

Samoa Youth Monograph 2020

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE, ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION

Policy Brief 2

Policy Brief

1. SAMOAN YOUTH MONOGRAPH OVERVIEW

The Samoa Youth Monograph (SYM) 2020 draws on and analyses data collected in the 2016 Samoan Population and Housing Census to present a picture of the younger generation in Samoa. This policy brief is one of three accompanying briefs that have been developed through a stakeholders consultation process to take a closer look at specific topics that impact on adolescents (aged 15 to 19 years) and youth (aged 18 to 35 years) in Samoa. This policy brief looks at school attendance, engagement and inclusion, and includes an analysis of 2016 Census data as well as data from other sources.

The primary goal of the SYM and this policy brief is to generate dialogue among key stakeholders to identify priority areas for intervention and reform; to empower young people with information; and to provide an evidence base of data to guide investment decisions and advocacy efforts.



Samoa Bureau of Statistics
Apia, Samoa



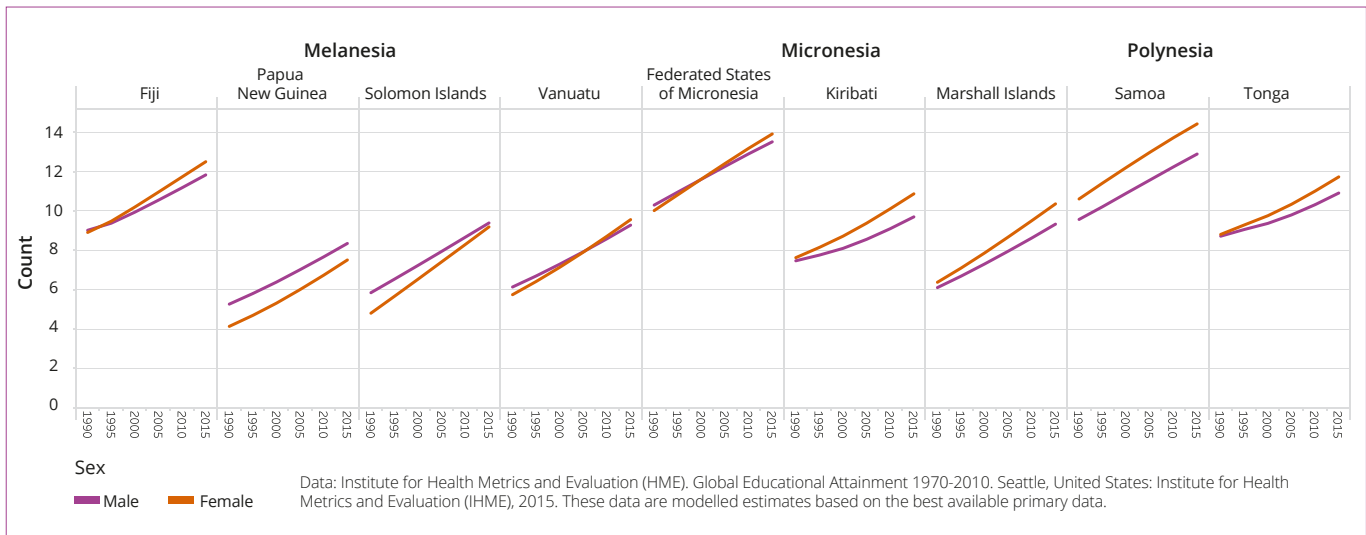
United Nations Population Fund
Pacific Sub Regional Office
Samoa and Fiji

2. INTRODUCTION

Access to education and training has a direct positive impact on employment opportunities for Samoan youth, harnessing the potential of human capital for the betterment of Samoan society.¹ Samoa has seen consistent improvements in many education outcomes over recent years. The quality of education has been raised through improvements in teaching standards and the proficiency levels of student subjects, particularly the sciences.² The number of students with a disability enrolled at school has also improved, nearly doubling between 2014 and 2018.³ Samoa now enjoys a higher than average attainment of education in the Pacific region, as illustrated at Figure 1 below.

The quality of education has been raised through improvements in teaching standards and the proficiency levels of student subjects

Figure 1: Mean years of education attainment for 10 to 24-year-olds

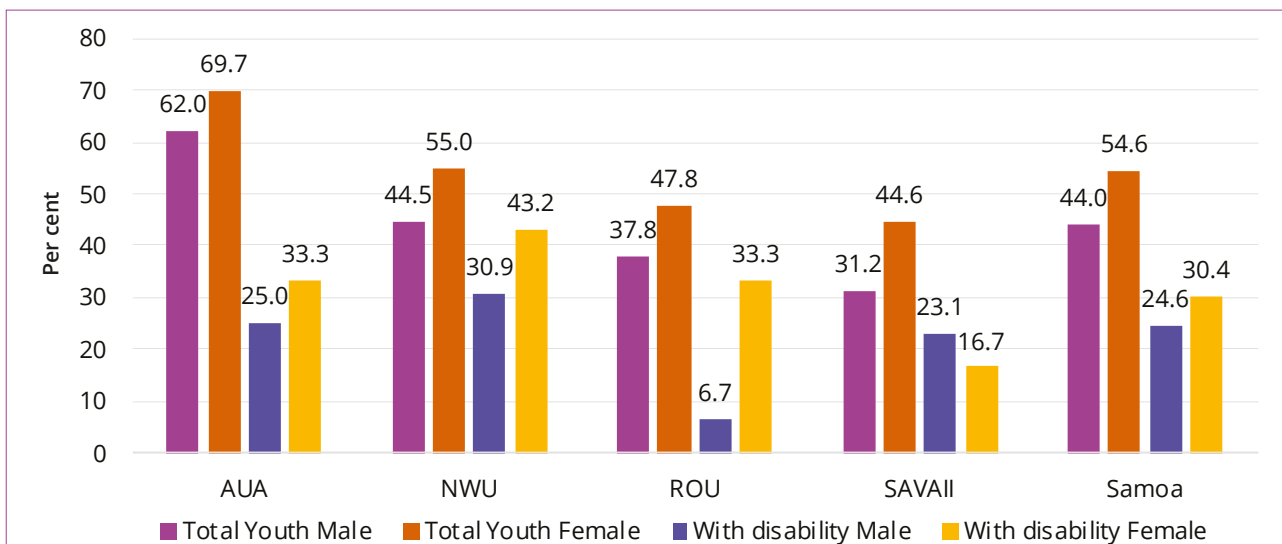


Source: UNFPA, 2017, State of Pacific Youth 2017.

Despite progress made by Samoa in increasing primary school completion rates and attaining gender parity, significant challenges remain in increasing secondary completion rate, where there is a high drop-out rate. Significant disparities also remain in completion rates for males and females, and for youth with disabilities as illustrated at Figure 2 below. Furthermore, geographical inequities exist with Savaii region showing comparatively lower completion rates than the national average also illustrated at Figure 2 below.

Significant disparities also remain in completion rates for males and females

Figure 2: Youth (aged 18-35) upper secondary school completion rates by sex, region and disability



Source: Samoan Youth Monograph 2019 (full report): An Analysis of the 2016 Population and Housing Census.

Administrative data from Samoa corroborates evidence from the 2016 Census. The percentage of students progressing from primary to secondary school declined from 93.7 per cent in 2014 to 86.5 per cent in 2018.⁴ School dropout rates are of concern in Samoa with 32.2 per cent of males dropping out by year 13 with a corresponding figure of 27.9 per cent for females.⁵ The completion rate for secondary school has declined overall by 10 per cent between 2016 and 2017.⁶ There is also an issue with gender equity. In 2014, female youth were more educated than male youth, with 27 per cent of female youth completing secondary education as compared to 23 per cent of male youth.⁷

Barriers to achieving educational outcomes can include issues with demand – large numbers of student dropping out – as well as supply issues in making quality education accessible to all youth. This brief focuses on both demand and supply issues affecting educational outcomes for youth.

The priorities for improvements in education are set out in the Samoan Government for Education Sector Goals in 2018. These include improving quality at all levels; enhanced access and opportunity; enhanced relevance of training and education; improved sector coordination of policy, planning and research; and effective management of all resources.⁸

A key outcome of the 2016 Strategy for the Development of Samoa is the improvement of quality education and training.⁹ The Strategy commits to a number of goals including increasing access to Post-Secondary Education Training (PSET) and Tertiary Vocational Education Training (TVET) as well as opportunities for employees and returned seasonal workers. This policy brief also includes the priorities laid out in international agreements including Sustainable Development Goal 4, which commits to ‘Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.’¹⁰

Barriers to achieving educational outcomes can include issues with demand as well as supply issues in making quality education accessible to all youth



3. APPROACH

An international literature review was conducted of peer reviewed papers published between 2015 and 2020, to identify trends and policy recommendations for improving outcomes in school attendance, engagement and inclusion. Consensus documents and international and regional agreements were reviewed, particularly in relation to policy commitments. Reviews of policy implementation were also included as, in practice, laws and policies may not be aligned with such agreements and, where laws may exist, absent or sporadic enforcement and resources may inhibit change adoption.

4. FINDINGS

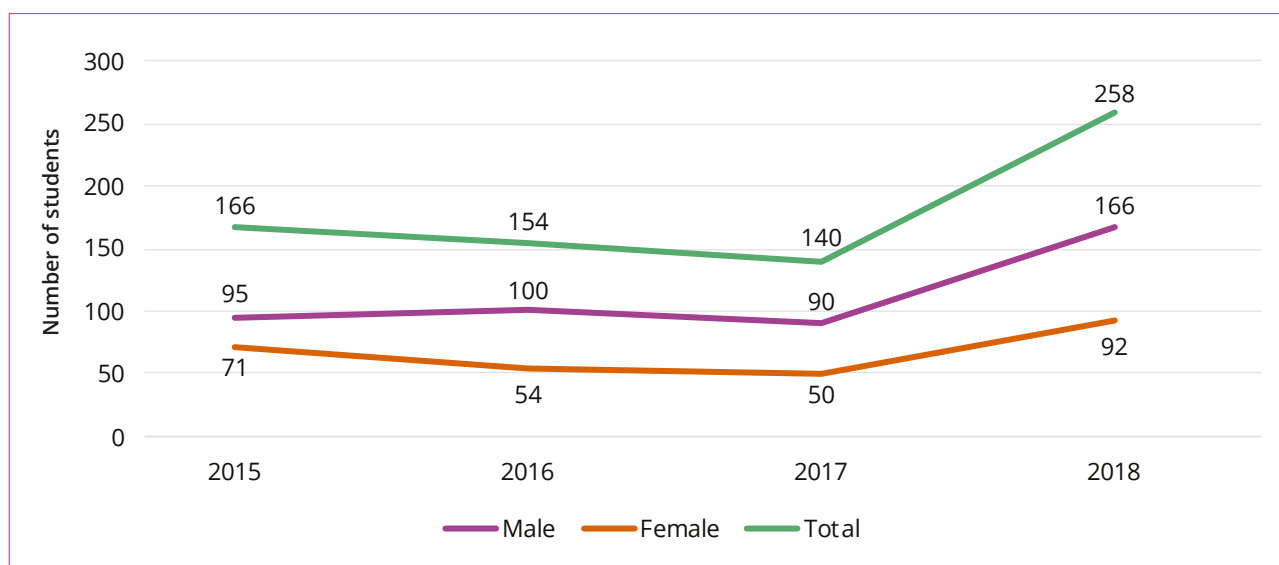
Factors that increase the likelihood that youth drop out of education include: Poverty – with those from wealthier households completing an average of three more years of schooling than those in poverty.¹¹ Family violence,¹² being orphaned or having a chronically ill family member – due to the need to look after the family member – or a lack of funds for school.¹³ Geographic location – in rural areas the Gross Attendance Ratio for secondary school stands at 66 per cent but it is considerably higher in urban areas at 73.¹⁴ Sex – in 2014 the Net Attendance Ratio for females at 71 per cent was substantially higher than their male counterparts at 58 per cent.¹⁵

Fulfilling potential in youth is linked to early childhood education attendance, with children who attend preschool earning 25 per cent more than those who do not.¹⁶ In Samoa, less than a third of eligible Samoan children were enrolled in Early Childhood Education between 2014 and 2018.¹⁷ On the demand side, the pursuit of education for female youth leads to an increase in the age at marriage and pregnancy by two years, according to 2016 Census data.¹⁸ The percentage of Samoans not in employment, education or training (NEET) has risen from 35 per cent in 2012 to 37.9 per cent in 2017.¹⁹ Nearly half of all unemployed Samoans are youth and unemployment for 15 to 24-year-olds has doubled between 2012 and 2017 from 16.4 per cent to 31.9 per cent.²⁰

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Student mobility is also an inhibitor with students with disabilities unable to access schools, particularly in remote locations where journeys to school are through bush trails or via canoe, resulting in some youth receiving no education at all.²¹ Samoa is striving to create a more inclusive and accessible education system and has seen an increase in the number of students with disabilities in primary education as indicated in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Number of Students with Disabilities in Primary Education



Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, Education Statistical Digest Samoa 2018.

The inclusion of students within the classroom, however, does not define inclusive education and the level of understanding of the needs of students with disabilities remains low. This positive trend needs to be accompanied by policies and indicators consistent with the Policy and Legislation and Awareness of the Rights of Children with Disabilities, together with awareness training for educators.²²

The inclusion of students within the classroom, however, does not define inclusive education and the level of understanding of the needs of students with disabilities remains low

Religious and cultural beliefs influence community attitudes around the inclusion of students with disabilities.²³ A combination of a policy driven from the top down together with grassroots leadership from village chiefs, religious and community groups, is required in order to shift social attitudes to students with disabilities.²⁴

The number of students with a disability in both secondary school and college is increasing and is expected to increase further with the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy and the signing of an memorandum of understanding between the Ministry and special providers in March 2018. Ongoing in-service training, awareness programmes and interventions are

provided to teachers, including information to improve their professional knowledge and to give them a clear understanding of the essential disability information they need to identify 'students with disabilities'.²⁵

Reforms in education are influenced by participation in international and bilateral agreements such as the SDGs,²⁶ globalization, foreign aid, national and local policy and culture.²⁷ Samoans wish to embrace the influence of globalization in education reform whilst recognizing local tradition and culture. Thus a nuanced approach to education policy is required that retains local knowledge and embraces the opportunities that come with international participation.²⁸

A number of policies and programmes have been developed and implemented in various regions of the world to help keep young people remain in school. In the South Pacific region, for instance, there have been efforts to maximize the usage of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve education.²⁹ The One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) policy is one of the projects that was launched in the South Pacific region in countries including Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to provide educational opportunities for underprivileged youth.³⁰ During the first phase of the OLPC project, Samoa was issued with 150 laptops including a server and internet access. Tablets have been issued to over 60 upgrading science teachers to enable them to study at a distance during school term.³¹ Additionally, the Samoa School Net and Community Access project has also been implemented to improve education quality and accessibility through electronic teaching, including an e-library that contains all required study materials.³² In Fiji, the National Policy on Open Educational Resources was endorsed in 2015 to support quality teaching and learning.³³

The Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018-2030 was developed to help accelerate inclusive learning in the Pacific region so that vulnerable youth are not excluded from accessing education services.³⁴ According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) State of Pacific Youth Report, a number of recommendations for the Pacific region were suggested which can be adopted in other regions of the world.³⁵ These include improving the relevance of education in preparation for work and life; expanding learning opportunities for young people, such as second chance education for those that drop out of school; and promoting youth participation in education policies.

The Samoan Government is providing grants to secondary schools for consumables for TVET and policies are being explored to lessen the stigma attached to the education pathway both in secondary school and post-school.³⁶ The alignment of the TVET curriculum with development goals has led to resilience building in Pacific Island countries, such as improvements in health and mitigating the impacts of climate change on coastal communities.³⁷

Increasing participation in sport and other forms of outdoor education contributes to outcomes in education³⁸ as well as economic productivity and promotes national and international peace and cooperation.³⁹ Attitudes to sport as a legitimate and worthwhile form of education are in need of improvement in Samoa – despite evidence that clearly identifies the transnational flows of remittances to families – to empower young people to participate in life outside of the local village and to acquire skills that will help them to participate in the global economy.⁴⁰



One Laptop Per Child policy is one of the projects that was launched in the South Pacific region to provide educational opportunities for underprivileged youth.

The alignment of the TVET curriculum with development goals has led to resilience building in Pacific Island countries

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are a set of policy recommendations for the supply of and demand for education.

Supply of education

- Implementation of reforms for inclusive education would be more effective if a multi-layered approach is taken that includes: devising high quality policy targeted at the national and local level; awareness training for teachers, curriculum adjustment and additional resources within schools; support for families with youth with disabilities, particularly in dealing with shame and stigmatization; and addressing cultural, community and religious beliefs at the local level.⁴¹
- Resourcing for the implementation of eLearning for youth with disabilities including training for parents and students and social awareness programmes driven by the local community.⁴² For those with limited physical access to a local school, online education programmes may be the most viable option, bringing learning to the home.⁴³ This will require adequate resourcing as well as training for parents.
- Substantive policy reform and legislative reform that targets the reasons for school dropout, legislation that, for example, sends a clear message that family violence is wrong, and policy reform that provides local services that target those for whom school attendance is at risk.⁴⁴ This is likely to be more achievable following the release of “Reasons Students in Samoa Do Not Complete Secondary” by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture.
- Expanded protection for youth through legislative and policy reform needs to examine closely the inequalities and infringement of human rights that may exist that stem from customary law,⁴⁵ protecting the lives of youth to pursue education free from any harm in the home and community.
- Skills development and awareness training within policy development forums to highlight the positive relationship between education, development and sport and how goals and targets in each of these three domains can be connected.

Demand for education

- Policies need to be co-written with local stakeholders to identify the factors driving demand for education.⁴⁶
- The development of inclusive education policies for youth with disabilities, grounded in cultural practices, require grassroots consultation.⁴⁷
- Cultural norms can also be appropriately challenged to encourage higher demand for education through the continued commitment to the implementation of indicators and frameworks in accordance with international agreements, such as the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF).⁴⁸

The above policy recommendations are inputs to a transformative policy agenda that targets national and local policies; the allocation of sufficient resources; skills training for field staff; and awareness programmes for staff, communities, including religious groups, families and youth.

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture has conducted a study into the reasons students drop out of school that includes interviews with students, parents and teachers called “Reasons Students in Samoa Do Not Complete Secondary”. When the results of this study are released it is expected to give further insights into the current reasons why people drop out of school and highlight potential policy drivers that are necessary to engage and re-engage students.

Achieving the SDGs requires a comprehensive research agenda that comes with firm commitments to investments in research and policy analysis together with implementation, monitoring and evaluation for the collection of evidence to inform further policy development.

ENDNOTES

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