**International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) Pacific**

**Pacific Scoping Study**

**8 December 2021**

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## Acronyms

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| APTC | Australia Pacific Technical Coalition |
| CRPD | Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |
| DFAT | Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade |
| FNU | Fiji National University |
| GPE | Global Partnership for Education |
| ICEVI | International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment |
| IEP | Individual Education Plan |
| JAWS | Job Access with Speech (commercial screen reading software) |
| MFAT | New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade |
| NVDA | Non-visual Desktop Access (free screen reading software) |
| OPD | Organisation of Persons with Disabilities |
| PACREF | Pacific Regional Education Framework |
| PDF | Pacific Disability Forum |
| PIFS | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat |
| SPC | Secretariat for the Pacific Community |
| SPEVI | South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment |
| UNESCO | UN Education, Science and Communications Organisation |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children’s fund |
| USP  | University of South Pacific |

## Acknowledgements

The consultants for this Scoping Study, Mereoni Daveta and Deborah Rhodes, are grateful to all those who have contributed information from within and beyond the Pacific.

Dr Joanne Webber, as Chair of ICEVI Pacific, commissioned this Study and the consultants are grateful for her effort and contributions to the process. She has contributed her expertise and knowledge of a number of countries, and been very supportive throughout the process.

Officials from many Ministries of Education as well as leaders and staff from organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) from 12 Pacific Island countries contributed willingly in writing or through phone interviews. In a number of countries, the consultants were unable to reach relevant people, despite best efforts. The consultants recognise that every context is different and people and organisations in each country have their own development priorities. Also, COVID-19 related-restrictions meant that opportunities to engage directly and in more detail at country level were limited. As we were working remotely, it was difficult to gather consistent data across all countries.

The consultants would like to acknowledge and commend all those who have worked hard and are now working towards improving the provision of educational opportunities for students who are blind or vision impaired. We hope that this Study will also contribute to the same goal.

# Executive Summary

This Scoping Study was commissioned by the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) Pacific. It collates information about the current situation in relation to education for children and young people who are blind or vision impaired in Pacific countries. This information is expected to inform efforts by ICEVI Pacific and its partners over the next three to five years. In addition, it is hoped this information will inform plans and activities of organisations interested in and responsible for the provision of inclusive education services across the region.

The Pacific Island countries that participated in this Scoping Study are: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. While the Study team sought information from other countries, their absence from the Study is one of its limitations.

The information included in this Study has been largely collected through interviews and responses to written surveys with the Ministries of Education (MoEs), organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), education service providers and other stakeholders at national, regional and international levels. There is little existing accessible documentation about these services, but where available, this has also been referenced (see Annex 4).

The Scoping Study found that a history of effort by non-government organisations in the provision of education for students who are blind or vision impaired in some Pacific countries provides a foundation for future activities in the region. In recent years there has been some positive progress in terms of regional and national policies and plans relating to inclusive education. Also, there are signs that implementation of some aspects of these policies is beginning in several countries. There is also shared agreement that a great deal more work, at many levels, is necessary to enable this relatively small group of students to achieve their potential, alongside their sighted sisters and brothers.

The Pacific Regional Education Framework (PACREF) is a shared regional agreement among Pacific governments about aspirations for education. PACREF includes 10 references to inclusive education. A US$15m grant has recently been made by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to support the implementation of PACREF. A group of technical agencies working in the Pacific (comprising UN and Pacific regional organisations) has been formed, under the leadership of University of South Pacific (USP), to advise on implementation. Efforts are beginning in relation to monitoring progress against the targets set in PACREF. This effort provides potential sources of energy to improve education for students who are blind or vision impaired. To date however, where there is evidence of inclusive education policies and activities, they tend to be generic rather than address specific means for educational inclusion of children who are blind or vision impaired.

Assistive technology is the phrase used to describe a range of means for people who are blind or vision impaired to access information. In practical terms, basic means for students who are vision impaired to access information are low cost: these include magnifiers, reading domes, coloured overlays, specialist lamps or large font printed material. Higher cost assistive technology includes video magnifiers and screen readers. For students who are blind, basic means for students to access information include Braille (hard copy) and access to screen-reading software, known as non-visual direct access (NVDA). Both students who are vision impaired or blind may require orientation and mobility training.

The Scoping Study found positive signs of effort and resource-allocation toward implementation of inclusive approaches and practices in primary and secondary schools to date, which make a difference for some students. In several countries, education systems provide some level of adaptive technology, Braille, orientation and mobility and inclusive teaching strategies. At the tertiary level, universities, particularly in Fiji, and some technical and vocational education programs and providers are operating some inclusive and accessible services. Overall, however, opportunities for students who are blind or vision impaired to participate in school, remain limited.

In the countries where advances have been made on inclusive education, such as Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, and Samoa most if not all students have individual Education plans (IEPs) and access to some relevant equipment for making educational materials accessible. In most countries, there are major limitations in access, particularly related to geographical factors (e.g. location of schools vis-à-vis rural populations, and those living on outer islands), availability of specialist expertise (e.g. in relation to assessment/diagnosis, orientation and mobility, and teaching skills in Braille or screen-reading software), and budget allocations for equipment and supplies (e.g. Braillers and specific types of paper).

Accessing educational materials is a key issue for students who are blind or vision impaired. Given the increasing, but not universal, access to IT services and internet connectivity in Pacific countries, and the value of contemporary ICT software systems for accessing information, this is an area where substantial benefits could be achieved. If governments are able to influence communications policies to increase accessibility, this will contribute to better education for this category of students. Where IT and internet access is limited, there is an increasing gap in access to information, i.e. increasing inequality.

Most Pacific OPDs are interested in and concerned about inclusive education. In practice, most of their efforts are focused on aspects of inclusion of more immediate value to their adult members. Current priorities include employment, inclusive disaster responses, social protection, community participation and governance. A small number of OPDs comprising people who are blind or vision impaired are advocating at individual or systemic levels. These include United Blind Persons of Fiji (UBP), Tonga National Vision Impairment Association (TNVIA) and Samoa Blind Persons Association (SBPA). Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) includes the goal of inclusive education among its strategic priorities and participates in regional networks and systems to advocate for the achievement of inclusive education. Apart from these efforts, there is relatively little community-based advocacy on inclusive education compared with other aspects of rights. Pacific Government efforts, with a small number of non-government schools and specialist service providers, form the major sources of hope for improved education services.

Those contacted as part of this Scoping Study were asked to identify priorities for strengthening the provision of education services for students who are blind or vision impaired in the short and medium-term future. They largely mentioned elements identified as core to the provision of education for students with sensory impairments (see Sections 2.3 and 5 for further details and discussion):

1. A supportive social, cultural and institutional context which supports inclusion
2. Committed leaders and officials in Ministries of Education
3. Supportive parents, families and communities who recognise all children benefit from education and the whole community will benefit from their participation
4. Principals, teachers and school communities who support inclusion, as a concept and practice, and have access to relevant specialist skills
5. Sustained access to ongoing provision of orientation and mobility services
6. Sustained access to specialist equipment and supplies

Overall, the Scoping Study team heard many Pacific stakeholders say that much can be done to improve access to education and the quality of education for children who are blind or vision impaired in Pacific countries. The Scoping Study makes detailed recommendations for ICEVI and other interested development partners, summarised here for the sake of brevity, but detailed and discussed in Sections 4, 5 and 6):

 ICEVI Pacific should:

1. Develop close relationships, based on trust and mutual respect, with Ministries of Education and OPDs so conversations can be held about how Pacific countries might strengthen the provision of education for students who are blind or vision impaired.
2. Work closely with those who are coordinating, implementing and observing progress on PACREF.
3. Collaborate with Pacific-led organisations which seek to improve their knowledge of educational services for students with vision impairments.
4. Be ‘on tap’ to build linkages, share information, respond to requests for advice and contribute to shared learning opportunities.
5. Recognise that Pacific educational institutions will be concerned about how to maximise the chances that students will return to school in the post-COVID context, and how to build resilience in education systems, with reduced rather than greater resources overall.

Other current and potential development partners should:

1. Support Pacific Ministries of Education as they seek to build on existing strengths and services for education of children who are blind or vision impaired, consistent with (PACREF).
2. Recognise that many people have already dedicated a great deal of effort in the provision of education services for students who are blind or vision impaired and have contributed to existing knowledge, skills and equipment.
3. Draw upon existing technical expertise within networks such as ICEVI and SPEVI to support programming across the Pacific and promote knowledge-sharing opportunities for established services in the Pacific such as Fiji and Kiribati.
4. Recognise the integrated nature of education for students who are blind or vision impaired including: social, cultural and institutional support for inclusion and education for all, leadership by Ministries of Education on inclusive education; awareness of how all children benefit from accessing education and the whole community benefits from their participation in social and economic life; importance of principals, teachers and school communities in supporting inclusion (as a concept and practice), and dedicated skills-development in provision of education for children with sensory impairments, at all levels of education; sustained management of and access to specialist equipment, resources and services for students at different levels of education, particularly in relation to access to information, including books, articles and on-line information, as supported by the Marrakech Treaty.
5. Consider support for individual or multiple elements (of those listed above) which contribute to education for children who are blind or vision impaired, based on:
	1. shared analysis of existing strengths in the national or school-based context and cultural values that shape inclusion and education
	2. co-production/co-design of proposed activities
	3. mutual respect for the respective contributions of all those involved in activity implementation
	4. recognition of the factors which influence ‘how change happens’ in each national context.
6. Promote and share information about good practices in various contexts to support other schools and countries as they progress towards better education service delivery for students who are blind or vision impaired.

In the next three to five years, ICEVI Pacific can play a role in supporting implementation of these recommendations which complement and support strategies and plans included in PACREF at regional level as well as national policies and strategies. ICEVI Pacific is in a position to provide links between sources of information, practitioners and expert advice to support the provision of education in Pacific countries for children who are blind or vision impaired, as well as support program implementation and access to funding, where possible.

# Introduction

Founded in 1952, the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) is an organization of individuals and agencies concerned with the formal and non-formal educational needs of children with visual impairment throughout the world. ICEVI brings together at the global level educators, administrators, parents and interested individuals to promote equal educational opportunity for children with visual impairment. ICEVI works closely with UN member agencies, government and non-government organizations concerned with education, as well as with organizations of persons with visual impairment. Of particular concern to ICEVI are the rights and needs of children and youth in developing countries where blindness is most prevalent and where, on average, less than 10 per cent of these children have access to any education.

ICEVI Pacific currently includes members from 13 Pacific countries. ICEVI Pacific works in partnership with its members to maximise access to and the quality of services for children and students, contributing in ways that are determined by members. The board comprises educators and interested individuals from Pacific countries as well as Australia and New Zealand. Information about this group is available at <https://icevi.org/pacific/>

## The Study

In 2021, ICEVI Pacific commissioned this Scoping Study to generate an up-to-date picture of the current situation and services for children who are blind or vision impaired in the region.

The Terms of Reference for the Scoping Study are at Annex 1. The Study sought to collate available information on the services, interventions and resources available to school aged children in the Pacific who are blind or vision impaired. While it was intended that all countries would be included, several factors resulted in incomplete coverage, including lack of contacts in some countries and in some cases, no response to invitations to participate.

The Scoping Study was intended to collate information relating to the following topics:

* Statistical data on numbers of children who are blind or vision impaired
* Literacy levels for this cohort of students
* School enrolment rates
* Alternative formatting services (e.g. audio, Word format large print and Braille production)
* Professional support services
* Mainstream/specialist/informal schooling opportunities
* Reading and writing tools (e.g. Perkins Braillers, computers with screen reading software, video magnifiers, Braille literacy assessments and pre-literacy Braille resources)
* Orientation and mobility services and any other specialist interventions for students who are blind or vision impaired.

For a range of reasons explained below (see Section 3. Methodology), this information was not accessible or available for all countries.

The context for the Study is considered briefly in Section 2. Findings are described in Section 4 below. Section 5 includes a collated set of priorities for strengthening education services and Section 6 provides information about potential partners and sources of funding for this area of collaboration.

The people consulted during the Study are listed in Annex 2.

A set of country-specific profiles is included in Annex 3.

# Context

## 2.1 Pacific inclusive education services

There is an increasingly shared commitment across countries of the Pacific region towards inclusive education, consistent with Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PACREF). However, there is great diversity between countries in terms of current services and approaches. Each Pacific country has different cultural, political, institutional, geographic and economic characteristics, and the variations contribute to different attitudes, policies and services related to education more generally and the rights of people with disabilities. The experience of people with disabilities varies widely across the region.

The governments and people of the region have a strong history of regional collaboration. Governments collectively generate regional plans and strategies, and are keen to learn from each other, including in the area of education and disability inclusion. The current PACREF is the over-arching agreement between education ministers of Pacific countries. The current Framework includes 10 references to ‘inclusive’ education, raising the profile of this aspect of education more than in previous frameworks. There are no specific references in PACREF to education for children who are blind or vision impaired. The introduction to PACREF notes ‘*The PACREF seeks to promote fully inclusive learning opportunities.*’ Examples of references to inclusive education within the Framework include the following objectives:

* Implement inclusive education programmes and pathways that include specialist training for teachers/teaching assistants. (Priority Strategy for Phase 1)
* Leverage and expand the use of ICT as an access tool to education, including inclusive education and the provision of differentiated pathways (Strategy for latter part of Phase 1 and beyond)

PacREF provides an over-arching framework but the commitment and resources required for countries to actually implement inclusive education are the responsibility of national governments. Non-profit organisations and some Ministries of Education have provided services for children who are blind or vision impaired in some countries for decades, particularly Papua New Guinea and Fiji, either in separate or inclusive contexts. Some Pacific countries are beginning to provide some services. Others either provide no or minimal services.

Annex 2 includes a summary of available information from Pacific Island countries about education for students who are blind or have vision impairment.

## 2.2 International agenda/funding to support inclusive education

At the global level, key agreements and commitments related to inclusive education, include Article 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (‘Ensure quality education for all’) and the SDG’s reference to leaving no-one behind and Article 24 of CRPD. In particular, these reflect understanding about the rights of all children to education, and the reality that specific efforts are required to make education accessible.

A range of multilateral, bilateral, regional and other entities and relationships are involved in supporting countries to achieve SDG 4 and CRPD Article 24. International development cooperation is dominated by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) (see Section 6 below).

Major development partners in the education sector in the Pacific include:

* Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
* New Zealand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)
* UNESCO
* UNICEF
* Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

As a major education-sector donor in the region, the Australian Government’s aid program uses the GPE as a key means to contribute to education in the Pacific, beyond its bilateral aid programs. For example, in July 2021, the Australian Government announced it ‘*will invest A$180 million in the Global Partnership for Education’s work in the Indo-Pacific over the next 5 years.’* In its press release, the Government announced *‘Australia will invest in GPE, as the largest global fund dedicated to transforming education systems in lower-income countries, to promote and support education of the most vulnerable children, and to deliver quality teaching and learning’* and that *‘this includes a doubling of grant funds to the Pacific since 2019, with eight Pacific Island countries becoming GPE grant recipients in 2020. In addition, GPE this year provided further support for basic education in 15 Pacific Island countries.’*

## 2.3 Themes in education for students who are blind or vision impaired

Education for students who are blind or vision impaired is not the sole responsibility of education service providers. It requires leadership, collaboration between education institutions and other stakeholders, such as those responsible for human resource planning and employment, as well as changes in attitudes and specific technical equipment and expertise. Children who are blind or vision impaired are not able to access education simply when governments decide to work on inclusive education. Many inter-connected elements are relevant to the likelihood that a child with a vision impairment will access and succeed at school.

The following **Six Key Elements** will support the provision of education for students who are blind or vision impaired:

1. **A broad social, cultural and institutional context which supports inclusion, values education and incentivises educational achievement and success for all**
2. **Committed leaders and officials in Ministries of Education, who are open to leading and driving change, learning, collaborating and supporting inclusive education**
3. **Supportive parents, families and communities who recognise all of their children will benefit from accessing education and the whole community will benefit from their participation in all aspects of social and economic life**
4. **Principals, teachers and school communities who support inclusion (as a concept and practice), and are skilled in how to provide education for children with sensory impairments, and have access to the specialist resources necessary for students at different levels of education**
5. **Sustained access to ongoing provision of orientation and mobility services and related specialist support for schools, teachers and students**
6. **Sustained access to specialist equipment, particularly alternative formatting services such as Braille machines, technology (particularly tools for supporting screen-based reading and writing tools) and relevant supplies and maintenance, and budgets and organisational responsibilities for their provision and maintenance.**

Since each of these elements needs to operate effectively and in mutually-supportive ways for children to succeed in education, a coordinated and collaborative approach is required, usually beyond the scope of Ministries of Education on their own.

Most stakeholders recognise there is significant room to improve access to quality education for children who are blind or vision impaired in all countries, so they can meet their potential and make a valuable contribution to and benefit from their respective communities.

The extent to which children who are blind or vision impaired actually attain their potential in educational terms varies widely between countries. This reflects systemic and institutional factors rather than matters that are within the control of individual students. Issues related to power, leadership, decision-making, resource-allocation, open-ness to new ideas, cultural values and relationships/partnerships interact differently in each country context. These all affect levels of commitment, effort, expertise and resources for inclusive education.

Importantly, education for children who are blind or vision impaired requires specific, and in some cases, quite specialised ‘inputs’ and technology which distinguish it from more generic aspects of inclusive education. For example, creating accessible school buildings maybe sufficient for many students with disabilities to access education, but is not sufficient for students who are blind or vision impaired, who may require orientation and mobility services. Students who are vision impaired can use a variety of means to learn to read and write and then access information more broadly, including magnifiers (for printed or computer-based material) and large-font text. Students who are blind require ongoing access to accessible information, either in the form of Braille or screen-based technology, as well as teachers who are trained in their use, and services responsible for maintenance and supplies.

Most documented information about approaches and methods to maximise the quality of education for children who are blind or vision impaired is based on experiences in high-resource countries where ‘western’ cultural values prevail. International NGOs and some University-based academics, such as those mentioned in Annex 4 (References) have increasingly paid attention to approaches which are relevant in low resource contexts, but there are few references specific to Pacific countries.

There are many specialist teachers, networks and systems to support work in this area, including ICEVI and SPEVI (see 2.4 and 2.5 below).

While not a full analysis of available literature, the following themes are offered as context for this Scoping Study:

* A holistic approach to education is appropriate, so that education for children who are blind or vision impaired is not only considered within classrooms and schools, but as part of life pathways
* Inclusive education is preferable to separate education, if certain conditions are in place and supported over time
* Access to assistive devices, orientation and mobility support, and public spaces are critical pre-conditions for children to maximise their educational potential and therefore their prospects of participating in social and economic life and maintaining well-being
* Access to all types of information (e.g. textbooks, on-line material, work-sheets, journals and other reading material) relevant to different levels of learning, is also essential for children to reach their potential
* Providing inclusive education requires explicit policies and strategies, skilled teachers, particular technologies and supportive school communities, as well as ongoing efforts to provide resources and continuously support teachers and schools
* Support for inclusive education requires parents to trust their children will be safe
* The support of schools and broader communities is helpful to maximise benefits of learning for students.

References used in this Study are listed in Annex 4.

## 2.4 ICEVI

ICEVI is a membership organisation with a mission to promote access to inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all people with vision impairment. At the international level, its goals are:

* **Goal 1:** Promoting access to quality education for people with visual impairment including those with blindness, partial sight, deafblindness and additional disabilities.
* **Goal 2:** Influencing governments’and relevant stakeholders’ implementation of the SDGs and UNCRPD in the area of education of people with visual impairment.
* **Goal 3:** Improving networking, information sharing and collaboration at national, regional and global levels.

**ICEVI believes** that all children and young people with visual impairment and their families have the right to:

* Provision of a full range of educational services and to be included in the educational programs of their respective countries and communities;
* Receive early intervention, early childhood development, care and pre-primary education;
* Support by teachers and other professionals who are properly trained
* Educational materials, teaching methods and programs that are of a high standard, conform to best practices, and to meet their needs;
* Live in environments that are free of barriers, social stigmas, and stereotypes; and
* Lead productive lives, according to their aspirations and capabilities.

## 2.5 SPEVI

South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI) is the major professional association for educators of students with vision impairments in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific region. SPEVI acts as the professional body on the education and support of persons who are blind, have low vision, deaf-blindness, or additional disabilities. SPEVI membership is open to educators, professionals and parent groups who support and promote education for persons with vision impairment. SPEVI Inc. is an Association incorporated under the laws of NSW, Australia, and it has the following vision: ‘to promote educational systems in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific in which diversity is valued and disability is not viewed as a characteristic by which to judge a person’s worth.’

The aims of SPEVI are:

* To be recognised as the professional body of educators whose specialty is in matters pertaining to the education of persons with vision impairment in Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island Countries.
* To advocate on behalf of members, persons with vision impairment and parents/carers for equitable education access and participation, in accordance with international and national disability anti-discrimination legislation.
* To encourage the highest standards in the educators of persons with vision impairment by promoting research and professional training for general and specialist teachers.
* To promote and facilitate the interchange of information and collaboration among educators, professionals, parent groups and the broader community concerning education and equal opportunity for persons with vision impairment.
* To encourage the use of appropriate mainstream and assistive technologies, resources and optical and non-optical aids, in the education of persons with vision impairment, and to promote teacher education programs in the use and care of existing and new techniques and technology.

## 2.6 COVID-19 and education

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impact on the provision of education for all students across the world. School closures and travel restrictions have tended to exacerbate existing inequalities of access and service provision. In countries with high access to internet, online learning has been a new phenomenon, and this is suitable for children who are blind if they have appropriate software and dedicated support, but can significantly reduce accessibility in most cases. In countries with low access to internet, for example, when schools are closed, children may simply stop participating in education. In these contexts, constraints associated with inaccessible information are highlighted. In the few Pacific countries where schools make information accessible in Braille for children at school, this is not feasible when they are at home.

A report by Humanity and Inclusion in late 2020 highlighted that ‘The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the huge inequalities already faced by children with disabilities in terms of access to quality education.’ (Pomatto and McGeown 2020).

# Scoping Study Methodology

An excerpt from the Terms of Reference for this Scoping Study is attached at Annex 1.

Two consultants, Mereoni Daveta and Deborah Rhodes, were appointed to undertake this Scoping Study and in summary, they:

* Undertook a brief desk review of relevant studies and reviews
* Sought information through direct communications with officials from Pacific Ministries of Education and other relevant authorities, schools and educators, OPDs, representatives from regional organisations and development partners and other knowledgeable specialists
* Prepared a draft report for consideration by a group of specialists before finalising.

This Scoping Study has relied on ICEVI’s networks and reputation to gather information from ministries of education, schools, organisations for persons with disabilities (OPDs) and others with knowledge and interest in this topic in the Pacific region.

To gather information, the team used a combination of written questionnaires tailored to suit different roles of stakeholders and online interviews and discussions.

The approach taken by the researchers was to focus attention on examples of achievement to date, since this is expected to generate positive motivation to other countries.

Starting with a list of contacts in each of the countries and at the regional level, a snow-balling method was used to grow the list. At the end of the process, 30 people have been consulted for this Study, listed in Annex 2.

# Findings

This section provides a summary and analysis of information available on current education services and resources available for Pacific Islands students who are blind or vision impaired. Details of the situation in each country are provided in Annex 3.

## 4.1 Policies related to inclusive education

Governments in most Pacific countries now have relatively recently developed policies in relation to disability inclusion – this was not the case a decade ago. Policies often include references to inclusive education or special needs education. In some countries, policies are at the early stages of being implemented, though the extent of implementation varies widely. Before Governments began to recognise their responsibilities in educating all children, services for children with disabilities have largely been provided by non-government organisations. This has been the case over decades, in countries such as Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Samoa and Fiji.

Policies on disability inclusion provide various levels of information about the responsibilities and resources available in different sectors and all include references to education. Annex 7 includes a summary of current relevant policies, illustrating whether a country has either a disability policy or a more specific inclusive education policy (if the latter is the case, only this is listed). Country Profiles in Annex 3 also include the same information by country.

No current policies make specific references to education for children who are blind or vision impaired, despite the fact that general inclusion approaches are not sufficient for this group of students.

The extent to which these policies are being implemented is reflected in the information provided in this Section and Annex 3. Overall, there are a number of Pacific countries where children who are blind or vision impaired could expect to have a good chance of reaching their educational potential, but in most, the chances are limited.

## 4.2 Data on numbers of children who are blind or vision impaired

Globally, the WHO estimates that at least 2 billion people are blind or vision impaired, with approximately half with preventable eye conditions. Due to limitations in formal identification and diagnosis of eye conditions, actual numbers are not available in most countries. It is possible that in many countries where basic or specialist eye testing and glasses are not available, children who have refractive errors requiring glasses may be classified as vision impaired, yet with corrective lenses, these children would not be recognised with a disability.

One major global report on blindness between 1990 and 2010 found that the number of people with moderate or severe vision impairment was 172 million in 1990 and this increased to 191 million by 2010. The global prevalence of blindness had reduced from 3.0% to 1.9% yet rates of blindness or vision impairment in low-income countries were 25 times greater than in high-income countries. [[1]](#footnote-1)

It is widely understood that children who are blind do not generally attend or complete school in most countries, which limits the collection of data for this cohort of children. Illustrating the challenge of meaningful data, in the US, estimates of numbers of children in this category range from approximately 63,000 to 700,000 (see National Federation of the Blind website <https://nfb.org/resources/blindness-statistics>). In Australia, Vision Australia estimates that there are currently 357,000 people who are blind or have low vision, based on ABS population data and the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, but others make different estimates. A 2015 report by Vision2020 identified that 11% of all people who had accessed vision services (9,922 out of 90,203) in 2013 were aged under 18 years.

Limited data was provided by stakeholders about the numbers of children in school in some Pacific countries who are blind or vision impaired, for this Study. Despite best efforts, reliable information is not available from most Pacific countries. This reflects a number of factors, including limited resources allocated to identification and record-keeping, challenges associated with the definition and diagnosis of children, as well as privacy considerations. At the regional level, there is no single organisation with the responsibility to collect this data. Neither the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, responsible for collaboration and support for the implementation of PACREF, nor the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), which represents OPDs across the region has data on this topic.

Data collected by this Study includes the following:

* In Fiji, there are currently approximately 100 students who are blind or vision impaired enrolled in the education system or receiving early intervention services
	+ One source suggests there are 30 students identified at the early intervention stage, 21 attending the Fiji School for the Blind, 16 attending mainstream schools, and 34 at tertiary institutions, making a total of 101
	+ Another source confirmed there are 30 children under 5 years, but counted 40 children aged 6-14 years and 50 children aged 14-18 years, making a total of 120
* In Vanuatu, informal sources identified approximately 5 children with low vision enrolled in schools in Shefa Province, and 8 children who are blind and do not attend school in the same province (no other data from other Provinces was available)
* In Papua New Guinea, one estimate (Marella et al 2017), suggested that approximately 0.07% of children may be blind and 0.14% may be vision impaired so, using the 2011 census (where there were 3,545,429 children), there may be approximately 2,400 students who are blind and 4,800 students who are vision impaired, though there is no evidence to confirm or refute these numbers
* In Kiribati, there are approximately 20 students with a vision impairment attending mainstream schools and four students who are totally blind attending the Kiribati School and Centre for Children with Special Needs.
* In Samoa, the data held by the national OPD can only be released following a formal application and consideration of ethical considerations
* In Marshall Islands, there are reported to be six students at school, 3 school-aged children who do not attend school and 8 students who attend school in other countries
* In Cook Islands, there are currently 2 school-aged children who are blind or vision impaired attending school
* In Solomon Islands, there are 4 students who are blind or vision impaired attending a school run by Red Cross for students with disabilities
* In Tuvalu, there is no current data, but a recent survey was expected to issue results in October 2021.

It may be argued that more effort should be given to counting the numbers of school-aged children who are blind or vision impaired in each Pacific country, either through census or other means. Several Pacific countries are adding disability-specific questions in the form of Washington Group questions, to their national census, so these may generate some data in future. Unless there is a direct connection between the effort required to diagnose and count children and the provision of better services, precious resources are best allocated to organising the latter. It is clear what resources are needed for education systems to be able to provide the necessary services and there will always be children who are blind or vision impaired in all populations, though numbers may change over time. If efforts are dedicated to continuous strengthening and counting of services provided (as per the list of Six Key Elements in section 2.3), so that schools are able to provide services whenever they are necessary, this will more likely achieve better outcomes for these students.

## 4.3 Schooling for children who are blind or vision-impaired

In terms of inclusive education more generally, there is early evidence of a broad shift from separate specialist schooling run by non-government organisations, to more inclusive mainstream education supported or coordinated by Ministries of Education. This is reflected in the current regional framework on education (PACREF – see Section 2.1 above) which includes references to inclusive education for the first time. The CEO of the Pacific Disability Forum noted recently that ‘*after seven years of advocacy in relation to inclusive education, there are now signs of formal commitment by senior Pacific Education officials at regional level, and while this needs to filter down to national levels, it is a positive shift*.’

In several countries, including Fiji, Kiribati, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa and Papua New Guinea, this shift has begun to occur or is already well underway. Respective Ministries of Education are increasingly recognising and beginning to undertake their responsibilities to provide education for all. The extent to which students are actually able to access quality education is still limited in several of these countries, because of a wide range of factors, not the least being geographical challenges.

Children who are blind or vision-impaired can access a suite of the specialist services to enable them to achieve their educational potential, in a small number of Pacific countries. In these countries, there is evidence that teachers have been trained about inclusion, specialist equipment has been provided and maintained and support services have been established and managed. So, if a child is born blind or vision impaired in one of these countries today, they have the potential to attend school and achieve similar literacy results as their sighted sisters or brothers, particularly if they live near schools with these features. Two examples of students who have been through primary, secondary and tertiary education, and the factors that have contributed to their participation and success, are included below (Boxes 1 and 2).

In another group of countries, while various elements may have been introduced at some stage, and some services may be functioning, the extent to which children can currently access the range of services is limited.

However, in remaining countries the chances that Pacific children who are blind or vision impaired will achieve their educational potential are very low to non-existent. Few, if any of the necessary services are available in these countries and where they are, children outside the major city or town are not able to access them.

Overall, this Study found a mix of services for students who are blind or vision-impaired across Pacific countries. In summary:

* In Fiji, Cook Islands, Samoa and Kiribati, there is currently a high possibility that educational services are available in mainstream schools for this group of students and that the majority of students who are blind or vision impaired attend school
* In Papua New Guinea, a range of support services are provided by a large non-government organisation (Callan Services) through provincial-level resource centres for children to attend mainstream schools, although it is understood a large number of students in this category are not attending school
* In Samoa, some students attend mainstream schools, with various levels of specialist support provided, while others attend schools dedicated to education for children with disabilities
* In Vanuatu, a small number of students with vision impairment attend mainstream schools in Port Vila, with low levels of support, but no students who are blind and most of those with vision impairment do not attend at all
* In Tonga, there are currently no services for children with vision impairment: some have moved to Fiji to attend Fiji School for the Blind
* In Solomon Islands, a small number of students attend a school run by Red Cross, while others have attended Fiji School for the Blind, however, for most, no accessible and inclusive education is available
* In the Federated States of Micronesia, very small numbers of students who are vision impaired attend school, while others are served at home or in special schools
* In Nauru there is one school, where students who are blind or vision impaired may attend, with little specialist support
* In Marshall Islands, there are reported to be six students who are vision impaired attending school, three who do not attend school and eight who attend schools in other countries
* The Scoping Study was unable to determine the current situation for school-aged children who are blind or vision impaired in Niue and Palau.

It is worth noting that according to global experience, there are differences associated with accessing education for children who are born blind or vision impaired and children who become blind or vision impaired during the time they are at school. For example, students (and their parents) who have attended school prior to becoming vision impaired may expect to be able to continue, based on previous experience of being included and having access to information. Alternatively, children (and their parents) who have no prior experience of inclusion, tend to experience charitable (if any) contributions from others and form the view their participation in education and therefore their potential are inevitably limited.

This section describes findings about current services by categories of primary, secondary and tertiary education. It is important to stress that there are limitations associated with data collection: despite best efforts, the study team were unable to access information from all countries and from a wide range of stakeholders in each country. Errors in data are the responsibility of the authors. Those wishing to make plans to collaborate in this area of work are encouraged to consult deeply with people in each respective country, rather than depend on this data.

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**Box 1** **Case Study: Ranjesh’s story of education**

*‘Accessibility to information is a major issue for education of students with vision impairments.’*

Ranjesh was born in the western part of Fiji in 1989, the youngest of three children. His father passed away when he was six months old and life quickly became very difficult for the family in the home of his father’s parents. Ranjesh’s mother decided to move out, taking work in a garment factory, with a salary of 60 cents an hour to pay rent, buy food and send the children to school.

Ranjesh went to the local primary school where the teachers quickly concluded he ‘was not performing’ and was ‘disinterested in study’. Teachers witnessed him going up to the blackboard to take notes, but they thought he was playing up so they placed him at the back of the class. He remembers being regularly beaten with a stick, a hose pipe or a wooden duster. The teachers gave him and his mother the impression that he was ‘worthless.’ Ranjesh said he wanted to stop going to school because teachers and other children were cruel to him, but because his mother was struggling, he did not want to let her down. Ranjesh’s mother was distressed her son was not studying well. His siblings told him he could only aspire to be a rubbish-collector.

When he reached Class Five at the age of ten years, Ranjesh’s mother became aware there were problems with his eyes. A doctor said he could straighten a squint through surgery and in 1999, he had the surgery on his left eye. The surgery accelerated the progress of his degenerative eye condition: he had no sight in the left eye, and remaining vision in his right eye deteriorated quickly.

Ranjesh now knows that he had an eye condition (retinitis pigmentosa), an eye squint and dyslexia, but none were diagnosed at that stage. His memory of school at this time was of a great deal of physical and mental abuse and he reflects ‘my dignity was rock-bottom.’

Ranjesh stopped going to school for two years. One day, a trainee special-education teacher came to his home and told his mother that Ranjesh was vision impaired and that he could attend a school for children in this category in Suva. In 2002, he went to the boarding school at Fiji School of the Blind. He failed Class Five again, and got a wake-up call when his school friends moved onto Class Six without him. He decided to try to catch up, making a huge effort and learning to read and write properly for the first time, in just one year! He realized learning was not so hard when the right resources are there. At the end of Class Six, Ranjesh wrote a letter to his mother, the first he had ever written. His brother read the letter out loud to her and when Ranjesh came home a few weeks later, his mother cried because she had believed he would never be able to read or write.

Ranjesh’s teachers in Suva identified his vision issues (he was categorized as a low vision student) and dyslexia. In Class Eight, his vision deteriorated again, and a visiting doctor recommended he should not strain his eyes further by using his vision, but switch to Braille. By this time, Ranjesh was about to go to high school and he was so keen, he learned to read in Braille in just three months!

At secondary school, Ranjesh used Braille but up-to-date versions of textbooks were not available in Braille, so he needed to rely on his memory to get through. Some teachers and students helped by dictating sections from textbooks. Ranjesh developed techniques to strengthen his memory and worked hard: he began to succeed at school. He remembers that from Forms Three to Six, he would achieve between first and fourth in most subjects, out of classes of 45 students. Not forgetting his Mum, Ranjesh’s goal was to succeed in education, secure employment, and support her.

After completing Form Six, Ranjesh enrolled to study a diploma in office administration at Fiji National University, encountering both barriers and key factors that help students with vision impairment access education. A Japanese volunteer gave Ranjesh a laptop: Ranjesh had learned that carrying heavy printed Braille notes around ‘required a suitcase’, so when he heard about screen-reading software, it was a significant benefit. He used a free demonstration version for 18 months, because of the prohibitive cost of the full download: this meant every 40 minutes, he had to re-start! Ranjesh struggled financially but worked very hard to obtain good results. Two lecturers witnessed his effort and generously paid his fees. Other lecturers helped to make information available in accessible formats. Once he entered the realm of digital information, Ranjesh realized accessibility to information is a major issue for education of students with vision impairments.

Ranjesh applied in vain for many jobs after completing his diploma. In 2011, with no income and living at a rescue mission in Suva, he saw an article about scholarships from the Australian Government, so applied. Many months later, while on a noisy bus, he remembers receiving an unexpected phone call to say he had won a scholarship. He started a degree in international development studies at Australian Catholic University in Melbourne. Ranjesh says he experienced a strong academic system, quality teaching and excellent support in Australia, but also faced many challenges. He was overwhelmed by academic expectations but told himself ‘I am not a quitter!’ By the end of first semester, he learned to para-phrase, write essays and reference. For most subjects in his degree, Ranjesh received distinctions. He also learned about accessibility, the rights of persons with disabilities, and the crucial importance of support services. He learned to be vocal about accessing information. He volunteered at CBM Australia and adjusted to the Australian way of life.

Ranjesh recalls areas where students with vision impairments can be left behind such as in accessing images, diagrams and maps. ‘*When I was doing a subject in geography, they got me a tactile globe, so I could keep up with the rest of the students. Presently, these kinds of facilities and approaches are not available in Fiji.*’ Ranjesh says this experience contributed to his understanding about barriers and systems, as well as other valuable lessons. He returned to Fiji with ‘sky-high confidence’ and the ability to articulate his interests, including to raise awareness about barriers to education.

Ranjesh felt confident he would secure a job when he returned to Fiji, with his education and work experience, but for two long years ‘people only saw my white stick.’ He lost count of job applications and his dignity and confidence took another blow. When the money he had saved in Australia was running out, he became distressed and with his mother’s encouragement, decided to apply for a UK Chevening Scholarship for further study at the end of 2018. Sadly, his mother became unwell and by the time he heard that he had won this prestigious scholarship, she had passed away.

Ranjesh studied a Masters in Human Rights Law at University of Edinburgh, finishing months after the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. He learned about the importance of mentors for students with vision impairments, reflecting that many students drop out of education because they do not receive appropriate information or advice, or face stigma, discrimination and stereotyping. His experience confirmed that access to information is essential for tertiary education: he researched a major essay on legislation related to access to information for his degree. Ranjesh is committed to supporting students with vision impairments to negotiate the education system, telling them ‘information is power.’ One student he has supported is soon to qualify as a teacher from USP.

Ranjesh recalls a major challenge has been a lack of understanding among teachers about how students with vision impairment learn. He tells the students he mentors to be humble and not fight with teachers, but explain to them about the right to learn, and if barriers persist, keep going to someone in a more senior position, and then advocate to the media if necessary. He says barriers to education persist now, and changes need to be made at both the systemic and classroom levels.

(end of box)

#### Primary schooling

Access to primary education specifically for students who are blind or vision impaired varies widely across the Pacific region. There are differences between countries which support children to attend mainstream schools and those which maintain separate schools. There are also differences between countries in which the Ministry of Education takes responsibility for provision of education for this group of students and those where non-government organisations provide services because Governments do not.

In some countries, access is possible and either most or all students in this category attend primary school and receive some level of specialist support. In some countries, there are some specialist support services, and a limited proportion of students attend primary school. In remaining countries, there is either little to no accessible inclusive or specialist schooling for children who are blind or vision impaired, so in these countries, they are denied education.

The following summary of information from Pacific countries, illustrates the diversity:

* In Fiji and Kiribati, significant progress has been made towards inclusive education at primary schools in recent years. There is a long history of charity-based segregated schooling in both countries, and more recent government policy commitments and efforts, supported by dedicated partnerships with Australian aid programs which specifically supported disability inclusion, have contributed to this change.
* In Fiji, the Fiji School for the Blind has provided dedicated teaching since 1970, with many of its 450 graduates accessing tertiary studies and employment. It now provides both in-school teaching for students from Years 1 to 8 plus specialist ongoing support for the integration of students into the broader education system. In addition to the provision of resources and equipment (described below in 4.3), FSB provides a range of services for primary (and secondary) students, including Braille learning skills, Braille transcription for teaching materials and exams, orientation and mobility programs in mainstream schools, integration teachers to visit students in schools and support teachers and students, additional classes in the afternoons to consolidate learning, supervision of exams and engagement with Ministry of Education in relation to students requiring reasonable accommodation in relation to examinations.
* In 2013, five primary schools were selected to pilot the implementation of inclusive education as part of the Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP) 2011-17 Disability Inclusion Strategy, funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT): The five schools were Adi Maopa Primary School, Arya Samaj Primary School, Ratu Latianara Memorial School, South Taveuni Primary School and Tavua District School. Each school received 2 Braille Braille machines each, 2 white canes, Braille papers as well as a trained Braille Teacher Aide to support inclusion of students with vision impairment. All children in the 5 schools were also screened. Students identified with vision related barriers were referred to optometrists and those who required prescribed glasses received funding for purchase of their glasses. The Fiji Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA)has continued to support the inclusive schools, with provision of disability grants and teacher aides. There is also a Special Education Unit and designated senior Education Officer at the national level to coordinate and facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools
* In Kiribati, until recently, the School and Centre for Children with Special Needs (KSCCSN) was the only location where students who were blind or vision impaired could attend primary school. As a non-government organisation, the centre was required to undertake fundraising over many years. More recently, the Ministry of Education has taken on some responsibility and some students who previously attended KSCCSN have been moved to mainstream primary school in recent years, and teacher assistants have been recruited to support them. There are now 91 students with disabilities attending 9 Model Inclusion Schools in the capital of South Tarawa with 19 of these students with a vision impairment and 1 who is totally blind. This mainstreaming process has been supported by the Kiribati Education Improvement Program, funded by DFAT.
	+ Annex 5 provides a more detailed description of education for children who are blind or vision impaired in Kiribati.
* In Samoa, until recently, students who are blind or visually impaired were able to attend separate non-government primary schools, which have relied on fundraising, grants and external specialist support. While the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, (MESC) has recently begun to institute more inclusive education, supporting students to attend mainstream schools, it currently refers all students with vision impairment to the Samoa Blind Persons Association (SBPA). This organisation of persons with disabilities has been designated as the key source of assistance for students and has established a Braille production unit, but cannot provide education services. Within schools, there are some teacher aides and access to Braille materials production. There is also a parent support group and a basic orientation and mobility service.
* In Vanuatu, there are currently five students with low vision attending five different schools in Efate Province and low levels of support are provided to them and their respective teachers by an inclusive education teachers’ network and a dedicated inclusive education role in the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). The Vanuatu Education Support Program (DFAT-funded, implemented with MoET) is focused on inclusive education training and providing some low-cost resources relevant to the inclusion of children who have a vision impairment. In addition, MoET has a remote AVI volunteer who commenced in 2021, developing a strategy to introduce Braille in Bislama, English and French to support the current cohort of out-of-school children in Vanuatu who are totally blind.
* In Papua New Guinea all services for students with disabilities, including those who are blind or vision impaired, are currently provided by Callan Services, through Resource Centres in 17 provinces. This includes early Braille literacy, specialised teachers, support for orientation and mobility and sighted guide techniques, Brailling of educational documents, parents’ meetings and training, and Braille literacy training for mainstream teachers. Callan Services is funded by Christian Brothers generally, with services for student who are blind and vision impaired currently supported by CBM Australia.
* In Solomon Islands, four students are currently attending Red Cross Special Disability Centre (RCSDC), but there are no specific services. An article about a young girl in Solomon Islands, see Annex 6, illustrates the reality of lack of access to education.
* Countries not listed above appear to have no services to support primary education for children who are blind vision impaired.

#### Secondary schooling

The services mentioned above in relation to primary schools also apply in most cases to secondary schools. In the countries where dedicated services are provided, students at secondary school are commonly able to successfully complete their education. This is often connected to and reflective of national inclusive education policies and school systems, but in several countries, is the result of efforts by non-government organisations over a long period of time.

However, across the region, data suggests that in most cases, even when students are able to access primary school, their progression to secondary schools is limited. Barriers to progression include community and parental attitudes, lack of school-based or education system commitment, expertise or support and challenges in accessing curriculum and other information as well as lack of access to transport. Anecdotally, there is information to suggest that special schools in the Pacific typically take approximately two years to teach every year level of curriculum. This affects successful transition into secondary school given children are approximately 17 years old when completing primary school in a special school before being able to transition into the first year of a mainstream high school.

In Fiji, students who attended primary school at the Fiji School for the Blind, have been supported to attend mainstream secondary schools in Suva and other locations, with a wide range of services accessible. For example, at present, 10 students (8 with low vision and 2 Braille users) are currently enrolled in various secondary schools across Fiji. These students are regularly visited by an Integration Teacher based at the Fiji School for the Blind. Her role includes visiting the students and meeting with the teachers to discuss how to address any issues.

#### Tertiary education including technical and vocational education

Currently, accessible university education is available for students at national universities in Fiji and Papua New Guinea, as well as those from Fiji and other Pacific countries attending the University of the South Pacific (USP).

Since 2013, the USP’s Disability Resource Centre, has supported enrolment and education for students with disabilities, including a substantial number of students who are blind or vision impaired. The Centre promotes and supports relationships between lecturers, tutors and coordinators with students, meeting with both regularly. Since a large proportion of university processes, including teaching, are undertaken online, USP is continuously seeking to upgrade services to ensure they are accessible. It provides the following services:

* Advice, coordination of meetings with key USP staff
* Awareness & advocacy initiatives
* Volunteer buddy support to support orientation and mobility, reading and research
* Assistive technology & software e.g. Braille Sense U2, Jaws, NVDA, Read & Write Gold, audio-recorded notes
* Test environment accommodations e.g. extra time, special venue, laptop, embossing, font increase, sign interpreter, JAWS/NVDA
* Designated student space
* Counselling referral support
* Sign language interpreters and basic sign language classes
* Quarterly e-Newsletter titled ‘Be Inclusive’
* Participation in other student programmes e.g. VC’s L&T Forum, JENESYS, etc
* Regional Scholarship Scheme for students with disabilities from other Pacific countries (for example, 2 students with vision impairment from Kiribati are currently studying at USP under this scheme)
* Gradually improving physical accessibility across the campuses

Fiji National University (FNU) has recently launched its Office for Disability Services, known as the Disability Unit, which is responsible for ‘coordinating support services, reasonable academic accommodation and promoting disability awareness in the University community.’ According to FNU, the Unit is ‘committed and ready to assist students with disabilities to reach their goals.’ The Unit offers to work with the various colleges within FNU to ensure students are able to complete academic requirements for example, through making materials available in accessible formats and enabling students to have extra time during exams. It proposes individual reasonable adjustment plans (IRAP) for students. Within these plans, students with vision impairments may be able to access services such as orientation or mobility instructors and provision of materials in alternative formats, including enlarged text and Braille. The Unit also has a computer laboratory with screen reading software for students able to access the campus and is currently purchasing a Swell Form Graphic machine for the university. FNU reports that admission and registration of students with disabilities including those with vision impairment is fast tracked. It is also working on inclusive budgeting, to ensure that the needs of students are included in the university budget, making new buildings more accessible and refurbishing existing buildings. FNU noted that the Government of Fiji provides grants with specifications that includes accommodation of students with disabilities. FNU also noted that a new Diploma in Inclusive Education is currently being developed.

In Papua New Guinea, some support is provided for tertiary students by Callan Services, including through access to screen reading software.

In the area of **technical and vocational education**, some examples of inclusion can be found in the region. For example, in Samoa, a partnership between the OPD, Nuanua O Le Alofa and the Australian Pacific Technical Coalition has been established in which some people with vision impairment are now taking or have taken courses in different areas.

#### Referral mechanisms

Education systems generally require referral mechanisms for students who are blind or vision impaired to access the suite of services necessary for full participation. The relatively small numbers of students and small population sizes in most Pacific countries mean that where there is a commitment to education for all, it is relatively feasible to collect relevant data and for authorities to track students from early identification processes through to school enrolment. However, in Pacific countries with multiple islands and remote communities, identifying and reaching students is particularly difficult, as is formal diagnosis by specialists.

The issue of transition from specialist schools to mainstream schools and from primary to secondary schools was raised by a small number of stakeholders during this Study. As noted above, there are transition issues for students from special schools where two years is taken to complete each year of curriculum, and also for access to different types of information.

In Cook Islands, a strong referral system is in place between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, and between schools and the Inclusive Education Advisor in relation to sourcing programmes, resources and assistive technologies. When appropriate, students are referred to the Ministry of Health for further support, and children are included in visiting eye specialist visits. The Inclusive Education Advisor provides support to teachers and other staff where appropriate.

In Fiji, the Ministry of Education has a Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS) which assists with the identification of students with vision impairment and other disabilities in schools, helping to determine the allocation of grants for schools to support their education in schools.

In Samoa, there are referrals between the Ministry of Education, OPDs and special schools operating within partnerships, relating to educational services for individual children, including those with multiple disabilities. The Samoa Blind Persons organisation is part of this network. Within this referral system, efforts are made to support parents to enroll their children into schools.

In Papua New Guinea, the Ministry of Education policy specifies that the nearest school must be accessible for all children regardless of disability, age, colour, gender and sex, so in theory, all children who are blind or vision impaired should be able to participate in education and would not need to be referred to an alternative school.

#### Education Management Information Systems

Education management information systems (EMIS) can be important means for identification, tracking and supporting students with particular impairments, including blindness and vision impairment, especially when used appropriately. Fiji is a good practice example as FEMIS includes student fields and the option for IEPs to be uploaded, supporting national monitoring of students with disability. The EMIS in Vanuatu and Kiribati, along with many other Pacific Islands, tend to focus on school data rather than student data at present. This means that student information such as disability identification and IEPs cannot be recorded within student fields.

### Literacy levels

Consistent with the points made above about data, this Scoping Study was unable to find data to make an assessment about literacy levels of students who are blind or vision impaired. Pacific-wide information available about school attendance and resources, suggests that overall, literacy levels are likely to be relatively low, with a few exceptions. In Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati and Samoa, where multiple elements which support learning are in place, literacy levels are likely to be relatively higher. In countries where students who are blind do not attend school, because of the absence of these elements, then literacy levels will likely be very low to non-existent.

### School enrolment rates

Consistent with the discussion above, data about school enrolment rates is not readily available across the region. It is possible that as more effort is given to inclusive education at the regional level, more data will be become available. For example, in 2023, the next Heads of Ministries of Education meeting will be convened by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, and the meeting agenda is expected to include discussion of progress towards PACREF, which includes references to inclusive education. Support from development partners to gather information for this purpose may be a useful contribution to improved attention to inclusive education.

Based on available data, the enrolment rates for students who are blind or vision impaired in Fiji, Cook Islands are likely to be relatively high. In other countries, it is not possible to make a determination, but anecdotally, it is likely that enrolment rates are relatively low.

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**Box 2 Case Study: Sovaia Coalala**

*‘Embrace your challenges and do not be afraid to move about of your comfort zone.’*

Sovaia Coalala, known as Sisi, was born in 1981 at the Lautoka Hospital in Fiji. Sisi is the middle child and has an older brother and a younger sister. She was born premature and spent her first few months in hospital. Sisi was born with some sight but gradually lost her vision as she grew older and by the age of five years, she had totally lost vision in both eyes.

Sisi recalled that she never faced any discrimination or stigma as she was growing up, but many people expressed pity towards her. Her parents were heavily involved in church functions and community work, and Sisi accompanied them wherever they went. At the age of three years, as she was gradually losing her sight, she was enrolled in a kindergarten. One day, a radio broadcast included a guest speaker talking about the Fiji Society of the Blind which runs the Fiji School for the Blind. They talked about the range of services available for students with vision impairments. This led Sisi’s father to visit the school and inform them about Sisi.

Field workers from the Fiji Society for the Blind started visiting Sisi at her home and providing a variety of early intervention activities. They also trained her parents how to support Sisi at home with basic daily living skills, feeding and dressing independently. In 1986, at the age of five years, Sisi totally lost her sight and was enrolled at the Fiji School for the Blind in Vatuwaqa, Suva. She lived in the school hostel amongst other vision-impaired students. Sisi knows that it was not easy for her parents, especially her mother, to part with her, but her father was optimistic and keen for Sisi to attend school.

Hostel life was not easy for Sisi. At home, everything had been familiar and many tasks were done for her by family members. At Fiji School for the Blind, Sisi learned to become independent. Even though it was challenging, as she was often bullied by the older students, looking back she said it was a good learning experience. She was disciplined and learned to be independent from an early age. She began to learn Braille and started orientation and mobility training without using the white cane. She received her first white cane around the age of seven or eight years and it took her about one whole year to learn Braille.

In 1991, Sisi was integrated into a mainstream primary school for Year Three. She was fearful at the beginning, especially being enrolled into a class of more than 40 students. The environment was totally different and she felt quite alone as the students did not know how to interact with her. Gradually, the class teacher encouraged the other students to make friends with Sisi and as she grew in confidence she began to participate in all class and school activities. The teachers at the school were supportive and understanding. Integration staff from Fiji School for the Blind visited the school twice or three times a week to check on her and give advice to the teachers on how best to support her. All her Brailled work was taken to the Fiji School for the Blind for marking. Exam papers were Brailled and transcribed by the staff at Fiji School for the Blind.

Sisi began to compete with the rest of the class academically and became one of the top five students by the time she graduated from primary school at St Marcellin Primary School in Suva. She was then accepted at one of the elite girls’ schools in Suva, the St Joseph’s Secondary School. Some of the girls from her primary school joined her at St Joseph’s, which meant Sisi had friends and classmates who already knew and understood her. As Sisi was one of the first students with a disability to be enrolled at St Joseph’s, teachers had little prior experience with how to support her learning. Again, staff from Fiji School for the Blind visited regularly to provide for both teachers and Sisi as a secondary student. In Year Nine, where students selected more of their own subjects, Sisi was assigned a buddy for each subject. She remembers that girls volunteered to be her buddy and this worked out very well.

In 2002, Sisi was accepted into university and enrolled at the University of the South Pacific. After being accepted, the University found out Sisi was vision impaired and expressed reluctance about her attendance. Mr Setareki Macanawai (current CEO for Pacific Disability Forum) was Head Teacher at the Fiji School of the Blind at the time, and he intervened to support Sisi’s attendance. He met with USP staff and discussed ways Sisi could be supported through her studies. Among other things, he suggested that USP purchase a JAWS Software Licence and install this software on a campus-based computer to help Sisi access classes.

Sisi was enrolled in a Bachelor of Education (Secondary) course, majoring in Literature and Language. It was one of the few options available for scholarship students at that time. Her parents had initially wanted Sisi to become a lawyer, but her own passion was for accounting. She was advised by the Integration Team at the Fiji School for the Blind that if she studied accounting, her career choices would be limited. In retrospect, Sisi said she had no choice but to take the Bachelor of Education course: that was the only option available.

According to Sisi, university life was fast-paced but she was fortunate to have access to JAWS and a computer installed with JAWS at the campus. During her studies, a group of volunteers, connected through an Expatriate Wives Club, supported Sisi and other students with vision impairments, through regular visits and assistance with reading and research work.

Daily travel to university was a challenge for Sisi in the early part of her studies. When she was no longer eligible to stay at the hostel at Fiji School for the Blind, from the age of 18, she needed alternative accommodation. It took considerable negotiation for Sisi to secure accommodation at the university campus, but she was finally offered a place, shared with a few other girls. Sisi graduated with a Bachelor Degree in Education, majoring in Literature and Language in 2005. In the same year, she was offered a job as Integration Teacher at the Fiji School for the Blind.

In 2013 Sisi was offered an Australian Leadership Award from the Australian Government and enrolled at the University of Wollongong. She graduated with a Double Master Degree in Strategic Human Resource Management and Commerce in 2015.

Today, Sisi is the Disability Coordinator at the Fiji National University in Fiji where she coordinates and facilitates inclusion and support for students with disabilities in the various Campuses. She recently received the 2021 HFC Senior Manager Award at the recent Homecare Independent National Disability Awards 2021, in recognition of her substantial contribution to the disability community in Fiji.

Reflecting on her education journey, Sisi says the most memorable experiences were associated with her three years at the University of the South Pacific. She found these years exhilarating because she got the freedom to make her own choices. This compared with the period before when her life at the hostel and in secondary school was highly structured and disciplined, with little freedom to follow her own interests. She reveled in the opportunity to experience the outside world and made many new friends.

Sisi encourages people with vision impairments to embrace challenges and not be afraid of moving out of their comfort zone. She stresses the need to strive for higher things and not limit ourselves to our current situations. Sisi is happily married to Mr Fuata Faktaufon, who is a teacher at the Fiji School for the Blind. (end of box)

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### 4.3.3 Individual Education Plans

Data collected for this Study suggest that where there are efforts made to provide inclusive education, there is a high likelihood that individual education plans are developed for students who are blind or have a vision impairment. For example:

* In Cook Islands, IEPs are used as the basis for meetings which typically involve the student’s parent/guardian, school teaching staﬀ and any specialists who have contributed to the assessment (such as physiotherapists, psychologists, or occupational therapists who live in the Cook Islands). Depending on the level of impairment, a student’s program is then instigated by the classroom teacher, or assisted by a teacher aide if more individual support is required (Townsend, Page, & Mccawe, 2014) (referenced in Page et al 2018).
* In Fiji, FSM, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Tuvalu, respondents noted that all enrolled students who are blind or vision impaired have Individual Education Plans, which are followed and updated appropriately.

## Equipment and Services

Equipment and tools that enable students to read and write and in particular to access information are clearly essential. This includes equipment and machines that make small text larger for students with vision impairments and provide information in alternative formats, including Braille, for students who are blind. Services for students who are blind that provide and maintain specialist equipment, produce documents in Braille and teach Braille are therefore also essential. Orientation and mobility services are also essential for students to enable access to education buildings and facilities.

### 4.3.1 Essential equipment

The Study found a mixed picture of current equipment and related resources available in Pacific countries. Almost all of the available equipment in the Pacific, including magnifying glasses, video magnifiers and Braille machines, has been donated through non-government organisations within long-standing partnerships and arrangements, including through the efforts of volunteers and other teachers over decades. Some students in countries such as Fiji, Kiribati and Samoa are able to access some of this equipment. Overall, most stakeholders identified that there is currently insufficient access to basic assistive devices and specialist equipment required for teaching students who are blind or vision impaired: most countries simply do not have this equipment or the trained teachers and support services to use and maintain it.

Various pieces of equipment can enable students who are blind or vision impaired to access information. Items such as reading domes and magnifying glasses can be used for students with vision impairments to enlarge text. For those who are blind, Braille production machines, such as Perkins Braillers, the most widely used mechanical braille writer in the world since its invention in 1951, can be found in several countries, including Samoa, Fiji and Kiribati. Several stakeholders mentioned that that equipment, in the countries where it is available, is only accessible within schools, so cannot be used by students to undertake homework, to work remotely (such as during COVID lockdowns) or to use for other purposes, such as hobbies or personal interests.

Maintaining Braille machines is important for them to be useful. The Scoping Study that many are in poor repair and maintenance was mentioned as an ongoing issue in most settings, as is the supply of suitable paper.

Examples of current data about equipment by country are provided below:

* In Samoa, there are facilities for Braille production, trained teacher aides, large print, electronic copies, white canes, slate and stylus, teacher aid, parents support group, basic orientation and mobility services. The Samoa Blind Persons Association has a fully functional electronic Braille production unit, established in 2018, that is producing educational materials for children who are blind and visually impaired who are enrolled in regular schools. Relevant parts of text books and other resources are recorded in Braille based on requests and needs that arise from students and teachers.
* In Cook Islands, access to assistive technology, in the form of voice to text functions, is provided. Also, schools have the capacity to enlarged printing (A3 sized worksheets).
* In Fiji, the Fiji School for the Blind has a Braille Production Unit and the Fiji Society for the Blind which manages the school provides white canes, magnifying glasses and reading glasses as well as enlarged fonts of textbooks and there is also good access to a Braille Embosser and good supplies of paper. There are also audiobooks, Braille books and computers with screen reading software.
* In Kiribati, DFAT funded KEIP is trialing six Disability Inclusion Kits that includes some low-cost assistive devices to support the inclusion of children who are blind or vision impaired. Findings will influence the provision of further equipment in 2022. KSCCSN has 1 Juliette embosser (which is old and rusty and runs out of paper), an INDEX embosser which can use regular paper, 6 Perkins Braillers, some canes and several computers with NVDA software for office and student use.
* Marshall Islands has five Braille machines, used across the different islands
* In Vanuatu, the DFAT funded Vanuatu Education Support Program has recently completed a trial of six Inclusion Kits with all resources to be handed over to the Ministry of Education and Training. Initial findings demonstrate value in low cost devices for students with low vision including dome magnifiers, talking calculators, thick lined paper and writing guides. In addition, an Australian Volunteer has recently completed a three-month remote placement scoping options for Braille instruction in Vanuatu.
* In Papua New Guinea, Callan Services has a wide range of equipment including Perkins Braillers, a dux box embosser, scanners, smart phone recorders, magnifiers, reading glasses and reading frame/writing board
* Tonga has two Braille machines and an embosser however no teacher has been trained on how to use this equipment. The only person in Tonga who knows how to use the Braille Machine and Braille embosser is currently studying at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji enrolled in the Bachelor of Special and Inclusive Education course.

### 4.3.2 IT-based systems

Computer-based systems, particularly screen-reading software such as JAWS and NVDA, as essential reading and writing tools for many people who are blind or vision impaired, are increasingly used to support the educational inclusion for this cohort of learners in Pacific countries. Adaptive or inclusive technology is also used in some settings to produce Braille and electronic Word format reading materials.

Several Pacific countries now provide some form of access to this software and hardware and there are increasing numbers of students who use IT-based systems. Examples include:

* In Fiji, USP provides JAWS software to students as well as a dedicated space in the Post Graduate students lab with allocated computer installed with JAWS
* Kiribati Institute of Technology has 12 computers installed with NVDA software
* In Kiribati, the national DPO, Te Toa Matoa has several donated laptops with NVDA software and KSCCSN also had 14 donated second-hand desk-top computers that were used to establish a computer lab with NVDA screen reading software. These computers are no longer working and the school has just received funding for 3 new desktop computers for this lab. The lab has been used to train students who are blind or vision impaired in a range of computer skills.
* In Papua New Guinea, Callan Services provides access to JAWS or NVDA software programs
* In several countries, an Australian volunteer (previous Chair of ICEVI Pacific) has provided training for individuals on use of computers and screen-reading software
* In Tonga, there are computers with JAWS and NVDA software but no teachers skilled in their use
* In Tuvalu, a hand Brailler and other Braille teaching resources have been recently purchased for the Aofiaga Centre, by an Australian Government funded education program.

Where there are limitations in access to computers and related IT equipment and services (speakers, headphones, electricity and internet) in Pacific countries, children who are blind or vision-impaired miss out on education.

### 4.3.3 Orientation and mobility services

Travel to and from school and around school grounds typically requires the specialised expertise of an orientation and mobility instructor with such services limited in many Pacific islands. Some Pacific Islands including Fiji and Kiribati have received capacity building in orientation and mobility instruction services from trained instructors from Australia who have informally volunteered their time in these islands. The skills to navigate spaces, including classrooms, playgrounds and other spaces, is a crucial skill set required by people who are blind or vision impaired in order to maximise their independence. Training in the use of white canes, improved level walking paths, tactile ground surface indicators and other interventions are important for the mobility of people who are blind or vision impaired.

### Other services

Some Pacific countries provide other services for students who are blind or vision impaired. For example, in FSM, free transport is provided for students who are blind or vision impaired for those attending school or specialist day schools.

## 4.4 Teacher training institutions

The Pacific Disability Forum noted that teacher training institutions are beginning to develop curriculum for teacher training so that teachers have basic knowledge about inclusion, however, this is mostly not to the level of detail required for teaching specific groups of students such as those with hearing or vision impairments.

* In Fiji, teacher training institutions do not provide specialist training in Braille for teachers. Teachers learn Braille when they are posted to the Fiji School for the Blind. The Fiji Society for the Blind provides training on Mobility and Orientation to teachers and students at the school.
* In Cook Islands, professional development for specific staff is offered on an ongoing basis including Braille if necessary
* In Kiribati, the Kiribati Teachers College offered a Certificate III Teacher Assistant Program in 2018 and 2019, with 25 qualified Teacher Assistants working in Model Inclusion Schools in the capital of South Tarawa.

## 4.5 Education to employment

The critical importance of considering inclusive education in the context of broader inclusion was highlighted by several stakeholders consulted for this Scoping Study. This recognizes that education is a key element in a person’s overall experience of life, and therefore official education policies and experiences of education are critical, but other policies and services are also influential for individuals, for economic development and social cohesion. While the quality of education affects a person’s access to employment, other areas of government policy and services also contribute to inclusion and participation in the workforce and society more broadly. For example, Ministries of Labour and Public Service Commissions work on inclusive employment policies and programs, consistent with national plans and International Labour Organisation commitments.

One stakeholder mentioned the importance of connecting education with other sectors at government policy levels, saying:

* ‘We should consider how to express education for children who are blind or vision impaired, in terms of the broader human resource context, so that it is considered as a priority beyond the Ministries of Education.  This way, other parts of government become involved and interested, such as Ministries for Employment, Labour, Trade etc. and inter-ministerial discussions can include [disability inclusive education] on their agendas and support Ministries of Education to do more, particularly in terms of achieving SDGs and CRPD compliance etc.’

Another stakeholder said:

‘One purpose of education is to get people into employment, so when students aren’t able to access information and equipment, it has potentially negative effects on the future employment of people with disabilities. Our organisation is currently concerned about the gap between inclusive education and inclusive employment for people with disabilities – we need to both work with schools and employers.’

There is scope for a more linked-up approach to education for students who are blind or vision impaired, particularly in terms of support for transition-to-employment programs and supportive career development services. Existing examples of tertiary institutions providing disability inclusive approaches which will contribute to students’ potential employment include the Kiribati Institute of Technology and Fiji National University. There are many examples of people who are blind or vision impaired working both in Pacific and other countries, to assure employers that an inclusive approach is not only feasible but also productive for all concerned.

## 4.6 Factors which contribute to education

The Scoping Study sought to identify factors that contribute to the provision of education services for students who are blind or vision impaired in Pacific countries. In summary, the following were suggested:

* Existence of a National Inclusive Education Policy, along with mandates regulations and procedures for early identification, inclusion and monitoring of services
* Appointment of senior inclusive education advisers and/or dedicated inclusive education units within the Ministry of Education, who are able to influence inclusion at all levels of education
* A budget within the education portfolio for necessary personnel, equipment and services
* Referral systems to maximise access to relevant health and education services
* Development of specialist disability resource centres which can support students and teachers at primary, secondary and tertiary levels
* Availability of basic equipment which enables vision impaired students to enlarge text
* Access to Braille machines, and services which enable students and teachers to access information using Braille
* Access to computers and specific software
* Pre-service and in-service teacher training and ongoing professional development opportunities.

Examples of these elements in particular countries are provided below:

* In Cook Islands, an Inclusive Education Advisor at the Ministry of Education is able to ensure funding is provided for teacher aides and other necessary support
* In Federated States of Micronesia, there are mandates, regulations and procedures for early identification, placement and monitoring of services for children who are blind or vision impaired (although insufficient trained personnel to provide quality services)
* In Fiji, a Special and Inclusive Education Unit in the Ministry of Education is dedicated to monitoring and supporting schools in relation to inclusion, consistent with a national policy. There are also grants to cover the costs of tuition and equipment as well as support for teacher training in relation to Braille as well as adjustments for exams
* In Fiji, the Fiji Society for the Blind raises funds for an integrated range of services to provide both specialist education and support for mainstream education
* In Fiji, dedicated Disability Resource Centres have been created to support students at both University of South Pacific and Fiji National University
* In Kiribati, contributing factors have included the availability of teacher assistants to support alternative formatting, provision of assistive devices such as magnifying domes and coloured overlays, a teaching guide, and continuous professional development for teachers
* In Papua New Guinea, a long history of dedicated and integrated efforts by Callan Services, contributes to current services in 17 provinces. This covers a wide range of factors including teacher training, a hostel for students from remote areas, referral system, friendly and welcoming school environment, provision of learning aids and equipment, establishment of peer buddy program, increased awareness at community level of the rights of children, continuous support for teachers and students, inclusive education policy at national level, training for parents and access to green reader software for students at tertiary level.

## 4.7 Lessons learned

Those involved in supporting education for students who are blind or vision impaired suggested a wide range of lessons over decades. These are summarised here:

* Change towards inclusive education happens when it is led by Pacific Islanders themselves, based on a good knowledge of the particular social and institutional context and agreed regional and national plans and strategies
* Government ownership and national leadership is essential for systemic change to occur
* Non-government organisations can provide services which support children in the absence of government commitment, but unless their specialist expertise is formally recognised and mainstream education services are inclusive, future generations of students will not be able to reach their potential
* Respectful partnerships with external organisations can contribute to supporting the delivery of quality services, recognising what has been learned internationally about inclusive education, teaching methods and equipment
	+ External partners can contribute in the form of on-tap technical expertise, support for leaders to achieve agreed strategies, and access to opportunities for sharing learning and experiences between countries and practitioners
	+ They cannot be relied upon for the direct provision of ongoing specialist service delivery, funding for basic service provision or ongoing resources
* While education for children with sensory impairments requires some specialist expertise, the general approaches apply to all forms of disability inclusion
* Support for and collaboration with OPDs, both general and disability-specific OPDs (such as UBP in Fiji, SBPA in Samoa and TNVIA in Tonga) is essential for long-term sustainability, coordination and community connections related to education for children with disabilities
* Efforts to make information accessible are critical for students with vision or hearing impairments, including through signing and complying with the Marrakech Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works by Visually Impaired Persons and Persons with Print Disabilities, working with the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), and accessing free materials through groups such as Bookshare.

# Priorities for strengthening education services

Stakeholders in all countries included in this Scoping Study have identified there is interest in and room for strengthening access to and the quality of primary education for students who are blind or vision impaired. They were asked to share existing plans or priorities or suggest their own, recognising the variety of current services across the region.

Consistent with PACREF and with the Six Key Elements required for education for children who are blind or vision impaired listed in Section 2.3, in summary, the following priorities were expressed overall:

* National-level promotion of the importance of inclusive schooling for all students
* Demonstration of commitment to inclusive education by leaders in the education sector and broader government and community
* Provision of pre-service and in-service teacher and teachers’ aide training which includes both basic training on inclusion and specialist training related to education for particular groups of students, including those who are blind or vision impaired, including in the use of specialist equipment (Braillers and screen-reading software)
* Workforce planning to ensure there are adequate numbers of skilled and qualified teachers across the education system, including through training/upskilling existing teachers
* Ensuring all curriculum materials are accessible for students who are blind and visually impaired
* Access to basic equipment and supplies
* Allocation of personnel to teach the use of equipment and maintain it, as well as provide supplies (paper) and ensure students and teachers have ready access to Brailled materials
* Support for orientation and mobility training and service provision, located wherever the service can be accessible and sustained
* Support for referral systems to early identification, diagnosis and treatment of health-related conditions and other related services
* Support for adjustments to curriculum to make all information accessible
* Policy and guidance to enable students and teachers to access all forms of information, i.e. communications policy which is in compliance with the Marrakech Treaty.

Examples of country priorities are listed below:

* In Cook Islands, the Ministry of Education prioritises the improvement of Teacher Aide skills and knowledge through targeted professional development. It also seeks to ensure that educational plans for individual students are aligned towards their needs and abilities.
* In Federated States of Micronesia, the Ministry of Education prioritises the inclusion of people who are blind or vision impaired in plans at all levels (local, state, national, regional, and international). They stated *‘they know best what needs to be planned out to make life meaningful for them. Then, we move on to establish what needs to be established, focusing on direct services first.’* The government is seeking to improve services for people with disabilities, mindful of its obligations under international treaties, such as CRPD.
* In Fiji, the Ministry of Education mentioned plans to set up resource centres in the four education divisions for teachers, students and parents, so they no longer need to travel to Suva to access services at the Fiji School for the Blind
	+ Fijian schools’ priorities include facilities such as access rails, specialized teachers in Braille, orientation and mobility Instructors and Braillists
	+ Fiji’s United Blind Persons organisation prioritises the identification of as many children with vision impairment as possible and provision of support through advocacy, specialized equipment and services to its members
* In Kiribati, the Ministry of Education is considering developing model inclusion schools in one or two outer islands, building on the success of the 9 Model Inclusion Schools in South Tarawa
* In Samoa, priorities include: increased access to information for all students, through provision of electronic copies of materials and materials in Braille; increased access to appropriate technology; strengthened capacity of teachers and teaching assistants; strengthened capacity of SBPA staff and other related workers in the field, for making appropriate assessments, orientation and mobility, the use of appropriate resources.
* In Papua New Guinea, the Department of Education is reviving its inclusive education policy and embarking on a plan to develop model schools for children with vision impairments in three provinces, with support from CBM New Zealand. By 2023 it is expected that four schools in each of three provinces will be in the implementation phase.
* In Tuvalu, the Government has recently endorsed a disability inclusive education policy and hopes to commence implementation soon
* In Vanuatu, with funding from the Global Partnership for Education, the Australian Government-funded Education Program and UNICEF, various activities are planned, such as the creation of an Inclusive Education Resource Centre and appointment of the first Inclusive Education officers
* In Tonga, the Ministry of Education’s Inclusive Education Unit plans to commence efforts for teaching students who are blind and vision impaired in the near future, including through training teachers in Braille and how to teach students who are blind or vision impaired, establishing a centre for children who are blind, and raising community awareness on education of children in this category.

# Potential partners and sources of funding

The Scoping Study asked stakeholders for information about current partners involved in the provision of education services for students who are blind and vision impaired, and kinds of support that may be sought from development partners in future. The Scoping Study also involved research about potential sources of partnership and support. A relatively small number of development partners currently operate in this area, including:

* the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (education sector programs in Fiji, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa which incorporate inclusive education to various degrees)
* UNESCO
* UNICEF
* Faith-based organisations such as CBM and Callan Services
* Disability Rights Fund (US foundation, with funding support from Australian DFAT and others) for OPDs’ efforts related to rights specified in CRPD.

In terms of the kinds of support requested from development partners, the following were suggested:

* Resources and technologies to facilitate access to information
* Support for transition from school-to-work programs
* Training for teachers and support personnel in specific technical aspects of teaching, use of assistive devices
* Support for raising community awareness and public support
* Funding for purchasing specific pieces of equipment, including canes, glasses, Braillers, Slate and Styluses, other visual aids and devices
* Scholarships for students to attend Pacific tertiary education institutions
* Strengthening the teaching of Braille
* Ongoing funding for hostels for students from remote areas to be able to access Braille literacy and other education
* Training in orientation and mobility for service providers
* Support for provision of services in remote locations.

## 6.1 Global partnership for education (GPE)

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is major potential source of support for inclusive education in the Pacific, although it is not clear to what extent they could focus on the specifics of education for children who are blind or vision impaired. GPE works with over 60 developing countries ‘to ensure that every child receives a quality basic education, prioritizing the poorest, the most vulnerable and those living in fragile and conflict-affected countries.’ GPE mobilizes financing for education and supports developing countries to build effective education systems founded on evidence-based planning and policies. GPE plays a key role in informing government education policies and has a focus on equity and inclusion. Until recently, the previous Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard was the Chair of GPE.

According to the GPE website, ‘the partnership is supported by the GPE Secretariat, which is hosted by the World Bank with headquarters in Washington DC and offices in Paris, France and Brussels, Belgium. Within the GPE Secretariat, the *Country Engagement and Policy Team (CEP)* serves as the primary interface with developing country partners. The CEP has a sub-team – the *Education Policy and Learning Team (EPL)* - whose primary objective is to consolidate a solid evidence base on the challenges and what works in GPE’s priority policy areas, including identifying cross-country needs and curating relevant knowledge across the partnership. This also includes the development of robust technical products (guidance, methodologies, tools and resources) across *thematic and education policy areas* for the benefit of all GPE countries and country partners in view of contributing to improved country engagements and support to accelerate education progress.’

In the Pacific, seven countries are members of GPE: Kiribati, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Federated States of Micronesia.

In 2021, a new grant of approximately US$15m was announced by the Global Partnership for Education for the Pacific. This grant will be used to support regional implementation of PACREF, being overseen/supported by a group of technical agencies including UNESCO, UNICEF, USP, SPC, APTC and PIFS (as an observer).  The group are expected to pay attention to inclusive education, although no information is currently publicly available on the scope and nature of specific activities.

The GPE website provides links to a number of potentially relevant activities and sources of funding, for example:

* [COVID-19 global grant: Innovation for inclusion](https://www.globalpartnership.org/what-we-do/knowledge-innovation/covid-19-global-grant) (September 28, 2021)

Funded by a $25 million GPE grant, a consortium composed of UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank is leveraging global expertise to generate solutions to the learning crisis.

* [Inclusive education](https://www.globalpartnership.org/what-we-do/inclusive-education) (August 24, 2021)

GPE supports countries to build equitable and inclusive education systems where all children can learn in a safe and healthy environment free of discrimination.

## 6.2 Other potential donors

In the UK, a consortium of organisations has been funded by the British Aid Program for 10 years to undertake a wide range of activities in selected countries (none in the Pacific) related to disability inclusion. The consortium may generate materials that could be useful and relevant to future programming on disability inclusive education in relatively low-resource contexts. The consortium is led by Sightsavers and partners are: Action on Disability and Development (ADD), BBC Media Action (BBCMA), BRAC, Humanity and Inclusion (HI), International Disability Alliance, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Leonard Cheshire, Light for the World (LFTW), Sense international and Social Development Direct (SDD).

In 2019, the World Bank announced an Inclusive Education Initiative (IEI) with the [purpose ‘to accelerate action by countries and support their efforts in making education more inclusive.](https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/brief/inclusive-education-initiative-transforming-education-for-children-with-disabilities) IEI will do this by working both at the global and country levels to help stakeholders and governments mobilize financing and develop programs that ensure inclusive education.’ According to the announcement, ‘At the global level, IEI will work to coordinate inclusive education planning and develop public goods that countries can use to improve access and quality of education for children with disabilities. At the country level, IEI will ensure that efforts by development partners are coordinated, provide financial resources and technical assistance for development and implementation of disability-inclusive education programs, and support disaggregated data collection related to disability.’ (source: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/brief/inclusive-education-initiative-transforming-education-for-children-with-disabilities>)

# Recommendations

## Recommendations to ICEVI Pacific

The following recommendations are made to ICEVI Pacific as a result of the Scoping Study:

1. Develop close relationships, based on trust and mutual respect, with Ministries of Education and OPDs which have an interest in and responsibility for education services. In the context of these relationships, conversations can be held about how Pacific countries might want to strengthen the provision of education for this group of students.
2. Work closely with those who are coordinating, implementing and observing progress on PACREF, since this is the focus of attention for Ministries of Education and all relevant organisations across the region for the next few years, and seek to inform their efforts towards inclusion, particularly for students with sensory impairments.
3. Collaborate with Pacific-led organisations which seek to improve their knowledge of educational services for students with vision impairments, recognising that changes are likely to be achieved when there is Pacific ownership of the change agenda
	1. Therefore, it is important to identify and respectfully support Pacific leaders in this area.
4. Be ‘on tap’ to build linkages, share information, respond to requests for advice and contribute to shared learning opportunities.
5. In the post-COVID context, recognise that Pacific educational institutions will be concerned about how to maximise the chances that students will return to school and how to build resilience in education systems, with reduced rather than greater resources overall.

## Recommendations to other current and potential development partners

The following recommendations are made to development partners:

1. Support Pacific Ministries of Education as they seek to build on existing strengths and services for the education of children who are blind or vision impaired, consistent with regional commitments included in the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PACREF).
2. Recognise that many people have already dedicated a great deal of effort in the provision of education services for students who are blind or vision impaired and have contributed to existing knowledge, skills and equipment.
3. Recognise the integrated nature of education for students who are blind or vision impaired including:
	1. Social, cultural and institutional support for inclusion and education for all
	2. Leadership by Ministries of Education on inclusive education
	3. Awareness of how all children benefit from accessing education and the whole community benefits from their participation in social and economic life
	4. Importance of principals, teachers and school communities in supporting inclusion (as a concept and practice), and dedicated skills-development in provision of education for children with sensory impairments, at all levels of education
	5. Sustained management of and access to resources and services for students at different levels of education, particularly:
		1. specialist equipment which enables alternative formatting services such as Braille machines, technology (tools for supporting screen-based reading and writing tools) and relevant supplies
		2. skills and systems for people to use and maintain equipment as well as ensure students and teachers could readily access information
		3. budgets and organisational responsibilities for their provision and maintenance
	6. Access to information, including books, articles and on-line information, as supported by the Marrakech Treaty.
4. Consider support for individual or multiple elements (of those listed above) which contribute to education for children who are blind or vision impaired, based on:
	1. shared analysis of existing strengths in the national or school-based context and cultural values that shape inclusion and education
	2. co-production/co-design of proposed activities
	3. mutual respect for the respective contributions of all those involved in activity implementation
	4. recognition of the factors which influence ‘how change happens’ in each national context.
5. Promote and share information about good practices in various contexts to support other schools and countries as they progress towards better education service delivery for students who are blind or vision impaired.

# Annex 1 Terms of Reference

[The following is an excerpt from the Terms of Reference]

**Scope of Services**

ICEVI is seeking a consultant to work alongside the ICEVI Pacific Committee to undertake a scoping study on the services, interventions and resources available to school aged children living in the Pacific who are blind or vision impaired. This scoping study will include:

1. A desk review of relevant studies and reviews that identify statistical data on the number of children who are blind or vision impaired in Pacific Islands, literacy levels for this cohort of students, school enrolment rates, alternative formatting services (e.g. audio, Word format large print and Braille production), professional support services, mainstream / specialist / informal schooling opportunities, reading and writing tools (e.g. Perkins Braillers, computers with screen reading software, video magnifiers, Braille literacy assessments and pre-literacy Braille resources), orientation and mobility services and any other specialist interventions for students who are blind or vision impaired.
2. Design and administer a survey to be delivered to education ministries and OPDs to capture more detailed information on: in and out of school children who are blind or vision impaired, literacy levels for this cohort of students, alternative formatting services, professional support services, mainstream / specialist / informal schooling opportunities, reading and writing tools, orientation and mobility services and any other specialist interventions for students who are blind or vision impaired.
3. Identification of development priorities and partnership opportunities until December 2024 for as many Pacific Islands as possible in relation to education for children who are blind or vision impaired.
4. Identification of relevant funding sources until December 2024 that align with ICEVI goals.
5. Production of a report including findings of the scoping study, recommendations and potential partners and funding sources.

# Annex 2 List of sources of information

**International and regional**

Dr Frances Gentle, President of ICEVI

Ms Andrea Cole, Director, Disability, Indigenous and Social Inclusion, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia

Ms Manaini Rokovunisei, Social Policy Adviser, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

Mr Setareki Macanawai, CEO, Pacific Disability Forum

Mr Joshco Wakaniyasi, Disability Inclusion Team Leader, Pacific Disability Forum

Ms Maria Miller, Program Officer Inclusive Education, Pacific Disability Forum

Ms Ruci Senikula, Program Officer, Pacific Disability Forum

Mr Iliesa Lutu, Disability Focal Point, Australian High Commission, Suva

Dr Joanne Webber, President, ICEVI Pacific

Mr Ben Clare, Former President, ICEVI Pacific

**Cook Islands**

Ms Anna Roumanu, Director, Ministry of Education

Mr Andre Hansen, Inclusive Education Support Advisor, Learning and Teaching Division, Ministry of Education

Mr Mataiti Mataiti,, Cook Islands National Disability Council

**FSM- Federated States of Micronesia**

Mr Albert Arthur, Assistant Secretary, Department of Education

**Fiji**

Mr Salesh Deo, Senior Education Officer, Special & Inclusive Education Unit, Ministry of Education

Mrs Barbara Farouk, Executive Director, Fiji Society for the Blind, Vatuwaqa, Suva

Ms Fulori Cavu, Integration Teacher, Fiji School for the Blind

Ms Sovaia Coalala, Disability Services Manager, Fiji National University, Suva, Fiji

Mr Dhruv Karan, United Blind Persons of Fiji

**Kiribati**

Ms Nnenne Kanere, Kiribati Ministry of Education Inclusive Education officer

Ms Teburantaake Kaei, Gender and Inclusion Officer, Kiribati Education Improvement Program

**Marshall Islands**

Mr Kanjen Kumtak, Marshall Islands Disabled Persons Organisation (MIDPO)

**Papua New Guinea**

Ms Maria John, Callan Services,  Mt Sion IERC, Goroka

**Samoa**

Ms Faatino Utumapu, Manager, Nuanua O Le Alofa (NOLA)

Mr Hillier Pouesi, Program Coordinator, Samoa Blind Persons Association (SPBA)

Mr Ari Hazelman, Volunteer, Samoa Blind Persons Association

**Solomon Islands**

Ms Gladys Siale, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development

**Tonga**

Ms Matelita Taufa, Inclusive Education Unit, Ministry of Education & Training, Nukualofa, Tonga

Mr Ofeina Leka, President Tonga National Vision Impairment Association (TNVIA**)**

**Tuvalu**

**Vanuatu**

Ms Sonia Wasi, GEDSI Officer, Vanuatu Education Support Program (VESP)

# Annex 3 Country Profiles

This annex includes details about education for children who are blind or vision impaired by country, with reports for:

* Cook Islands
* Federated States of Micronesia
* Fiji
* Kiribati
* Marshall Islands
* Nauru
* Niue
* Palau
* Papua New Guinea
* Samoa
* Solomon Islands
* Tonga
* Tuvalu
* Vanuatu

## Cook Islands

There are no Special Schools in the Cook Islands,

although specialist units attached to schools exist. Of note, the IE policy addresses the

learning needs of students with physical, behavioural, developmental and intellectual

diﬃculties and includes, in addition, the needs of gifted children. In terms of current

services in IE, Individual Education Plans (IEP’s) are used in the Cook Islands. These IEP

meetings typically involve the student’s parent/guardian, school teaching staﬀand any

specialists who have contributed to the assessment (such as physiotherapists, psychol-

ogists, or occupational therapists who live in the Cook Islands). Depending on the level

of impairment, a student’s program is then instigated by the classroom teacher, or

assisted by a teacher aide if more individual support is required (Townsend, Page, &

Mccawe, 2014).

Despite these developments, sustainability of service provision has proved to be one

of the Cook Islands’greatest challenges. There was a period of in-service teacher

education in IE from 1995 to 2002 (McDonald, 2004), although this is no longer available.

Additionally, pre-service teacher education that had an IE component as part of its

delivery was in place before the teachers’college closed in 2008 (Smith, 2008).

Teacher perceptions of inclusion

Outside of the Cook Islands context of IE, studies have shown that teachers’perceptions

about inclusion vary according to a wider range of what is regarded as a disability (De

Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Wood, Evans, & Spandagou,

2014). Within international research, a highly relevant aspect of the inclusion debate is

that of attitudes to inclusion held by education personnel. These include teachers,

principals and education oﬃcers, amongst others. For inclusion to be a successful

concept at the school level, it follows that there must be some form of support at

least from the teaching staﬀ, as well as the other levels of an organisation. In Figure 1,

Boyle, Topping, Jindal-Snape, and Norwich (2012) illustrate the importance of attitudes

in the organisation and how they can aﬀect the situation irrespective of some forms of

support. Sharma, Loreman, and Macanawai (2015a) report several factors contributing to

the successful implementation of IE in Paciﬁc countries. For school reform to take place,

any negative attitudes of school administration, staﬀand students without disability

needed to be addressed. These negative attitudes in South Paciﬁc countries may

Figure 1. Attitudes to inclusion versus available resources (Boyle et al., 2012, p. 178).

ASIA-PACIFIC JOURNAL OF TEACHER EDUCATION 3

**SUMMARY**

Cook Islands has had official recognition of and commitment to the provision of education for children who are blind or vision impaired longer than most Pacific countries and has dedicated services and referral systems. Students with vision impairments are fully included in mainstream classes with adaptive and assistive technologies provided through the Inclusive Education Advisor at the Ministry of Education. Intensive, individually focused programs are being implemented. At present there are only two children with vision impairment in the school system, and it is likely others may have moved to New Zealand given the citizenship arrangements that are in place and availability of more extensive services. Both students have a full-time funded Teacher Aide, and receive all the support they need to achieve at their respective levels.

The Ministry of Education have an Inclusive Education register that records any medical diagnosis if there is one. There are no special school in the Cook Islands so all students attend mainstream schools. Students that are visually impaired follow the normal curriculum The Inclusive Education Advisor works through a referral system and sources programmes, resources and assistive technologies where necessary. Cases are referred to the Ministry of Health for further support, and children are included in visiting eye specialist visits (when conducted, with the Ministry of Health and visiting professionals). The Inclusive Education Advisor also provides professional development wherever necessary and supports the staff to be able to work with each IE student. Specific support is given to any teacher or teacher-aide with a visually impaired student under their care. Adaptive devices, teacher aides and reader/writers through special assessment conditions are provided to complete work, assessments and external exams.

A strong referral system is in place between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, and between schools and the Inclusive Education Advisor in relation to sourcing programmes, resources and assistive technologies. When appropriate, students are referred to the Ministry of Health for further support, and children are included in visiting eye specialist visits. The Inclusive Education Advisor provides support to teachers and other staff where appropriate. Access to assistive technology, in the form of voice to text functions, is provided and schools can enlarge printing for A3 sized worksheets.

The distances between the islands of the Cook Islands contribute to long waiting times for diagnosis at times. Resourcing is expensive as most adaptive devices need to be sourced overseas with added shipping costs and long wait times.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOLS DATA**

The current populationof theCook Islands is *1*7,586 (November 2021). <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/cook-islands-population/>

There are 30 schools in Cook Islands, comprising 22 government and 8 private schools. Twelve of these are located on the mainly populated islands. Satellite schools are located in isolated villages in small islands and these offer early childhood education.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

The Cook Islands adopted a comprehensive Inclusive Education Policy in 2011 for the benefit of children with disabilities. The policy has been reviewed and updated in 2017 and it clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in the education of students with disabilities or special needs.

**REFERENCES**

Government of Cook Islands, Inclusive Education Policy 2017 <http://www.education.gov.ck/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Inclusive-Education-Policy-2017_a.pdf>

Page, A., Boyle, C., McKay, K., and Mayropoulou, S., 2018 *Teacher perceptions of inclusive education in the Cook Islands* February 2018 [Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education](https://www.researchgate.net/journal/Asia-Pacific-Journal-of-Teacher-Education-1469-2945) 47(2):1-14 DOI:[10.1080/1359866X.2018.1437119](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2018.1437119)

## Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)

**SUMMARY**

In the Federated States of Micronesia, different levels of government (a national government and 4 autonomous state governments) are responsible for education services. They have mandates, regulations, and procedures for the early identification, placement, and monitoring of services for children who are blind or visually impaired. Special Education Advisory Councils are engaged in the monitoring of services. Education for children with disabilities is free. Special education and related services are funded through the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and supported by public law in FSM.

Each of the four state Local Education Agencies has programs to provide free public education to children with disabilities. The Ministry of Education reported that the major source of support for these children are ‘education instructional services’ but details were not available. According to those consulted for this Scoping Study, only a few students are currently enrolled in schools, due to limitations in access to assistive devices and trained personnel, and the rest are served at home or in special-day schools. All children with disabilities who have been identified and do actually receive education services, have IEPs. Overall, there are insufficient qualified personnel to provide quality services. The Government’s Special Education program is responsible for provision of assistive devices to children with disabilities under the age of 21, however purchases rarely occur, reportedly due to low incidence of disability.

**DEMOGRAPHICS AND SCHOOL DATA**

FSM comprises four states comprising around 607 islands. The population is estimated to be 114,604. <https://countrymeters.info/en/Federated_States_of_Micronesia>)

A 2013 report by the FSM Department of Education noted there were 192 total schools (public and private) with about 34% of the schools located in the outer islands which are only accessible by boats, ships and small aircraft.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

The national government established a Special Education Procedural Manual in 2007 that helps guide states to deliver special education services. This set up helps to control quality and assurance that services are being delivered since funding to states for special education programs are controlled at the national level. The national government establishes laws and minimum standards and each state establishes and runs their education departments at standards that are higher (in almost all areas) than those of the national government.

**REFERENCES**

FSM Department of Education, Special Education Programs and Services,[www.fsmsped.org](http://www.fsmsped.org)

## Fiji

**SUMMARY**

Fiji has a robust system in place with regards to the identification, referral and education of students with vision impairment. Early identification is undertaken by community-based rehabilitation (CBR) field workers who work under the Fiji Society for the Blind. Once the children are identified, the field workers then provide early intervention for children and training for parents on how to support and train their children at home until they reach the age of 6 where they are then enrolled into the Fiji School for the Blind. The school has a school bus that picks up students from their homes in the morning and drops them off after school. Children with vision impairment who live out of Suva have access to hostel accommodation. Teachers at the Fiji School for the Blind are all paid by the Ministry of Education. Since its establishment in 1972 over 450 students have enrolled and transitioned from the Fiji School for the Blind into mainstream primary and secondary schools. The Fiji Society for the Blind provides training on mobility and orientation for teachers and students at the school.

The Fiji School for the Blind has a Braille Production Unit and the Fiji Society for the Blind manages the school provides white canes, magnifying glasses and reading glasses as well as enlarged fonts of textbooks and there is also good access to a Braille Embosser and supplies of paper. There are also audiobooks, Braille books, talking computers and access to screen reading software. All textbooks and external examination papers set by the Ministry of Education and used by students who are blind attending mainstream schools are transcribed into Braille. The student papers are then transcribed back to written form for marking.

Significant progress has been made towards inclusive education at all levels of education from primary to secondary, vocational and tertiary institutions in recent years in Fiji. There are currently around 120 students who are blind or vision impaired who have been identified through early intervention (i.e. are either at home or in pre-school) and attending schools in Fiji. Of these, 20% are attending the Fiji School for the Blind, and 80% are participating in early intervention activities (n = 30) or are attending mainstream schools (n = 16) or tertiary institutions (n = 34).

The Fiji Ministry of Education has a Special Education Unit with a designated Senior Education officer who provides support to 17 special schools in Fiji as well as to mainstream schools that enrol students with disabilities. Students with disabilities have access to support during examinations. When registering students for national examinations, the exam and assessment unit are informed of students who will need additional support such as extended time or enlarged and Brailled test papers for students with vision impairment. The Fiji Education system has Disability Disaggregation on FEMIS (Fiji Education Management and Information System). This tool provides primary and secondary schools in Fiji with a standardized means of recording and analyzing information related to disability in children. FEMIS also assists with the identification of students with vision impairment and other disabilities in schools, helping to determine the allocation of grants for schools to support their education in schools.

Tertiary education in Fiji is increasingly accessible. For example, USP provides JAWS software to students as well as a dedicated space in the Post Graduate students lab with an allocated computer installed with JAWS. Fiji National University also has a dedicated Disability Resource Centre to support students and teachers, including through access to information. Teacher training institutions do not currently provide specialist training in Braille for teachers. Teachers learn Braille when they are posted to the Fiji School for the Blind.

**DEMOGRAPHICS AND SCHOOL DATA**

The current population of Fiji is 905,371 (November 2021)

<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/fiji-population/>

There are approximately 735 primary, 17 Special schools and **150**secondary schools in Fiji. All these schools are public schools managed by school Management Boards or committees and all receive grants from the Ministry of Education. All teachers at these schools are civil servants and fully paid by the government.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

Fiji has a Special and Inclusive Education Policy (2016 – 2020) (see reference below).

**REFERENCES**

Fiji Society for the Blindhttps://fijisocietyfortheblind.org/

Government of Fiji, Special and Inclusive Education Policy

<http://www.education.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Special_and_Inclusive_Education_Policy_-_20161.pdf>

## Kiribati

**SUMMARY**

Education in Kiribati is free and compulsory for children aged 6 to 13 years. The Ministry of Education and the Kiribati Education Improvement Program (funded by the Australian Government through DFAT) have enabled some students to recently transition from the Kiribati School for Children and Centre for Special Needs (KSCCSN) into mainstream schools.

This Scoping Study found that approximately 20 students with a vision impairment are currently attending mainstream schools and a smaller number are attending the KSCCSN. Until recently, KSCCSN was the only location where students who were blind or vision impaired could attend primary school. As a non-government organisation, the Centre was required to undertake fundraising over many years. Now the Ministry of Education has taken on some responsibility and there are 91 students with disabilities attending 9 Model Inclusion Schools in the capital of South Tarawa with 19 of these students with a vision impairment and 1 who is totally blind.  Teacher Assistants have been trained and recruited by the Ministry of Education to support students.

In terms of equipment, the national OPD, Te Toa Matoa has several donated laptops with NVDA software which are no longer working. KSCCSN also has donated computers to establish a lab with NVDA screen reading software, also no longer working. The Centre recently received funding for 3 new computers for the lab, to train students who are blind or vision impaired. Kiribati Institute of Technology also has 12 computers installed with NVDA software and has contributed to the graduation of eight students with vision and hearing impairment with foundation courses in ICT and carpentry. Some alternative formatting, assistive devices such as magnifying domes and coloured overlays and a teaching guide are also available.

Progress on implementation of the Ministry of Education’s Inclusive Education Policy is undertaken by an Inclusive Education Working Group.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOLS DATA**

Kiribati has a population of 91,985 (July 2000 estimated).

Kiribati has 94 elementary schools, 24 junior high schools, and 16 senior high schools.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

The Government of Kiribati has a national Inclusive Education Policy 2015.

**REFERENCES**

Government of Kiribati, Education Services, <https://kiribati.gov.ki/information/education>

## Marshall Islands

**SUMMARY**

In Marshall Islands, there are reported to be six students who are vision impaired attending school. A further three school-aged children do not attend school. Currently, there are eight students who attend schools in other countries.

The country has five Braille machines, used across the different islands.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOLS DATA**

The population of Marshall Islands is approximately 53,000.

**There are 75** public elementary schools, one middle school, and two secondary schools, with total enrolment of over 10,000 students.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

The country does not have an inclusive education policy but [adopted the 2015–18 National Policy on Disability Inclusive Development](https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/cobp-rmi-2016-2018-ld-04.pdf), which aimed to ‘provide a comprehensive framework for improving the quality of life of person with disabilities’.

According to available information, the [Special Education Program](https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqhKb7yhssK7tpVz141TGRM9ya3Ih1IsZI0eQH%2bQfdRdvr4Pr0uQ%2b8LOdGtOSAClEChh3Colo2PTwBSCaOkaXSobOUqVrJ5rs4wvv294ROoGeWtwApot) develops an individualized educational plan for each student, which is followed by the special education teacher assigned to that student. The Program adopts a flexible approach to providing support to students. The 2009–14 National Youth Policy sets out priorities for youth, covering seven policy areas, [including education](https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/1146/file/Situation-Analysis-of-Children-Marshall-Islands.pdf).

**REFERENCES**

The Marshall Islands Journal, 2018, ‘RMI ramps up Special Education’ [RMI ramps up Special Ed action - The Marshall Islands Journal](https://marshallislandsjournal.com/rmi-ramps-up-special-ed-action/)

## Nauru

**SUMMARY**

The Government of Nauru recognizes the rights to education for all citizens, including those who have a disability. The Education Act 2011, includes provisions for children with disabilities as well as inclusive education. The Department of Education has a Special Education Adviser who is responsible for education of students with disabilities. This role includes identifying resources that will enhance students’ learning; identifying training needs of teachers for better teaching of students with disabilities; identifying school’s needs for specific facilities; and ensuring that all students with disability are accorded with the same rights as other students.

The Department of Education funds and manages a school for children and young people (aged from 3 to 30 years) called the Able Disable Centre. Students who are blind or vision impaired may attend this school, and it appears there is little specialist support. The school also receives aid from the New Zealand Government as part of its support for the education sector as a whole.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOLS DATA**

The population of Nauru is approximately 10,900.

There are 11 government schools in Nauru, including 3 primary schools and 2 secondary schools (**Nauru**College and**Nauru**Secondary School) and the Able Disable Centre.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

The Government of Nauru has an Inclusive Education Policy and Guidelines 2017 (passed in 2018). According to this Policy:

* ‘Nauru’s provision of a Centre for special education for children with disabilities is the Able Disable Centre that serves to provide an education for a range of students from primary level and beyond.
* The Centre was established in 2002 and is resourced by teachers, with other potential teachers currently in training. The students engage in an academic programme concentrating on core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics. Lessons also include afternoon sessions in life skills.
* IEP’s have been developed for each student. Work experience placements are also available for senior students.’

**REFERENCES**

Republic of Nauru, 2011, Education Policy, <http://www.paclii.org/nr/legis/num_act/ea2011104/>

Republic of Nauru, 2017, Inclusive Education Policy and Guidelines, available at <https://www.pacificdata.org/data/dataset/nauru>

Republic of Nauru, 2015, Disability Monograph: Analysis of 2011 Nauru Population and Housing Census, [file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/5c22f97b80c3af97d76d4a389843f1b2.pdf](file:///C%3A/Users/User/Downloads/5c22f97b80c3af97d76d4a389843f1b2.pdf)

## Niue

**SUMMARY**

Education in Niue is free for all children attending primary and secondary schools and compulsory for all children up to the age of 16 years. The Government of Niue has collaborated with UNESCO to develop an Education for All plan to improve learning achievements and provide better educational opportunities for children with disabilities. The most recent policy available online is the Education Strategic Development Plan (2005 – 2015). This Scoping Study was unable to determine the current situation in Niue for any students who are blind or vision impaired.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOL DATA**

The current population of Niue is 1,641 (November 2021). <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/niue-population/>

Niue has one primary school and one secondary school, with just over 200 students in each.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

Niue’s Department of Education has issued an Inclusive Education Policy 2012 (see references below).

**REFERENCES**

Government of Niue, 2012, Inclusive Education Policy, <https://pacificdata.org/data/dataset/75142b85-64e8-4340-a58d-fcad5edac22c/resource/66944e0d-c680-4b91-8de6-b40e97219045/download/inclusive-education-policy-2012-.pdf>

Government of Niue, 2006, MDG Goals report, available at <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/samoa/docs/UNDP_WS_Niue_MDG_Report_2006.pdf>

## Palau

**SUMMARY**

Palau complies with the United States’ [Individuals with Disability Education Act](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/) (IDEA). Although inclusive education is not explicitly defined in laws and policies, both the 1989 [Programme and Services for Handicapped Children Act](https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/palau.special-education-policy-2009.pdf) (Public Law 3-9), as amended in 1996, and the [Special Education Policy](http://www.palaumoe.net/sped/files/policies/Special_Education_Policies.pdf) mention education for all children.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for administrating the education system, providing policy and management directions for primary and secondary education levels and for funded special education programmes.

Most education facilities in Palau, especially schools, do not have access ramps that make the facilities accessible to children with disabilities. With the public schools spread in different states, some at different islands, it is challenging for children to attend any school that can accommodate them. Some children simply do not attend school because the school facilities do not accommodate their physical needs.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOL DATA**

The current population of Palau is 18,213 (November 2021).

<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/palau-population/>

There are 21 elementary schools and six high schools in Palau. Of the 21 elementary schools, 19 are public and two are private. Only one of the high schools is a public school whereas the other five high schools are private. The private schools are sponsored by Catholic, Protestant, and Seventh-day Adventist missions as well as one local religious institution.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

Special Education Policy & Procedures (2008)

**REFERENCES**

Republic of Palau, 2019, Pathway to 2030: First Voluntary National Review of SDGs <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23606VNR_FINAL_21June2019_UN_Version.pdf>

UNESCO, 2021, Palau, Global Education Monitoring Report

<https://education-profiles.org/oceania/palau/~inclusion>

Ministry of Education, Republic of Palau, Education for All National Plan, 2002-10 <http://www.paddle.usp.ac.fj/collect/paddle/index/assoc/pal006.dir/doc.pdf>

## Papua New Guinea

**SUMMARY**

Ministry of Education policy in Papua New Guinea specifies that the nearest school must be accessible for all children regardless of disability, age, colour, gender and sex. Due to a range of factors, most children who are blind or vision impaired, cannot access education at their local schools. One study from 2011 found: ‘despite there being a well-established Government education policy to support the inclusion of students with VI the reality is only a small percentage of the projected eligible students actually receive specialist services. Using an educational definition of VI to help read between the lines, our conjecture is that, the small number of students who do receive support services are mostly Braille using and functionally blind. Large numbers of children with VI are not being identified, particularly those with low vision. Urgent research is therefore needed to clarify numbers and to find out what is actually happening to children with VI in PNG.’ (Aiwa and Pagliano, 2011).

A long history of dedicated and integrated efforts by an NGO called Callan Services, contributes to current services for students with disabilities, including those who are blind or vision impaired, in 17 provinces. They have established 19 Inclusive Education Resource Centres (IERCs) as well as the Callan Studies National Institute (CSNI). The IERCs have personnel and equipment to support children to attend mainstream schools, although it is understood a large number of students in this category are not attending school. Callan Services undertakes a wide range of activities including teacher training, a hostel for students from remote areas, support for orientation and mobility and sighted guide techniques, Braille literacy programs, Brailling of educational documents, referral systems, support for friendly and welcoming school environments, provision of learning aids and equipment, establishment of peer buddy programs, increased awareness at community level of the rights of children, continuous support for teachers and students, engagement with inclusive education policy at national level, training for parents and access to screen reader software for students at tertiary level. Callan Services is funded by Christian Brothers generally, with services for students who are blind and vision impaired currently supported by CBM Australia. Callan Services has a wide range of equipment including Perkins Braillers, a dux box embosser, scanners, smart phone recorders, magnifiers, reading glasses and reading frame/writing board. It also provides access to JAWS or NVDA software programs for students.

UNICEF works with the Government’s Inclusive Education (IE) Unit within the Department of Education. The IE Unit oversees the implementation of Disability programs with Callan National Services, Cheshire disAbility Services, a Government operated Special Education Resource Center (SERC) and other service providers in Papua New Guinea.

A study in Papua New Guinea of barriers to the provision of vision services across the country interviewed 10 special education teachers who self-reported they ‘had limited skills in managing children with visual impairment because their primary focus over the past few years had been teaching students with hearing and physical impairments. ….Resource centre managers and Braille unit staff reported that their centres were unable to meet with the requirement of teaching students in high schools because of limited number of staff with advanced Braille skills.’ (Marella 2017: p58)

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOLS DATA**

The current population of Papua New Guineais 9,180,981 (November 2021), <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/papua-new-guinea-population/>

No clear data on the number of schools in PNG can be found, although several references mention that approximately a third of schools are managed by faith-based organisations.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

Papua New Guinea has an Inclusive and Special Education Policy and Minimum Standards dated 2020.

**REFERENCES**

Aiwa, J. and Pagliano, P., 2011, The education of students with vision impairment in Papua New Guinea: a tentative review of the literature. Journal of the South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment, 5 (1). pp. 50-57. <https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/21321>

Nazer, S., 2017, **‘**Heard for the first time: inclusive education in Papua New Guinea’

<https://www.unicef.org/png/stories/heard-first-time-inclusive-education-papua-new-guinea>

UNICEF, ‘Papua New Guinea Education report: For every child, access to quality education’

<https://www.unicef.org/png/what-we-do/education>

## Samoa

**SUMMARY**

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC) has an Inclusive Education Unit which, among other responsibilities, carries out awareness-raising activities such as commissioning documentaries and undertaking school visits. A referral system between the Ministry of Education, OPDs and special schools operates within partnerships, relating to educational services for individual children. Within this referral system, efforts are made to support parents to enroll their children into schools.

Several non-government schools have provided education for students who are blind or vision impaired over decades, among students with other disabilities. These schools include Senese, Loto Taumafai Centre and Aoga Fiamalamalama.

In recent years, Samoa Blind People’s Association (SBPA) has advocated for and begun to coordinate support for education for students who are blind or vision impaired, for example by coordinating access to Braille machines and services. SBPA is part of the referral system noted above and directly supports students with vision impairment who are enrolled in mainstream primary and secondary schools. The Government of Samoa recently awarded SBPA a contract to be the sole producer of Braille materials for various Ministries. Two embossers have now been installed at the Association and its staff are producing educational materials in Braille, on requests from teachers and students.

The separate non-government primary schools noted above have relied on fundraising, grants and external specialist support. While the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, (MESC) has recently begun to institute more inclusive education supporting students to attend mainstream schools, it currently refers students with vision impairment to SBPA but it cannot provide education services. Some teacher aides and access to Braille materials are available in schools, and there is also a parent support group and basic orientation and mobility services.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOLS DATA**

The current population of Samoa is 200,237 (November 2021). <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/samoa-population/>

There are 157 schools in Samoa.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

Samoa has an Inclusive Education Policy for Students Living with a Disability (2014).

**REFERENCES**

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<https://www.sonokids.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/JSPEVI-Vol-11-2018-FINAL-eCopy-v2.pdf>

## Solomon Islands

**Summary**

In Solomon Islands, 2% of children with disabilities have access to any form of education, inclusive or otherwise (Sharma et al 2017). The report by Sharma et al (2017) noted that a study in 2014 found three factors contributed to barriers to inclusive education in Solomon Islands: negative community attitudes, teacher and school unpreparedness, and a lack of national commitment towards inclusion.

There are currently four students who are blind or vision impaired attending the Red Cross Special Disability Centre (RCSDC) in the capital city, Honiara, but there appear to be no specific support services for children in this category. Historically, some Solomon Islands st udents have moved to Fiji to attend Fiji School for the Blind, however, for most, no accessible and inclusive education is available. Some support has been provided to people with vision impairments at home through the Community Based Rehabilitation service.

At present, if a child who is blind happens to be born in Solomon Islands, they are most likely to either never attend school, or to drop out quite early because of lack of accessible information or support. This ensures their chances of active engagement in and contribution to community and employment are significantly reduced.

**DEMOGRAPHICS AND SCHOOL DATA**

The current population of the Solomon Islands is 710,073 (November 2021)

<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/solomon-islands-population/>

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

Solomon Islands has a National Disability Inclusive Education Policy Implementation Plan.

**REFERENCES**

Sharma, U., Loreman, T., and Simi, J., 2017 ‘Stakeholder perspectives on barriers and facilitators of inclusive education in the Solomon Islands’ Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, Volume Number 2017 doi: 10.1111/1471-3802.12375

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## Tonga

**SUMMARY**

Education in [Tonga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tonga) is compulsory for children up to the end of high school. However, there are currently no services for children with vision impairment within the country. Some students have moved to Fiji to attend Fiji School for the Blind. A 2016 UNESCO report (see references below) mentioned there were ‘two primary schools in Tonga [which] catered for children with disabilities within the normal classrooms (GPS Folaha and GPS Veitongo)’ but it is unknown whether these schools still provide inclusive education. An NGO-run ‘Ofa, Tui, ‘Amanaki (Love, Faith and Hope) Centre, provided some educational facilities for young children.

The country has two Braille machines and an embosser, however currently there are no teachers trained on how to use the equipment (one person skilled in its use is currently studying at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, enrolled in the Bachelor of Special and Inclusive Education course). Tonga also has JAWS and NVDA software but no teachers skilled in their use.

Tonga National Vision Impairment Association (TNVIA) is an OPD which provides services and supports for people who are blind or have a vision impairment. Its mission is to advocate and lobby for issues on behalf of people who are blind or visually impaired and to promote and protect the human rights of all persons with disability including those who require more intensive support. They refer their members to available services and provide some support services for members who live on the main island, Tongatapu.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOLS DATA**

The current population*of*Tonga is 107,350 (November 2021). <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/tonga-population/>

There are 95 primary schools including pre-schools and 22 high schools, in Tonga

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

The Ministry of Education and Training (MET) adopted the Tonga National Inclusive Education Policy in 2007. There is also a Tonga Education Lakalaka Policy Framework (TELPF) 2012–2017 which supports Inclusive Education by planning for the development of ECE centres and training for teachers and education for children with disabilities.

**REFERENCES**

UNESCO, Tonga Education Profile Report (undated),

<https://education-profiles.org/oceania/tonga/~inclusion>

## Tuvalu

**SUMMARY**

In policy terms, education in mainstream school is open to all children, however students with disabilities are often left out of formal school systems due to the barriers that discourage them from attending schools. A recent report (Tavola 2018) found ‘the lack of trained teachers for children with special needs, the poor infrastructure of school facilities and the inaccessibility of schools are mentioned as main reasons why the education system in Tuvalu has not been ready to provide inclusive education as set out in their plans and policies.’

The Fusi Alofa Centre in Tuvalu seeks to address these barriers by providing some education services for children with disabilities, mainly those with intellectual disabilities, to bridge the education gap between children with disabilities and those without disabilities. A majority of children with disabilities attend the Fusi Alofa Centre as parents are reluctant to send their children to mainstream schools because of bullying and teasing. However, as a non-government centre, resources are limited and it is not recognised by the Ministry of Education. For example, in 2017, the school was closed for much of the academic year because of issues with water supply (Tavola 2018). Outside the main town area, there are almost no education facilities for students with disabilities.

In terms of equipment and resources, Tuvalu has one hand Brailler and other Braille teaching resources which have been recently purchased for the Aofiaga Centre, by an Australian Government funded education program. Other information on the provision of services for students who are blind or vision impaired was unavailable.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOLS DATA**

The current population of Tuvalu is 11,992 (November 2021). ([https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/tuvalu-population)/](https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/tuvalu-population%29/)

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

The 2016–20 [Education Sector Plan III](https://meys.gov.tv/publication?view=download&fileId=12) defines inclusive education as a means to provide ‘enabling learning environments for special needs students’. Tuvalu also has a Disability-Inclusive Education Policy (2021) (in draft). According to those consulted for this Scoping Study, Tuvalu’s inclusive education policy framework is emerging and not yet operationalised.

**REFERENCES**

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## Vanuatu

**SUMMARY**

The Ministry of Education and Training in Vanuatu has issued policies which support education for all, but a study it commissioned in 2018, show that despite progress in the discourse on inclusive education, many children with special needs remain excluded from mainstream education (see Development Service and the Vanuatu Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Team, 2018, listed below). A UNESCO report mentions that the first inclusive school was developed in Luganville within a community school ‘with its own disability-inclusive education policy, a program to support teachers, and wheelchair ramps. Inclusion applies to the whole school, with a view to developing a greater understanding of diversity.’ It also noted another community school in Port Vila also includes children with disabilities (see UNESCO, listed below).

Currently, a very small number of students who are vision impaired attend mainstream schools in Port Vila and they receive low levels of support. No students who are blind attend schools, according to those interviewed for the Scoping Study, and most students with vision impairment away from the capital, Port Vila, do not attend any form of schooling. In terms of education participation overall, Vanuatu has the lowest attendance and enrolment in the Pacific due to school not being compulsory. According to Government of Vanuatu statistics, around 30 percent of children do not attend the full six years of primary school.

The Ministry of Education coordinates with the Health Department on early identification of children with impairments and is establishing a register. In this regard, the 2008–15 [National Disability Policy and Plan of Action](https://mjcs.gov.vu/images/disability_desk/National_Disability_Policy_Plan_of_Action.pdf) addresses the need to work closely with the Health Department and service agencies to put in place measures to facilitate the assessment of the student population and procedures for screening ears and eyes until teachers are trained to conduct such assessment themselves. The Government of Vanuatu created a Special Education Coordinator position in 2001 as well as a ‘disability desk’ to work with the government to implement policies related to disability and to liaise between disabled persons’ organizations, non-government organizations and government institutions.

In terms of specialist equipment, a magnifying dome has been recently provided through the Education Support Program (funded by Australian aid program), along with a talking calculator, colour overlays, thick lined paper and an A4 writing guide. An Australian Volunteer has been recently appointed to provide remote volunteering support in Braille.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOLS DATA**

The current population of Vanuatu is 316,988 (November 2021). (<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/vanuatu-population/>)

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY**

The Government has an Inclusive Education Policy and Strategic Plan (2010 - 2020) which incorporates international, regional and national agreements and conventions. Informed by the CRPD, this document sets the framework toward an education system that is inclusive of all children, and seeks to create an environment that recognizes that all children can learn.

**REFERENCES**

Government of Vanuatu, 2011, Inclusive Education Policy <https://education.gov.vu/docs/policies/Vanuatu%20Inclusive%20Education%20Policy_2011.pdf>

UNESCO, undated, Vanuatu Education Profile,

<https://education-profiles.org/oceania/vanuatu/~inclusion>

Government of Vanuatu, Education Policy Statement, 2015, <https://education.gov.vu/docs/policies/Education%20Policy%20Statement_2010-2015.pdf>

Development Service and the Vanuatu Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Team, 2018, ‘Vanuatu Barriers to Education’ <https://moet.gov.vu/docs/policies/20181114%20EN%20Barriers%20to%20Education_2020.pdf>

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Sharma, U. Loreman, T. and Simi, J. 2017 ‘Stakeholder perspectives on barriers and facilitators of inclusive education in the Solomon Islands’ Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, Vol 17, Issue 2

<https://nasenjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1471-3802.12375>

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# Annex 5 Case Study of Inclusive Education in Kiribati

Kiribati’s Ministry of Education (MoE) is continuing to improve access to and participation in mainstream education for children with a disability. This goal is included in the Education Sector Strategic Plan and Inclusive Education Policy. Improved inclusion is also in line with international agreements and trends, enabling children with and without a disability to study with their brothers and sisters and other community members in their neighbourhood schools.

The Kiribati School and Centre for Children with Special Needs (KSCCSN) is the only specialised school for children with a disability in Kiribati. It provides education services for approximately 225 children with a disability. Since the school is located in Kiribati’s capital of South Tarawa, most children are those who live in the local area, plus a few who have relocated from outer islands to live with extended family.

KSCCSN was established in 1992 as a volunteer, parent-run school. For the first 25 years of its operation, its NGO status meant there were no requirements to report to the MoE. It has played a significant role in creating a welcoming place for children with a disability who were otherwise denied access to an education. KSCCSN transitioned under the authority of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2016, improving its eligibility to access education resources, training and funding. In this package, the MoE supported training at the Kiribati Teachers College for two previously unqualified teachers per year. Teachers at KSCCSN now have Advanced Diplomas in Teaching.

Te Toa Matoa is Kiribati’s national Organisation for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), and a member of the Pacific Disability Forum. Their members confirm that the rights of people with a disability have not been taken seriously in Kiribati historically. Te Toa Matoa members reflect that this is largely due to parents being over-protective, and concerned about stigma and discrimination against their children with a disability. Children with a disability, especially from outer island communities, have been kept at home rather than attended school due to parents’ concerns about the risk of abuse and rejection. Te Toa Matoa has a mission to foster the inclusion of children with a disability in Kiribati’s mainstream schools with an aim to see all of Kiribati’s children with a disability in a barrier-free, inclusive education system at all levels.

Te Toa Matoa’s commitment to inclusive education includes ongoing advocacy for children with disabilities to attend their local schools in Tarawa along with Kiribati’s outer islands. They have developed a drama on Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities along with a song on inclusive education. Their outreach activities occur in churches, maneabas and schools. Te Toa Matoa’s president, Teewata Aromata stated that their work has “opened the eyes of community members” with parent comments including “thank you for coming: before you came I thought my daughter would be left out for ever, now I know she can be included”.

Jack is one student who transitioned from the Kiribati School and Centre for Children with Special Needs (KSCCSN) in 2016 and commenced year 10 at a mainstream senior secondary school. Jack is totally blind and was assigned a retired teacher to support him in his participation at school. He was one of Kiribati’s first students with a disability to be enrolled in a mainstream school and there were only a small number of others at the time. Jack’s need for an assistant prompted the establishment of a formal Certificate III Teacher Assistant course in Kiribati. The goal for this course was to establish a network of trained assistants with the necessary skills and a rights-based approach in the mainstream inclusion of children with disabilities in their local community schools throughout Kiribati.

Kiribati Teachers College (KTC) was identified as the most feasible training partner for this course due to its status as the Island’s predominant training institute for Kiribati’s teachers. KTC was approached in 2017 by the Kiribati Education Improvement Program (a partnership between the Australian and Kiribati Governments) with a proposal to support the design of a teacher assistant program. A number of existing Diploma of Teaching subjects on child development, literacy, physical education and inclusive education were identified as core components of the program. In addition, specific subjects such as alternative formatting have been incorporated into this course so that all teacher assistants have a common skill-set in a range of competencies relevant to supporting children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Teacher assistants have now graduated from this course with skills in alternative formatting, disability inclusive teaching strategies, activity differentiation, basic sign language skills and building a good rapport with teachers, students and the community. All Certificate III Teacher Assistant students are assigned to complete a teaching portfolio to be assessed at the end of their program. Teaching Experience is also a significant component of their studies, with all students devoting each Wednesday to class observation and practical work both in mainstream primary schools and at KSCCSN. This placement experience has presented the students with exposure to teaching in real-life situations. This continuously improves their problem-solving skills for improving the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

The Ministry of Education has supported students such as Jack in their inclusion into mainstream schools. In 2017, a further two students with a disability joined Jack at his school and nine transitioned into other schools in 2018. In 2021, many of the 92 students with disability in Kiribati’s nine Model Inclusion Schools transitioned from KSCCSN. This process has been supported by the Inclusive Education Officer of the Ministry of Education through identification of students ready for mainstream schooling with the support of family and the teacher assistants in the Model Inclusion Schools.

Jack was one of the first beneficiaries of Kiribati’s qualified teacher assistants. This enabled Jack to receive Word format reading materials, have consistent access to a laptop computer with NVDA screen reading software, receive sighted guide and orientation and mobility support and have an Individual Education Plan with subject and exam adjustments documented. Jack, along with the 20 students who are blind or vision impaired currently in mainstream schools have benefited through access to reading material, some assistive devices and improved teacher awareness in disability inclusion and inclusive teaching strategies.

In summary, without the provision of assistive devices, access to a trained teacher assistant and an environment with inclusion policies and motivated and welcoming teachers and students, students who are blind such as Jack would otherwise be denied access to a mainstream education.

Case study content developed with extracts from: Webber, J; Aromata, T; Teramarawa, T; and Kaei, T. ‘Creating Disability Inclusive Classrooms in Kiribati’, Development Bulletin Issue 80, November 2018, Pacific Reflections: Personal Perceptions of Aid and Development. Australian National University pp 124-127; <https://crawford.anu.edu.au/rmap/devnet/devnet/db-80.pdf>

# Annex 6 Case study of Rose, a child who is vision impaired in Solomon Islands

The article below appeared in The Guardian in 2011. While the article is now 10 years old, this Scoping Study confirms that little has changed in terms of education for children like Rose since then, in Solomon Islands.

**The challenges faced by disabled girls in the Solomon Islands by Kiran Flynn**

Tue 5 Jul 2011 19.23 AEST

Rose lives on a remote island in Makira province, part of the archipelagic South Pacific island nation Solomon Islands. She is the fourth of five children, and her parents estimate that she is aged 11. Rose had an accident when she was a baby that left her sight severely impaired, and lack of access to health care means her sight worsened over the years. She is now completely blind. There is one primary school on the island, but there are no resources for blind pupils, and Rose has never attended school.

"Rose stays and helps us in the home," explains Rose's father, Peter. "We can't afford to pay for her to go to school because we have four other children, and you need to be able to see to learn anyway."

Like many Pacific Island nations, traditional Solomon Islands society operates in close knit, mostly patriarchal communities, where the 'unfortunate' are cared for by community members. This creates an environment of charity towards those with disabilities, and while this can be positive, it is a subtle form of discrimination. This kind of attitude promotes pity for disabled individuals, and strips them of fundamental human rights – like pride, dignity, and the opportunity to shape their own lives.

Pacific customs mixed with religions such as Christianity can often be exclusionary, despite preaching tolerance and respect as core values. Literal preaching from Deuteronomy in the Old Testament depicts disability as a curse from God. Combined with customary beliefs that disability is punishment for a family's wrongdoing, this results in many people being ashamed of and fearing people with disabilities.

"Rose plays with her brothers and sisters," Peter says of Rose's social life "It's a big burden for whoever takes her outside because she has to be watched all the time, so she just plays near the house. Sometimes the other children don't understand that it's not her fault, so they play tricks on her because they know she can't see. It's better to keep her away from that."

Solomon Islands is a Melanesian country, and in most Melanesian cultures men control the decision making and governance mechanisms in the villages – girls and women are excluded. The idea that disabled girls and women could participate in community or country scale decision making that is vital to improving their lives is unlikely to be fulfilled.

Disabled girls face discrimination in various forms. Not only because of their gender, but also because of their disability, and yet again because they are children. This is known as intersectional discrimination. However, when policies and frameworks are drawn up by governments and aid donors, this isn't usually considered and issues are addressed separately - Gender. Disability. Children. Those from more than one marginalised group, who arguably need the most attention, are forgotten. For example, the draft 2011-2014 corporate plan from one ministry in Solomon Islands neglected to mentioned disabled children as a minority group that need protecting in one of its core aims, yet did mention age, gender, religion, ethnicity and cultural background.

"Disability is still just a buzzword in our country," remarks Savina Nongebatu, President of the country's only disability nongovernmental organisation, People with Disabilities Solomon Islands (PWDSI). "It's just 'disability' across the board ... most people aren't even really aware of what it means to be physically disabled. There is still a long way to go before 'invisible' disabilities, like learning difficulties, can be addressed."

Lack of access to education is an issue for children in many developing countries. In rural communities like Rose's, children often walk for several hours to school. For girls with physical disabilities, this is not possible. Many schools require fees, so sending your child to school is an investment. Prejudice against women and disabled people in Solomon Islands prevent future employment opportunities, so sending your disabled girl to school simply doesn't make financial sense for most parents. As a result, according to a 2009 UNDP study only 18% of disabled girls attend school in Solomon Islands, compared to 37% of non-disabled girls.

For girls living with disabilities in developing countries however, there are other dangers.

"How can I run away?" exclaims Savina, as she gestures to her wheelchair. "How can I run away if someone is hitting me?"

A 2009 survey conducted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community reveals Solomon Islands has one of the highest gender based violence rates in the world, with 68% of girls and women experiencing physical or sexual abuse by partners or family members. In a society where females are already treated as second class citizens with little respect for their basic human rights, what chance do further marginalised and vulnerable groups have of claiming and enjoying the rights that they are born with?

So why doesn't the international aid community ensure that issues of intersectional discrimination and the various types of disabilities get equal inclusion in government policies?

"Donors work with governments" explains Savina. "Solomon Islands' Government doesn't have any clear policies in place to improve the lives of people with disabilities. It's just not a priority. PWDSI funding has to come directly from international donors; we get no funding from the government."
Therefore while donors can implement complex issues in their plans, in a country where the government fails to acknowledge nearly 3% of the population, just getting the word 'disability' into parliament would be an achievement.

However, if governments in developing countries are not prioritising disability issues, neither is the international community. The Millennium Development Goals cover issues like eradicating extreme poverty, fighting disease epidemics and promoting gender equality – but do not include goals for improving the lives of people with disabilities.

"We are always helping organisations like UNDP and UNICEF to write reports and give recommendations, but it never amounts to anything," says an exasperated Savina. "Policies need to specify that problems faced by disabled girls are different, and must actively include girls in mainstream systems, such as schools."

"Sometimes when we're doing advocacy work, people with disabilities will ask questions like 'but do I have the same right to vote?'" explains Savina. "Advocacy is our main priority. People need to be made aware of what disability is, how it happens, what it means, and that it's not something to be ashamed of. We need people with disabilities to be visible. We need girls with disabilities doing advocacy work, and showing other girls that they have the same rights and freedoms as everybody else."

Perhaps then girls like Rose, along with the thousands of other disabled people in the country, won't have to be invisible any more.

**This feature was written for the Guardian International Development Journalism competition.**

# Annex 7 Countries’ existing policies relevant to inclusive education

* Cook Islands’ Inclusive Education Policy (2017) (first developed in 2002) formally requires all students with special educational needs to be included in mainstream classes, although some specialist units are attached to some schools (Page et al 2018)
* Federated States of Micronesia developed its first National Disability Policy 2009-16 and also has a Special Education Procedural Manual Revised 2007
* Fiji has a Special and Inclusive Education Policy (2016 – 2020)- first developed in 2009 and reviewed regularly
* Kiribati has a National Disability Policy and Action Plan 2018-21; Kiribati Inclusive Education Policy (2015)
* Republic of the Marshall Islands has a Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act and a national Policy on Disability Inclusive Development 2014-18 as well as Special Education Policies and Procedures (2014)
* Nauru has a draft National Disability Policy (not yet formalised) Nauru Inclusive Education Policy and Guidelines 2017
* Niue has a National Disability Policy dated 2011 and a National Action Plan on Disability 2012-15; Niue Department of Education Inclusive Education Policy 2012
* Palau has a National Disability Inclusive Policy 2017-20; Special Education Policy & Procedures (2008)
* Papua New Guinea has a draft Disability Authority Bill and a National Policy on Disability 2015-25 Inclusive and Special Education Policy and Minimum Standards 2020
* Samoa has a National Policy on Disability 2011-16; Samoa Inclusive Education Policy for Students Living with a Disability (2014)
* Solomon Islands has a National Policy on Disability 2005-10 and a Draft Persons with Disabilities Bill (drafted 2006); Solomon Islands National Disability Inclusive Education Policy (2016-2020) (SINDIEP)
* Tokelau- Tokelau Inclusive Education Policy (2018)
* Tonga has a National Policy on Disability Inclusive Development 2014-18 and a Tonga Education Lakalaka Policy Framework 2012-17 Tonga Inclusive Education Policy (2008-2013
* Tuvalu- Disability-Inclusive Education Policy (2021) (Draft)
* Vanuatu has a National Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2018-25; Inclusive Education Policy (2010 - 2020)

no Special Schools in the Cook Islands,

although specialist units attached to schools exist. Of note, the IE policy addresses the

learning needs of students with physical, behavioural, developmental and intellectual

diﬃculties and includes, in addition, the needs of gifted children. In terms of current

services in IE, Individual Education Plans (IEP’s) are used in the Cook Islands. These IEP

meetings typically involve the student’s parent/guardian, school teaching staﬀand any

specialists who have contributed to the assessment (such as physiotherapists, psychol-

ogists, or occupational therapists who live in the Cook Islands). Depending on the level

of impairment, a student’s program is then instigated by the classroom teacher, or

assisted by a teacher aide if more individual support is required (Townsend, Page, &

Mccawe, 2014).

Despite these developments, sustainability of service provision has proved to be one

of the Cook Islands’greatest challenges. There was a period of in-service teacher

education in IE from 1995 to 2002 (McDonald, 2004), although this is no longer available.

Additionally, pre-service teacher education that had an IE component as part of its

delivery was in place before the teachers’college closed in 2008 (Smith, 2008).

Teacher perceptions of inclusion

Outside of the Cook Islands context of IE, studies have shown that teachers’perceptions

about inclusion vary according to a wider range of what is regarded as a disability (De

Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Wood, Evans, & Spandagou,

2014). Within international research, a highly relevant aspect of the inclusion debate is

that of attitudes to inclusion held by education personnel. These include teachers,

principals and education oﬃcers, amongst others. For inclusion to be a successful

concept at the school level, it follows that there must be some form of support at

least from the teaching staﬀ, as well as the other levels of an organisation. In Figure 1,

Boyle, Topping, Jindal-Snape, and Norwich (2012) illustrate the importance of attitudes

in the organisation and how they can aﬀect the situation irrespective of some forms of

support. Sharma, Loreman, and Macanawai (2015a) report several factors contributing to

the successful implementation of IE in Paciﬁc countries. For school reform to take place,

any negative attitudes of school administration, staﬀand students without disability

needed to be addressed. These negative attitudes in South Paciﬁc countries may

Figure 1. Attitudes to inclusion versus available resources (Boyle et al., 2012, p. 178).

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1. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329626925\_Prevalence\_and\_Causes\_of\_Vision\_Impairment\_and\_Blindness\_The\_Global\_Burden\_of\_Disease [↑](#footnote-ref-1)