift in the world of work, with more women than men being in employment (figure 6). However, an analysis of self-declared status in employment shows that more women than men are own-account

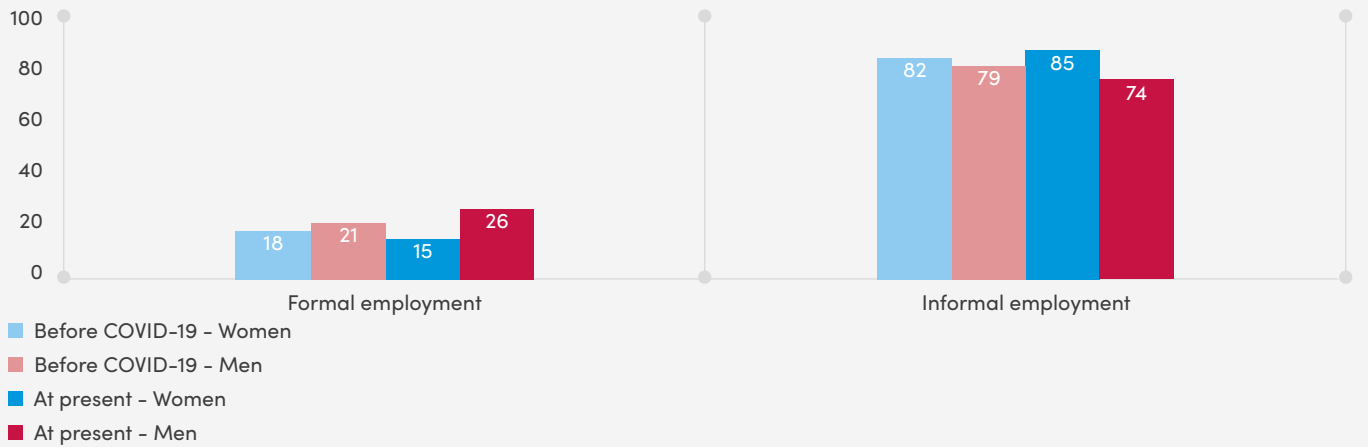
workers and contributing family workers, which are vulnerable forms of employment.⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic has also pushed workers into informal jobs, with more women than men noting shifts from formal to informal jobs. Women are still more likely than men to engage in informal employment overall (figure 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=495 current employment; n=495 previous employment)



Note: Estimates for women and men performing unpaid domestic and care work before COVID-19 and at present in Solomon Islands should be interpreted with caution as the number of respondents that chose this response category is less than 25. Differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for women in employment before and after COVID-19 ($p = 0.01$).

Figure 7: Proportion of people engaged in formal and informal employment, before COVID-19 and at present, by sex (percentage) (n=451 current employment; n=425 previous employment)



Note: Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for women and men in informal employment ($p = 0.03$) and formal employment ($p = 0.02$) at present.

4 A higher proportion of women than men in employment usually occurs for contributing family workers or self-employed workers. To respond to the job losses of men in the household, women take on work in family businesses to support cost of living of the household. In 2021, the National Provident Fund allowed its members to withdraw funds to cope with layoffs. This allowed women to start income generating activities to support the family. Also, the roll-out of a stimulus package in 2020 supported the rural and national economy and boosted output in agriculture and fisheries.

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 Solomon Islands, 46 per cent of women and 50 per cent of men noted having a source of personal income at the time of the survey. Gender gaps in this regard are fairly large, especially for non-partnered women (figure

8).⁵ As a result of the economic recession triggered by the pandemic, 87 per cent of both 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=2,311)

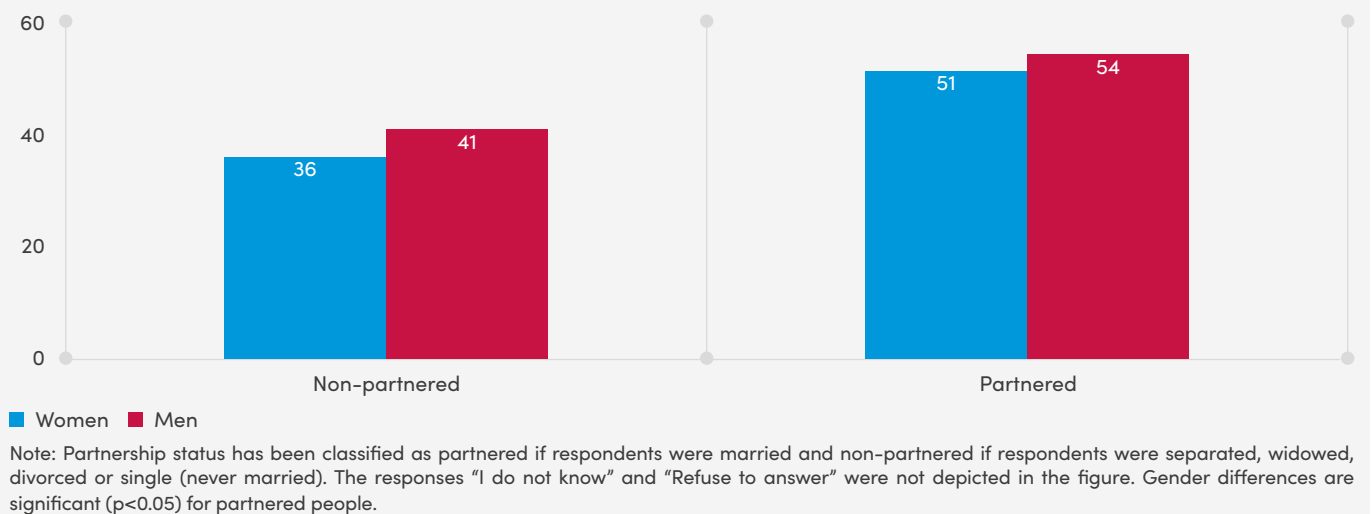
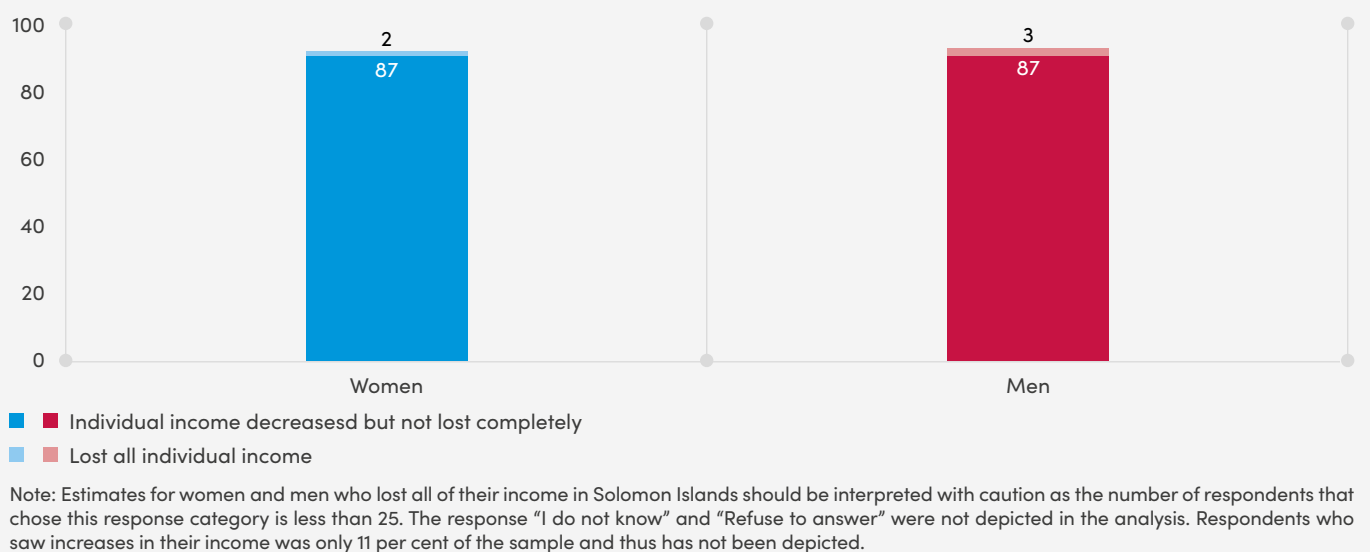


Figure 9: Proportion of people who saw changes in personal income since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and type of change (percentage) (n=692)



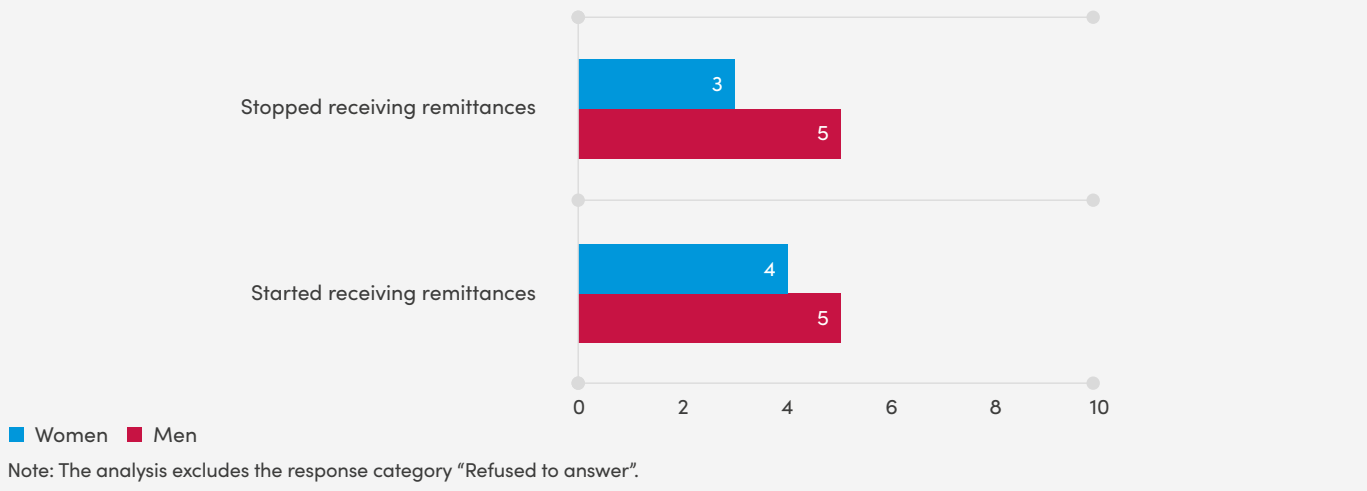
⁵ Non-partnered women and men tend to be younger and are less likely to earn an income.

REMITTANCES ARE A LIFELINE FOR MANY, BUT THE PANDEMIC HAS AFFECTED THESE FLOWS

In Solomon Islands, about 13 per cent of both women and men receive remittances. Since the onset of COVID-19, roughly the same share of men stopped receiving and started receiving remittances. This is not true of women,

as slightly more women noted they started receiving remittances compared to women who stopped receiving them (figure 10).

Figure 10: Proportion of people who stopped/started receiving remittances since the onset of COVID-19, by sex (percentage) (n=2,314)



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

About 44 per cent of people in Solomon Islands experienced a change in household income since the onset of the pandemic. Among these, 93 per cent saw a drop in household income. Of these people, 46 per cent of women had no personal income compared to 44 per cent of men. Drops in household income, in many cases, were accompanied by food hardship. In Solomon Is-

lands, more than 65 per cent of adults are experiencing moderate or severe food hardship, with more women than men in rural areas experiencing this challenge (figure 11). Slightly more women than men (24 per cent compared to 23 per cent) noted a severe challenge in accessing food in quantity and quality since the onset of the pandemic.

Infographic 1: Severe food hardship in Solomon Islands

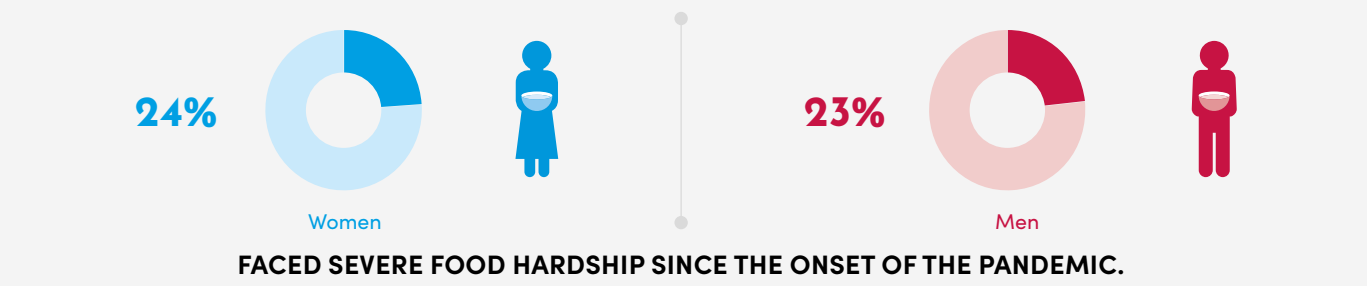
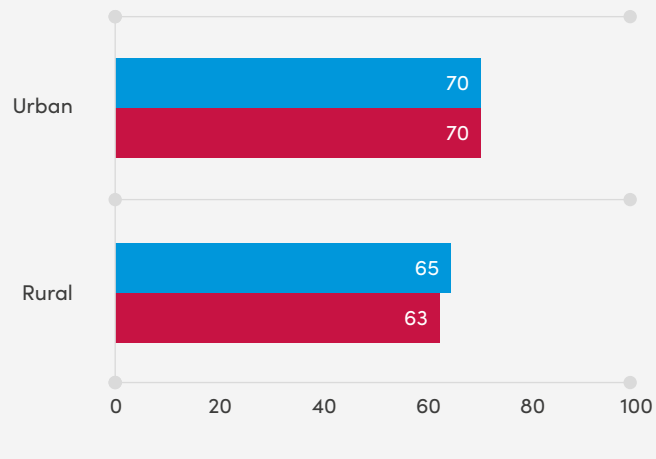


Figure 11: Proportion of people experiencing moderate or severe food hardship, by sex and location (percentage) (n=2,299)



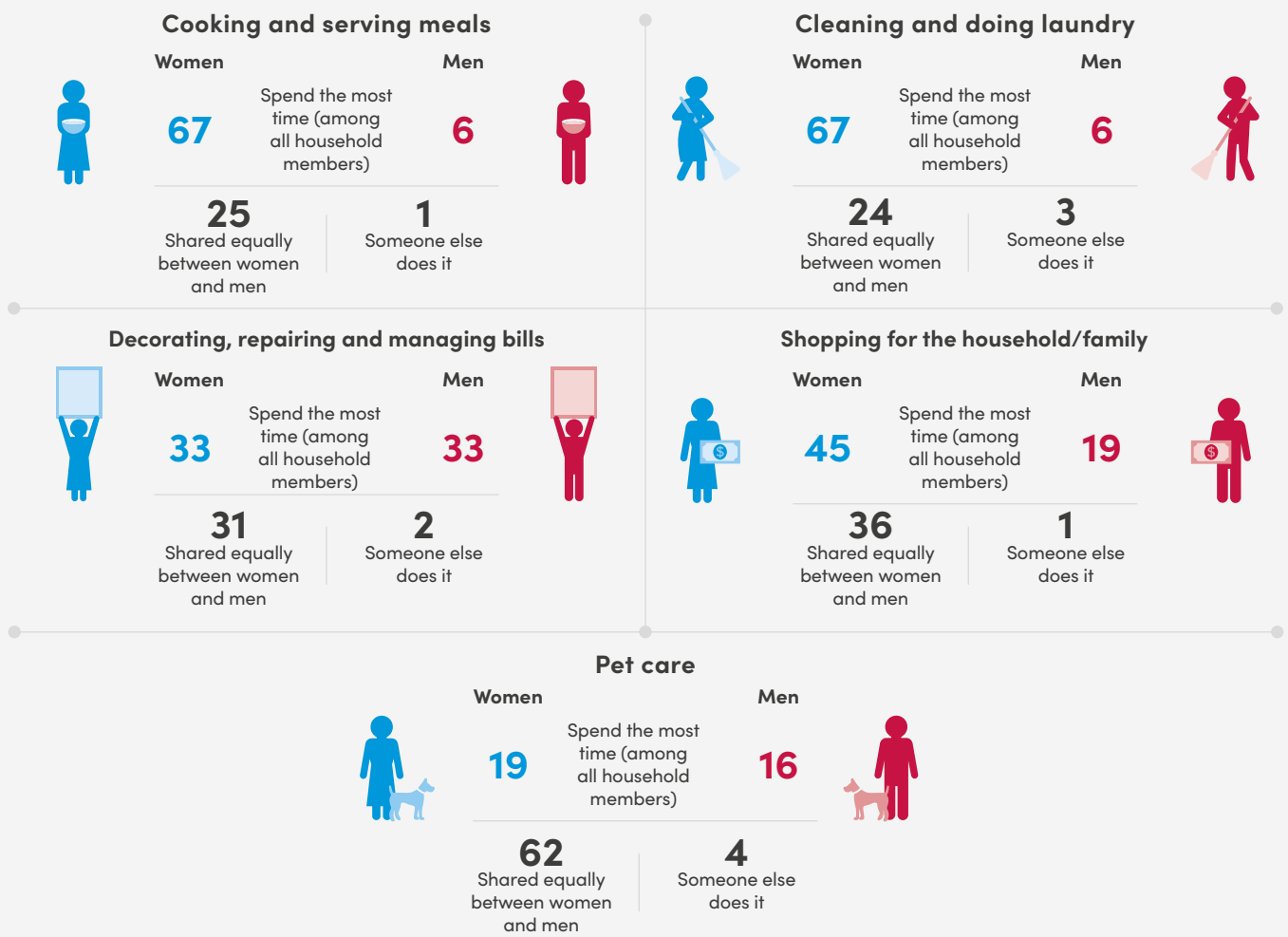
Note: Food hardship measures the lack of access to food in enough quantity or quality. Data collected utilizing FAO FIES questionnaire sequence were analysed using the Rash model to assess the performance of the scale. The data passed the statistical validation tests, and the raw score (the number of 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 12 and 13). In Solomon Islands, women take on most of the cooking, cleaning and shopping for the family. The onset of the pandemic also multiplied care responsibilities, with 6 per cent of women and men noting an increase in time spent on providing physical

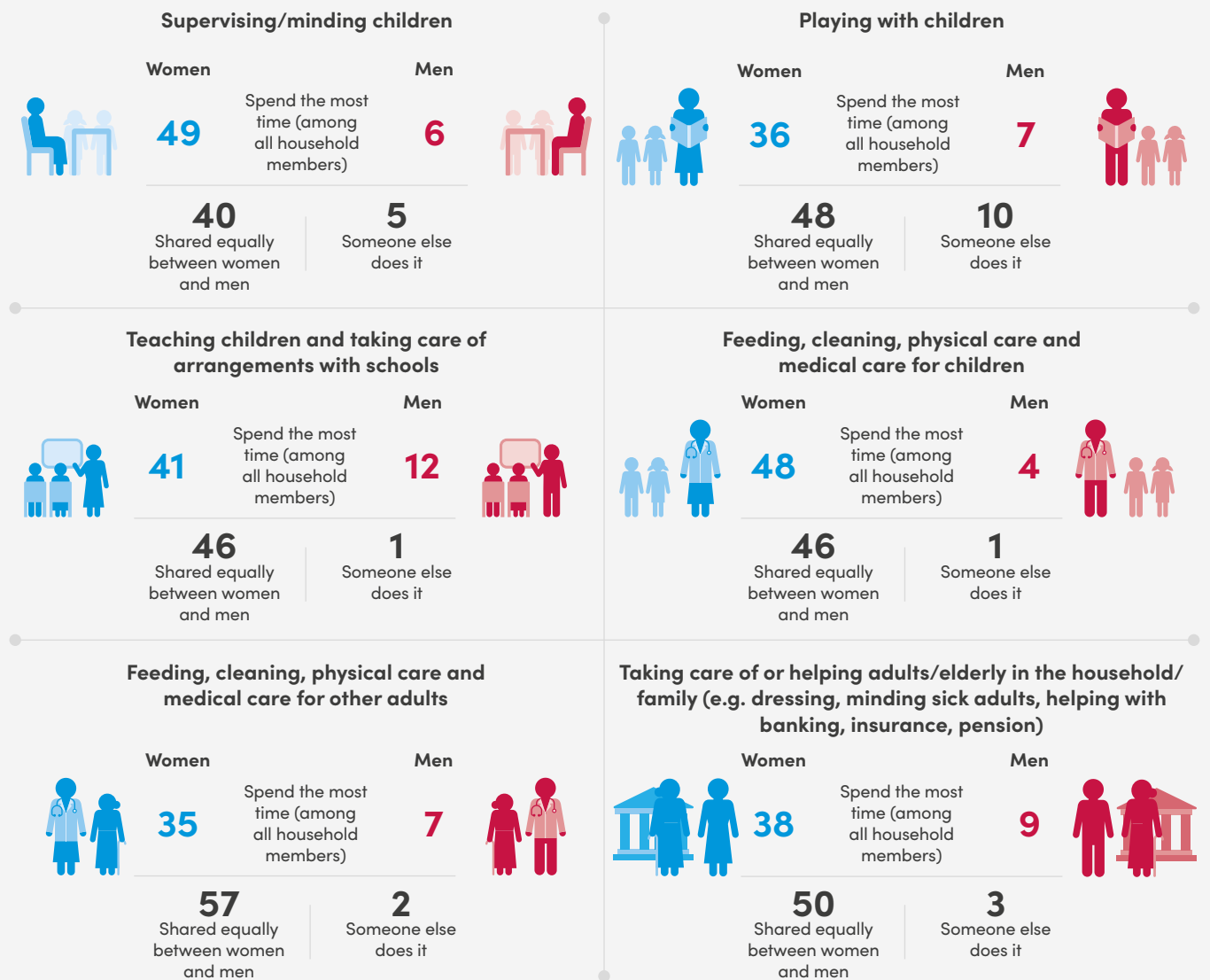
and medical care to children. More women than men are in charge of teaching children and managing related arrangements with schools (figure 13). An estimated 59 per cent of people noted that children missed school because they lacked access to remote learning technologies or they were unable to pay for schooling (figure 14).

Figure 12: Proportion of people who noted women/men in the household spend the most time performing different unpaid domestic work activities (percentage)



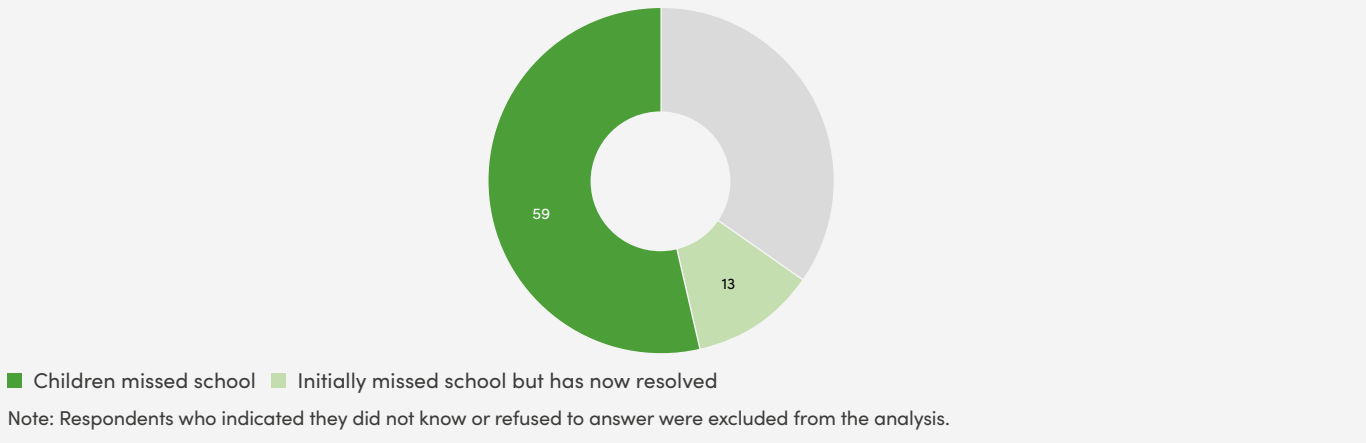
Note: "Women in the household" refers to a clustered category of women respondents who reported being primarily in charge of the activity and respondents of any sex who reported a female household member was primarily in charge of the activity. "Men in the household" refers to a clustered category of 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. All gender differences are statistically significant (p<0.05) except for pet care.

Figure 13: 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 Solomon Islands who indicated "Someone else does it" in the analysis of feeding, cleaning, physical care, and medical care for children. All gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Figure 14: Proportion of people who noted that children living in the household missed schooling due to 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=1,882)



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

Natural hazards such as cyclones, floods and landslides have overlapped with the pandemic. This, coupled with changes in the availability of public transportation (figure 15), affected access to natural resources for women and men. In Solomon Islands, an estimated 20 per cent of women and 19 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 16). In most households in Solomon Islands, women are in charge of water collection whereas fuel collection falls on men’s shoulders (figure 17 and figure 18). In addition, 17 per cent of people noted losing access to power.

Figure 15: Proportion of people who lost access to public transportation since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and location (percentage) (n=2,314)

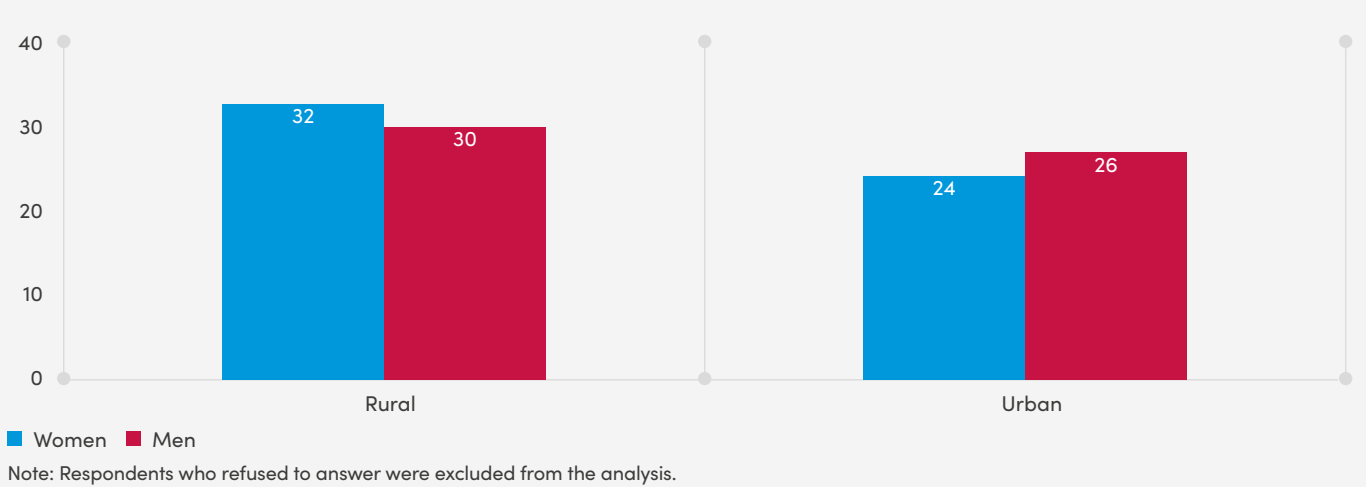


Figure 16: Proportion of people whose water source was compromised since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and location (percentage) (n=2,311)

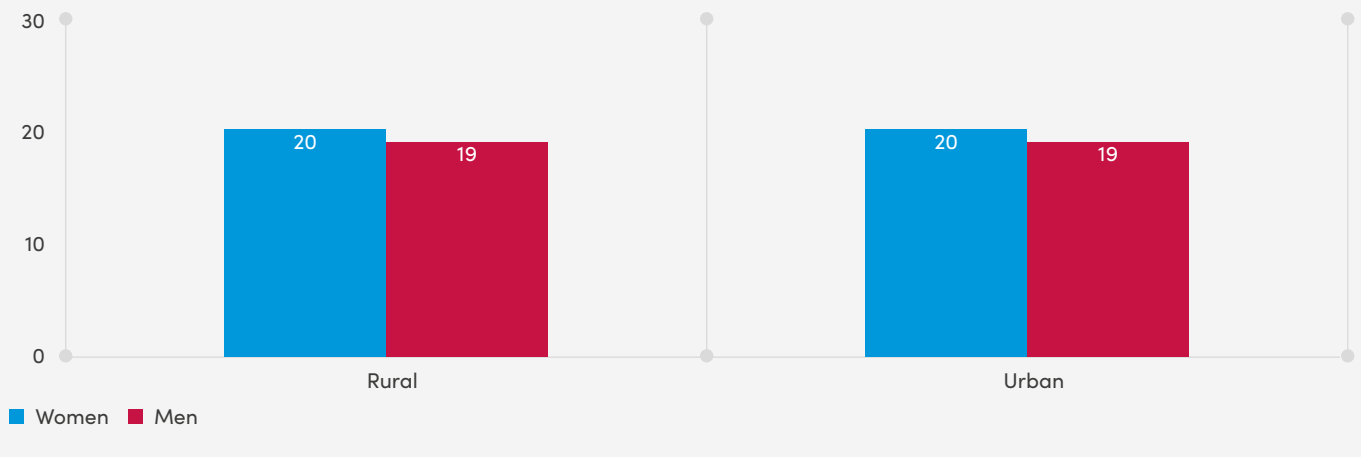


Figure 17: Proportion of people who noted women/men spend the most time fetching water (percentage) (n=2,085)

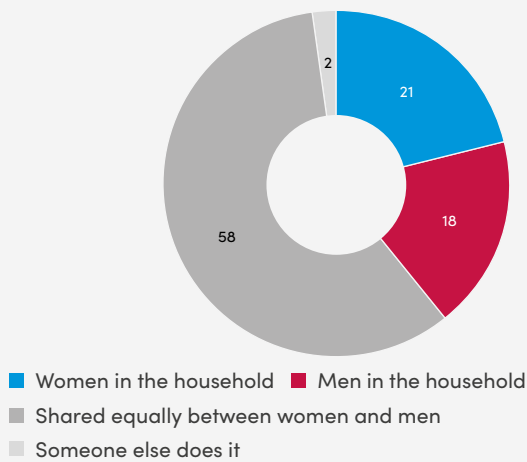
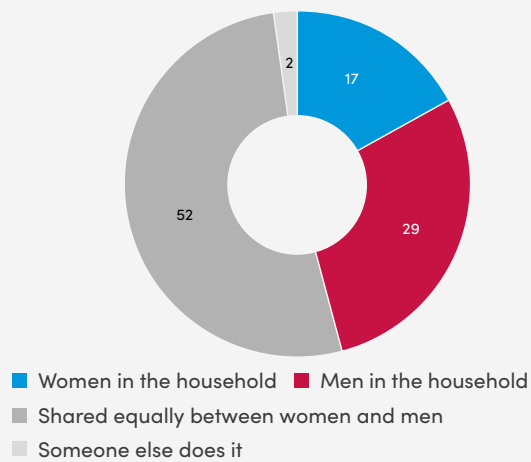


Figure 18: Proportion of people who noted women/men spend the most time collecting fuel/firewood (percentage) (n=2,145)



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 or indicated they did not know or refused to answer were excluded from the analysis. Gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for fetching water.

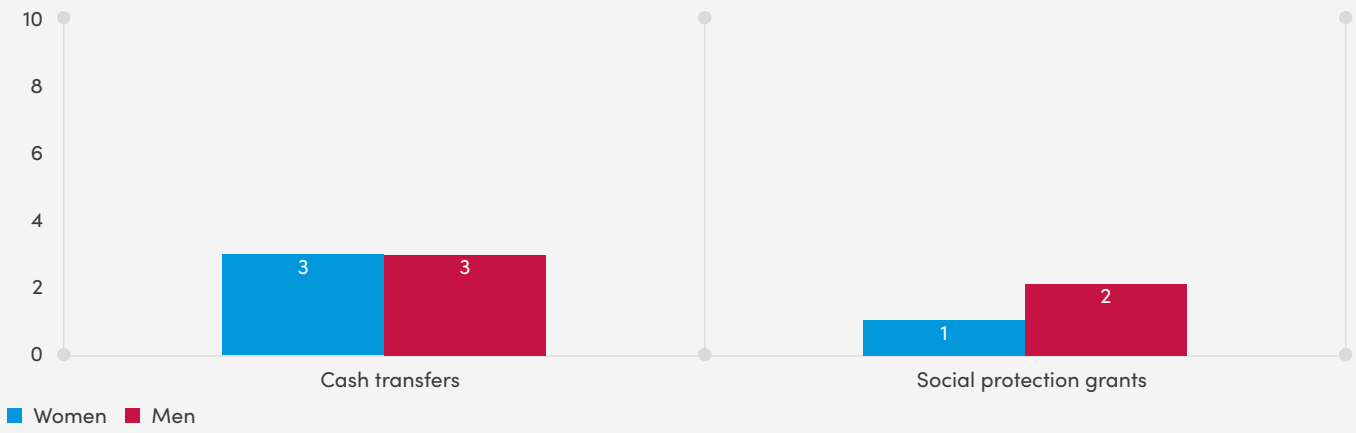
GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES AND OTHER SUPPORT ARE INACCESSIBLE TO MANY

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 Solomon Islands set up subsidies but access to these benefits has been limited, with some gender differences.

Among all forms of government support, cash transfers had the furthest reach, although neither transfers nor social protection grants have been widely disbursed (figure 19). In the absence of wealth data, analysis by

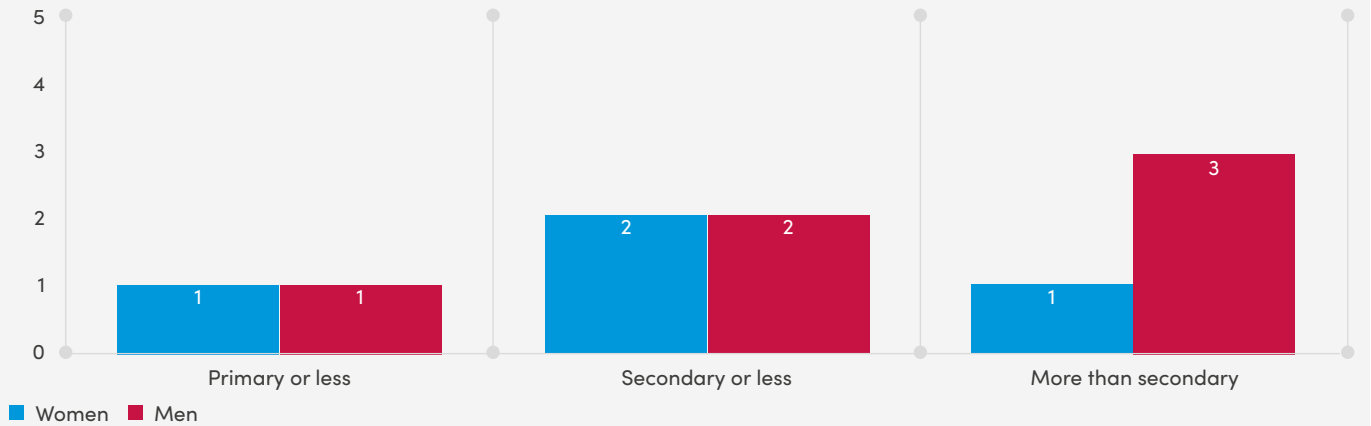
educational attainment shows how people in different groups have accessed these resources. Women and men with lower levels of education benefitted the least, while men with more than secondary education were most likely to benefit (figure 20). Other social protection measures, such as the distribution of personal protective equipment, reached about 13 per cent of people, and very few people received personal hygiene supplies (figure 21). Overall, women tended to benefit slightly more than men from these measures.

Figure 19: Proportion of people who received government support since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and type of support (percentage) (n=2,283 cash transfer; n=2,312 social protection grant)



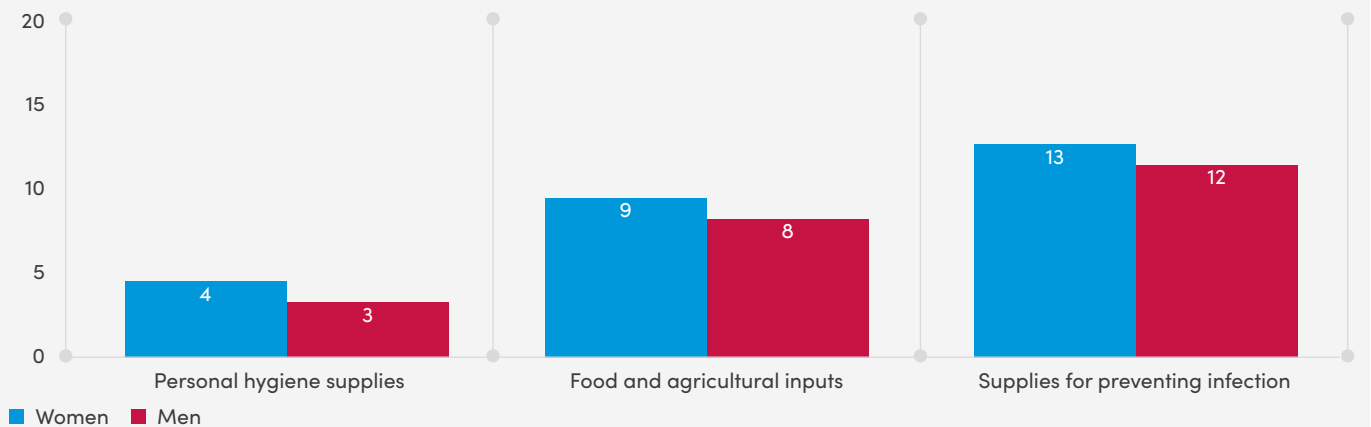
Note: Estimates for women in Solomon Islands in the analysis of social protection grants should be interpreted with caution as the number of respondents that chose this response category is less than 25. Respondents who indicated they did not know or refused to answer were excluded from the analysis.

Figure 20: Proportion of people who received social protection grants since the onset of COVID-19, by sex and education level (percentage) (n=2,299)



Note: Estimates for women and men in Solomon Islands 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 were excluded from the analysis.

Figure 21: Proportion of people who received government support in the form of personal hygiene supplies (n=2,312), food or agricultural inputs (n=2,313) and supplies for preventing infection (n=2,313), by sex (percentage)



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

ANNEX I: UNWEIGHTED SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION (PERCENTAGE) (N=2,315)

	Women	Men
Total	44	56
Location⁶		
Urban	53	51
Rural	47	49
Age group		
18–28	42	34
29–39	31	29
40–50	18	21
51–61	7	11
62+	2	5
Marital status⁷		
Married	58	64
Married but separated	4	2
Widowed	4	1
Divorced	2	1
Single (never married)	32	31
Education⁸		
Some primary education	16	11
Primary education	9	9
Secondary education	46	48
Vocational/ college	16	19
Tertiary education	13	14
Disability		
Self-reported	29	29

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

7 Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100.

8 Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100.