



**Fondazione Marista
per la Solidarietà
Internazionale ETS**
FMSI
Per il Bene dei Bambini



**Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Samoa
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Joint Stakeholders' Submission on:

Human Rights in Samoa

Submitted by:

Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)

(NGO in Consultative Status with ECOSOC)

and

Marist Brothers – Star of the Sea Province

and

Saint Joseph's College

Geneva, April 2026

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This stakeholders' report constitutes a joint submission by the above-mentioned organizations within the framework of the Universal Periodic Review process. It presents a comprehensive and evidence-based analysis of the state of children's rights in Samoa, assessed in line with the principles and provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and relevant commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report highlights key areas of concern, including access to inclusive and equitable quality education, the promotion of decent work and sustainable employment pathways for young people, the availability and accessibility of healthcare services, and the broader social and economic conditions affecting the overall welfare and development of children.
2. Adopting a child-rights-based and equity-focused approach, the report identifies persistent structural barriers, policy and legislative gaps, and implementation challenges that hinder the full realization of children's rights, particularly among vulnerable and marginalized groups. Each thematic section provides targeted, evidence-informed, and actionable recommendations aimed at supporting the Government of Samoa in strengthening its legal, institutional, and policy frameworks, and in ensuring the effective protection, promotion, and fulfilment of the rights of all children without discrimination.
3. The data and information informing this submission were gathered from a range of credible and diverse sources, combining both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through consultations and contributions from key stakeholders, including youth, educators, and civil society actors living and working in Samoa, thereby ensuring that the perspectives of affected populations are meaningfully represented. These inputs were complemented by a desk review of relevant secondary materials, including national policy documents, legislative frameworks, government and United Nations reports, and other scholarly and institutional publications, to ensure a comprehensive and balanced analysis. While the report seeks to present an accurate and objective account, it acknowledges certain limitations, including gaps in disaggregated data and constraints related to access to up-to-date statistics in some sectors
4. **The Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)** is an international organization established and promoted by the Marist Brothers, with a presence in over 80 countries worldwide. With more than 18 years of experience advocating for the rights of children, particularly in the areas of education, child protection, and holistic development, FMSI actively engages with United Nations human rights mechanisms to promote the protection and fulfilment of children's rights. Through a range of programs, including capacity-building initiatives for teachers, support for vulnerable children, and advocacy for inclusive education policies, FMSI works directly with local communities to strengthen educational access, equity, and quality. The organization has been formally accredited by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2011, enabling it to contribute substantively to international policy discussions, reporting processes, and global efforts to advance children's rights
5. **The Marist Brothers** is a religious congregation of consecrated men in the Catholic Church. They are involved in the education of children and young people in schools and other educational settings. **The Star of the Sea Province** ¹ is an Administrative Unit within the Marist Institute, composed of several locations and personnel living and working in Samoa, Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, East Timor, New

¹ Cf. Marist presence in the world: <http://champagnat.org/en/marist-institute/our-presence/>

Caledonia, Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Cambodia. The **Star of the Sea Province** is the canonical entity through which the Marist make presence in Samoa. The Marist Brothers Star of the Sea Province governs St. Joseph's College.

6. **St Joseph's College**, Alafua, is a Marist educational institution that fosters the holistic development of students by encouraging active engagement with social realities. The College promotes critical reflection, social responsibility, and advocacy, empowering students to contribute meaningfully to community transformation and the promotion of social justice.
7. Together, FMSI and St Joseph's College, Alafua, have prepared this joint submission to provide a comprehensive assessment of the situation of children's rights in Samoa. Drawing on their combined expertise in education, child protection, and community engagement, the submission highlights persistent challenges and emerging opportunities across key thematic areas, including education, access to quality employment, healthcare, and overall child welfare.

II. GENERAL REMARKS AND COOPERATION WITH THE UPR MECHANISM

8. Samoa was reviewed in November 2021 during the 39th Session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), receiving a total of 145 recommendations.² The State accepted 94 of these recommendations and noted the remaining ones.
9. The submitting stakeholders welcome Samoa's constructive engagement with the UPR process and acknowledges the Government's commitment to aligning its national policies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).³
10. The Government's efforts to integrate human rights principles within the framework of *fa'asamoa* (the Samoan way of life) demonstrate a culturally grounded and context-sensitive approach to development. However, continued efforts are required to ensure the effective implementation, monitoring, and follow-up of accepted recommendations.
11. We respectfully urge the Government of Samoa to strengthen its National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting, and Follow-up (NMIRF) and to ensure meaningful participation of civil society, particularly young people, in the monitoring and evaluation processes. Such engagement is essential to enhance transparency, accountability, and the full realization of human rights for all.

III. METHODOLOGY FOR DATA COLLECTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE TOPICS

Methodology:

12. The methodology for this submission emphasized the active engagement of adolescents and young people, particularly senior secondary students (Form 6), whose lived experiences form the core evidence base for the report.

² United Nations Human Rights Council, "Universal Periodic Review: Samoa – 39th Session (2021)," <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ws-index>

³ Cf. Infographic https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Infographic_Samoa.pdf

13. Data collection employed participatory approaches, including consultations, interviews, and focus group discussions, designed to capture the perspectives, concerns, and aspirations of youth in Samoa. Teachers, school administrators, and civil society actors working in education, child protection, and community development were also engaged to provide expert insights and contextual understanding.
14. Direct voices of young people are incorporated throughout the report, presented in *italics and quotation marks*, to faithfully reflect their perceptions and lived realities. These testimonies complement the analytical framework, offering nuanced insights and highlighting priority areas for intervention.
15. In addition to primary data, the report draws upon secondary sources, including national legislation, policy documents, statistical data, and prior assessments by government and civil society organizations. This multi-source approach ensures that findings are evidence-based, comprehensive, and actionable, supporting well-informed recommendations to strengthen children's rights in Samoa.

Overview of the Topics:

16. **Education:** Young people emphasized the urgent need to address hidden costs associated with schooling, including fees for uniforms, materials, and transport, which disproportionately affect students in rural and underserved communities. They also highlighted persistent challenges in access, quality, and inclusivity of education. Enhancing teacher training, curriculum relevance, infrastructure, and learning resources is critical for promoting equitable educational outcomes and preparing youth for meaningful participation in society.
17. **Quality Employment and Labour Market:** Youth expressed significant concern regarding limited employment opportunities, a mismatch between acquired skills and labour market demands, and the absence of transparent and equitable recruitment processes. Strengthening technical and vocational education, entrepreneurship programs, and fair labour policies was viewed as essential for reducing youth unemployment and ensuring sustainable livelihoods.
18. **Health Care:** Participants highlighted challenges in accessing comprehensive healthcare services, particularly mental health support, essential medicines, and adequately equipped health facilities. Mental health issues, including stress, anxiety, and depression, were identified as pressing concerns. Improved infrastructure, trained personnel, and youth-friendly services are necessary for the holistic well-being of children and young people.
19. **Poverty and Social Issues:** Young people drew attention to the adverse effects of poverty on child development, including heightened vulnerability to abuse, bullying, and substance misuse. Social inequality, family hardship, and limited social support networks exacerbate these challenges. Participants emphasized the need for comprehensive social protection measures, awareness campaigns, and targeted interventions to safeguard children and foster inclusive and resilient communities.
20. While acknowledging government efforts, young people stressed the need for more targeted, inclusive, and context-specific policies. Sustained engagement with youth, civil society, and community stakeholders is essential to address these challenges effectively, uphold children's rights, and promote equitable development across Samoa.

IV. EDUCATION

21. The submitting stakeholders recognize the Government of Samoa's commitment to ensuring inclusive and equitable education, including the provision of free primary and secondary schooling and ongoing reforms under the Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2025–2030. The Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) has reaffirmed its dedication to strengthening learning pathways from early childhood through secondary education, guided by national development frameworks such as Samoa 2040 and the Pathway for the Development of Samoa (2022–2026). In February 2026, MEC, in partnership with UNESCO and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), launched a USD 2.5 million Education Transformation Project to support system-wide improvements in foundational learning, equity, inclusivity, and transitions from school to further education or employment.⁴
22. Despite these efforts, persistent challenges continue to limit the realization of quality education for all. Hidden costs including transportation, uniforms, learning materials, and other school-related expenses remain substantial barriers for vulnerable families, undermining access even where tuition is free.⁵ Disparities between urban and rural areas are evident in the availability of qualified teachers, infrastructure, and learning resources, contributing to inequities in educational participation and outcomes.
23. Recent education data indicate that Samoa has made substantial progress in basic education participation; for example, adult literacy rates are high (approximately 99 per cent).⁶ However, structural gaps in learning quality, infrastructure, and support services persist, particularly at secondary levels where national performance assessments have identified areas needing improvement. Challenges also remain in adapting school environments for students with disabilities, although progress has been made, with 45 per cent of primary schools having access to adapted infrastructure and materials in 2020—up from less than 16 per cent previously.⁷
24. Among the most significant challenges reported by young people and stakeholders consulted for this submission are:
 - i. **Shortage of qualified teachers:** Many schools, especially in rural areas, lack enough trained teachers, affecting instructional quality and individual attention to learners.
 - ii. **Limited educational materials:** Inadequate textbooks, teaching aids, and digital resources constrain learning experiences and student engagement.
 - iii. **Inadequate infrastructure in rural schools:** Many facilities lack basic amenities, library spaces, and technology access, limiting the learning environment's effectiveness.
25. Participants in this study voiced the following concerns:

⁴ Ministry of Education and Culture (Government of Samoa) and UNESCO launch USD 2.5 million Education Transformation Project, UNESCO, 4 February 2026, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ministry-education-and-culture-and-unesco-launch-usd-25-million-gpe-supported-education>

⁵ Samoa Education – UNICEF MICS EAGLE Factsheet (2025), Samoa Bureau of Statistics & UNICEF, https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Samoa_Factsheet_31Dec25_final.pdf

⁶ Samoa SDG 4 Country Profile (2023), UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/country-profile/Samoa.pdf>

⁷ In Samoa, 45 % of primary schools have access to adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities (2020), Pacific Community, <https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/did-you-know/2023/01/in-samoa-45-of-the-primary-schools-have-access-to-adapted>

- *“School fees may be free, but there are many other costs families cannot afford.”*
 - *“Lack of learning materials affects our performance.”*
 - *“Transport to school is expensive and difficult for many students.”*
26. In the previous UPR cycle, Samoa supported recommendations to “continue to strengthen policies for access to quality and universal public education” (106.67 Dominican Republic), to “dismantle barriers related to the hidden costs of education, in particular in rural areas, and provide an adequate budget to the education sector” (106.68 Bahamas), and to “adopt a coherent strategy to ensure universal access to education, especially with regard to students with special educational needs” (106.69 Mauritius),⁸ reflecting its commitment to inclusive and equitable education. While progress has been made, challenges remain, particularly for learners in rural areas and those with special educational needs.
27. **Building on these efforts, the following recommendations aim to further strengthen Samoa’s education system and ensure that all children can fully benefit from quality learning opportunities:**
- a. **Develop a targeted subsidy system** to reduce indirect education costs, such as transport, materials, and uniform fees, especially for low-income and rural families.
 - b. **Enhance school infrastructure** by investing in learning spaces, sanitation, accessibility, and technology, prioritizing underserved rural and remote areas.
 - c. **Scale up teacher recruitment and professional development programs** to improve teacher availability, pedagogical skills, and retention.
 - d. **Expand access to digital and technological learning resources** through national e-learning strategies and partnerships to support blended and interactive teaching.
 - e. **Promote community and civil society engagement** in education planning and monitoring to ensure that reforms reflect local needs and priorities and improve accountability.

V. QUALITY EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR MARKET

28. Despite ongoing policy reforms, youth unemployment and underemployment remain significant challenges in Samoa. According to the most recent labour market data, the youth unemployment rate (ages 15–24) was approximately 11.9 per cent in 2024, significantly above the national rate of 4.6 per cent for all ages.⁹ Female youth unemployment was notably higher, at about 20.9 per cent, compared with male youth unemployment at 7.4 per cent, reflecting gender disparities in access to employment opportunities.¹⁰ These figures demonstrate that young people continue to face structural barriers in transitioning from education to productive and secure work.

⁸ Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Samoa, A/HRC/49/7, para. 106.

⁹ Trading Economics. “Samoa Youth Unemployment Rate.” 2024.

<https://tradingeconomics.com/samoa/unemployment-youth-total-percent-of-total-labor-force-ages-15-24-wb-data.html>

¹⁰ Trading Economics. “Unemployment, Youth Female & Male (% of Labor Force Ages 15–24) – Samoa.” 2024.

<https://tradingeconomics.com/samoa/unemployment-youth-female-percent-of-female-labor-force-ages-15-24-wb-data.html>

29. The Government of Samoa has taken regulatory and policy steps to address labour market challenges through the **Samoa National Employment Policy (SNEP 2) 2021–2026**, which aims to “Recover, Increase and Sustain” employment levels, enhance labour market demand and supply, and strengthen employment institutions and regulations.¹¹ This strategy encompasses interventions to promote inclusive labour markets, support skills development, and improve employment services.
30. Nevertheless, a persistent skills mismatch between education outcomes and labour market demands constrains youth employability. Many young people complete formal schooling without possessing the technical, vocational, and digital competencies required by employers, particularly in emerging sectors such as information technology, sustainable tourism, renewable energy, and value-added agriculture. Youth participants in this consultation articulated this challenge clearly:
 - *“Many young people finish school but cannot find jobs.”*
 - *“Employment opportunities depend on connections, not merit.”*
 - *“There are not enough opportunities for young people.”*
31. Informal employment remains widespread, particularly among youth who lack formal qualifications or access to secure jobs, and often entail low earnings, limited social protection, and precarious working conditions. Limited access to entrepreneurial support including start up financing, business development services, and mentorship, further constrains young people’s ability to create and sustain their own enterprises.
32. Aligning national employment strategies with these international commitments is critical to ensure that young people can realise their economic rights and contribute meaningfully to Samoa’s sustainable development.
33. **Key Challenges:**
 - **Persistent Youth Unemployment and Gender Disparities:** Youth unemployment remains disproportionately high, particularly among young women, indicating systemic barriers to labour market inclusion.¹²
 - **Skills Mismatch and Education Work Transition:** Employers often cite a lack of job relevant skills among school leavers, particularly in technical and digital fields, which hinders effective school to work transitions.¹³
 - **Opaque Recruitment Practices and Social Networks:** Youth reported that employment opportunities are frequently influenced by social connections rather than merit, undermining equal access to opportunities.¹⁴

¹¹ Government of Samoa, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour. “Samoa National Employment Policy (SNEP 2) 2021–2026.” <https://mcil.gov.ws/our-services/employment-services/labour-market/>

¹² Trading Economics. “Samoa Youth Unemployment Rate.” 2024. <https://tradingeconomics.com/samoa/unemployment-youth-total-percent-of-total-labor-force-ages-15-24-wb-data.html>

¹³ Government of Samoa, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour. “Samoa National Employment Policy (SNEP 2) 2021–2026.” <https://mcil.gov.ws/our-services/employment-services/labour-market/>

¹⁴ Trading Economics. “Unemployment, Youth Female & Male (% of Labor Force Ages 15–24) – Samoa.” 2024. <https://tradingeconomics.com/samoa/unemployment-youth-female-percent-of-female-labor-force-ages-15-24-wb-data.html>

- **Informality and Limited Social Protection:** A high proportion of young workers are engaged in informal or precarious work without formal contracts, benefits, or protections.¹⁵
 - **Limited Access to Entrepreneurial Support:** Many young entrepreneurs face barriers in accessing capital, training, and networks needed to establish and scale their businesses.¹⁶
34. Samoa's most recent Universal Periodic Review included limited recommendations explicitly related to employment. Among these, the country noted the recommendation to amend existing laws to prohibit the worst forms of child labour and align with International Labour Organization standards on child labour and minimum age for employment (**107.32**, United States of America) and supported measures to improve and fully implement policies and programmes to increase women's participation in decision-making, public life, and employment at all levels (**106.72**, Indonesia).¹⁷ However, stakeholder consultations and data collected from participants indicate significant challenges in the labour market that were not fully reflected in the UPR recommendations.
35. **To address these gaps and strengthen the quality of employment and labour market opportunities, the coalition recommends the following measures:**
- a. **Strengthen Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET):** Expand and upgrade TVET programs in partnership with industry stakeholders to align training with market needs.
 - b. **Enhance apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities.**¹⁸
 - c. **Promote Youth Entrepreneurship Programs:** Facilitate access to start up financing, business incubation, and mentorship for youth entrepreneurs, with specific support for rural and female-led enterprises.¹⁹
 - d. **Ensure Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment Systems:** Develop and enforce policies that promote fairness in hiring and prohibit discriminatory practices.²⁰
 - e. **Invest in Emerging and High Growth Sectors:** Prioritize investment and training in digital services, value added agriculture, renewable energy, and sustainable tourism.²¹

¹⁵ Trading Economics. "Samoa Youth Unemployment Rate." 2024.

<https://tradingeconomics.com/samoa/unemployment-youth-total-percent-of-total-labor-force-ages-15-24-wb-data.html>

¹⁶ Government of Samoa, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour. "Samoa National Employment Policy (SNEP-2) 2021–2026." <https://mcil.gov.ws/our-services/employment-services/labour-market>

¹⁷ United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Samoa, A/HRC/49/7 (2022), recommendations 106.72, 107.32.

¹⁸ United Nations. Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Article 32.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

¹⁹ United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8). Decent Work and Economic Growth.

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>

²⁰ Trading Economics. "Unemployment, Youth Female & Male (% of Labor Force Ages 15–24) – Samoa." 2024.

<https://tradingeconomics.com/samoa/unemployment-youth-female-percent-of-female-labor-force-ages-15-24-wb-data.html>

²¹ Government of Samoa, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour. "Samoa National Employment Policy (SNEP 2) 2021–2026." <https://mcil.gov.ws/our-services/employment-services/labour-market>

- f. **Develop a Comprehensive National Youth Employment Strategy:** Finalize and implement a youth employment strategy with measurable targets, monitoring frameworks, and active youth participation in policy design and review.²²

VI. HEALTH CARE

36. Samoa has demonstrated sustained commitment to improving the health and well-being of its population through ongoing national strategies and health system reforms. The **Samoa Health Sector Plan 2021–2025** sets out a comprehensive framework to strengthen service delivery, improve access to care, and enhance health system performance across the life cycle, including maternal and child health, preventive services, and emergency response capacity.²³ The Government works closely with development partners such as the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the Pacific Community (SPC) to implement immunization campaigns, nutrition programs, and efforts to address non communicable diseases.²⁴
37. **Systemic Challenges:**
- **Shortage of Health Workforce:** Samoa’s health workforce density remains low relative to regional benchmarks. As of 2023, there were approximately 0.48 physicians per 1,000 people, limiting the capacity of the system to deliver specialized care and manage complex clinical needs.²⁵ The shortage is particularly acute in mental health, where trained psychologists and counsellors are few, and in specialized child and adolescent care.
 - **Uneven Access to Services:** Health services, particularly specialized and emergency care, are concentrated in urban centres, such as the capital city, Apia. This urban concentration leaves rural populations, especially those on the island of Savaii and in remote villages, with limited access to essential diagnostic services, timely emergency treatment, and follow up care. Inadequate transport infrastructure compounds these access barriers, as many families must travel long distances to reach functional health facilities.
 - **Mental Health Service Gaps:** Mental health support remains significantly under resourced across the health system. The 2023 Pacific Regional Health Report notes that mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and substance misuse are increasing among adolescents and young adults, yet community-based mental health programmes, trained professionals, and early intervention services are limited.²⁶ Youth participants in this report consistently highlighted this gap: “*Mental health issues are common but not properly addressed.*”
 - **Essential Medicines and Supply Constraints:** Participants also reported frequent shortages of essential medicines at health facilities, including antibiotics, chronic disease

²² United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8). Decent Work and Economic Growth.

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>

²³ Samoa Ministry of Health, Health Sector Plan 2021–2025, <https://www.health.gov.ws/resources/strategic-plans>

²⁴ Community Health Worker Program Reports (MOH Samoa), <https://www.health.gov.ws/our-services/community-health>

²⁵ World Bank, Physicians (per 1,000 people) – Samoa, 2023, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.MED.PHYS.ZS?locations=WS>

²⁶ Pacific Community (SPC), Mental Health Situation in Pacific Islands, 2021, <https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/mental-health>

medications (such as insulin), and basic pain relief. These shortages are attributed to supply chain challenges, ordering delays, and logistical constraints that affect inventory management across both urban and rural clinics.

- **Infrastructure and Facility Limitations:** Many rural health clinics lack adequate equipment, diagnostic tools, and stable electricity or internet connectivity, limiting their ability to provide comprehensive care. Clinicians often have to refer patients to central hospitals for basic imaging, laboratory tests, and specialised treatment, creating additional time and cost burdens for families.
 - **Lessons from the 2019 Measles Outbreak:** The 2019 measles epidemic in Samoa exposed critical vulnerabilities in health service preparedness, vaccination coverage, and disease surveillance systems.²⁷ While subsequent policy reforms and immunisation drives have strengthened routine immunization, ongoing investments in surveillance capacity, emergency planning, and community outreach remain essential to prevent future outbreaks.
38. Young people who participated in consultations emphasized how these systemic weaknesses affect their daily lives, particularly in ways that are not always visible in official statistics. Their reflections highlight both service delivery gaps and the lived impact of health system limitations:
- *“Hospitals sometimes lack medicines.”*
 - *“Access to healthcare is difficult in some areas.”*
 - *“Mental well being is important but there are no counsellors we can talk to.”*
39. Despite these efforts, significant gaps persist that affect the quality, accessibility, and responsiveness of the health system. Available data indicate that while basic health outcomes have improved, challenges remain in key areas of youth and rural health. For example, the under-five mortality rate in Samoa declined to approximately 13 per 1,000 live births by 2024, but childhood illness, inadequate access to safe water, and childhood nutrition continue to require targeted interventions.²⁸ In recent years, the Government has taken steps to mitigate some of these challenges:
- **Expansion of Community Health Worker Programs:** Samoa has strengthened its community health worker networks, enabling basic primary care, health education, and follow up services at the village level.²⁹
 - **Routine Immunisation Strengthening:** After the 2019 outbreak, national Immunisation coverage increased significantly through targeted vaccination campaigns, school-based immunizations, and public awareness initiatives.
 - **Collaborations with International Partners:** Partnerships with WHO, UNICEF, and SPC have supported workforce training, health systems planning, and data capacity building to support evidence informed decision making.

²⁷ UNICEF Samoa, 2019 Measles Outbreak Report, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/samoa/reports/measles-2019>

²⁸ World Bank, Physicians (per 1,000 people) – Samoa, 2023, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.MED.PHYS.ZS?locations=WS>

²⁹ Community Health Worker Program Reports (MOH Samoa), <https://www.health.gov.ws/our-services/community-health>

40. While important strides have been made, the gap between policy ambition and on the ground service delivery remains, especially for adolescents and youth whose health needs extend beyond traditional maternal and child health indicators to include mental health, sexual and reproductive health, and preventive care tailored to emerging health risks.
41. In the last Universal Periodic Review, the country supported several health-related recommendations focused on improving access, quality, and inclusivity in health care. These included strengthening gender-sensitive health campaigns for the prevention of infectious diseases and expanding access to primary health-care services (**106.62**, Canada); improving access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health services, particularly for women in rural areas (**106.63**, Malaysia); revising the family life education curriculum to align with international technical guidance on sexuality education (**106.64**, Iceland); adopting a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy and comprehensive sexuality education for adolescents, including prevention of sexually transmitted infections and early pregnancies, and removing the age limit for testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (**106.65**, Luxembourg); and strengthening measures to reduce maternal mortality through improved antenatal care and quality training for health-care workers (**106.66**, Malaysia).³⁰ While progress has been made in advancing health services and strengthening policy frameworks, challenges persist, particularly in rural areas and among vulnerable populations.
42. Building on these commitments, the coalition recommends further measures to enhance health service delivery, expand coverage, and ensure equitable access to quality health care for all Samoans:
 - a. **Establish a National School Mental Health Programme:** Develop and implement evidence based mental health services integrated into school health systems, including trained counsellors, referral pathways, and peer support frameworks to address anxiety, stress, and psychosocial challenges among young people.
 - b. **Improve Healthcare Infrastructure in Rural and Remote Areas:** Invest in upgrading rural clinics with essential diagnostic equipment, reliable power sources, telemedicine connectivity, and capable support staff to ensure that basic and intermediate care can be delivered locally without requiring costly travel.
 - c. **Expand Investment in Health Workforce Development:** Support increased training and retention policies for doctors, nurses, midwives, and mental health professionals, including incentives for rural service and continuous professional development opportunities.
 - d. **Ensure Availability of Essential Medicines at Affordable Prices:** Optimize procurement and supply chain systems to prevent stockouts, establish buffer stocks for essential drugs, and implement policies that ensure medicines are both affordable and consistently available across all health facilities.
 - e. **Promote Preventive Healthcare and Health Literacy Campaigns:** Scale up nationwide public health education efforts that address preventive practices related to nutrition, hygiene, immunization, mental well-being, sexual and reproductive health, and non-communicable disease prevention to support healthy lifestyles from adolescence into adulthood.

³⁰ United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Samoa, A/HRC/48/12 (2021), recommendations 106.62–106.66.

VII. POVERTY AND SOCIAL ISSUES

43. Poverty remains a significant underlying factor affecting children's rights and overall well-being in Samoa, influencing access to education, health care, protection, and opportunities for development. Although Samoa has made progress in reducing extreme poverty, recent estimates indicate that approximately 22–23 per cent of the population lives below the national poverty line, with children and rural households disproportionately affected.³¹ Persistent income inequality, geographic disparities, and vulnerability to economic shocks continue to place pressure on families and communities.
44. The Government of Samoa has taken important steps to address poverty and social vulnerability through national development frameworks such as the Strategy for the Development of Samoa (SDS) 2021–2026 and the Samoa Social Protection Framework, which aim to strengthen household resilience, improve access to basic services, and support vulnerable groups.³² Programmes such as community development initiatives, social welfare assistance, and partnerships with international organizations demonstrate a clear commitment to improving living conditions. These efforts are aligned with broader global priorities on poverty reduction, inequality, and social inclusion.
45. However, despite these initiatives, significant challenges remain in addressing the root causes and social consequences of poverty. Youth identified several critical concerns, including child abuse and domestic violence, bullying in schools, substance abuse, and the broader impact of economic hardship on family stability. Evidence from the Pacific region indicates that violence against children remains a serious concern, often underreported due to stigma and cultural barriers:³³ *"Some children experience abuse at home"*
46. Bullying in schools continues to affect students' safety, mental well-being, and academic performance. Regional and global studies show that a considerable proportion of students experience bullying, which undermines inclusive and safe learning environments:³⁴ *"Bullying is a serious issue in schools."*
47. Economic hardship within households continues to shape children's life outcomes. Many families struggle to meet basic needs, including food, transportation, and education-related expenses, which in turn affects school attendance, performance, and overall well-being: *"Poverty affects our ability to succeed."*
48. These issues are closely interconnected. Poverty increases vulnerability to violence, neglect, and social exclusion, while exposure to such conditions negatively impacts educational attainment, health outcomes, and future employment opportunities. Although government policies reflect a commitment to addressing these challenges, **implementation gaps, limited coverage of social services, and resource constraints** reduce their overall effectiveness, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

³¹ World Bank, Poverty and Equity Brief: Samoa, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/poverty-and-equity>

³² Government of Samoa, Strategy for the Development of Samoa (SDS) 2021–2026; UNICEF Samoa, Social Protection Framework, <https://www.samoagovt.ws> <https://www.unicef.org/samoa/social-policy>

³³ UNICEF Pacific, Violence Against Children in the Pacific Islands, <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/reports>

³⁴ UNESCO, Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/behind-numbers-ending-school-violence-and-bullying>

49. During its most recent Universal Periodic Review, the country supported a wide range of recommendations addressing poverty and social issues, with a strong emphasis on gender equality, social inclusion, and protection from violence. These included measures to combat discrimination and violence against women and children, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (**106.32**, Fiji); ensure the meaningful participation of women, children, persons with disabilities and local communities in climate change and disaster risk reduction frameworks (**106.39**, Fiji); and address gender inequality by removing cultural, economic and institutional barriers to equal opportunities for women (**106.70**, Ukraine).
50. Further recommendations called for increasing women's participation in decision-making, public life and employment (**106.72**, Indonesia), enhancing women's participation in political and public spheres (**106.73**, Philippines), and promoting women's engagement in entrepreneurship (**106.74**, Mauritius). States also urged continued efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and support gender equality (**106.75**, Tunisia), alongside the development and strengthening of comprehensive legislation on gender-based violence (**106.76**, Ukraine; **106.83**, Luxembourg; **106.84**, Malaysia).
51. Significant attention was given to addressing violence against women and girls, including adopting measures to eradicate such violence and protect vulnerable groups (**106.80**, Cyprus); implementing comprehensive strategies to prevent and respond to domestic violence (**106.81**, Georgia; **106.82**, New Zealand; **106.89**, Ireland); and effectively implementing existing frameworks such as the Family Safety Act 2013 and national development plans (**106.85**, Germany; **106.86**, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). Additional recommendations emphasized the need to establish a national referral system for victims and survivors of violence (**106.87**, Denmark), raise public awareness of domestic violence (**106.88**, Germany), and increase funding for quality support services (**106.90**, Montenegro).³⁵
52. **While these commitments reflect progress in addressing poverty-related social challenges and promoting inclusive development, persistent gaps remain in implementation, particularly in protecting vulnerable populations and ensuring gender equality. To build on these achievements, the submitting stakeholders recommend the following measures:**
 - a. **Strengthen child protection systems and reporting mechanisms:** Enhance coordination among institutions, improve accessibility of reporting channels, and ensure timely response and support services for victims of abuse.
 - b. **Implement comprehensive national anti-bullying policies:** Develop clear school-based frameworks that promote safe learning environments, including prevention programmes and accountability mechanisms.
 - c. **Expand public awareness campaigns on child protection and well-being:** Promote positive parenting practices and community awareness to address stigma and encourage early intervention.

³⁵ United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Samoa, A/HRC/49/7 (2022), recommendations 106.32, 106.39, 106.70, 106.72–106.90; coalition recommendations derived from the analysis of gaps and priorities in the implementation of these measures.

- d. Support youth mentorship and development programmes:** Invest in structured programmes that provide life skills, employment pathways, and community engagement opportunities for young people.
- e. Strengthen and expand social protection measures:** Scale up targeted poverty reduction initiatives, including financial support, livelihood programmes, and services for vulnerable families, particularly in rural areas.
- f. Increase women's participation in decision-making, public life, and entrepreneurship** through targeted programs and capacity-building initiatives.
- g. Monitor and evaluate the implementation of existing laws and policies** to ensure effectiveness and accountability.

VIII. CONCLUSION

- 53. As members of civil society, we commend the Government of Samoa for its continued engagement with the Universal Periodic Review process and for its demonstrated commitment to advancing human rights through national policies and development frameworks. Samoa's willingness to engage constructively with international mechanisms reflects a positive trajectory toward strengthening accountability, transparency, and inclusive governance.
- 54. At the same time, this report has highlighted several persistent and interrelated challenges affecting children and young people, particularly in the areas of education, quality employment, health care, and social protection. While important progress has been made, these challenges underscore the need for sustained, coordinated, and adequately resourced interventions to ensure that all children and youth can fully realize their potential.
- 55. The findings presented in this submission reaffirm that the well-being of children and young people is shaped by multiple, interconnected factors. Addressing these issues effectively requires a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach that brings together government institutions, civil society organizations, local communities, development partners, and, crucially, young people themselves. Their lived experiences and perspectives provide invaluable insights that should inform policy design, implementation, and monitoring processes.
- 56. We wish to express our sincere appreciation to the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Universal Periodic Review mechanism for providing an inclusive and constructive platform through which diverse stakeholders can contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights. This process remains essential in fostering dialogue, mutual accountability, and shared learning among States and civil society actors.
- 57. We also extend our deep gratitude to all contributors to this report, particularly the young people, educators, and community members in Samoa whose voices and experiences form the foundation of this submission. Their openness and engagement reflect both the challenges they face and their aspirations for a more just, inclusive, and supportive society.

58. In conclusion, we reaffirm our commitment, as civil society actors, to continue working collaboratively with the Government of Samoa and other stakeholders to promote the rights and well-being of children and youth. We respectfully encourage the Government to build upon its existing efforts, strengthen implementation mechanisms, and ensure that the voices of young people remain central to decision-making processes. Only through inclusive and sustained action can meaningful and lasting progress be achieved.